

Have You Been *Wondering*?

WHAT IS GENDER INCLUSION?

Gender Inclusion in the PreK-12 Context

Gender impacts all individuals and students in all grades. Gendered stereotypes are often perpetuated in many ways in the school environment, just as they are in society at large, which prevents all students from reaching their full potential as learners and individuals. For example, we may associate certain toys or activities with preconceived notions of appropriate interests and roles for girls and boys. We may also use language that reinforces the idea that students must conform to one gender or the other.

Often, we seek out more inclusive practices and approaches when we have a transgender student in our classroom or school who needs support. Creating a more welcoming and gender-inclusive environment for all students, however, is a more effective and impactful strategy than trying to solve or accommodate the concerns associated with an individual transgender student. Many schools are therefore working to develop more gender-inclusive practices and learning environments for all students, which in turn creates more affirming spaces for transgender and gender-expansive students in particular. This systematic approach helps improve a school's overall climate and increases all students' sense of safety, belonging, and engagement.

Gender Inclusive Language & Practices

The following language and practices help to avoid gender assumptions about others. Though you may not mean harm, assuming a person's gender or pronouns (if that person has not shared them) can cause harm. Using language that implies there are only two genders can also erase other individuals' genders and sense of self. Small changes in language can often have a big impact on individuals' experiences and lives, especially those that are often marginalized.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

SEX: biological traits that society associates with being male or female

GENDER: cultural meanings attached to being masculine and feminine, which influence personal identities

SEXUALITY: sexual attraction, practices and identity that may or may not align with sex and gender

TRANSGENDER or TRANS (adj.): An umbrella term that describes many gender identities for people who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth.

NON-BINARY (adj.): An umbrella term used to describe gender identities that do not fit within the binary of male and female.

CISGENDER (adj.): Describes people who identify their gender identity with their sex assigned at birth.

MISGENDER (v.): Incorrectly referring to a person's gender through language and behaviors that assume someone's gender identity.



Pronouns

What are they?

Pronouns are how a person wants to be referred to in the third person. Examples of pronouns include, but are not limited to:

- he/him/his,
- she/her/hers,
- they/them/their,
- they/them/their and she/her/hers (used interchangeably)
- they/them/their and he/him/his (used interchangeably)
- they/she/he (used interchangeably)
- ze/hir/hirs, and other gender-neutral pronouns.

What are they not?

Pronouns do not indicate an individual's sexuality or sexual orientation. They are third-person signifiers that allow individuals to navigate their gender identities and share with others how to refer to them in the third person. Pronouns also are not always indicative of an individual's gender identity.

Pronouns are not only used for nonbinary, gender non-conforming, transgender, or other gender-expansive individuals. Any time we refer to someone in the third person, we use a pronoun.

Why do we share our pronouns?

Sharing our pronouns with others and asking them to do the same prevents us from perpetuating assumptions about how people want to be referred to in the third person, which can result in instances of misgendering. Misgendering is incorrectly referring to a person's gender by assuming their gender identity; often this is done by using the wrong pronouns for a person. Misgendering someone can be done intentionally or unintentionally, and it can have a long-lasting harmful impact, especially if it happens frequently.

By respecting others' pronouns, you recognize their sense of self and affirm the humanity of all members of our community, specifically transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender questioning, and other gender expansive members of our community. Using an individual's pronouns correctly, along with their preferred name and correct name pronunciation, is a way to continue to practice inclusion and foster belonging for all community members - students, parents, teachers, staff, and alumni alike.

While respecting individuals' pronouns is paramount to creating inclusive learning and working environments, forcing individuals to disclose information about themselves that they are not yet ready to or not comfortable sharing in certain settings should be avoided. Instead, introducing yourself with your own pronouns (if you feel comfortable doing so) can model inclusive practices for others to do the same. Offering individuals the option to share their pronouns and avoiding saying preferred pronouns instead of just pronouns, also signals that a community or organization intentionally welcomes and recognizes gender-expansive individuals. Creating welcoming spaces where individuals feel comfortable bringing their authentic and full selves to the conversation will enrich the organization's ability to advance equity and inclusion in all aspects of its work.



Inclusive Practices

Language is always evolving, which requires each of us to commit to ongoing learning and acknowledge our mistakes. If you are unsure of how to address someone, the best strategy is to always ask directly. These additional practices are examples of how to use more gender-inclusive language in different settings:

- When you don't yet know someone's pronouns, use they/them/their, their name, or other gender-neutral language, such as "that person or individual"
- When addressing groups of people, avoid "ladies and gentlemen" or "boys and girls"; instead consider using:
 - Friends
 - Colleagues
 - Children
 - Students
- Instead of saying "men and women" consider using:
 - Everyone
 - All people
 - People of all genders
 - Women, men, and nonbinary people
- Instead of saying "you guys," "ladies" or other gendered language to refer to a group of people, consider using:
 - Folks
 - Y'all
 - You all
 - All of you

What Do I Do If I Misgender Someone?

- If you misgender someone in their presence, correct the mistake by using the correct pronouns and move on with the conversation. Often, individuals who are misgendered find additional attention more uncomfortable.
- If you misgender someone when they are not in your presence, acknowledge the mistake and commit to using the correct pronouns moving forward.
- If you misgender someone whose pronouns have changed, acknowledge that you now know they use a different set of pronouns and will commit to using the correct ones moving forward.

While you may not have intended harm, the impact your words may have had on others should be centered. Often, the key is to acknowledge the mistake, correct it when possible, and to indicate a commitment to affirming an individual's correct pronouns. For more scenarios and strategies, see mypronouns.org/mistakes.

READ WATCH LISTEN

READ

- [Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out](#)
- [Resources for LGBTQ+ Students and their Families](#)
- mypronouns.org
- [Title IX and US Department of Education Policy Letter on Transgender Students](#)
- [Learning to Give: Gender Inclusive Language and Support for LGBTQ+ Friends](#)

WATCH

- [Videos about gender identity](#)
- [What are pronouns?](#)

LISTEN

- [LGBTQ&A](#), podcast

Sources:

[Schools in Transition - A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools](#)

[Sociology of Gender - Other Sociologist](#)

[Trans Inclusive Practices in the Classroom - NYU](#)

mypronouns.org/inclusivelanguage

[Pronoun Guidance, Vanderbilt University](#)

Key Dates

- International Transgender Visibility Day: March 31
- October: LGBTQ+ History Month
- International Pronouns Day: 3rd Wednesday every October
- June: Pride Month