

# Avoiding assumptions: Using non-gendered language



Use these tips to address and refer to people when you don't know or can't ask how they would like to be addressed. Once you know how the person wants to be addressed, make sure to use the correct terms as provided by that person. This practice demonstrates respect for and affirmation of the person's gender identity.

## Instead of this

How may I help you, sir?

This lady is asking about...

Do you have a wife?

He is here for his appointment.

He/she is in the waiting room  
(don't know correct pronoun).

What are the names of your  
mother and father?

Do you have sisters and  
brothers?

## Try this

How may I help you?

This patient is asking about....

Are you in a relationship?

The patient is here in the  
waiting room.

They are sitting in the waiting  
room.

What are your parents' names?

Do you have siblings?

# Cultural Humility:

## Practical tips for working with patients

1

### Listen with intent

Pay attention to the patient's or client's words, not to what you want to hear as an answer to a question. Patients notice your body language – it should display openness and non-judgment.

2

### Reflect on what the person shares

Give yourself time to reflect on what the person shares, and notice your biases and assumptions related to what is shared.

3

### Engage in a skilled and sensitive dialogue

Ask open ended questions using neutral language. Don't rush to provide answers. Acknowledge clearly if you don't have an answer to a patient or client question. It's ok to not have all the answers, and to take time to find them.

4

### Treat each person as a unique individual

For hundreds of individuals accessing our health network on a daily basis, we are their only source of healthcare. Each patient is unique in their lived experiences, expectations, conditions and beliefs. Take the time to know the person so you can compassionately serve them through a greater understanding of their background.

5

### Be an ally for patient and client well-being

Many people come to us with invisible traumas in addition to physical and/or mental ailments. They also come with cultural strengths and practices of resilience. Recognize that behaviors or words may reflect that trauma, and seek to understand their trauma and their resilience. This can help transform behavior, make you their long-term ally, and improve the care experience at DPH.