Pronouns: An Introduction

101 Low Trust 10 mins LGBTQ+ Participants

Materials & Media: N/a

Set Up: N/a

Goals & Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will be able to explain what pronouns are and how they help create more inclusive/affirming environments
- Participants will be able to identify strategies for introducing pronouns to new groups
- Participants will be able to describe how to correct themselves and others when someone uses the wrong pronoun

Framing:

- We are going to be talking about pronouns, why they are important, and how to correct ourselves and others if we are mispronouncing someone

Process Steps & Talking Points:

1. Introduce what a pronoun is and why they are important.

“Pronouns are words that function in the place of a name. So instead of saying, “my brother Steve is coming to pick me up in Steve’s car and we are going to Steve’s favorite restaurant,” I could instead say, “his car/his favorite restaurant.”

In English pronouns we have two sets of gendered pronouns. “She/her/hers” and “he/him/his” are two sets of pronouns that are attached to a particular gender. Men/males have been typically referred to using he/him/his and women/females by using she/her/hers. We likely all grew up assuming we knew someone’s pronouns and that we can tell just by observing that person or knowing their gender. But this isn’t the case and in an effort to be more affirming of all it is important to get out of the habit of assuming pronouns.”

“If we want to get out of the habit of assuming pronouns, we need to learn and let people introduce their pronouns.”

2. Ask the group if anyone has ideas on how they would ask a group of folks to introduce their pronouns?

3. After anyone has shared their answer feel free to add additional thoughts or options.
   (a) Role model your pronouns before inviting everyone to introduce theirs. “Hi, my name is Meg and I use she/her/hers pronouns. Could everyone please go around and share their name and pronouns.”
   (b) Explain what pronouns are and why you’re asking people to introduce theirs before you do. “Hey everyone! So during introductions we are going to introduce our name and pronouns.
Pronouns are words that we use to replace names, like she/her/hers, he/him/his, or they/them/their. I want to make sure that we are referring to each other in the way that feels most accurate, so we are going to go around and if everyone could share their name and pronouns that’d be great!

4. If you haven’t introduced pronouns with each other pauses here and invite folks to do exactly that! Have everyone go around the room and ask them to share their name and pronouns with the group.

5. Share with the group, “A common question and fear that we may have when getting to know someone who uses pronouns we are less practiced using, who has recently changed pronouns, is using the wrong pronoun and misgendering this person.” Ask the group what do they think would be important to do if they misgendered someone?

6. Share your some of these thoughts if the group didn’t cover these ideas.
   a. Apologize briefly and correct yourself. Ex. “And I was saying to someone that he’s a really good, sorry, she, that she was a really good painter.”
   b. Do not over apologize. Over apologizing could sound like, “Oh gosh I am SO SO sorry, I really am. I know it’s wrong and this must happen all the time. Gosh pronouns are so difficult!” You’re doing a few things when you over apologize. Instead of the moment being about them you’ve made it about you feeling bad.

   “Pronouns are difficult and in particular challenging your lifelong habit of assuming pronouns is hard to break. It takes practice. But it is important to challenge yourself to keep trying, to do your best, and to not make the challenge part of the apology. Practicing when that person is not around is crucial, when you are talking about them to other people, is a really important time to constantly correct yourself to get yourself into a new habit.”

OPTIONAL ADDITIONS:

8. Ask the group what they think they could do if they hear someone else getting misgendered? What are ways they could be an ally in that moment?
   a. Correcting in the moment: “Alex was talking to be the other day and he was saying...” “She was saying.” “Oh right, she was saying.”
   b. Role model the correct pronouns when you speak next: “Oh that’s really interesting about Alex, she was just saying to me the other day that...”
   c. Directly address the issue: “Oh that’s really interesting about what Alex was saying. Just wanted to let you know though, Alex uses she/her/hers pronouns, just wanted to remind you/let you know.”

9. Ask if there are any additional questions about pronouns.

Wrap Up:

- Now that we have a better understanding of pronouns and why they are important we encourage you to challenge yourself and to bring inviting people to share their pronouns into your new groups and experiences