

# LGBTQIA-AFFIRMING CLASSROOM TIPS

Pronouns | Vocabulary | Advice for Educators

## Pronouns?

Pronouns are words that can replace nouns in a discourse in which those nouns have already been otherwise identified.

Ex: "He went to the bathroom." "She drank water." "They are reading a book."

They/them/theirs is a common nonbinary pronoun. It can be used in the singular form to not specify someone's gender.

## Why are pronouns important?

Misgendering (using the wrong pronouns for someone) is harmful because it is a sign of disrespect to someone's gender identity. It can also lead to students feeling unsafe in the classroom, because if their identity is not respected by their teacher, they may feel more vulnerable to harassment from their teacher or from their peers in the room.

## What if you make a mistake?

Apologize, correct yourself, and keep the conversation moving!

# Vocabulary

*"If a professor goes out of their way to make sure to establish a safe space, to establish an inclusive space, I definitely will look forward to coming back every day and learning what I have to learn in that class."* - From "Ask Me: What LGBTQ Students Want Their Professors to Know" - The Chronicle of Higher Education 9/15

- **Gender** - The social organization of bodies into different categories of people. This sorting at birth is usually based on a child's sexual organs. However, gender differs from "sex" in that it is cultural, not biological. When we are born, we are assigned a gender and come to identify (or not) with that gender through socialization. Each person has a subjective sense of fit (or lack of fit) with a particular gender category; this is one's gender identity.

- **Assignment** - refers to the way that we assume others' genders based on their bodies. When a child is born, our culture slots it into one of two groups: male or female. We "determine" the child's "correct" identity based on a quick visual assessment of the appearance of its sexual organs, and we do so by following a specific dichotomy. (A vulva-bearing child is typically assigned female at birth, or AFAB, for short. A





## CPS “Supporting Gender Diversity” Toolkit

About Face Theatre encourages educators to visit the Office of Student Health and Wellness webpage to read CPS’s “Supporting Gender Diversity Toolkit” (2017) in full and implement its suggestions. In this toolkit, you will find:

- A template for a plan staff can make with trans students to help them feel safe and supported at school.
- How staff can update information related to a student’s name and pronouns in SIM.
- CPS’s official statement that “intentional or persistent refusal of students or staff to respect a student’s gender identity by their chosen names and pronouns violates the Student Code of Conduct and Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy.”

penis-bearing child is typically assigned male at birth, or AMAB.)

- **Trans** - Transgender. Describes people whose gender identity is different from the biological sex they were assigned at birth. It can be used as an umbrella term that encompasses many diverse gender identities and expressions (applies to identity, appearance, and behavior - not necessarily body parts).

- **Dysphoria** - A sense of unhappiness (the opposite of euphoria) over the incongruence between how one subjectively understands one’s experience of gender and how one’s gender is perceived by others. Trans people in particular may also have a strong aversive reaction – perhaps sadness, or anger, or disgust – upon being called by the (inappropriate) pronouns of their birth-assigned genders, or the inappropriate-gender names that were used for them before they came out (these actions are known as respectively as “misgendering” and “deadnaming”).

- **Cis** - Cisgender. A word used to describe people who are not trans. Term used to describe people whose gender identity is congruent with biological sex. This word is a simple opposite, formed by using the prefix “cis” (on the same side) as opposed to “trans” (across/beyond).

- **Nonbinary** / Genderqueer / Gender Nonconforming / Gender Expansive - A variety of people who feel that, in some way, the substance of their genders lies outside the gender binary’s two labels of “male” and “female.” They/them/theirs are common nonbinary pronouns, though there are many others, including “ze”, “hir” and more.

- **Intersex** - A condition when someone is born with sex chromosomes, genitalia, or reproductive organs that aren’t easily categorized into “male” or “female”. Intersex conditions affect about every 1 in 2,000 births, about the same number of people born in the US every year with red hair. When people only believe in 2 biological gender categories, they can sometimes subject intersex people as infants to unnecessary medical procedures such as genital surgery or hormone therapy.

- **LGBTQIAA+** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Allies, Asexuals, and more. These letters are used in various combinations to notate the queer community. LGBT, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA are common shortened forms. This initialism can not include all elements of queer identity, therefore, the plus sign is used to leave space for new terms and identities that are always evolving.

- **Queer** - someone who defines their sexuality and gender as they see fit, often with the understanding that sexuality and gender are fluid and therefore shouldn't be labeled with traditional labels. Now, a common umbrella term for the LGBTQ community, though there are some who do not prefer this word because of its not-too-distant history as a slur term.
- **Sexual orientation** - A person's emotional and sexual attraction to other people based on the gender of the other person. Sexual orientation is not the same as gender identity. What we find erotic and how we take pleasure in our bodies constitutes our sexuality. Sexuality describes how and with whom we act on our erotic desires.
- **Intersectionality** - Recognizing that social oppression of any one group inherently contains many different oppressed identities within that group as well. For example, the oppression of any woman or group of women should take into account all of their identities that intersect with their being a woman as well, such as race, class, nationality, religion, disability, sexuality, citizenship status, or other circumstances that may marginalize or privilege them.

### *Other tips for Educators include...*

- Introduce yourself to your class with your names and pronouns, and invite students to do the same. "My name is \_\_\_ and my pronouns are she/her/hers. When I take attendance, please respond with your current name pronunciation and the pronouns you would like to me use for you." Take notes of these pronouns on the roster so that you will remember.
- Names and pronouns for students should be on a roster each teacher gets. CPS's "Supporting Gender Diversity Toolkit" (2017) provides detailed instructions on how to change a student's information in the Student Information Management system (SIM).
- Avoid gendered addresses like "boys and girls" or "ladies and gentlemen", etc. Try "all students" or "everyone" as examples of inclusive terms.
- Avoid asking students to line up as boys or girls or separating them by gender. You can use other things, such as "odd and even birthdate".
- Use inclusive examples in lessons : Aim to include English classes with queer protagonists and experiences; science classes recognizing more than two genders; math courses using more varied examples than "Bill and Sue"; health courses offering comprehensive information on sexuality, gender, and safer sex for all students; physical education classes that do not separate students by gender.

The vocabulary and advice compiled for this handout were compiled with assistance from CPS "Supporting Gender Diversity Toolkit" (2017); Transgender History: Updated Edition (Susan Stryker 2018); [transwhat.org](http://transwhat.org); and Youth Speak Out: A report from About Face Youth Ensemble.