

# Pronouns 101:

## A Guide for the CSD Community

A pronoun is a word that may substitute for a noun or noun phrase in a sentence. When referring to people, using the correct pronouns shows respect for them and their gender identity, and helps create an inclusive environment.

### Asking About Pronouns

Sometimes, our assumptions about a person's pronouns are incorrect, and do not reflect their gender identity. Asking about pronouns ensures you are addressing everyone accurately and with the respect they are due.

When conducting introductions, sharing your own pronouns can encourage others to do the same (e.g., "Hello, my name is Eric and my pronouns are he/him"). Pronouns can be shared in syllabi, email signatures, social media biographies, etc.

### Gender Neutral Pronouns

Pronouns "he, him, his" and "she, her, hers" are associated with masculine and feminine gender identities. This may not reflect an individual's gender identity, and "they, them, theirs" is often used as gender neutral pronouns.

"They" is most often used as the third-person *plural* pronoun in English, however, use of singular "they" for someone of unknown gender dates back to 1375. We use singular "they" for this purpose every day, most often unconsciously. Grammar style guides such as APA and Merriam-Webster reaffirm this usage.

### Pronouns in Academic Settings

Institutional policies on utilizing chosen names and pronouns vary. If students share pronouns, take note of this. A student's name and gender expression may not align with your class roster. When in doubt, ask individually and respectfully, without drawing attention to the situation. Avoid referring to a group as "ladies" or any other gendered term, as it may not be inclusive of all people.

### Pronouns in Clinical Settings

Clinicians and patients should feel empowered to share their pronouns in the clinic setting, and respecting this should be a core part of your institution's culture. There is nothing unprofessional about one's gender identity or expression.

In some cases, pediatric patients may go by a set of pronouns without parental support. In such cases, ask the client what they prefer you do. Options include only referring to the client by their name, using gender neutral pronouns, or switching between pronouns to speak to the client and parents.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**What if I use the wrong pronoun?** Simply apologize for the mistake and move forward. If you need additional clarification or a reminder of someone's name or pronouns, ask them privately and respectfully.

**Why do we no longer say "preferred pronouns"?** It is now more appropriate to omit the term "preferred," as preference implies an acceptable alternative. Pronouns are not a preference, as there is not an alternative to using them correctly.

**What does it mean to have multiple different pronouns?** Sharing multiple pronouns means any of those pronouns are acceptable. They may be listed as one set, for example "he/they." Generally, use the pronoun listed first most often.

**What if someone uses pronouns I am not familiar with?** Neopronouns are sets of pronouns which offer an alternative to existing options that may not align with someone's gender identity. Some examples are "xe, xem, xyr" or "ey, em, eir." These may take some getting used to, but using them correctly conveys respect.