

Transgender 101 Guide

While there has been growing visibility and increased acceptance of transgender and gender diverse people in recent years, there has also been a significant increase in political, rhetorical, and literal attacks on transgender and gender diverse people.

The ACLU of Kansas stands for all Kansans' civil rights and will continue to fight against discrimination and political attacks against trans and gender diverse Kansans, and we want to make sure our network of civil liberties advocates is well-equipped to fight alongside us. We understand that issues involving transgender and gender diverse people can involve words, ideas, and identities that are new or confusing to some people and want to meet you where you are when it comes to knowledge and understanding of trans issues and identities. This guide seeks to provide you with the resources and information you need to feel confident communicating and advocating for trans and gender diverse Kansans' civil rights. Check out the language and pronouns guides below, as well as the ally resource links if you'd like more information or additional resources.

Gender & Sexuality Language

This guide includes common terms used when talking about gender, sexuality, and expression. This is not an exhaustive guide and is Western and U.S.-centric. Other cultures may use different terms and have other conceptions of gender. Additionally, language changes. Some of the common terms used now are different from those used in the past to describe similar concepts. Some people may use terms that are less commonly used now to describe themselves, and some people may use different terms altogether. While that can feel confusing, don't worry—what is important is listening to, recognizing, and respecting people as you're learning.

- **Sexual orientation:** A term used to describe a person's physical, romantic, or emotional attraction to other people, or lack thereof.
- **Gender identity:** A term used to describe a person's innate sense of their own gender, which may or may not correspond to their gender assigned at birth.
- **Gender expression:** A term used to describe how a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, through behavior, clothing, voice, or other perceived characteristics. Society tends to identify these cues as "masculine" or "feminine," although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture.
- **Gender assigned at birth:** A term used to describe a person's assigned gender; typically referring to the gender ("boy" or "girl") assigned to them at birth by a medical professional, usually based on the person's external anatomy at the time.
 - Sometimes, you will see this phrased as "sex assigned at birth;" both have the same meaning.
- **Cisgender:** An adjective used to describe someone whose gender identity corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Transgender:** An adjective used to describe someone whose gender identity does not correspond with the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender diverse:** An umbrella term used to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary gender framework of "man" and "woman." This can include a range of gender identities that reject the binary, like non-binary, genderqueer, and agender identities.
- **Intersex:** An umbrella term used to describe people with differences in reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, or hormones that do not fit typical binary definitions of "male" and "female."
- **Gender dysphoria:** A medical diagnosis used to describe the psychological distress that results from incongruence between one's gender assigned at birth and one's gender identity. Not all trans and gender diverse people experience dysphoria, and those who do may experience it at varying levels of intensity.
- **Misgendering:** A term that refers to the experience of someone using language to describe a person that does not align with that person's gender.
- **Deadnaming:** A term that refers to the act of using a trans person's old name from before they transitioned.

Understanding Pronouns

This guide describes what pronouns are, why they matter, how to use them, what to do if you mess someone's pronouns up, and how you can normalize inclusive pronoun practices in your life. Pronouns are what we use to refer to someone without using their name, and using someone's chosen pronouns is a sign of respect and a recognition of someone's humanity. While there has been a lot of discussion about gender neutral pronouns specifically, it is important to know that everyone has pronouns that are used when referring to them—and getting those pronouns right is not exclusively a trans or gender diverse issue.

- **What are pronouns and why do they matter?**

Pronouns are the words you use to refer to others in place of their name. Some examples include “I work with Omar. *He's* great,” or “That's Allison's bag. *They* must have left it here,” or “I just got off the phone with *her*, and *she* said *she* would meet us here at noon.” Some people use only certain pronouns, some use any pronouns, and some use none at all. While pronouns may seem inconsequential, they are in fact vital and an important way to affirm trans and gender diverse people's identities. Using someone's correct pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive and welcoming environment. In fact, research shows that using trans people's chosen pronouns leads to better mental health outcomes for trans people, while using the wrong pronouns leads to worse mental health outcomes.

- **How do I find out someone's pronouns?** Some people feel more comfortable assuming someone's pronouns based off of their gender expression and how they present themselves; but assuming someone's pronouns can potentially be harmful. Assuming someone's pronouns based off their appearance will not always be correct, and can send the message that someone has to look a certain way to be a certain gender. It is better practice to simply ask someone what pronouns they use! You can do this in many ways—but an easy way is to start the conversation by sharing your own pronouns and then asking what pronouns they use. For example, “Hello, I'm John and I use he/him pronouns. What about yourself?”

- **How do I use someone's pronouns correctly?** Usually folks are comfortable using she/her and he/him pronouns for people, because those pronouns fall within the binary gendered language common in society. But using gender neutral pronouns like they/them/theirs can sometimes cause folks problems. However, “they” is already commonly used as a singular pronoun when you are talking about someone and don't know who they are. For example, we already say “Oh no! Someone left their bag behind. I hope they come back for it.” When you're using gender neutral pronouns for someone that you know, you still use them in the same way you would in the above example. For example, if it

was Oliver who left their bag, but Oliver uses they/them pronouns, you still say “Oliver left their bag behind. I hope they come back for it.”

- **What do I do if I use the wrong pronouns for someone?** Mistakes happen—that's part of being human! If you accidentally assume someone's pronouns incorrectly and they correct you, or if you make a mistake and use the wrong pronouns for someone you know uses different pronouns, all you need to do is apologize, correct it, and move on. Sometimes when this happens, you might feel compelled to explain how you did not mean any harm, or how you are still practicing or learning the person's pronouns. While that may all be true, it's important to not center your feelings and your intent in the situation, but to instead center the impact the misgendering had on the person you are speaking to. For example, this would look like: “I was talking to Marisol before the meeting and she said—I'm sorry, they said that the project was still on time.” It is that simple.
 - o It's important to note that while mistakes happen, you should strive to make sure you use the correct pronouns for the trans and gender diverse people in your life. If you are having trouble using gender neutral pronouns in sentences, try practicing at home or in your daily life. Use they/them pronouns for strangers you see in public, or for your pets, to get more experience with gender neutral pronouns.
- **How can I normalize inclusive pronoun practices in my own life?** There are tons of great ways to make sure you're using inclusive pronoun practices, whether you're at work or just going about your daily life. As mentioned above, you can start by breaking the habit of assuming people's pronouns and build the habit of introducing yourself with your pronouns and asking others to do the same. Some other specific examples include adding a line for your pronouns in your work email signature and on your social media accounts or bio lines, or if you're at an event with name tags, you can add your pronouns to the nametag.
- **Pronoun resources:** For more information about pronouns, visit: <https://pronouns.org/> or <https://www.glsen.org/activity/pronouns-guide-glsen>.