

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER PRONOUNS

Gender pronouns are important because they're the smallest way to acknowledge someone's identity. Other than our name, pronouns are one of the main ways that people identify and call us. The practice of using your own pronouns when introducing yourself to another person or in a larger group helps demystify the notion that the use of gender pronouns is the sole responsibility of transgender or gender nonconforming youth and adults. Using pronouns creates safer and more inclusive spaces for people to be themselves knowing that other people are going to respect their identity.

When someone states their pronouns (he, she, they, etc.), they are asking for your respect. When you use the wrong pronouns this is called misgendering. When you choose not to use a person's correct pronouns, and instead opt for your own, you are not only invalidating someone's identity, but you are potentially also saying a series of harmful things you may or may not have intended, including:

- 1 I KNOW YOU BETTER THAN YOU KNOW YOURSELF.**
- 2 YOUR SAFETY IS NOT IMPORTANT TO ME.**
- 3 YOUR IDENTITY ISN'T REAL AND SHOULDN'T BE ACKNOWLEDGED.**
- 4 DISRESPECTING YOU MAKES ME FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE.**
- 5 I'M GOING TO IGNORE WHAT YOU'VE SAID BECAUSE YOUR IDENTITY IS AN INCONVENIENCE TO ME.**
- 6 MY OWN INTERESTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR SAFETY, VALIDATION, AND DIGNITY.**
- 7 I AM NOT AN ALLY, A FRIEND, OR SOMEONE YOU CAN TRUST.**

While you may not intend to say any of these things, that doesn't change how it may impact the person on the receiving end. You may not understand someone's gender identity. It's more important to respect someone's gender identity than it is to understand it.

When a student/adult takes the brave step to come out to you, it is absolutely essential that you respect their journey, trust their lived experience, listen intently, and celebrate their identity, rather than replace their reality with your own assumptions.