Pronouns – tips on getting them right

Often, people make assumptions about the gender of another person based on their appearance, name, associations/known family life and parental/maternity status. These assumptions aren't always correct, and the act of making an assumption (even if correct) sends a potentially harmful message - that people have to look a certain way to demonstrate the gender that they are or are not.

Using someone's correct personal pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment, just as using a person's name can be a way to respect them.

Remember that not all people identify as male/man/boy or female/woman/girl (gender binary). They may identify as non-binary, gender fluid, non-gendered or in other ways, and may use gender neutral pronouns (They/Them) or neopronouns (including Ze/Hir, Ey/Em). Please note that "ze" is usually pronounced with a long "e" and that "hir" and its forms are usually pronounced like the English word "here." Some people do not use any pronouns and would prefer their name to be used.

Listen

Listen to how people speak about themselves and follow suit.

Help others

If you know someone's pronouns, use them when you introduce them to someone else so they will also learn, e.g. "This is Danny, they work in finance. This is Jay, she studies history."

Encourage pronoun sharing during introductions

Begin your meeting/lecture/seminar by introducing yourself and your pronouns and inviting others to do the same. e.g. "Hello everyone, I'm Jo Smith and my pronouns are she/hers please go round and introduce yourself and your pronouns if you're comfortable doing so." We don't recommend ever forcing people to share their pronouns.

If you make a mistake, correct yourself and move on …

If you make a mistake, then correct yourself and move on. Don't dwell unnecessarily on it, which could inadvertently make the person feel more uneasy. You might have a follow up conversation with the person you referred to incorrectly to apologise or see if there's something else you can do to correct it moving forward besides doing better. The following website have some useful examples of how you might approach different situations https://www.mypronouns.org/mistakes.

Use 'they'/'them'/'the person' or their name

If you don't know someone's pronouns, use 'they/them/the person' or their name, until you know what they use, e.g. "There is someone here to see you, I'll ask them to take a seat"; "The person in the red shirt would like to speak next."

Use your own pronouns

Get into the habit of including your own pronouns when you introduce yourself to other people. By sharing your own pronouns you're giving those around you the opportunity to share theirs too, and minimise the risk of misgendering.

Use your email signature

Consider including pronouns in your email signature, e.g. under your name and job title add "Pronouns: He/Him; or "Pronouns: She/Her; or "Pronouns They/Them etc."

Display your pronouns

Consider wearing a badge displaying your pronouns, to help normalise sharing pronouns. If you are attending an event, you can write on your name tag the pronouns that you go by in the corner, near your name. If you're working or meeting online, you can display your pronouns as your profile picture on MS Teams. We have designs you can download and use saved here.