

Preferred Gender Pronouns

What is a pronoun?

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

What is a “preferred gender pronoun”?

A "preferred gender pronoun" (or PGP) is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themself. For example: If Xena's preferred pronouns are she, her, and hers, you could say "Xena renewed her membership because she wanted to receive the member rate for Midyear registration."

What are some commonly used pronouns?

- She, her, hers and he, him, his are the most commonly used pronouns. Some people call these "female/feminine" and "male/masculine" pronouns, but many avoid these labels because, for example, 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 (Xena ate their food because they were hungry.)
This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun.... And yes, it can in fact be used in the singular.
 - Ze, hir (Xena 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! (Xena ate Xena's food because Xena was hungry) Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a self-identification instead.
- Never, ever refer to a person as “it” or “he-she” (unless they specifically ask you to.) These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals.

How do I ask someone what their PGP is?

- Try asking: "What are your preferred pronouns?" or "Which pronouns do you like to hear?" or "Can you remind me which pronouns you like for yourself?" It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what a PGP is, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and your preferred pronoun. That means the pronoun you like to be referred to with. For example, I'm Xena, I'm from Amazon Island, and I like to be referred to with she, her, and hers pronouns. So you could say, 'she went to her car' if you were talking about me."

Why is it important to respect people's PGPs?

- You do not always know what someone's PGP is by looking at them.
- Asking and correctly using someone's preferred pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
- When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above.)

It is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. If you have this privilege, yet fail to respect someone else's gender identity, it is not only disrespectful and hurtful, but also oppressive.

Why is it important to respect your colleagues PGP?

- Asking your colleagues and ASHP's members what their preferred pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected at ASHP or not.
- You will be setting an example. If you are consistent about using someone's preferred pronouns, others will follow your example.
- Discussing and correctly using PGPs sets a tone of respect and allyship that trans and gender non-conforming people do not take for granted. It can truly make all of the difference, especially for new employees that may feel particularly vulnerable, friendless, and scared.

What if I make a mistake?

- It's okay! Everyone slips up from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like "Sorry, I meant she." If you realize your mistake after the fact, apologize 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. But please, don't! It is inappropriate and makes the person who was mis-gendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job. It is your job to remember people's PGPs.

How do I request my Preferred Gender Pronouns at ASHP?

- New employees will be asked their PGP's and at any time employees can request to add or change their PGP's in their email signature by emailing the ASHP helpdesk at helpdesk@ashp.org.

Adapted from:

Hampshire College. 2011. "Preferred Gender Pronouns: For Faculty." Based on materials written by Mateo Medina, Hampshire College, Orientation Training.

https://www.hampshire.edu/sites/default/files/shared_files/Preferred_Gender_Pronouns_for_Faculty.pdf