



**TOP TIPS GUIDE FOR
COUNSELLORS & THERAPISTS**

PRONOUNS IN COUNSELLING

HELPING YOU TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE

Free Guide



What are pronouns?



Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns.

Some examples include:

she/her/hers

he/him/his

they/them/theirs

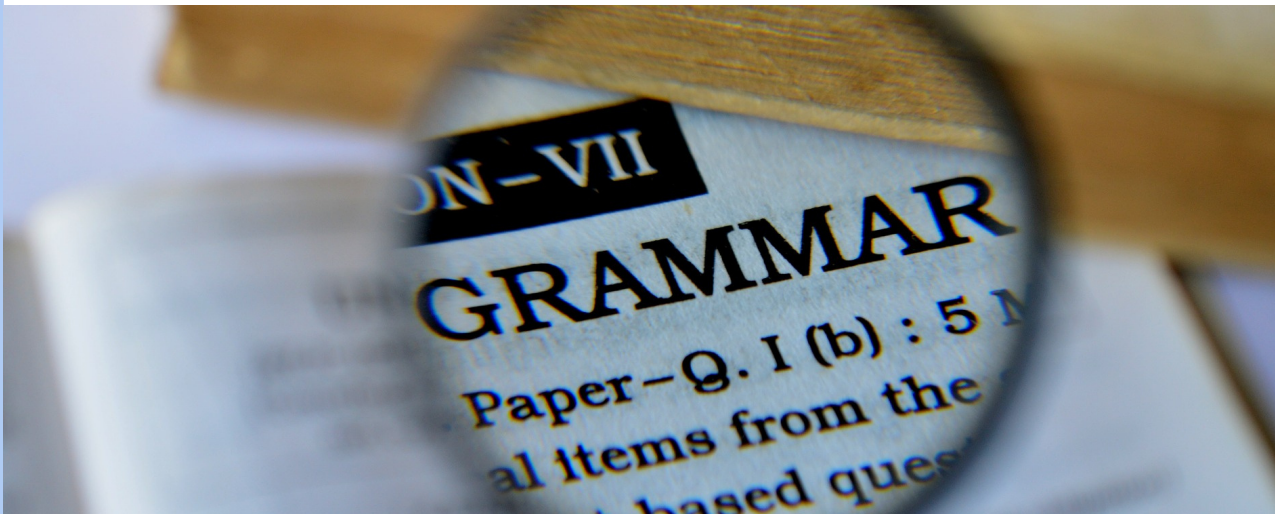
ze/hir/hirs

e/em/eirs

I wonder which pronouns you use for yourself?

Are there pronouns in the list above that are new to you?

Why do we need pronouns?



Here is an example of a sentence using the pronouns (he/him) in the place of the noun (Martin).

"Martin packs his book in his bag every morning, in case he has time to read on his lunch break.

Without using pronouns here, to talk about Martin – where the only other option is to use Martin's name – the sentence would be hard to make sense of. It would seem very convoluted and clunky, as if you were trying to avoid using Martin's pronouns:

"Martin packs Martin's book in Martin's bag every morning, in case Martin has time to read on Martin's lunch break.

So I hope this clarifies why we need pronouns and that this is the way we talk naturally.

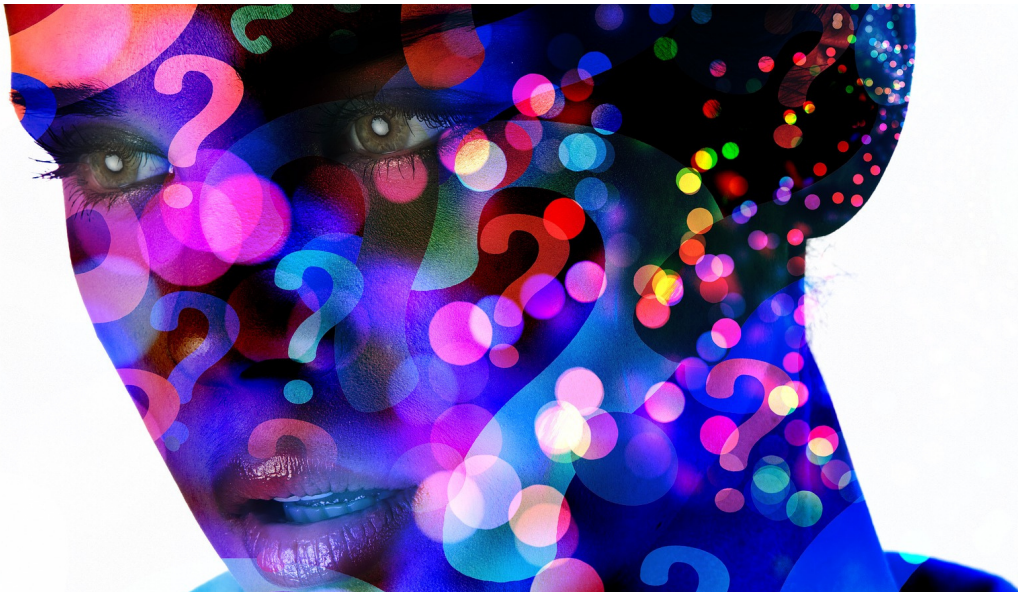
Why are pronouns important in counselling?



As counsellors we need to be mindful of 3 main contexts for pronoun awareness.

- In supervision, when discussing clients referring to them in third person.
- When clients use specific pronouns while referring to others.
- When clients are relating to something that has happened in their past, referring to themselves, e.g. When I spilt my milk, I heard Dad shout at my Mum 'why did he spill his milk again?!'

Should I ask clients' pronouns?



Try to get into the habit of asking people what their pronouns are. Asking each client sensitively and routinely when you meet (either in conversation or in paperwork) will make the client–counsellor relationship feel more comfortable for you both.

To avoid making assumptions, it is important we ask every client, as we can't know their pronouns just going by how they present their gender.

Clients often talk about their partners, friends and colleagues, and it is important to be sensitive to the pronouns used for them too. A good tip is to listen out for the pronouns of the people your client speaks about and use what you hear. If it is unclear, or you miss this information, or they haven't yet used a pronoun as they are speaking, you could ask – or alternatively use 'they' pronouns until and unless you hear differently.

5 Top Tips



1. Ask

Ask verbally and/or in your paperwork what your clients' pronouns are.

To avoid assumptions, ask *all* clients.

Asking creates a safe space for clients who might find the topic difficult to raise.

2. Use

Use each client's correct pronouns when in supervision.



3. Respect

Try to respect each client's pronouns.

If you make a mistake, that's OK.
Apologise, correct yourself and move on.

4. Practise

Practise using less familiar pronouns such as they/them in role plays with colleagues.

5. Share

Share your own pronouns when you meet clients
and/or in your email signature.

Share this free guide to help spread the word.

Want to learn more?



Join our Pronouns Workshop

In this experiential online group workshop we explore the background of 'they' as a pronoun and why it's important to increasing numbers of clients we see in the counselling room.

Join us for an interactive, fun and engaging learning experience from the comfort of your own home. Activities include case studies, virtual group work and role play.

[Find out more](#)

Workshops are run by Chloe Foster at
Sussex Rainbow Counselling



Thanks for reading



My name is Chloe Foster and I'm passionate about helping fellow counsellors become more confident in working with sexual and gender diversity.



I'm a counsellor and trainer in my private practice, Sussex Rainbow Counselling. I specialise primarily in gender and sexuality within the LGBTQ communities.

If you have any questions or you would like to subscribe to my mailing list please get in touch.



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Let's connect on social media

