

Preferred Gender Pronouns

(Or, How to Take Important Steps in Becoming a Trans Ally!)

What is a pronoun?

- A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like *I* or *you*) or someone or something that is being talked about (like *she*, *it*, *them*, and *this*). Gender pronouns (like *he* and *hers*) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

What is a “preferred gender pronoun”?

- A "preferred gender pronoun" (or PGP) is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for them self. For example: If Kim's preferred pronouns are *she*, *her*, and *hers*, you could say "Kim ate *her* food because *she* was hungry."

What are some commonly used pronouns?

- ***She, her, hers* and *he, him, his*** are the most commonly used pronouns. Some people call these "female/feminine" and "male/masculine" pronouns, but many avoid these labels because, for example, not everyone who uses *he* feels like a "male" or "masculine."
- **There are also lots of gender-neutral pronouns in use.** Here are a few you might hear:
 - ***They, them, theirs*** (Kim ate *their* food because *they* were hungry.)
This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun.... And yes, it *can* in fact be used in the singular.
 - ***Ze, hir*** (Kim ate *hir* food because *ze* was hungry.)
Ze is pronounced like "zee" can also be spelled *zie* or *xe*, and replaces *she/he/they*.
Hir is pronounced like "here" and replaces *her/hers/him/his/they/theirs*.
- **Just my name please!** (Kim ate Kim's food because Kim was hungry)
Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.
- **Never, ever refer to a person as “it” or “he-she” (unless they specifically ask you to.)**
These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals.

Why is it important to respect people's PGPs?

- You can't always know what someone's PGP is by looking at them.
- Asking and correctly using someone's preferred pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
- When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above.)
- It is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. If you have this privilege, yet fail to respect someone else's gender identity, it is not only disrespectful and hurtful, but also oppressive.

Why is it really important to respect others PGP as an Ally?

As a ally:

- Asking others what their preferred pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected or not.
- **You will be setting an example for those partnering with you in ministry:** If you are consistent about using someone's preferred pronouns, others will follow your example.
- Many will be learning about PGPs for the first time, so **this will be a learning opportunity** for them that they will keep forever.
- **Discussing and correctly using PGPs sets a tone of respect and allyship that trans and gender non-conforming people do not take for granted.** It can truly make all of the difference.

How do I ask someone what their PGP is?

- Try asking: "What are your preferred pronouns?" or "Which pronouns do you like to hear?" or "Can you remind me which pronouns you like for yourself?" It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what a PGP is, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and your preferred pronoun. That means the pronoun you like to be referred to with. For example, I'm Kim, I'm from Amazon Island, and I like to be referred to with she, her, and hers pronouns. So you could say, 'she went to her car' if you were talking about me."

What if I make a mistake?

- It's okay! Everyone slips up from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like "Sorry, I meant *she*." If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize in private and move on.
- A lot of the time it can be tempting to go on and on about how bad you feel that you messed up or how hard it is for you to get it right. But please, *don't!* **It is inappropriate and makes the person who was mis-gendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job. It is our responsibility to remember people's PGPs.**

Taking an active role

- In your ministry, you may hear one of your participants using the wrong pronoun for someone. In most cases, it is appropriate to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been mis-gendered. This means saying something like "Actually, Kim prefers the pronoun *she*," and then moving on. **If others are consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, do not ignore it! It is important to bring it to their attention as an ally.**
- It may be appropriate to approach them and say something like "I noticed that you were referring to ___ by the wrong pronoun earlier, that can be really hurtful to ___. I want to make sure that this group is a safe space for everyone." Follow up as/if necessary. **Your actions will be greatly appreciated.**