

Pronoun Protocol

1. We always use gender-inclusive words like people, person, kid, relative, baby human, parent, child, etc.

Pay attention to gendered language in everyday conversation;

2. At Awa we see people as people first without gender assumptions.

This looks like/sounds like: When meeting a new person, introduce yourself with your name AND pronouns. If the other participant doesn't identify their pronouns - refer to them by the name given to you.
(This also includes an accurate pronunciation of a name that may be unfamiliar - ask for clarification on how to say or use it, if needed)

3. At Awa we don't assume we know someone's pronoun based on their name or appearance.

This looks like/sounds like: Identifying different characteristics as individual not part of a "gender"

4. We use the singular pronoun they as the default in public for people you don't know, instead of assuming he or she.

This looks like/sounds like: "I was giving a presentation and they asked me a thought-provoking question."

5. We use a person's name if you don't know their pronoun, if you must use a pronoun you could use they.

This looks like/sounds like: "They asked a really good question. But I cannot remember they're name."

6. Assume there is no safe space to ask someone's pronouns, it is theirs to tell or not when ready.

This looks like/sounds like: Use the singular pronoun "they" or the person's name until they initiate a conversation that tells you differently.

7. If someone shares their pronouns with you, use them.

This looks like/sounds like: Vocally applying only the pronoun conventions identified by the individual to whom you are speaking or about.

8. Remember that people can have more than one pronoun and pronouns can also change

This looks like/sounds like: Using all identified pronouns of the person in their varying contexts, and immediately addressing them by newly declared pronouns when you become aware.

9. There are more than two or even three pronouns, Learn about and practice ze, xe, using a name, and more

This looks like/sounds like: Actively accessing learning resources to update your awareness and knowledge of the gender spectrum and implementing strategies into your daily life.

10. If we slip into assumptions, we immediately self-correct, or if someone else corrects us; re-phrase the statement using the correct pronouns.

This looks like/sounds like: Immediately self-correct and use declared pronouns/name

11. Establish this as a standard to include everybody, whether or not there are non-binary people present.

This looks like/sounds like: All elements of this protocol are observable in all settings, with all people, and in all situations at all times. Including in vivo vocal speech, textual behaviors, and video.

12. At AwA we always use the pronoun protocol in public settings

This looks like/sounds like: All elements of this protocol are observable by other people in your immediate presence or in any public media presence.



Parents,

We love that you are a part of our AWA family, and are honored that you have entrusted us with the ongoing care of your child. We believe in building and maintaining a nurturing environment that is respectful, inclusive, safe, and empathetic to the needs of our clients. Our priority is for your family and your child to experience a place where everyone is welcome and loved.

Over the past year, we've consulted many resources about the need for societal changes in a variety of areas, and are implementing changes wherever we can. Due to this, we are officially rolling out our "gender-neutral" policy.

We've found the most useful information regarding the need for this change through the ACLU (https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/schools_in_transition_6.3.16.pdf) to be the most beneficial. We've included a direct citation from this resource below as we feel it is more eloquently stated than anything we could do ourselves:

"Children typically begin expressing their gender identity between the ages of two and four years old. Around this age, transgender children often express their cross-gender identification to their family members and caregivers through statements like "I have a girl brain and boy body," or vice versa, and behavior like dressing in clothing and engaging in activities consistent with their gender identity. Even at that young age, transgender children are often insistent and persistent about their gender, differentiating their behavior from a "phase" or imaginative play. With the love and support of families, caregivers, and other adults, transgender children and youth can thrive. Supporting them means allowing them to live in a manner consistent with their gender identity, which helps them develop self-esteem and grow into happy, healthy members of society.

However, some transgender children receive the message from their families, caregivers and society that there is something wrong with who they are, and begin to repress their cross-gender identification out of fear and shame. Not having their gender identity respected and affirmed in their daily lives will likely cause them significant psychological distress. That distress is often exacerbated when a transgender student's gender identity is not affirmed at school, which can be a very gendered space (e.g., girls' and boys' toys/games, girls' and boys' lines).

The consequences of not affirming a child's gender identity can be severe, and it can interfere with their ability to develop and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. In the school context, that distress will also hinder a transgender student's focus in class and ability to learn. The longer a transgender youth is not affirmed, the more significant and long-lasting the negative consequences can become, including loss of interest in school, heightened risk for alcohol and drug use, poor mental health and suicide".

Adventures with Autism has undertaken the responsibility of being on the forefront of social change, in regards to Diversity and Inclusion practices that aim to create an equitable world for everyone. To achieve this, we are officially rolling out our "gender-neutral" policy for language and programming. We actively defer to the use of the pronouns "they, them, their" in our interactions with each other and with all of our clients, instead of "he, his, she, hers". We understand that this can be uncomfortable, as change usually is so we found a letter sent by a Superintendent to the families of enrolled students to share with you:

"If your experience is anything like my own, you will be in unfamiliar - perhaps even uncomfortable -territory. It is important , however that your own personal uncertainties do not interfere with your ability to do the right thing to protect the safety and well-being of our children." - Janice Adams, Superintendent Benicia School District

As always, we'd love the opportunity to chat through any questions or concerns you may have surrounding this change!

Sincerely,

Samantha Parnham MS BCBA LBA CCTSI

She/Her

Chief Clinical Officer

Adventures with Autism