Toolkit: Pronouns and Gendered Language

**Pronouns**

He/him/his and she/her/hers are gendered pronouns. It should not be taken as certain that someone uses a gendered pronoun, unless they have specified so (for example, it might appear in their Twitter bio). When referring to someone for whom you do not have pronoun confirmation, they/their is the best practice for a gender-neutral pronoun.

There are numerous additional gender-neutral pronouns available, including xe/xem/xirs, ey/em/eir and zie/zir/zis. These are best used only upon specific request. When in doubt, use they/them/their.

**Gendered Language**

Using gendered language in English, particularly for salutations, is a hard habit to break, but it’s worth trying. Common gendered phrases to avoid: “hey guys”, “ladies and gentlemen”, “dudes”, “boys and girls” etc.

Some suggested alternatives are “y’all”, “folks”, “everyone”, and “friends”.

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**When greeting others**

**Avoid:**

- ladies
- gentlemen
- ma’am
- sir
- girls
- guys
- etc.

**Consider using instead:**

- “Thanks, friends. Have a great night.”
- “Good morning, folks!”
- “Hi, everyone!”
- “Can I get you all something?”
- “And for you?”

**Why?**

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

**Be mindful of language**

Based on Toni Latour’s “Hello there” cards.

Learn more at qmunity.ca

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**Further Resources**

- **GLSEN.ORG:** Pronouns & Gender Terminology
- **qmunity.ca:** Gender-Neutral Language & Queer Glossary
- **The 519:** Gender-Neutral Pronouns & Media Reference Guide to Trans & Gender Diverse People
- **Anti-Defamation League:** Gender Bias in Language & Resource Library