Gender Pronouns – Why bother?

**He/Him/His. They/Them/Theirs. She/They.**

You’ve probably seen discussions around pronouns on the news; on social media; a recording artist you like might have shared their pronouns; you’ve seen it popping up on email signatures; people might have started sharing their pronouns at the start of meetings.

And you’re maybe thinking…why? Why are people sharing this?

You might think “Well you look like a man, why do you need to tell me your pronouns are he/his?”

Or “I’m not bothered what anyone’s pronouns are, anyone can be what they want.”

And that’s ok. But gender pronouns are incredibly important to many people and as a modern organisation, we surely want to make our workspaces as safe and inclusive as we can.

Words are a powerful language tool that helps us connect with one another and nothing is more personal than the words people use to refer to us through our names and pronouns. You wouldn’t want to sit in a meeting and be called the wrong name the whole way through it. It’s frustrating to receive an email with the wrong name on it. But it’s not just frustrating or annoying to be misgendered; It can be traumatic. I can’t sit here and write about the experiences of everyone in the LGBTQ+ community, but I’ve heard enough and read enough to know how damaging being misgendered in the workplace can be.

The amazing thing with gender pronouns is, it’s incredibly easy to do. You don’t need to even learn new words! Because gender pronouns aren’t new: we use them all the time to identify people and objects. But by changing some very small behaviours in the workplace, you can make a huge impact on people’s lives.

Some ideas of what you can do:

* The easiest way to learn someone’s pronouns is to politely ask them. “Hi, can I just check, what pronouns do you use?” We all make mistakes and if you accidentally misgender someone, that’s ok.
* If you’re doing introductions in a meeting, you could share your pronouns. “Hi, I’m Ollie, I work in People Management and my pronouns are she/hers.”
* You could introduce yourself to new employees and share your pronouns, letting them know your team is supportive and inclusive.
* If you feel comfortable to, you could add your pronouns to your email signature
* If you hear colleagues misgendering another colleague, you can politely correct them, even when the person isn’t there
* One final point is the reminder that the phrase ‘preferred pronouns’ is no longer used and this phrase is also damaging

These might take some getting used to, but it causes you no harm and using the right pronouns for someone will make them feel safe, acknowledged, and valid. Everyone deserves to come to work and be treated with respect.

Thank you for reading and if you’d like to see what some of the gender pronouns are, there are some helpful tables below. To write this, I referred to [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk) and they have lots of excellent resources.

Happy International Pronouns Day 2021!

Ollie Wright, from the LGBTQ+ Staff Network Group

(She/Her)

If you’d like to learn more about what the LGBTQ+ Staff Network Group are about, please email me directly at Orlanda.wright@cumbria.gov.uk