



www.GenderJabber.org
Practicing Gender Inclusive Language

Some words of encouragement and advice

If using gender inclusive language is new to you, this is your chance to practice! We acknowledge that it's hard to change deeply-ingrained language habits. Also, we do it all the time as language changes or we remove certain words from our vocabulary (i.e. "um"). It's OK if you make mistakes -- change takes practice, but it's worth it!

Why is this a good thing to get good at? Because if you are not sure what pronoun someone uses, it is best to use gender inclusive language when talking with the person and when referring to the person. Also, it makes you more thoughtful about the assumptions you make about people's genders (e.g. assuming physicians are men).

There are many ways to have a conversation without using gendered pronouns. Instead of using "he" or "she," you can use "they". If you know the person's name you can use it instead of a pronoun. Also, you can structure your words so that no pronoun is needed. For example, instead of, "Everyone should try to do his job well" try to:

- Pluralize to avoid using a gender-specific pronoun -- "The employees should try to do their job well."
- Rewrite the sentence without using a pronoun -- "Everyone should try to do the job well."
- Use an indefinite pronoun, (they are often used in speaking and informal writing) -- "Everyone should try to do their job well."

The practice session

This is best done with someone else or in a small group.

Part I: Brainstorm a list of gender inclusive terms. If you have a paper, post-it notes, or a whiteboard, write them down. For example, parent, client, coworker, person, someone.

Part II: Practice having a gender inclusive conversation by telling a story about someone you know. Each person will take turns being the speaker and the listener for 2 minutes each.

Advice for the speaker:

- The speaker will tell the story, but not indicate the gender of the subject.
- Keep trying to use "they" even if you slip up.
- Choose a gender-neutral name if you use one (e.g. Jo, Jesse, Pat, Angel, Cam, etc...)

Advice for the listener:

- Actively listen and respond conversationally, but briefly, to keep the conversation going.
- The point is not for the listener to try to guess the gender of the person in the story- it's to practice gender inclusive language.

After each person has gone, talk about how it went. What felt challenging? What was easy? Can you commit to using gender-inclusive language in your day-to-day life?

This exercise was adapted with permission from a Gender Inclusive Language training developed by The Network/La Red in Massachusetts (www.tnlr.org).