



## Trans-Affirming Best Practices FAQ

These are best practices, but true allyship isn't cookie cutter and everyone has their own boundaries & wishes. Ask the trans & nonbinary folks in your life how they want to be supported.

*Cultural humility is a lifelong process of self-reflection, self-critique, and commitment to understanding and respecting different points of view, and engaging humbly, authentically, and from a place of learning.*

- Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998

### **What are pronouns and why are they included in introductions and with names?**

Personal pronouns are a way to talk about people without repeating their name over and over again. The most common sets of pronouns for individuals are *she/her/hers/herself* and *he/him/his/himself*. There are infinite sets of pronouns as both language and human beings are creative and expansive, with new understandings reached every day. While pronouns have existed for a very long time (*thou/thy/thee/thine* and *ye* have become less common), the discussion about sharing pronouns in affirming ways has recently become a more mainstream conversation.

We share ours and ask others for theirs because:

- It prevents us/others from making assumptions.
- It is respectful of people and basic human dignity to refer to each other how we like.
- People, especially trans youth, are less likely to consider suicide when people honor them.
- When people regularly share their pronouns, it illustrates that just like we don't know someone's name until they tell us, we don't know anyone's pronouns until they share them.
- Transgender and nonbinary people will feel welcome.
- It opens up opportunities for others to share. The onus isn't on the transgender/gender non-conforming (TGNC) person and it signals to TGNC people who may be a potential ally/someone to trust.
- We create sustainable relationships. When we're able to share more of ourselves in an authentic way with each other, it deepens relationships.

### **What about *they/them*? And isn't that plural?**

In short, whether you understand someone's pronouns or not and/or whether you think it's grammatically correct or not, you can still use them. Also, *they/them* as a singular pronoun has existed since the 1300s. It is grammatically correct according to the Associated Press, dictionary.com, Merriam-Webster, The Washington Post, etc. And we already use singular *they/them* when we say things like: "Someone left their cell phone here." or "Whose jacket is this? They have great style."

For more, visit: [www.praxischi.com/news/singular-they-them](http://www.praxischi.com/news/singular-they-them)

### **How come some people say 3 pronouns rather than 2? Should I say *she/her/hers* or just *she/her*?**

One way isn't more correct than the other. It is a personal decision if you choose to share two or three. Often, when people choose to list three or more, it is because they use [neopronouns](#)<sup>1</sup> - any set of singular third-person pronouns that are not officially recognized in the language they are used in. In these cases, people often want to make sure everyone knows [all of the](#) forms<sup>2</sup> of their pronouns: subject, object, dependent possessive, independent possessive, reflexive (also known as: nominative, accusative, pronominal possessive, predicative possessive and reflexive). English speakers generally know that *she/her* means *she/her/her/hers/herself*. It is rarer that English speakers know that *e/em* means *e/em/eir/eirs/emself*.

### **What do I do when people list multiple sets of pronouns?**

Sometimes you may see different sets of pronouns such as “she/her, they/them” or “they/he” used by one person. In these cases, it is okay to use any of the options. If you have rapport with the person, you may want to inquire if they have a preference for one over the other. (Note: this is the only time it is okay to use “preference” when talking about pronouns because pronouns aren't preferred, they're mandatory.) Sometimes people list their favorite one first. Sometimes people want you to use all the options equally and change it up each sentence. Sometimes it depends on the context, location and/or who is around. The only way to know is to ask. The same goes for people who list “any/all” for their pronouns. A lot of people we know who do this greatly appreciate it when we switch it up for them and don't use the same set over and over.

### **How do I handle it if someone gets misgendered/the wrong pronouns are used?**

If a person has publicly shared their pronouns, we do not want to ignore it when someone is misgendered. The best practice is to interrupt the sentence, tell the person the correct pronouns, and repeat the sentence with the correct pronouns. Ideally, we should have conversations with folks who get misgendered as soon as possible so we can ask them how they would like it to be handled. Do they want you to address it with the person 1-on-1 instead? Do they want you to check with them before saying something? Is it situational? Do they want you to correct everyone except for judges? Everyone has different comfort levels around attention and conflict, so it's important to center the person who experiences misgendering first and foremost.

### **What if I get pushback when sharing my pronouns or correcting someone?**

Determine your goal(s) and remember why this is important to you. Are you hoping to change their mind? Are you hoping they will change their behavior? Are you simply informing them of protocol from your organization/business? Just like we cannot assume anybody's name just by looking at them, we cannot assume anybody's pronouns just by looking at them. Some people think gender/pronouns are obvious, but it isn't always; so in order to avoid making incorrect assumptions, we err on the side of respect. For more reasons and scripts to respond with, visit [www.praxischi.com/news/responses](http://www.praxischi.com/news/responses)

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.lgbtqia.fandom.com/wiki/Pronoun#Neopronouns](http://www.lgbtqia.fandom.com/wiki/Pronoun#Neopronouns)

<sup>2</sup> [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_personal\\_pronouns#Basic](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_personal_pronouns#Basic)

## **I don't understand all these new words. What if it's just too hard for me?**

As [Travis Alabanza said](#): Being understood is not a prerequisite for care and safety<sup>3</sup>. You don't have to understand why someone uses the pronouns they do or where they come from to be able to use them. There are several websites that allow you to practice, such as [pronouns.minus18.org.au](#) and [practicewithpronouns.com](#). You can also give your pet or a stuffed animal new pronouns and practice when talking about them. For more vocabulary, visit [www.praxischi.com/news/vocabulary](#)

Other suggestions:

- As you would do learning anything new, practice a little bit every day. Language is maintained through regular and habitual use.
- Write or narrate out loud about someone, using the pronouns you want to learn/practice.
- Listen to/read works by other people using the pronouns: podcasts, YouTube, fiction and non-fiction books, newspaper articles.
- Start using singular *they* when talking about people whose genders you don't know.
- Research genders that defy the binary.
- Get used to the idea that you don't know anyone's gender until they tell you.

## **What's the difference between trans & nonbinary?**

These words mean something personal to each person who uses them. Sometimes if you ask 10 nonbinary people what nonbinary means, you may get 11 different answers. For some people, they use both words to describe themselves. For others, they only use one or the other. Like everything else, don't make assumptions without getting that information directly from the person.

Oftentimes nonbinary people describe their gender as something outside the spectrum of "male" or "female" - which could fall somewhere between the two, could be many points including both male and female, or could exist on a completely different plane that doesn't use male/female at all.

There is no "one way" to be trans or nonbinary. So long as someone says they are, then they are.

## **What about Spanish and other languages that are gendered?**

Many languages, like Spanish, are gendered in ways that are both similar and different from English. Therefore, consider asking for direct feedback/collaboration from TGNC people in these communities to find out which pronouns are used. In Spanish for instance, *elle* is used with more regularity as a third person singular pronoun, despite not being officially recognized.

For more information, visit [www.praxischi.com/news/using-elle](#)

## **What if I still have questions? Who can I talk to?**

Please check out Praxis' website at [www.praxischi.com](#) to see more information, schedule a free consultation, or access resources.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.twitter.com/travisalabanza/status/1081174426845106177?s=46](https://www.twitter.com/travisalabanza/status/1081174426845106177?s=46)