

## Addressing Mistakes, Misgendering and Other Microaggressions

We all make mistakes. People are not perfect, and it is not fair to expect them to be. Learning a person's new set of pronouns, or their new name, can take a bit of time, especially if they are someone we have known for a long time. While mistakes will happen, it is important for cisgender people to recognize the harm such mistakes cause. Using the correct name and pronouns is an act of basic respect that is routinely afforded to cisgender people, but often denied to trans and gender diverse people.

### *What to Do When You Make a Mistake*

When we make mistakes, it is important to apologize, correct ourselves and move on. In most situations, when we make a mistake, we can address the issue quickly and move on. Mistakes cause harm, but they don't have to be a big deal. Many trans people are used to misgendering. That's not to say it's okay - but rather, that we live in an imperfect world.

For example, the scenario below outlines a simple script for how to respond if you misgender someone:

**“Oh, sorry, I used the wrong pronoun there. Jesse uses they/them pronouns. I mean to say they called earlier.”**

### *How to Apologize After Misgendering Someone:*

1. Correct yourself simply - either repeat the sentence segment with the correct pronoun, or just say 'oops, I used the wrong pronoun there'.
2. Apologize concisely - a brief apology is best - a quick 'sorry' or 'my bad' is generally all that is needed.
3. Move on - misgendering is unpleasant but it doesn't help anyone to overemphasize. We can apologize, move on, and strive not to make the mistake again.

## *If you overhear someone being misgendered...*

If you overhear someone misgendering somebody, there are a number of ways to intervene. It is always best to take your cue from the individual who has been misgendered, and to centre the safety and comfort of that individual in these situations. Generally speaking, the following options are available to you:

1. You can jump in after the individual finishes speaking and reconfirming that “I think Jesse uses they/them pronouns”.
2. You can emphasize the correct pronouns in your following sentence such as “Yes, Jesse’s great, I think they would be a great candidate for promotion”
3. You can let the person know after and remind them of the correct pronouns - “Hey, just wanted to flag you used he for Jesse earlier but I think they use they and them pronouns”.

## *Practice Makes Perfect:*

If you are struggling to adjust to a person’s new name or pronouns, practice them in the mirror or in your head. Say their name and pronouns out loud a few times. Human brains have an incredible capacity to learn and grow - through repetition, we can help ourselves change our practices and avoid making mistakes in the first place.

## *Don’ t Make it About Yourself:*

When we make mistakes, it’s important not to centre ourselves. When many trans people are misgendered, they are often then pushed to make the person who made the mistake feel better - to reassure them that they’re a good person, to support them if they’re feeling guilty about the mistake that they made. While your guilt in those moments is a valid emotional response to harm you inadvertently caused, it is inappropriate and unfair to expect a trans person to prioritize you and make you feel better when you are the one who caused harm. This tendency often puts the burden back on trans people, while simultaneously making what may have been a minor mistake into a bigger issue than it had to be.