

Everyone has a gender identity. Some people identify as cisgender – a gender that is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Others identify with a gender that is different from what they were assigned at birth. Regardless of a person’s sex assigned at birth, a person may identify as a woman, a man, both, neither woman nor man, or they may switch between genders (genderfluid). Respecting a person’s gender identity and asking about their name and pronouns are an important part of facilitating a welcoming workplace for our colleagues.

What is a Gender Pronoun?

We all use pronouns as part of our everyday conversations. Pronouns are words like “it,” “he,” or “I” that refer to either the person that is talking or the person/thing that is being spoken about. Gender pronouns refer specifically to people that you are talking about. Gender pronouns (such as “he/him/his,” “she/her/hers” or “they/them/theirs”) are the way in which we refer to each other’s gender identity – except we often don’t think a whole lot about them. Usually, we interpret a person’s gender based on their outward appearance or their name and “assign” the person a gender pronoun. However, our assumption of their gender may not be a correct interpretation of a person’s gender identity.

Why Should I Display My Gender Pronoun at Work?

Because gender identity is internal (an internal sense of one’s own gender), we do not necessarily know a person’s correct gender pronoun by looking at them or knowing their name. Additionally, a person may identify as gender-fluid, genderqueer or non-binary, and may not use either male (he/him/his) or female (she/her/hers) pronouns. A genderqueer or non-binary identified person may use a gender-neutral pronoun such as “they.” For example, you would say “I know Sam. They work in our legal department.” Displaying your gender pronoun at work, such as in your email signature or in an employee directory, is an important way to make our workplace more inclusive of people of all genders.