

# A Basic Guide to Understanding Gender Pronouns

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QUEER VOICES OF BHUTAN



**Disclaimer:**

This material is developed as an informative booklet and may contain basic information on safe sex and condom use. This material may only be appropriate for individuals who are at least 13 years and above.

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

Pronouns are words that describe someone's gender. Out of the many different pronouns that can be used, the most common are she/her/hers (female), he/him/his (male) and gender neutral pronouns (they/them/theirs). It is our personal choice what pronouns fit us best.

For many people, gender is simple and clear-cut: either their gender identity aligns with physical sex or falls closely within the traditional norms, such as 'he' for men and 'she' for women. Many other individuals present their gender identity and expression ambiguously, causing traditional assumptions about gender to be irrelevant or incorrect. Gendered pronouns like "he" and "she" can be very uncomfortable and limiting for some people who prefer gender-neutral pronouns. Some individuals feel more comfortable using a pronoun different from the one associated with their physical sex or apparent gender expression. Examples of gender-neutral pronouns can be; they, their, ze, hir.

**Misgendering:** An occurrence where a person is described or addressed using language that does not match their gender identity. This can include the incorrect use of pronouns (she/he/they), familial titles (father, sister, uncle) and, at times, other words that traditionally have gendered applications (pretty, handsome, etc.). It is best to ask a person, at a relevant moment, what words they like to use.



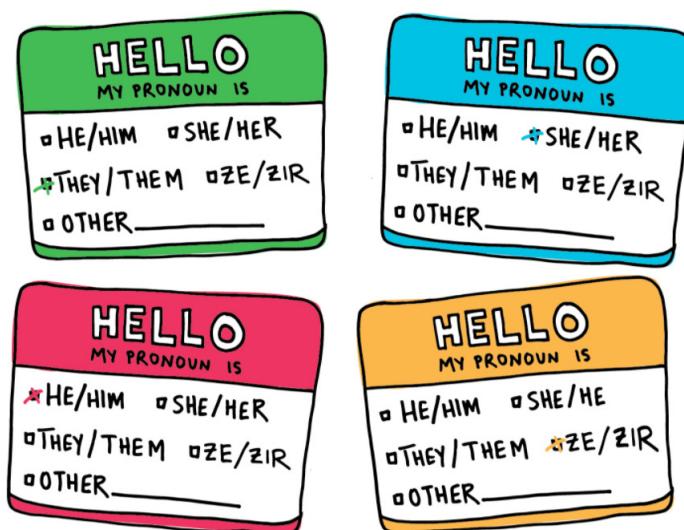
# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO RESPECT PEOPLE'S PRONOUNS?



You can't always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns 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 (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.



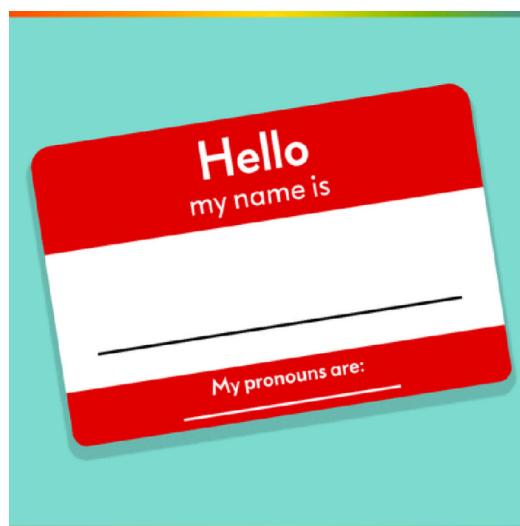
# What are some commonly used Pronouns?

She/her/hers and he/him/his are a few commonly used pronouns. Some people call these “female/feminine” and “male/masculine” pronouns, but many avoid these labels because 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 (Ugyen ate their food because they were hungry.) This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun and it can be used in the singular. In fact, “they” was voted as the Word of the Year in 2015.
- Ze/hir/hir (Karma 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! (Dechen ate Pema’s food because Dechen was hungry). Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.

Never refer to a person as “it” or “he-she”. These are offensive slurs used against trans and gender non-conforming individuals.



# Pronouns – A How To Guide

## Pronouns-- A How To Guide

**Subject:** 1 laughed at the notion of a gender binary.

**Object:** They tried to convince 2 that asexuality does not exist.

**Possessive:** 3 favorite color is unknown.

**Possessive Pronoun:** The pronoun card is 4.

**Reflexive:** 1 think(s) highly of 5.

**The pronoun list on the reverse is not an exhaustive list.  
It is good practice to ask which pronouns a person uses.**

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1	2	3	4	5
(f)ae	(f)aer	(f)aer	(f)aers	(f)aerself
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vis	verself
xe	xem	xyr	xyrs	xemself
ze/zie	hir	hir	hirs	hirself

Note: the top line is meant to indicate two separate - but similarly spelled - sets of pronouns. They are ae/aer/aers and fae/faer/faers.

## Frequently asked questions:

# 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 (insert pronoun)" 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. Please don't! It is inappropriate and makes the person who was misgendered feel awkward and responsible for comforting you, which is absolutely not their job.

If you witness someone misgendering someone else, it is appropriate to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individual who has been misgendered. This means saying something like "Karma uses the pronoun she," and then moving on. If other people or individuals are consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, do not ignore it! It is important to let your friends know that you are their ally.

It may be appropriate to approach them and say something like "I noticed that you were getting referred to with the wrong pronoun earlier, and I know that that can be really hurtful. Would you be okay with me taking them aside and reminding them about your pronouns?" Follow up if necessary, but take your cues from the comfort level of your student. Your actions will be greatly appreciated.

**It's worth remembering that the phrase 'preferred pronouns' is no longer used. Terms like this make it sound like someone's gender is up for debate. Intentionally using the wrong pronouns for someone repeatedly is a hurtful form of misgendering.**

**International Pronouns Day began in 2018 and takes place on the  
3rd Wednesday of October each year.**



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**Published: 2021**

**QUEER VOICES OF BHUTAN PUBLICATIONS**

**Queer Voices of Bhutan thanks the  
Embassy of Canada to Bhutan for their support.**



**Canada**

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