

# Building Belonging:

## Pronouns + Inclusive Language At Work

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Hi, my name is  
Katrina Kibben  
and I want to  
teach you about  
pronouns.

I want to teach you how to be an ally, how to understand why pronouns matter, and to learn simple ways to show up for your teammates. But I think it's important to start with why I am doing this at all.

For one thing, I am *non-binary*. I know what it feels like to be misgendered and have pronouns go all wrong. But that's not why I'm writing this.

I don't want to risk taking too long to have this conversation when I know that, **every 45 seconds, a queer kid attempts suicide\***. I never want a queer kid to ask me why I waited so long to speak up, educate, and help people learn to slow down and get these pronouns right.

I want a better life for these kids. I'm willing to do whatever it takes, today and every day after, to help them walk into a world of work and communities that are more affirming than they were. Than they are now.

I hope you won't wait either. Educate yourself now and become a safer place for others. That's why I wrote this book: to make ally a verb. To make people feel safer at work. To know that tomorrow is better than today.

-Katrina  
(They/Them)

\*Research brief: Pronouns usage among lgbtq youth. The Trevor Project. (2020, July 22). <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/07/29/research-brief-pronouns-usage-among-lgbtq-youth/>.

## Goals

By the end of this guide, I don't expect you to get everything right. I don't expect you to be an expert either. I'm not. I don't know it all.

Here's what I do know: You will walk away with 1% more knowledge than you had yesterday, whether you learn from one of my stories or some of the more tactical advice. Here's the cool part.

That 1% will multiply in your family, work and community as you interact and engage with people from every background.

While 1% may not sound like a lot, it could be everything to someone who's struggling. A recent study from The Trevor Project says that if just one person uses the correct pronouns for someone at work, that **decreases the likelihood of their coworker committing suicide by up to 40%\***.

You can be the one. Let's get started.

### HELPFUL JUMP LINKS:

[What Is A Pronoun?](#)

[What Is Misgendering?](#)

[Turn Ally Into A Verb](#)

[Nonprofits I Support](#)

[Hire Me](#)

## Katrina's Mini Queer Dictionary

9 words you should probably know the meaning of

### Gender

Society's traditional answer? Gender is the state of being male or female in relation to the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women. It's way more complicated than that.

### Sexuality

Who and how you want to have romantic relationships.

### Non-binary

The more complicated side of gender. Everyone has their own definition. Mine is that it's the best part of the spectrum between male and female.

### Binary

Boy or girl. Either end of a spectrum.

### Trans [or transgender]

You do not align with the gender you were assigned at birth. It does not necessarily mean someone is pursuing surgical or legal changes. That's personal.

### Transition

Moving from one of the binaries to something else. It usually comes with a pronoun change.

### Ally

Verb, not a noun, when I use it. It's a way of being. It means speaking up.

### Misgendering

Getting pronouns wrong.

### Queer

This is another word with many definitions. Mine is "anyone who falls into the LGBT+ universe."

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## What Is A Pronoun? – English Lesson

You downloaded this book, so I believe you have some concept of what a pronoun is. Just for education's sake, let me break it down for you. A pronoun replaces a noun in a sentence. For example:



The apples in Colorado are the best. They come straight from the mountains.

Shawn likes to sing. He's actually not bad at it.

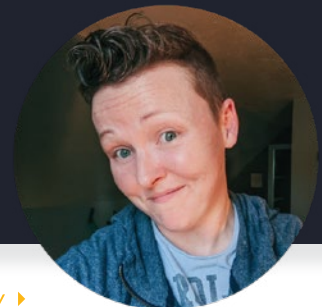
Katrina is a great writer. They are an expert at job postings.

A pronoun replaces a noun, but it also represents an identity – what you see in the mirror and who you feel you are inside. For generations, people just talked about he and she, but non-binary and gender nonconforming identities existed in history long before the binary he and she.

### WHY PRONOUNS MATTER

Growing up on military bases, everything is very uniform, down to the clothes you wear. Everything has a place. There are very few things left to be negotiated or considered. Will Smith describes growing up as an Army brat by saying that everything was a mission. You either win or lose. But when you approach life that way, there's a lot of room for failure and feeling like you're not enough. That's how pronouns always felt for me. Trying to decide between being a boy or a girl felt challenging. The best way I know how to describe it? Right foot, left shoe. It's uncomfortable.

I don't know what makes you a boy or a girl, but I do know that I'm somewhere on the spectrum between those. I'm just enough of everything and that feels like a pair of shoes I'll keep for 10 years. It's the best feeling. And if you've never had the feeling, you might not 100% understand what it feels like, but I know you know what it feels like to feel safe. To feel confident. To feel like you're having your best day and you stand out in all the right ways. That's what it feels like to get my pronouns right. And that feeling isn't universal. Everyone has an opinion and perspective. That's the cool part. If you want to know why pronouns matter to someone, ask them.



*The Kid who probably should've known they were gay ▶*

I'll leave the history of non-binary identity and colonization to the real experts, but here's what's most important to remember: These pronouns are tiny little affirmations to say, "I see you, I love you, and I want you to be happy." Getting them right is an act of love and allyship.

# What Pronouns Are There?

Several pronouns extend outside of the binary. Let's walk through the basics:

<p><b>She/Her/Hers and He/Him/His</b></p>	<p>These are the pronouns you already know, and although our brains are trained to use them, you may find that some folks use a label that doesn't match your perceptions of gender. This is why it is crucial to open the door during conversation/introductions to allow folks to share the pronouns that feel best for them.</p>
<p><b>She/They and He/They</b></p>	<p>Chances are, these folks identify with a healthy balance of masculine and feminine energy. In all cases, you should integrate both pronouns as often as possible. Use they and them ever so often in circumstances where you would normally use she and her.</p> <p><b>Ex. "She sent in her application for the new job opening. I have looked at their résumé, and they seem to be an excellent fit."</b></p> <p>It is perfectly acceptable to use they and them when referring to a singular person. Our brains might tell us otherwise, but think of a time when you've spoken about someone you've never met before.</p>
<p><b>They/Them/Theirs Ze/Zir/Zirs, and Ze/Hir/Hirs</b></p> <p><i>PRONOUNCED: Zee / Zeer / Zeers Here / Heres</i></p>	<p>Many, but not all, folks who use these pronouns identify as non-binary, meaning they do not feel particularly drawn to either masculinity or femininity. Some might use these pronouns if they are feeling detached from the gender they were assigned at birth. Regardless of the reasoning, those using they/them pronouns should ONLY be referred to as they and "them".</p>

**Note: Pronouns and gender are not the same thing. So, just because someone uses they/them pronouns, you can not assume they are trans. When in doubt, ask. Even better, stop worrying about it. It doesn't really matter how they identify. All you need to know are the pronouns and then you need to use them correctly.**

# Practice Makes Perfect: What is Misgendering?



## You owe me \$1.

I'm kidding.

I wanted to start with a joke because I know people just got a little anxious. Take a deep breath. I'm not mad. You're doing great. Please don't be worried. I'm going to help. I know you're afraid you're going to get someone else's pronouns wrong, so you avoid them altogether.

I need you to take a deep breath and realize this universal fact: Everyone has messed up someone else's pronouns at some point in their life. It happens. I am not saying this to say screw it; don't worry about getting the pronouns right. I'm saying this because we have to start accepting that we will get things wrong. You have to want to do better. That's one of the essential elements of allyship.

Often misgendering happens because we're simply talking too fast. It's easy to get into default mode, where your brain dumps information. It's not evil intent. It's a habit that's changing.\*

Look, it doesn't matter why it happens. **Let's do better.**

### Pronouns:

SUBJECTIVE	OBJECTIVE	POSSESSIVE	REFLEXIVE	EXAMPLE
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/ Zirself	Ze is speaking.

\*I'd like to assume that if you're reading a book like this, you're not the kind of person who would go out of their way to treat other people like shit.

## Active Allyship: Turning Ally Into A Verb

### Introductions: Stop Assuming.

Introductions can be intimidating when you're coming out to a stranger. Imagine telling a stranger something you kept secret for months, if not years. That. It's hard.

You can make it easier as an ally by including your pronouns as part of introductions and asking others how they should be referred to. Here's a simple way to make the first moments of meeting someone a lot more inclusive.



Start with: **Hi, my name is ...**

Then: **My pronouns are ...**

Finally: **How should I refer to you?**

That simple.



### Kindly Correcting Others.

The first time I met a non-binary person, I misgendered them repeatedly at dinner. Yes, really.

I remember because a mutual friend was brave enough to correct me. "It's they," she said every single time I got it wrong. I wish I could hug her for that. Being corrected just that handful of times at dinner made me more aware and opened my eyes to how easy it is to mess up.

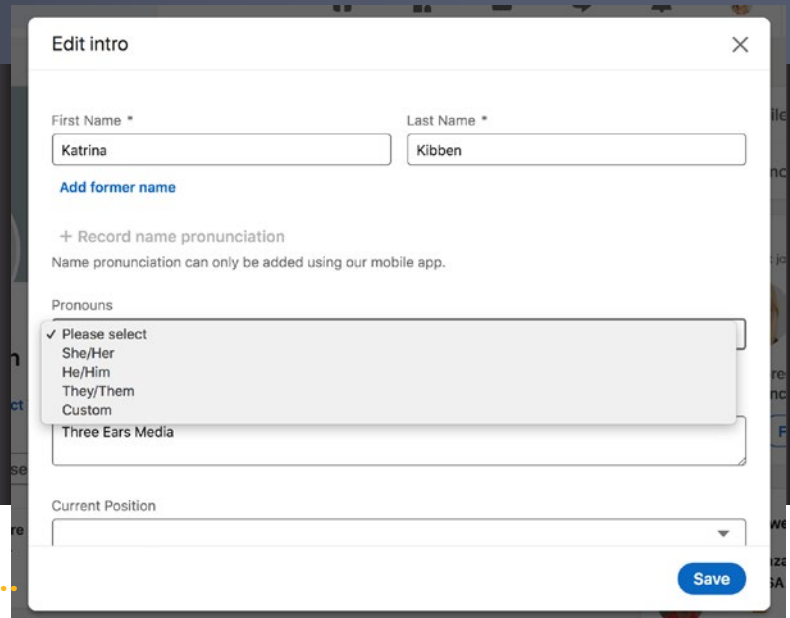
Note, she didn't give me a lecture or make a joke. No shame, no conversation, just a plain old "say this, not that." It doesn't have to be a discussion. Just a quick correction, the same way you would if someone was using the wrong name.

## Update Social Media Profiles.

Pronoun awareness is an act of allyship. We need to see cisgendered pronouns just as much as we see those from gender-non-conforming folk.

Many social media sites now have a specific place to add your pronouns. If not, the end of your display name works, too.

P.S. - We should totally connect! [Click here to add me on LinkedIn](#) ▶



Edit intro

First Name \* Katrina Last Name \* Kibben

[Add former name](#)

+ Record name pronunciation  
Name pronunciation can only be added using our mobile app.

Pronouns

- ✓ Please select
- She/Her
- He/Him
- They/Them
- Custom

Three Ears Media

Current Position

Save

LinkedIn Profile Editor

## Kid Questions.

If you're a parent, you know what it's like when your kid asks an embarrassing question about someone's appearance. Gender isn't an exception. As a parent or in a situation with someone who hasn't read this book (yet), here is how you answer the question.

Under 8-ish:

**"It does not matter. I love their shoes, don't you?"**

Older than 8:

**"Why don't you ask them and see if they're comfortable sharing with you instead of guessing?"**

**In general, for the adults reading this, the answer is "just ask."**



## Careers Site.

Saying “we support the LGBT community” is just the beginning of belonging. Hell, I don’t even know that this phrase accomplishes what you think it does.

My advice? Show, don’t tell. Talk about same-sex benefits, showcase how you support time off for gender-conforming surgery and ensure your forms are inclusive, not just your content. Updating your application allows people to self-identify early and you to avoid misgendering.

## Subtle Cues.

Allyship happens everywhere, even at work. As we continue to do remote meetings, consider adding something that shows your support of the LGBT community in your background. Look at my background. You can learn a lot about me depending on what you look for.



## Support.

Support local community advocacy and health care organizations that help gender-nonconforming people have access. Read and follow legislation. As of June 2021, there have been more anti-trans bills (more than 250) in just six months than in the last 10 years.

As an ally, it’s critical that you follow and learn about the evolution of the side and know the impact it has on the community and corporations.



# Hire Me: I'll Teach Your Teams How to Build Belonging and Allyship.

Corporate responsibility is not about rainbow flags and sponsoring events we never attend. It's about making our people allies and advocates in our communities by empowering them with the tools and knowledge they need. These tools and this knowledge that will make them better siblings, parents, partners, and activists who can make tomorrow a lot better than today.

The things we learn become seeds inside us. As companies, we have the responsibility to invest in those seeds and educate our people. Each of them can become that 1% better that we talked about at the beginning of this book and go into the community to make it 1% better as well.

That's why I'm speaking at companies big and small on the topic of pronouns. We can't become allies without even starting the journey. Help your team build allyship and belonging with me.

## How Can We Help?



### Delete Bias From Job Postings

You want great LGBT+ people to apply? Stop incorporating that bias.



### 1-Hour Q&A

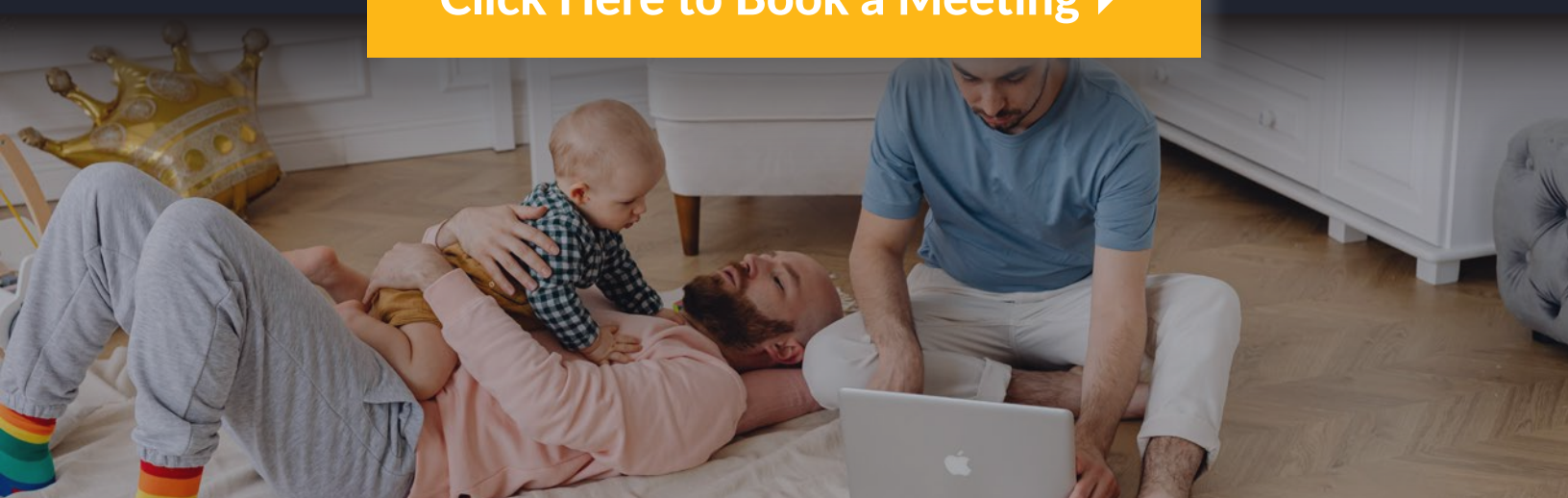
Start culture conversations with a conversational Q&A led by your team.



### Panel

Bringing together remarkable stories that make scary statistics human.

[Click Here to Book a Meeting ▶](#)





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