

Making Your Club Inclusive of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

Being inclusive means that your student club and its members commit to an ongoing process of education. Your club will need to make an effort to ensure that its activities and advocacy efforts are inclusive of transgender and gender nonconforming people and issues.

Use Gender-Neutral Pronouns

Some transgender and gender nonconforming people may prefer what are traditionally thought of as female or male pronouns, like “she” or “he”, but others prefer gender-neutral pronouns. Respecting people’s preferred gender pronouns is an important way to be supportive of everyone’s identity.

- “Zie” (pronounced “z”) is subjective and is used instead of “she” or “he.”
- “Hir” (pronounced “here”) is both objective and possessive and is used instead of “him,” “his,” “her,” and “hers.”
- “They,” “them,” and “their” are also gender-neutral and can be used as singular gender-neutral pronouns.

Using “it” to refer to people is offensive and dehumanizing, so make sure to stick with gender-neutral pronouns when appropriate!

Practice Gender-Neutral Pronouns

Plan an activity to allow people to become more fluent with these pronouns. For example, break the group into pairs, have each person get to know the other, and then have each member introduce his/her/hir partner to the group using only gender-neutral pronouns. Remember to gently correct people if they make a mistake.

Important Definitions

GENDER: A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles — codified as feminine or masculine — that are assigned to people, based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construct, it is possible to reject or modify the assignment made, and develop something that feels truer and just to oneself.

GENDER IDENTITY: How an individual identifies in terms of their gender. Gender identities may include “male,” “female,” “androgynous,” “transgender,” “genderqueer” and many others, or a combination thereof.

GENDER EXPRESSION: The multiple ways (e.g., behaviors, dress) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.

CISGENDER: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.

TRANSGENDER: A person whose gender identity and/or expression is not aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth. “Transgender” is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a large number of identities related to gender nonconformity.

GENDER NONCONFORMING: A descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”