

Pronouns

what they are, how to use them, and why they are important

A choose-your-own-adventure mini-lesson deck!

INSIDE: A series of reflective questions. At any point if you feel stumped and/or want to know our thoughts, you can flip to the card # provided and then come back for more!

It is completely okay to feel brand new to this information, that's the whole reason this deck exists!

by the social justice



toolbox

What pronouns do you use?

(If this is a new question for you or you're unsure how to answer please scroll to card 9 and then come back!)

Can you list common pronouns? Include at least one set of gender neutral pronouns?

*(If not...that's okay!
Skip to card 10 before continuing!)*

If you are working with a new group of people & you want to include pronouns in your intros—how would you invite people to share their pronouns?

(Want some ideas? Check out card 11!)

If someone was to ask you, “what are pronouns and why do we need to talk about them?” what would you say? How confident would you feel in your answer?

(Need some help or ideas? Check out card 12)

Do you feel you'd be able to respond to resistance/ pushback from a group that you asked for pronouns in? What would make you uncomfortable about that resistance?

Need some thoughts? Skip to cards 13 & 14. If you want to work through some resistance examples - continue on!

Sticking point #1:

“I get the idea of asking pronouns but why are you asking me *my* pronouns? Can't you just tell by looking at me?”

(Help or ideas – check out card 13)

Sticking point #2:

“You said you’re asking us about pronouns to be inclusive...but I feel offended that you’re asking me, and that doesn’t make *me* feel very included.”

(Help or ideas – check out card 14)

What pronouns do you use?

Pronouns are words that we use instead of someone's name. Instead of "Steve is going to Steve's car to get Steve's shoes" we can say things like, "Steve is going to his car to get his shoes." If someone is asking you your pronouns they are asking what set of pronouns do you use. In English we have two sets of gendered pronouns "she/her/hers" & "he/him/his", but these are not the only pronouns that folks use.

The question "what pronouns do you use" is becoming an increasingly common question in an effort to create more inclusive environments for people who are misgendered a lot (ex. people assume their pronouns wrong) and/or people who use non-binary (non male/female pronouns). Getting comfy sharing your pronouns can be an important part of normalizing this inclusive practice!

Common & gender neutral pronouns

she	her	hers
he	him	his
they	them	theirs
ze	zem	zirs

You are probably quite familiar with the first three lines of pronouns. The third set of pronouns is now being used by many genderqueer and gender nonconforming folks as their pronoun. It is used in the singular so you would say, “My friend Zane is coming over, they are really cool and they are bringing their new partner too!” Zane’s pronouns would be “they/them/theirs.”

Other non-binary pronouns sets include “ze/zem/zir” or “ze/hir/hirs” (pronounced ‘here’).

Strategies for intros with pronouns!

Role model your pronouns before inviting everyone to introduce theirs. “Hi, my name is Meg and I use she/her/hers pronouns. Could everyone please go around and share their name and pronouns.”

Explain what pronouns are and why you’re asking people to introduce theirs before you do.

“Hey everyone! So during introductions we are going to introduce our name and pronouns. Pronouns are words that we use to replace names, like she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs. I want to make sure that we are referring to each other in the way that feels most accurate, so we are going to be going around and if everyone could share their name and pronouns that’d be great!”

What are pronouns and why do we need to talk about them?

“Pronouns are words that function in the place of a name. So instead of saying, “my brother Steve is coming to pick me up in Steve’s car and we are going to Steve’s favorite restaurant,” I could instead say, “his car/his favorite restaurant.”

“Most of us grew up assuming that we could tell people’s pronouns just by looking at them or by knowing their gender. But that isn’t true for a lot of people and in order to be inclusive of folks who don’t either have their pronouns assumed correctly and/or use pronouns that we may be less familiar with it is important to talk about pronouns and give everyone an opportunity to share their pronoun.”

Being able to explain *why* pronouns are important with confidence is an important skill because for a lot of folks it is something they are unfamiliar with and may even be hesitant or resistant to.

“I get the idea of asking pronouns but why are you asking me my pronouns? Can’t you just tell by looking at me?”

“Something important to remember is that asking pronouns is about not assuming things. So while I could make a guess and probably a very educated one based off of prior experience, norms, etc. about your pronouns, it would still be at best a very educated guess. Asking everyone their pronouns is an important practice to help me get out of the pattern of assuming people’s pronouns because how you present does not inherently indicate their pronouns.”

“You said you’re asking us about pronouns to be inclusive...but I feel offended that you’re asking me my pronouns, and that doesn’t make *me* feel very included.”

“I really appreciate you sharing that you don’t feel super comfy with this new idea of introducing pronouns. And sometimes inclusivity isn’t entirely achievable. By introducing pronouns I may have made you uncomfortable but without asking pronouns I might make someone else uncomfortable. And that is important for me to name that this practice is in an effort to make people who experience a lot of marginalization or discrimination around their gender more included/affirmed. And that may leave others feeling uncomfortable and that’s the trade off we are making.”

For more educational trans*
resources check out:

www.socialjusticetoolbox.com

and

www.thesafezoneproject.com

