

# Pronouns

## What are pronouns?

Personal pronouns are words that we use, in place of names, to refer to one another. Traditionally we use she/her/hers and he/him/his, which separates individuals into two distinct and opposite categories of gender: women vs. men. However, not everyone's gender fits into these categories, or matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth (female or male). Transgender individuals, genderqueer individuals, and the [1.7% of the population that is intersex](#) may not fit into these two distinct categories.

While some transgender and gender nonconforming individuals choose she/her/hers or he/him/his pronouns, others prefer gender inclusive pronouns such as they/them/theirs, ze/zir/zirs, or ze/hir/hirs. [The dictionary recognizes they as a singular pronoun](#), and [several states now allow individuals to choose their own pronouns](#) on official documents. Additionally, several countries support individual gender identification and pronouns as a choice.

## Why are Pronouns important?

Like learning someone's name, learning and using someone's preferred pronouns is a way to get to know them and show that you respect them. You have probably heard of "The Golden Rule" to treat others how you want to be treated. Consider practicing "The Platinum Rule" of treating others the way that they would like to be treated. This way, you are creating an inclusive environment by proactively respecting everyone's identity. Just as you would not make up a nickname for someone you are just meeting, you should not assume that you know an individual's preferred pronouns based on how they dress or express their gender.

## Why are pronouns included in my email signature?

Tippecanoe County CASA is committed to cultivating a culture of respect and inclusion. Including pronouns in our email signatures is one small step towards fostering inclusivity in our community. It is important that all of the children we advocate for, the service providers with whom we work alongside, and the volunteers that advocate for our children know our preferred pronouns, and feel comfortable sharing their preferred pronouns with us. Actively sharing our pronouns is just one step we are taking towards celebrating diversity and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community. [Read more about our work with the Human Rights Campaign's All Children All Families project here.](#)

## What if I make a mistake?

Everyone makes mistakes. Apologize, correct yourself, and move on. Do not belabor the mistake, but use the opportunity to show your commitment to using the correct pronouns going forward.

## What if I notice others mis-gendering someone?

Using someone's preferred pronouns is an essential part of creating an inclusive culture, and is just as important when the person you are referencing is not in the room as it is when they are in the room. If you notice others mis-gendering someone, politely correct them, just as you would if they called them by the wrong name.

### **Respecting Boundaries**

Pronouns play an important role in respecting each other's gender identity, and it is generally considered acceptable to ask what pronouns others prefer. However, it is best to refrain from asking what pronouns an individual used in the past, as well as what names they may have gone by in the past. Conversing about gender expression can be complicated in a professional setting, or when you do not know someone well. As a rule of thumb, it is acceptable to compliment someone on something they chose to wear, such as a scarf, a sweater, or a pair of shoes. However, you should always refrain from commenting on or asking questions about people's bodies. GLAAD's [Tips for Allies of Transgender People](#) is a great resource for learning more.