

Using a Person's Correct Pronouns Saves Lives

PRONOUNS ARE A KEY TO SUICIDE PREVENTION

An important part of creating a supportive environment for transgender and nonbinary youth is understanding – and using appropriately – the terms they use to describe themselves.

Why do pronouns matter?

Pronouns are any word that replaces a noun, such as I, you, and they. Pronouns allow us to refer to someone without using a name. We use pronouns all the time. You can't know someone's pronouns just by looking at a person and making assumptions can make people feel unsafe and unwelcome. Using a person's correct pronouns saves lives and shows people that we respect and support them and that we care about their identity.

Did you know that using correct pronouns creates a safer environment?

Assuming someone's pronoun can make them feel unsafe, unwelcome and contributes to suicide. Asking for and respecting someone's pronouns creates a safer environment, promotes wellbeing and reduces their risk of suicide.

- According to the [2025 Minnesota Student Survey \(https://mss.mn.gov/MSS/index.html\)](https://mss.mn.gov/MSS/index.html), **46% of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit Plus (LGBTQIA2S+) youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year**, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.
- [The Trevor Project's 2024 National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People \(https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2025/\)](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2025/) found that:
 - Transgender and nonbinary **youth who reported having pronouns respected by all the people they lived with attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not** have their pronouns respected by anyone with whom they lived.
 - **LGBTQIA+/2S youth who reported living in very accepting communities attempted suicide at less than half the rate of those who reported living in very unaccepting communities.**

How do I ask about pronouns?

Asking someone what pronouns they use is a simple way to learn the most respectful and correct way to refer to them. You can help make any space feel more inclusive by leading with your own pronouns.

"My name is [name], and I use she/her pronouns."

You can ask someone what pronouns they use. Some examples:

“What pronouns do you use?” or “What pronouns can I use to refer to you?”

You can also propose that people share their pronouns while introducing themselves in a group setting and then modeling for the group how to respond. Include pronouns as part of introductions. Consider something like the script below:

“As we introduce ourselves, please share how you would prefer others in the room to refer to you. This could include your pronouns, such as he, she, or they, or it could be that you prefer people in the room to refer to you by your last name, Ms. or Dr. so-and-so. This is important because we want to create a respectful space for everyone, and we don’t want to make assumptions about each other. I’ll go first. My name is Katie; you can refer to me as she/her or just Katie is fine.”

Let’s highlight a few important parts of this example:

- While it’s important to give people the option to share pronouns and introduce the idea, it’s equally important that **sharing pronouns is optional**. Making pronoun sharing mandatory may inadvertently disclose their gender identity before they are ready.
- While there are other pronouns as well that people might prefer, explicitly **including “they” as an example of how to refer to a single person** helps normalize its use.
- Broadening an introduction to include **other ways that people want to be referred to**, such as their last name, makes the space welcoming and inclusive in ways beyond pronouns.

How should I respond when people ask me and people around me about pronouns?

Pronouns can be deeply personal and important, regardless of which pronouns people use. When someone asks you what pronouns you prefer, they are telling you that they care and that they want to treat you with respect. Simply answer their question by sharing your pronouns.

Remember, you cannot know what pronouns people use just by looking at a person. We can help keep LGBTQIA2S+ people safer by not making assumptions. Asking and answering questions about pronouns provides everyone with the knowledge and skills to treat each other with respect.

What if I make a mistake?

Humans make mistakes. What matters is to show that you’re trying. If you mess up, simply repeat what you just said using the correct pronoun and don’t make it a big deal. Whoever you’re talking to will most likely appreciate the effort. Mistakes can be a part of the learning process. Here are some tips for when those mistakes happen:

- **Don’t make the mistake a big deal.** If you misgender someone, simply apologize, thank them for correcting you, and move on.

- **Use your mistakes as learning opportunities.** Mistakes are a great opportunity to educate others who may not be informed.
- **Hold yourself accountable.** Continue to educate yourself on this topic and commit to making a more conscious effort to ask people about their pronouns in the future. Over time, you might find yourself making fewer and fewer mistakes.
- **Don't diminish the importance of pronouns** by making a joke about your own. Saying that your pronouns are things other than actual pronouns is dehumanizing and disrespectful.

What if I don't understand someone else's pronouns?

You do not need to understand someone else's pronouns or make judgments about them in order to respect them as a person. No one owes anyone else an explanation about their pronouns and why they've chosen them. Be patient and demonstrate support in trying.

When you use someone's correct pronouns, it creates an inclusive environment where you demonstrate that you care for and respect them. Actively choosing to not use someone's pronouns is harassment and implies that intersex, transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people do not or should not exist.

To learn more about why pronouns matter and find additional resources, visit [Pronouns Matter \(https://pronouns.org/\)](https://pronouns.org/)

Minnesota Department of Health
Mental Health and Well-being Committee of the Minnesota Suicide Prevention Taskforce
<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/index.html>

To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5400.

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