

Gender Pronouns

How to Address Misgendering

Getting the pronouns right for the people we're speaking with and about is an important part of demonstrating respect. But how can we avoid unintentionally misgendering someone? And what should we do if we happen to make a mistake?

What Does It Mean to Misgender Someone?

Misgendering occurs when a person (intentionally or unintentionally) uses language to refer to another person that does not align with that person's affirmed gender.

Intentionally or maliciously failing to use a person's proper pronouns is a violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code which protects people from actions that discriminate against protected social areas, including gender identity and expression.

Examples of Misgendering Include:

- ◆ addressing a mixed-gender group with "hey guys"
- ◆ referring to a person who has transitioned using their old name or pronouns
- ◆ using titles that do not accurately reflect the person's gender (e.g., fireman, chairman, etc.)

Addressing Instances of Misgendering

If you inadvertently misgender someone simply acknowledge your mistake, correct yourself and move on. While lengthy apologies might make us feel better about our mistake, it often puts unwelcome attention on the misgendering that occurred, creating even more discomfort for the person who was misgendered.

If you are corrected after misgendering someone, resist the urge to become defensive and instead simply thank the person for the correction and keep the conversation moving.

Examples of What to Say if You Make a Mistake

When correcting yourself:

Hey, have you spoken to Claire about that new project?

I did! He said... excuse me, she said it's going great!

When responding to corrections:

So I was speaking to Quinn and she told me....

"they" told you...

Ah yes, thank you, they told me about the pizza party. We should go!

Helpful Tips

1. Practice using singular "they" to refer to those whose gender identity you do not know.
2. If you're unsure what pronouns to use to address a person, find a private moment to ask.
3. Consider sharing your pronouns when meeting new people to promote safety and inclusivity.

For more information, contact Kerry's Place Autism Services:

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