Using Gender Pronouns

Pronouns are something most people do not think about. However, pronouns are very important to many transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary people as it affirms their gender.

What are pronouns?

A pronoun is a word used to replace a noun. We use gender pronouns (he/she/they) most often when referring to someone without using their name. For example, 'he' is used most often to refer to men and 'she' is used most often to refer to women. However, some people use gender neutral pronouns such as 'they' or a combination of pronouns such as 'he' and 'they' interchangeably.

THEY / THEM

Pronouns are optional, but if we normalise displaying our own pronouns, we can make the workplace a more inclusive place for everyone.

Why are pronouns important?

Sometimes assumptions are made about the gender of another person based on an appearance or name. These assumptions are then used to address or refer to a person. This can be harmful to transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary people as these assumptions show that people are expected to look a certain way to validate their gender.

Anyone can share their pronouns, and they are not indicative of someone's sexual orientation.

How can I use pronouns?

You can incorporate gender pronouns in the workplace, with these simple strategies:

- Edit your email signature to include your pronouns
- Use verbal introductions to clarify your pronouns
- Add your pronouns to your Zoom and/or Microsoft Teams name
- Ask people what pronouns they use
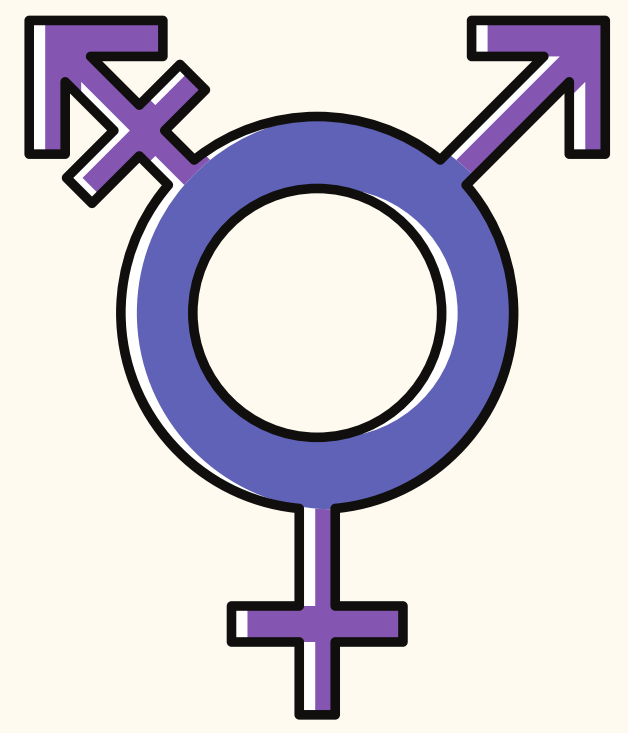
Gender describes a person's socially constructed roles, behaviours and expressions. Gender is a broad spectrum, and different to a person's sex which is related to biological differences (e.g. genitalia). A person's gender may or may not be related to their sex.

Commonly used pronouns

- She/her/ hers
- He/him/his
- They/them/theirs
- Ze/zir/zers (less common / pronounced zee/zeer/zeirs)
- Xe/Xem/Xir (less common / pronounced zee/zeer/zeirs)
- A combination of she/he with they
- Some people prefer to be addressed by their name alone

Examples

- "I went to the doctor about my symptoms" "Great, and what did **they** say?"
- "My partner Blue is a ballet dancer" "When did she start dancing?" "Oh Blue goes by **they/them** by the way. **They** started when they were 10". "Oops my bad - thanks for the correction. That's cool what school did **they** go to?"

- I'm going to buy a cake for my friend. **She** loves chocolate so I think I'm going to get this one for **them**.
- Welcome to my workshop! By the way, I use the pronouns **he/they** so I'm happy for you to alternate between both when you're referring to me.

Help I made a mistake!

Mistakes are inevitable but try not to excessively apologise as this tends to centre *your* needs and feelings over the person who's been misgendered. Instead, correct yourself (even if the person you're talking about isn't around!) and make a mental note to be more careful next time. Don't worry - making mistakes is ok and sometimes getting used to changes like new pronouns can take time. But with a bit of practice and commitment, you'll find it gets much easier. This is the opportunity to grow and learn!

Think about the ways in which language is often gendered. Instead of saying "Hey guys" or "Dear ladies and gentlemen", try something more inclusive like "Hello everyone/ folks/ team".

Glossary

Transgender (trans): people whose gender is different to the one they were assigned at birth. This includes trans men, trans women and non-binary people.

Cisgender (Cis): people whose gender is the same as the one they were assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming (GNC): people who challenge and subvert stereotypes about how they look and/or act based on the gender they were assigned at birth.
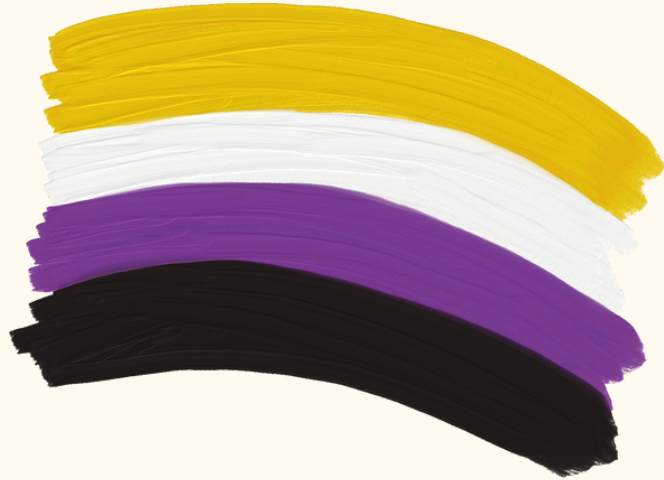
Non-binary (nbry): people who are outside the gender binary (man/woman). This can include people who are neither exclusively woman or man or is in between, both or otherwise.

Two-Spirit (2S): Indigenous people who identify as having both a masculine and feminine spirit. It's an umbrealla term to describe sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity.

Resources

- The Inclusive pride flag explained here.

- LGBTQIA+ Wikipedia for more information on gender and sexual orientation.

- Using pronouns in the workplace

- Understanding misgendering

- The Proud Trust for advice or questions

- Buy (or make your own) pronoun pins!

If you have any questions, please get in touch at wildaboutinclusion@wildlifetrusts.org