**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - Cultural Competence**

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) is dedicated to inclusive language development and implementation for all County employees and its community partners who offer behavioral health programs and services. Below, the DEIC is providing information regarding pronoun definition and pronoun use. All County of San Luis Obispo Behavioral Health employees are invited to add their preferred pronouns in their electronic mail signature.

What are gender pronouns?

* A gender pronoun is the pronoun that a person uses for themselves.
* For example: If Alex’s pronouns are she, her, and hers, you could say “Alex ate her food because she was hungry.”

How do I ask someone what pronouns they use?

* Try asking: “What pronouns do you use?” or “Can you remind me what pronouns you use?” It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as making a hurtful assumption.
* If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what gender pronouns are, you can try something like this:
* “Tell us your name, where you come from, and your pronouns. That means the pronouns that you use in reference to yourself. For example, I’m Nestor, I’m from Peru, and I like to be referred to with he, him, and his pronouns. So you could say, ‘he went to the movies with his partner’ if you were talking about me.”

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 (Shea 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 (Tyler 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! (Ash ate Ash’s food because Ash 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.

Gender Pronouns & E-mail Signatures

For employees that wish to express their preferred pronouns, below you will find an example on how to incorporate gender pronouns in your e-mail signature. As in the example below, you may also choose to add a link to one of the resources below with information on the importance of pronouns:

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*Pronouns: he/his/él* [*(Why pronous?)*](https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/gender-pronouns-in-workplace)

Resources:

<https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/gender-pronouns-in-workplace>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/pronouns-usage-among-lgbtq-youth/>

<https://www.glsen.org/activity/pronouns-guide-glsen>

If you have any questions or concerns, do please contact the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Program Manager at the phone number and e-mail provided on the example above.