

Use of Pronouns Fact Sheet



Through language, we understand ourselves, each other and the world around us. **Language forms an integral part of our transmission of history and culture, of the way we operate and navigate our surroundings and build connectivity, and of our emotional expression and relationships.** (University of Cambridge)

Language is constantly evolving. **As is the language around diversity and inclusion; luckily most will say, as this is opening doors and opportunities for a more inclusive world and working environment.** When talking about inclusive language pronouns and their importance is a good place to start.

As we know, gender is not a simple binary delineation; it involves how a person identifies and refers to society's expectations about how they should think and behave. Unlike birth sex, gender is not made up of binary forms. **Gender is a broad spectrum and a person may identify at any point within this spectrum or outside of it entirely.**

People may identify with genders that are different from their birth sex or with none at all. These identities may include transgender, nonbinary, or gender-neutral. (WebMD)

What are pronouns and why are they so important:

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (I or you) or someone/something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). (Minus18)

Respecting and acknowledging an individual's gender identity by using their chosen pronouns is a critical way of showing respect to those who identify as gender diverse. It also aids in forming a more inclusive environment and in breaking down the prejudice and discrimination often faced by our LGBTQIA+ colleagues.

It is important to respect people's pronouns. Ignoring a person's pronouns can also imply that people who are under the transgender umbrella — such as those who are transgender, nonbinary, or gender non-conforming — do not exist. You can't always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for gender identity.

By using a person's pronouns correctly, people can reduce the adverse effects of social oppression. One 2016 study, found that affirming a person's pronouns — and, by extension, their gender — lowers depression and raises self-esteem. A person affirming another's pronoun use can help others feel comfortable with their external appearance and their gender identity. (MedicalNewsToday & PubMed)

Small changes that go a long way:



- Start by introducing yourself, using your own pronouns, and asking a person what their pronouns are.
- **Adding pronouns to email signatures and business cards can also help normalize the importance of using correct pronouns and fostering an inclusive environment.**
- Do not assume a person's pronouns, and try using "they" when you do not know a person's gender. **By using gender-neutral pronouns, people are not making assumptions about another person's gender, nor are they making stereotypical assumptions about job roles — such as using "he" pronouns for a doctor or "she" pronouns for a receptionist.** (Medical News Today)

*If you need extra support in understanding how to communicate respectfully or appropriately –i.e. what not to say, how to interact respectfully, how to dismantle stigma and stereotypes. The Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet has developed an LGBTQI+ Inclusive Language Guide which may help guide individuals in how to use language respectfully and inclusively when working with gender-diverse people.

