

## **What are pronouns?**

Pronouns are the most common way we refer to another person besides using their name. Common pronouns are she/he/they. Less common personal pronouns are ze/ay/xe.

## **Why pronouns are important in the workplace**

If you are someone who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth (also known as cisgender), you may wonder why pronouns are important. However, if you are someone who is transgender, non-binary (someone who identifies outside the binary of a woman or a man), or gender non-conforming (GNC), pronouns can be one of the most important aspects of your identity validation.

As a society, we make many assumptions about people's names and what they wear based on heteronormative social structures. If we see someone who is in a dress named Jen, we may automatically assume their gender based on our interpretation of their physical expression. This is an antiquated practice in the cisgender heteronormative world and it does not work in the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. You cannot guess a person's pronouns by looking at them, observing how they dress and learning their name.

You may meet someone named Alex who is wearing a dress, has facial hair and is wearing makeup. Now guessing their pronouns becomes more complicated, and this is why having access to someone's pronouns is important. As an organization, we have a duty to make everyone who works with us feel seen and respected. Giving the option for people to share their pronouns (and having the choice to put them in an email signature) is a small and easy way to acknowledge someone's identity and make them feel safer in the workplace. This is a common practice in the queer community and with Vancouver having one of the largest 2SLGBTQIA+ communities in Canada, it is only natural that Vancouver workplaces would be at the forefront of this practice.

## **Some common misconceptions**

Some people may think that asking or displaying pronouns is rude, too personal or unnecessary. This may be because cisgender people are not misgendered every day. If you are transgender, non-binary, or GNC though, having the option to share your pronouns in person and in an email signature is the quickest and easiest way to make sure you are getting addressed correctly in the workplace. Misgendering can happen multiple times a day for transgender, non-binary and GNC people and it can lead to depression and mental health challenges. By giving the option to display pronouns, it normalizes the practice of not making assumptions about people's gender identities and sends the message of respect and inclusivity, which is what our organization is based on.

## **Normalizing pronoun sharing**

If you are cisgender it is important that you use that privilege and consider sharing your pronouns when prompted. The reason for this is simple - cisgender people face no risk of being outed or alienated when sharing pronouns, a privilege transgender, non-binary and GNC folks do not have.

## **Make pronoun sharing optional, never mandatory**

While having the option to share pronouns can create a safer space for transgender, non-binary and GNC people, it can also be a loaded question. Some people might be in the process of questioning their gender and not ready to share, others may not feel safe enough in the space/setting to share. Regardless of reason, pronoun sharing should always be optional, and never mandatory.

If someone chooses not to share their pronouns with you, use their name when referring to them in the third person.

## **Notes**

Language and common practices change quickly in 2SLGBTQIA+ community. This document will be reviewed and updated every 6 months. If you would like to be on the update list or have constructive questions or suggestions, please email Sara Martin ([smartin@cinesite.com](mailto:smartin@cinesite.com))

This resource has been provided by Sara Martin, Cinesite.