

How do I introduce pronouns as a facilitator in a space?

Since discussions about pronouns may be new to many people, offer a brief explanation of the process. A suggested introduction would be:

“When we take turns sharing our names, I want to ask each of you to also share the pronouns that you would like people to use to refer to you. For example, ‘My name is Michiko; I use *they* and *them*.’ Although we often use assumptions about gender to determine someone’s pronouns, this exercise will give us all a chance to name how we want to be addressed so we can better respect each other’s gender identities.”

they
them

In this process, people may need reminding and prompting. But it is important that all people participate, even those who are privileged enough to never have to think about stating their pronouns.

This handout is an excerpt from Celebrating Gender Diversity: A Toolkit on Gender Identity and Trans Experiences for Communities of Faith, 2019 edition. For more information on this topic, search www.united-church.ca for “gender diversity.”

To format this handout for photocopying and distribution, print or photocopy the pages double-sided and fold down the middle.



The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada



FACTS ABOUT PRONOUNS

A **HANDOUT** ON
GENDER IDENTITY AND
TRANS EXPERIENCES
FOR COMMUNITIES
OF FAITH

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he
her
they
she
him

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are words used to refer to a person, place, or thing. In English, the pronouns “he” or “she” are frequently used to talk about a singular person.

Why should we talk about pronouns?

Most people are raised to believe that there are only two genders and that gender can be determined based on appearance. This involves many assumptions when referring to other people, including the decision to use “he” or “she” pronouns. However, there are people who are hurt when these assumptions are made. They may not identify with “he” or “she” pronouns and would prefer something gender-neutral like “they.” They may be a trans person whom you are reading as the wrong gender.

When should we talk about pronouns?

It's great to talk about pronouns when meeting people or when group introductions are being made. You can't assume someone's name without asking; the same goes for someone's pronouns.

Can I make a joke when sharing my pronouns?

If you have been asked to participate in sharing your pronouns, it is important that you engage in the exercise with respect. For people who rely on pronoun sharing in order not to be misgendered, pronouns are a serious matter. When you don't take sharing pronouns seriously, you are telling other people that you are unaware or unsympathetic about how painful it can be to live in a world where your identity is frequently disrespected or ignored.



What do I do if someone's pronouns bother me?

Find someone who is educated about the issue and ask if you can talk to them—it is important for you to work through your feelings about this. In the meantime, understand that people have the right and ability to choose what gender identity and pronouns work best for them, regardless of your opinion.

What do I do if someone uses the wrong pronouns for someone else when I am around?

If you know the person who is being referred to, you can ask them how they would like you to respond in those situations. But when possible, correcting the pronoun is helpful. If the person using the pronoun seems confused or resistant to the correction, consider taking time to fully explain the importance of using correct pronouns.

What do I do if I use the wrong pronouns?

Apologize and correct yourself by using the right pronoun. This will help you learn how to use the right pronoun in the future. Your apology should not be made in a way that demands the person you misgendered to forgive you or make you feel better.

What do I do if I don't know the person's pronouns?

Use their name or gender-neutral pronouns.

If a person wants to use "they" as their pronoun, which is correct: "they are" or "they is"?

Use the plural verb conjugation when using "they" as a pronoun that refers to an individual. Example: "They are a talented artist." Or you could try rewording the sentence to avoid both a gender identification and the need for a pronoun. Example: "The artist is talented."