

## *How to Be Respectful in Name and Pronoun Introductions: A few tips*

- **Take time to do introductions with name and pronouns at gatherings, and not just when it seems to you that a trans/gender non-conforming (GNC) person is present or requests pronouns.** It's good allyship to initiate this if a leader forgets. Don't wait for trans/GNC people to have to ask. You never know when someone might have changed their name or pronoun or if they use a different name or pronoun in certain spaces. This reminds us not to make assumptions about others. This practice is an indicator to people that this group is seeking to be a safe and affirming space. And, this gives us all room to name and claim ourselves and for us to be open to changing.
- **Avoid the binary system.** Say, for instance, "she pronouns," or "he pronouns," or "they pronouns," or "ze pronouns," instead of "female pronouns" or "male pronouns." Regardless of how we identify our gender, people might use a variety of pronouns.
- **Don't assume you know someone's pronouns** (by looking at them, by hearing their name, by hearing others pronoun them, or because you've never heard them request particular pronouns before). There are lots of reasons why people might ask for a different name and/or pronoun in different settings or at different times.
- **If you don't know how to use the pronouns someone is asking for, ask for examples/clarification.** Don't be afraid to ask for help. You might say, "Can you give me an example of how those pronouns are used?" If you're having trouble, practice in your head or on paper (or aloud to yourself when you're alone).
- **If you make a mistake, correct yourself, apologize quickly, and move on.** Work on getting it right next time. Different people will feel differently, but being mispronounced over and over again can be hurtful. It's often harder when people apologize profusely and call a lot of attention to it or seem not to even notice or care when corrected. People make mistakes, especially when something is new - don't get caught up in feeling embarrassed or guilty. Then put some care and attention into getting it right next time.
- **Give yourself room to ask for pronouns you've never asked for before!** You don't have to know for sure that you want a set of pronouns for the rest of your life in order to ask for a change. Everyone has room to experiment with gender, and to try different things until they find what feels most respectful/comfortable for them at a given point in time. Just be careful to be clear that you're taking things seriously, and please don't make up different pronouns as a joke.

- **If someone says “any/all pronouns,” ask follow up questions, if you feel comfortable, to try to figure out what it means to them.** Do they want a mix of pronouns? Will they feel more seen or understood if people aren’t just using one set of pronouns for them? This doesn’t mean you get to choose pronouns for the person based on your assumptions. It doesn’t mean they don’t care or take pronouns seriously or need respect. It usually means that one set, all by itself, doesn’t work for them.
- **Please don’t ask for “any/all pronouns” unless you are comfortable with this and serious about having people use multiple sets of pronouns for you.** This could feel like it minimizes the importance of being seen and referred to how a person chooses, and can unintentionally imply that those who have clear pronoun preferences are being picky or high-maintenance. It’s fine to enlist people in experimenting with new pronouns, but just make sure you’re not implying that you’re more low-maintenance for having less specific pronoun needs, or that pronouns don’t matter.
- **People may also ask for no pronouns at all - to only be referred to by name.** If you’re unsure of someone’s pronouns and it’s not a safe or appropriate time to ask, you can also always just use their name or title instead.
- **Please don’t ignore the question.** Answering honestly and sincerely helps encourage others to be brave and ask for what they need to feel safe and respected.
- **Please don’t say (or imply) “of course” before naming your pronouns.** That encourages the idea that everyone already knows everyone else’s preferred pronouns (or should), or that assumptions are good and valid, and that “normal” people’s pronouns are obvious or never change.
- **Please don’t say “you should hear the names I get called!” or make a joke or trivialize the process of asking for pronouns.** For people who are often mispronounced, it can be really scary to ask for the pronouns we prefer, and hearing other people joke about it can feel hurtful or disheartening.
- **Please don’t answer for someone else, just because you think you know their pronouns.** Let people answer for themselves, even if it’s a little awkward, until people learn how to do it.
- **Please don’t argue about the pronouns people use.** Don’t tell someone that their pronouns don’t make sense, or are too hard. Don’t say, “but you asked for different pronouns the other day.” Just respect their decision today.

*Adapted from a resource from The Night Ministry, Chicago, IL.*