



**all children
all families**

Pronouns 101

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun is a word used to refer to either the people who are talking (like “I” or “you”) or a person being talked about in the third person (like “she/her,” “he/him,” and “they/them”). Since some pronouns are gendered (“she/her” and “he/him”), it is important to be intentional about the way we use pronouns as we all work to create as inclusive an environment as possible.

Why do pronouns matter?

Ask yourself how many times someone has used your name or a pronoun to refer to you today. Chances are this has happened countless times. Now, imagine that your coworker, or a family member, or your doctor or a friend routinely calls you by the wrong pronoun. That would be hard. This is why using a person’s chosen name and pronouns is essential to affirming their identity and showing basic respect. The experience of being misgendered – having someone use the incorrect pronouns to refer to you – can be uncomfortable and hurtful. The experience of accidentally misgendering someone can be difficult for both parties. Routinely asking and providing pronouns helps everyone avoid assumptions and feel comfortable interacting.

Pronoun Etiquette Tips

- **Create opportunities for people to share their pronouns** with you rather than assuming you know their pronouns based on their appearance. For example, when introducing yourself share your pronouns like this:
 - *In one-on-one conversation:* “Hi, I’m John and I go by he/him. Nice to meet you.”
 - *In a meeting:* “Hi everyone. I’m Mollie. I’m the senior program manager and I go by she/her.”
 - *In your e-mail signature next to your name:*
E. Wilson (pronouns: they/them/theirs)
- **If you don’t know someone’s pronouns, it’s okay to ask.** You can say, “What pronouns do you use?” or “What pronouns do you go by?” or “What pronouns would you like me to use when I refer to you?”
- **Always use someone’s chosen (preferred) pronouns unless you’ve been asked not to** do so for a specific reason (e.g., safety or privacy concerns).
- **Practice! Practice! Practice!** It takes intention to consistently use someone’s correct pronouns if you previously used different pronouns for that person or if you’re using pronouns that are new to you. Take the time to practice referring to the person with the correct pronouns in conversation and in written communication. (Tip: Worried about misgendering someone in an email? Do a quick “CTRL+F” and search for any use of an incorrect pronoun before hitting send.)
- **If you make a mistake, apologize and move on.** Help others by gently correcting them if they misgender someone.

EXAMPLES OF PRONOUNS IN USE



**all children
all families**

She/Her/Hers	He/Him/His	They/Them/Theirs	Ze/Zir/Zirs	Ze/Hir/Hirs
She is here now.	He is here now.	They are here now.	Ze is here now.	Ze is here now.
Her phone call just started.	His phone call just started.	Their phone call just started.	Zir phone call just started.	Hir phone call just started.
She excused herself from the meeting.	He excused himself from the meeting.	They excused themselves from the meeting.	Ze excused zirsself from the meeting.	Ze excused hirsself from the meeting.
That seat is hers.	That seat is his.	That seat is theirs.	That seat is zirs.	That seat is hirs.
Let's wait for her.	Let's wait for him.	Let's wait for them.	Let's wait for zir.	Let's wait for hir.

The image above provides examples of how to use different pronouns. For much more information on talking about pronouns with youth and adults that you serve, visit hrc.im/acaf-sogie.