Understanding Different Gender Identities

## Key Terms and Concepts

**Gender Identity**

An individual’s deeply-held sense of being male, female, a blend of both, neither, or something else entirely. Gender identity may or may not align with an individual’s assigned sex at birth.

**Cisgender**

A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a woman).

**AFAB**

An acronym standing for “assigned female at birth”

**AMAB**

An acronym standing for “assigned male at birth”

**Transgender (Trans)**

An umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes but is not limited to trans men, trans women, and nonbinary individuals.

**Non-binary**

A gender identity that does not fit exclusively within the categories of male or female. Nonbinary people may identify as having a gender that is a mix of both, neither, or fluid.

**Genderqueer**

An umbrella term to describe someone who doesn’t identify with conventional gender identities, roles, expression and/or expectations. For some, genderqueer is a non-binary identification, and for others it is not.

**Genderfluid**

A gender identity that changes over time. A genderfluid person may feel more aligned with different genders at different times.

**Two-Spirit**

A term to describe Indigenous people who are sexual and/or gender minorities. The term is inclusive of those who ‘walk between two genders’ or ‘carry two spirits’ and in the culture is often thought of as a gift. The term Two-Spirit was established in 1990, at a conference in Manitoba and is an English term to describe an identity that existed prior to colonization. Note:  not all Indigenous people feel comfortable with identifying as two-spirit.

**Androgynous**

A gender expression or identity that blends or is ambiguous in terms of masculinity and femininity.

## Pronouns and Respectful Language

* Always ask for and use a person’s correct pronouns. Pronouns can include:
	+ He/him
	+ She/her
	+ They/them (singular)
	+ Ze/zir or xe/xem (less common gender-neutral pronouns)
* When in doubt, introduce yourself with your own pronouns and ask: “What pronouns do you use?”

## Gender-neutral pronouns

* The singular “they” is the most common pronoun used by non-binary people, although not the only one. While the traditional use of the singular “they” is for a person whose gender isn’t known or isn’t important in the context, the new use of “they” is direct and for a person whose gender is known but does not identify as male or female. And if you’re ever unsure of an individual’s pronouns, just ask. Keep in mind the general principle of self-identification.
* It can also be helpful to indicate your pronouns in communication channels like in your email signature. Not only does this provide the opportunity to self-identify, but it also normalizes the process and indicates a safe environment for individuals who identify as non-binary and/or trans.

Pronoun formatting and capitalization
* When writing one’s pronouns, for example, in an email signature, choose the pronouns most accurate and authentic to who you are and how you identify. There’s no hard and fast rule for how to format and/or capitalize pronouns. Typically, you’ll see pronouns divided by slashes (e.g., she/her/hers or they/them). Capitalization is personal preference.

## Why Understanding Gender Matters

* **Fosters Respect:** Using the correct terms and pronouns affirms people’s identities and fosters an inclusive environment.
* **Builds Inclusivity:** Understanding and acknowledging diverse identities helps create safe spaces for everyone.
* **Reduces Harm:** Misgendering or using incorrect terms can cause emotional harm and alienation.