



Parents Fact sheet

Pronouns

Language and terms describing gender identity can often change. It can be helpful to understand certain terms that your young person may use when talking about gender identity. They may ask you to use some of these to better reflect who they are.

A pronoun takes the place of a noun (a noun is the name of a thing, such as an object, a place, or a person) in a sentence. Pronouns are short words like 'it', 'she', 'he', 'you', 'we', 'they', 'us' and 'them'. Pronouns are basically how we identify ourselves apart from our name. It's how someone refers to you in conversation, and when you're speaking to people, it's a really simple way to affirm their identity. In English, our most commonly used pronouns (he/she) specifically refer to a person's gender.

For gender non-conforming, non-binary, and transgender people, these pronouns may not fit, can create discomfort, and can cause stress and anxiety. Affirming a person's pronouns demonstrates respect, reduces depression, increases self-esteem, and supports positive regard.

When you proactively share what your own pronouns are with others, you send a signal that you are an aspiring ally and help reduce the stigma or awkwardness many people feel when talking about gender pronouns. You also help make it easier for trans and non-binary people in your life to more comfortably share their own pronouns and reduce the risk of being misgendered.

Pronoun definitions

- **Personal pronoun:** A word that can be substituted for other nouns, particularly people's names.
- **Gender-neutral pronoun:** A pronoun that does not specify the gender of the person it refers to
- **Nonbinary pronoun:** Gender-neutral pronouns may also be considered nonbinary pronouns because they don't indicate masculinity or femininity. However, a nonbinary person might use any type of pronoun, including he and she.



- Neopronoun: are also pronouns and include those pronouns besides the ones most commonly used in a particular language. As one's pronouns are ultimately a reflection of their personal identity, the number and types of (neo)pronouns a person may use is limitless. Examples of neopronoun sets include: xe/xir/xirs, ze/zir/zirs and fae/faer/faers.

Common personal pronouns

- Common personal pronouns are he/him/his and she/her/hers, which are typically used to refer to people who identify their gender (identity) as masculine or feminine, respectively.
- People who identify outside of a gender binary most often use non-gendered or nonbinary pronouns that are not gender specific. These include they/them/their used in the singular, ze (pronounced "zee") in place of she/he, and hir (pronounced "here") in place of his/him/her.
- Using just a person's name – Some people do not use pronouns at all and use their name as the pronoun.

If your young person asks you to use different pronouns.

- Take a deep breath, pause, and remember that your child is sharing this information because they trust you with it. How you respond will greatly impact their well-being and your relationship.
- Thank them for sharing this with you.
- Use the pronouns your young person asked you to use. Research shows that gender diverse youth experience best outcomes when parents, families, and communities use pronouns that align with a young person's gender identity.
- Let your young person guide you, teach you the language and terms.
- If you make a mistake, correct yourself or allow yourself to be corrected, and continue to try. This will show your young person that you are making an effort, showing them respect, and doing your best to adapt to their preferences.