



How can we use language to create affirming spaces?

Discussion Guide

Discuss

Bing describes how language can create affirming spaces for people who identify as trans* or gender non-conforming. What are some other examples of inclusive language in speech?

Consider this statement by Sayume Romero, a speech pathology student and LGBTQ activist:

“Using gender-neutral and anti-ableist language isn’t about just being politically correct. It’s about allowing yourself to broaden your perspective. Language is powerful and..doesn’t only affect the listener, but also the user. By taking the extra energy to be more mindful of the language we use, we’re training new circuits in our brains and becoming more aware of how certain language can create a more supportive work environment.”

How might language broaden your perspective?

Can you think of a time when you were negatively impacted by the language someone used? Describe why the impact was a negative one, and how different language choices would have mattered.

What unconscious assumptions might you make about people that influence the language you use? Can you share specific examples?

Bing concludes with the following question: *How can you create an affirming space with the language that you use?* How would you answer this question? How has language created affirming spaces for you?

Practice

You are in a meeting with colleagues you haven’t met. Most of the participants present as typically masculine or feminine, however one person’s appearance is gender non-conforming. How do you ask this person about their personal pronouns without singling them out?

Someone in your department is resistant to the chosen name and personal pronoun practice that was recently put into place on campus. This person claims that being required to use

someone's chosen name or personal pronoun violates their free speech. How do you respond to this person?

You have a colleague with good intentions, but whose efforts to do the right thing are awkward and sometimes even offensive to people who don't know your colleague. Recently, your colleague commented about a student, referring to them as "that transgender one," even though the student's gender identity was not relevant to the conversation. How can you help this colleague so that their behaviors better align with their intentions?

A student in your department began transitioning from male to female over summer break. Upon their return to campus, they introduced themselves with a chosen name different from the name they used the prior semester. You, along with everyone in the department, are supportive of the student's transition, but you caught yourself misgendering the student not once—but twice! What can you do when you make a mistake like this?

Learn More

Are you familiar with Virginia Tech's Chosen Name and Personal Pronoun practice? Go to https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/content/inclusive_vt_edu/en/names-pronouns.html to learn more.

The website, [Nonbinary](https://nonbinary.wiki/wiki/Main_Page), (https://nonbinary.wiki/wiki/Main_Page) provides a glossary of terms and nonbinary pronoun options for many languages.

For a broader discussion around the complexity of diversity and identity language and how it continually changes and adapts, see the article, [The Evolving Language of Diversity](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Evolving-Language-of-Diversity-The.pdf), by Kathy Castania at <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Evolving-Language-of-Diversity-The.pdf>.