Gender Pronouns
VACCA Learning & Development
Training Resource

What is a Pronoun?

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

What are some commonly used Pronouns?

She/her/hers and he/him/his are a few commonly used pronouns. Some people call these "female/feminine" and "male/masculine" pronouns, but many avoid these labels because 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 (Shea ate their food because they were hungry.) This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun and it can be used in the singular. In fact, "they" was voted as the Word of the Year in 2015.
- Ze/hir/hir (Tyler 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! (Ash ate Ash's food because Ash was hungry) Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.

Never refer to a person as "it" or "he-she". These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals.

What are Gender Neutral Pronouns?

A gender neutral or gender inclusive pronoun is a pronoun which does not associate a gender with the individual who is being discussed.
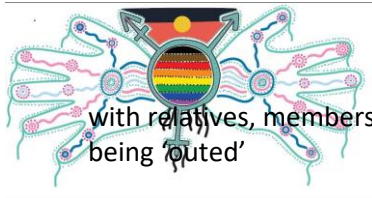
Some languages, such as English, do not have a gender neutral or third gender pronoun available, and this has been criticized, since in many instances, writers, speakers, etc. use "he/his" when referring to a generic individual in the third person. Also, the dichotomy of "he and she" in English does not leave room for other gender identities, which is a source of frustration to the transgender and gender queer communities.

People who are limited by languages which do not include gender neutral pronouns have attempted to create them, in the interest of greater equality.

Be mindful that LGBTQIA+ people – especially trans, gender diverse, and nonbinary people – may use different names and pronouns in different circumstances. While someone might be open to having their preferred name used with trusted staff, they may also like their legal name to be used

with relatives, members of their cultural community, or around other clients of the service to avoid being 'outed'

How can I demonstrate inclusive practices in relation to pronouns?

It's important to never assume someone's pronoun. You can model this by introducing yourself and advising your preferred pronouns. This is called 'pronoun cueing'.

You might like to include your pronouns on your email signature.

You can practice using Gender Neutral Pronouns more than using gendered pronouns.

You can call out discrimination, bullying or genuine mistakes in a supportive way to ensure that gender diverse people feel supported in the workplace.

If you have questions about gender diversity, using pronouns or other questions relating to the LGBQTIA+ community, you can email LGBQTIA@vacca.org

What if I make a mistake?

It's okay to make a mistake, especially whilst we are learning! The best thing to do once you have realised a mistake has been made is to say something right away, 'Sorry, I meant (insert Pro-noun).

If you become aware that you have made a mistake after the fact, apologise 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. Please don't! It is inappropriate and makes the person who was misgendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is not their job.

Resources

Minus 18 have developed a pronoun app/game that you can play to fine tune your ability to use correct pronouns. This can be found here: https://pronouns.minus18.org.au/

You may also wish to discuss with your manager running meetings using only gender-neutral pro-nouns to get even better at using the correct pro-nouns.