What is the importance of pronouns in relation to gender identity?

It is important not to make assumptions about someone else's gender by using the wrong pronouns because you risk mis-gendering someone.

Asking about someone else's pronouns and revealing your own can benefit transgender people, gender nonconforming people, and those whose gender identity may not align with how they're perceived. For people who are 'read by others' as the gender they identify with, this helps normalise the practice of using pronouns for all. It can help show your support for LGBTQ+ people and that you are someone who would be happy to be corrected if you've been using the wrong pronouns for someone.

A person's internal sense of their own gender (their gender identity) does not always match the gender they were assigned at birth. People whose gender *does* match the identity they were assigned to at birth are called cisgender.

Transgender (or trans) is an inclusive umbrella term used to describe anyone who feels that the gender that was assigned to them at birth incompletely describes or fails to describe their relation to gender. However, some non-binary people may not consider themselves to be trans. Non-binary people identify in some way outside of the man-woman gender binary and may regard themselves as neither exclusively a man nor a woman, or as both, or take another approach to gender entirely.

The training on Transgender Awareness that is run by The Kite Trust for Cambridge City Council can help you better understand terminology around gender identity, and more information on pronouns. It is important training because terminology around gender is constantly developing.

The Council is signed up to Safer Spaces that is a project which organisations can sign up to in order to ensure LGBTQ+ staff and customers feel welcome, safe and supported. It was developed by The Encompass Network.

What are pronouns?

A **pronoun** is "a word that is used instead of a noun or a noun phrase". Pronouns refer to either a noun that has already been mentioned or to a noun that does not need to be named specifically. A noun is a word used to identify a class of people, places, or things. A noun phrase is a group of words that work together to name and describe a person, place, thing,

or idea (e.g. "the owner of the house"). The most common pronouns are the personal pronouns, which refer to oneself, a person, or people.

Some definitions of common personal pronouns are as follows:

- **Subject**: A pronoun that takes the place of a noun as the subject of a sentence. For instance, "**I** went to the party".
- **Object**: A pronoun that takes the place of a noun as the object of a sentence. For instance, "He said he would travel with **them**."
- **Possessive**: A pronoun indicating possession, for example mine, yours, hers, theirs
- **Reflexive**: Reflexive pronouns are words ending in -self or -selves that are used when the subject and the object of a sentence are the same (e.g. "I believe in **myself**")

The following chart details some typical gender pronouns, though others exist as well.

	Subject	Object	Possessive	Reflexive
Male/Masculine	he	him	his	himself
Female/Feminine	she	her	her	herself
Gender Neutral	they	them	their	theirself
Gender Neutral	ze	hir	hir	hirself

For example the pronouns in the following sentences are in bold:

- Sam Smith is a singer-songwriter and has released two studio albums. **They** are an Oscar- and Grammy-winning singer-songwriter.
- Theresa May was the last UK Prime Minister. **She** served as Prime Minister between 2016 and 2019.

Using pronouns in email signatures

Cambridge City Council supports staff members to use pronouns in their email signatures. We recognise that this is a personal choice for staff members to make.

Please follow this template in order to include pronouns in your email signature, which also includes a short description to explain why you are including pronouns. There is no need to include titles (e.g. Mr, Mrs, Mx) as well.

Here is the template:

Useful links

[The truth about trans - Stonewall](#)

[MyPronouns.org Resources on Personal Pronouns](#)

[International Pronouns Day](#)

Your Name (pronouns e.g. "he/ him pronouns", "she/ her pronons", "they/ them pronouns", "they/them pronouns", "ze/ hir pronouns"), Job title, Cambridge City Council | Email address | >Landline phone number

[cambridge.gov.uk](#) | [facebook.com/camcitco](#) | [twitter.com/camcitco](#)

I have included pronouns in my email signature because this is an important move towards inclusivity by not making assumptions about pronouns and people's gender identity. For further information, see https://www.mypronouns.org/

Asking people what their pronouns are

If someone has not told you what pronouns they use it is best practice to ask. It is also best practice to ask upon being introduced to someone what pronouns they use.

This is the best way how to ask what someone's pronouns are:

- Before asking for someone else's pronouns share your own e.g. "My name is Sam and I use the pronouns she and her, what about you?". It is more conversational to share your pronouns first.
- You might need to explain the reason for asking because asking for people's pronouns is not practiced everywhere. For instance, you might say "I ask everyone this question because I want to be respectful and not make any assumptions. We are encouraged to ask by Cambridge City Council". If you need to explain further you can share that this is something we are encouraged as a council to ask of everyone upon introduction, and especially during staff inductions. We can explain this in the context of ensuring we do not assume what some's gender is and get this wrong, and that the practice is in line with our status as a Safe Space for LGBTQ+ people.

In a group setting make sure ask all people pronouns and not just single out people unsure of.

If you happen to misgender someone, acknowledge your mistake apologise to show you are aware of it and move on. Over-apologising can make things more uncomfortable.

Asking people's pronouns is not the same as asking people's gender. Pronouns are used to publicly refer to someone even if the details of their gender are private.

Please note that pronouns people use can be different at different times (especially for genderfluid people). Just do your best to always use the pronoun you have been given by the person.