

# GENDER EXPANSIVE WORKSHOP

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY



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## CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

There are endless opportunities to continue to learn more about the gender expansive community. Below are just a few readings and resources you could utilize. Ultimately, you are responsible for your continued learning and the way you support the gender expansive community.

### *Transgender Reading List for Adults*

Questions about transgender issues, gender identity, and transitioning aren't just for [kids](#) and [young adults](#). Adults have plenty of questions about those issues, and several more besides: how best to help a child who's questioning their gender, how to help a friend or family member in transition, how to be a good friend or ally, or how to navigate the many complex legal issues that surround being transgender. The answers to those, and many other, questions can be found in the books below. You can donate to PFLAG National by signing into Amazon Smile—[smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)—prior to purchasing any of these titles.

[Becoming A Visible Man](#) by Jamison Green, Ph.D.: Combines candid autobiography with informed analysis to offer unique insight into the multiple challenges of the female-to-male transsexual experience, ranging from encounters with prejudice and strained relationships with family to the development of an FTM community and the realities of surgical sex reassignment.

[Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children](#) by Diane Ehrensaft, Ph.D: Ehrensaft offers parents, clinicians, and educators guidance on both the philosophical dilemmas and the practical, daily concerns of working with children who don't fit a "typical" gender mold. She debunks outmoded approaches to gender nonconformity that may actually do children harm. And she offers a new framework for helping each child become his or her own unique, most gender-authentic person.

[Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us](#) by Kate Bornstein: Part coming-of-age story, part mind-altering manifesto on gender and sexuality, drawn directly from the life experiences of a transsexual woman.

[Helping Your Transgender Teen: A guide for parents](#) by Irwin Krieger: If you are the parent of a transgender teen, this book will help you understand what your child is feeling and experiencing. Irwin Krieger is a clinical social worker with many years of experience helping transgender teens. This book brings you the insights gained from his work with these teenagers and their families.

[He's My Daughter: A Mother's Journey to Acceptance](#) by Eve Langley: Lynda's account of how she adjusted to the reality that her eldest son had decided to physically become a woman is the story of a family. Tears and laughter, support and withdrawal, accompany Toni—now the eldest daughter—as she maps out her new life. And with her all the time is Lynda, her mother. Helping to select her wardrobe, guiding her in the subtleties of speech and behavior, and supporting her, especially in the early stages of her new life as a woman.

[The Last Time I Wore A Dress](#) by Daphne Scholinski: This memoir recounts the author's three years spent in mental institutions for, among other things, Gender Identity Disorder. Because she was a tomboy who wore jeans and T-shirts and didn't act enough like a girl, her treatment, in addition to talk therapy, isolation, and drugs, required her to wear makeup, walk with a swing in her hips, and pretend to be obsessed with boys.

[My Husband Betty](#) by Helen Boyd: Author Helen Boyd is a happily married woman whose husband enjoys sharing her wardrobe. Boyd gives a thoughtful account of their relationship (as well as the relationships of other crossdressers she knows) in this forthright and revelatory book.

[On the Couch with Dr. Angello: Raising & Supporting Transgender Youth](#) by Dr. Michele Angello: When a single child comes out, their entire family will transition, along with their community. This is an eye-opening guide to navigating social spaces when most don't quite understand the process of changing genders.

[Queerly Beloved](#) by Diane and Jacob Anderson-Minshall: After fifteen years as a lesbian couple, Jacob came out to Diane as a transgender man. Eight years later, the couple not only remains together, they still identify as queer, still work in LGBT media, and remain part of the LGBT community. The authors delve into their relationship to reveal the trials and tribulations they have faced along the way.

[Raising My Rainbow: Adventures in Raising a Fabulous, Gender Creative Son](#) by Lori Duron: A frank, heartfelt, and brutally funny account of Duron and her family's adventures of distress and happiness raising a gender-creative son.

[Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More](#) by Janet Mock: In 2011, Marie Claire magazine published a profile of Janet Mock in which she stepped forward for the first time as a trans woman. Those twenty-three hundred words were life-altering for the People.com editor, turning her into an influential and outspoken public figure and a desperately needed voice for an often voiceless community.

[The Right To Be Out: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in America's Public Schools](#) by Stuart Biegel: Biegel begins with a cogent history and analysis of the dramatic legal developments concerning the rights of LGBT persons since 1968. He then turns to what K–12 schools should do—and in many cases have already done—to implement right-to-be-out policies. He examines recent legal and public policy changes that affect LGBT students and educators in the K–12 public school system. Underlying all of these issues, he shows, is an implicit tension about the right to be out, a right that is seen as fundamental within LGBT communities today and, legally, draws on both the First Amendment right to express an identity and the Fourteenth Amendment right to be treated equally. Biegel addresses the implications of asserting and protecting this right within the hotly contested terrain of America's public schools.

[She's Not the Man I Married: My Life with a Transgender Husband](#) by Helen Boyd: As Boyd struggles to understand the nature of marriage, passion, and love, she shares her confusion and anger, providing a fascinating observation of the ways in which relationships are gendered, and how we cope, or don't, with the emotional and sexual pressures that gender roles can bring to our marriages and relationships.

[She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders](#) by Jennifer Finney Boylan: This bestseller is the winning, utterly surprising story of a person changing genders. By turns hilarious and deeply moving, Boylan explores the territory that lies between men and women, examines changing friendships, and rejoices in the redeeming power of family.

[The Social Justice Advocate's Handbook: A Guide to Gender](#) by Sam Killerman: A book about gender with no mention of the word "hegemony," but plenty of references to Star Wars, The Matrix, Lord of the Rings, and Star Trek—with less of a focus on overwhelming scholarship and more of a focus on enjoyable learning. A couple hundred pages of gender exploration, social justice how-tos, practical resources, and fun graphics and

comics, it offers clear, easily-digested, and practical explanations of one of the most commonly misunderstood things about people.

[Stone Butch Blues](#) by Leslie Feinberg: Published in 1993, this brave, original novel is considered to be the finest account ever written of the complexities of a transgender existence.

[Stuck in the Middle with You: A Memoir of Parenting in Three Genders](#) by Jennifer Finney Boylan: A father for six years, a mother for ten, and for a time in between, neither, or both, Boylan has seen parenthood from both sides of the gender divide. When her two children were young, Boylan came out as transgender, and as she transitioned from a man to a woman and from a father to a mother, her family faced unique challenges and questions. In this thoughtful, tear-jerking, hilarious memoir, Boylan asks what it means to be a father, or a mother, and to what extent gender shades our experiences as parents.

[Supporting and Caring for Our Gender Expansive Youth, a report from Gender Spectrum and the Human Rights Campaign](#): This report examines the experiences of survey respondents whose gender identities or expressions expand our conventional understanding of gender. It is designed to provide adults with a better understanding of these youth and to help adults find ways to communicate with and support all youth in their lives. The report also provides information and suggestions for those seeking to increase their comfort and competency with the evolving landscape of gender identity and expression.

[Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community](#) edited by Laura Erickson-Schroth: A comprehensive guide written by, for, and about transgender and genderqueer people.

[The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals](#) by Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper: The Transgender Child is a comprehensive guidebook that, through research and interviews, provides insight on how to raise transgender and gender nonconforming children with love and compassion.

[Transgender Family Law: A Guide to Effective Advocacy](#) by Jennifer Levi & Elizabeth E. Monnin-Browder: This book provides a comprehensive treatment of family law issues involving transgender persons. Various experts have written chapters that provide practical advice on providing effective representation for transgender clients. Family law practitioners representing this community often encounter challenging issues unique to transgender individuals. Some of these topics include legal recognition of post-transition name and sex, parental rights, relationship recognition and protections, divorce and relationship dissolution, custody disputes involving transgender children, legal protections for transgender youth, intimate partner violence, and estate planning and elder law. This book serves as a resource for those practicing in this emerging and constantly changing area of law.

[Trans-Kin: A Guide for Family and Friends of Transgender People \(Volume 1\)](#) by Dr. Eleanor A. Hubbard (Editor), Cameron T. Whitley (Editor): Transgender-Kin is a collection of stories from significant others, family members, friends and allies of transgender persons (SOFFAs). Powerful, thought-provoking and enlightening, this collection will provide for the head and the heart of anyone who has ever loved a transgender person. Transgender-Kin is also an essential read for allies of the transgender community and anyone who wishes to become one.

[Transgender Employment Experiences: Gendered Perceptions and the Law](#) by Kyla Bender-Baird: Brings together the workplace experiences of transgender people with an assessment of current policy protections, using personal interviews, legal case histories, and transgender theory.

[Transgender History](#) by Susan Stryker: Stryker takes a chronological approach to transgender history from the mid-twentieth century to its publication in 2008 by examining movements, writings, and events.

[Transgender Warriors: The Making of History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman](#) by Leslie Feinberg: Feinberg (author of *Stone Butch Blues*) examines historical notions of gender, how they have shifted over time, and how societies that celebrated gender creativity and variance were structured.

[Transgender Workplace Diversity: Policy Tools, Training Issues and Communication Strategies for HR and Legal Professionals](#) by Jillian T. Weiss, J.D., Ph.D.: Explanation and how-to for HR and legal professionals on transgender policy development, training and communication strategies for the workplace.

[Transitions of the Heart](#) edited by Rachel Pepper: The first collection to ever invite mothers of transgender and gender variant children of all ages to tell their own stories about their child's gender transition. Sharing stories of love, struggle, and acceptance, this collection of mother's voices, representing a diversity of backgrounds and sexual orientations, affirms the experience of those who have raised and are currently raising transgender and gender variant children between the ages of 5–50.

[Two Spirits, One Heart: A Mother, Her Transgender Son, and Their Journey to Love and Acceptance](#) by Marsha Aizumi with Aiden Aizumi: In this first of its kind, illuminating new book, PFLAG mother, educator and LGBT activist Marsha Aizumi shares her compelling story of parenting a young woman who came out as a lesbian, then transitioned to male. The book chronicles Marsha's personal journey from fear, uncertainty, and sadness to eventual unconditional love, acceptance, and support of her child who struggled to reconcile his gender identity.

[Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity](#) by Julia Serano: A collection of personal essays that debunk many of the myths and misconceptions that people have about transgender women, as well as the subject of gender in general.



## Pronouns & Trans People

### VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS' FACT SHEET

[www.forge-forward.org](http://www.forge-forward.org)  
PO Box 1272, Milwaukee, WI 53201  
[AskFORGE@forge-forward.org](mailto:AskFORGE@forge-forward.org)



*A transman reported that a woman at a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community center, looking at the birth certificate he had produced to gain access to a program, insisted on calling him "she." He pointed out that "several" things about him had changed since that birth certificate was issued. To name but one example, he no longer weighed five pounds.*

We usually take pronouns – the small third-person words we use to refer to other people like "he," "her," and "theirs" – for granted. Still, nearly all of us are taken aback whenever someone refers to us by an incorrect pronoun. This is especially true for transgender and gender non-conforming people, who frequently view pronouns as indicative of whether the user is respecting their gender identity.

Most transgender people use pronouns we are most familiar with like "he" and "she," and usually dress and groom in alignment with our culture's gender expectations. However, there are exceptions. Some people are not able or do not want to align with binary gender stereotypes; if you determined/guessed these people's pronoun by their looks, you might not be right. For that reason, we advise asking all new clients what pronoun they use: "We know that some people have gender identities different from their appearance, so we ask everyone, 'What pronoun would you like us to use for you?'" You might need to explain what you mean to people who haven't thought much about their gender, but by doing so, you have alerted them to the fact that your agency serves people who may be gender non-conforming, knowledge that could help prevent later questions or conflicts.

A growing number of people are using pronouns that aren't linked to just one gender. Below is FORGE's conjugation chart of some of these gender neutral pronouns. This list, however, is not complete. If your new client says they use a pronoun you haven't heard before, it's fine to say "I want to make sure I get it right, can you repeat or write down how you spell your pronoun?"

Subjective	Objective	Possessive adjective	Possessive pronoun	Reflexive	Pronunciation
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself	pronounced as it looks
He	Him	His	His	Himself	pronounced as it looks
Ze	Zim	Zir	Zirs	Zirself	pronounced as it looks
Sie/Zie	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself	pronounced: zee, here, here, heres, hereself
Zie	Zir	Zir	Zirs	Zirself	pronounced: zee, zere, zere, zeres, zereself
Ey	Em	Eir	Eirs	Eirself	pronounced: A, M, ear, ears, earsel
Per	Per	Pers	Pers	Persself	pronounced as it looks
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themself	pronounced as it looks



It is important to always use a person's preferred pronoun, even if they are not present. An exception to this may be in certain medical, employment, or familial settings where the person is known as another gender, and has requested you use a different name or pronoun in these settings. Because of widespread discrimination, some transgender people protect their safety and wellbeing by not disclosing they are transgender to some people, or they simply may still be known (such as by their health insurance company) by their old name and/or gender. If you suspect this might be the case, try to speak to your client privately ahead of time to clarify what name and/or pronoun they want you to use in a certain situation. If you are going to be advocating for a client with new providers, ask the client how they want you to handle it if the new provider uses the wrong pronoun. Some will want to correct the provider themselves. Others will welcome this advocacy, and still others will prefer to let incorrect pronouns slide by.

We all make mistakes, like using the wrong pronoun. What should you do when you make a mistake? Apologize as soon as you recognize the error, pledge to try not to repeat it, and then move on. Prolonged apologies make everyone uncomfortable, and you're better off returning your attention to providing needed services. However, if the client needs a more in-depth dialogue about what happened, be open to that discussion and listen carefully to their concerns and comments.

## Q & A

**Q: FORGE was recently asked this question: "I really don't want to sound judgmental; I am not...but I still don't get the use of plurals ["they" and "them"] to refer to one individual. I want to show the respect that any human being deserves, but it's just grammatically incorrect. If I asked to be called "Mrs. President" or "Your Majesty," would you feel obliged to do so? Must we assimilate any term out of respect or can we politely ask to use a gender neutral term or something that we can relate to as well?"**

*A: Language reflects our belief sets, and it can be hard to use language that violates our beliefs. What service providers in this situation need to ask themselves is, "Which do I value more: being grammatically correct, or connecting with and serving this victim?" When "Ms." first started being used, many objected to the term and insisted on calling women "Mrs." or "Miss" even if they preferred Ms. There have also been struggles over terms like "Black" and "African-American," "survivor" and "victim." You certainly can choose to debate language usage with your clients, but it is highly likely that a survivor seeking services will find that conversation alienating, disempowering, and even downright disrespectful. Many transgender people have walked out of service providers' offices unserved over just this kind of discussion, thinking to themselves, "If I have to fight over my own pronoun, there is no chance they are going to be able to hear and meet my other needs."*



# When greeting others, be mindful of language.

Consider

“Thanks, **friends**.  
Have a great  
night.”

“Good morning,  
**folks!**”

“Hi, **everyone!**”

“And for **you?**”

“Can I get  
you **all**  
something?”

Why?

Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption.

Based on Toni Latour’s “Hello there” cards.

Learn more at [qmunity.ca](http://qmunity.ca)

## How to Support Someone Who's Trans and Just Came Out to You

(Adapted with permission from keshetonline.org)

It is important that friends and family positively affirm someone who comes out as trans, gender nonbinary, gender expansive, etc. Coming out is a personal process and does not look the same for all folx. Some trans/gender nonbinary choose to be very out, such as being advocates. Others do not feel comfortable or safe to be out in those same ways and do not want to answer questions about who they are when they are out in the world. They may come out in person, via email, on social media, etc. We continue to live in a world that is transphobic which significantly impacts the way trans/gender nonbinary folx come out. Trans/nonbinary folx deserve privacy and ownership over if and when they come out. Creating an environment that is accepting is very important.

### Ways to Respond When Someone Comes Out to You as Transgender:

- *Congratulate the person!* This is probably a big step toward living a more authentic life
- *Thank them for sharing,* and thank them for trusting you enough to share
- *Center the need of the person coming out to you:* ask how you can support them at this time, “If you have a different name or pronouns you’d like me to use, I’d love to know about that and use them whenever you feel ready.”
- *While being your authentic self is something to celebrate, the process of coming out is personal, liberating, and at times very difficult. Outing someone without their permission can be dangerous, so find out if this information is confidential.* Who else knows? And who does the person want you to share this information with, if anyone?
- *Check in* with how they’re feeling having shared this information with you
- *Remember that they are still the person you knew before:* don’t make all subsequent conversations/interactions about their coming out. A human has other things to talk about!

### Ways NOT to Respond When Someone Comes Out — and WHY

- *Don’t downplay what this person just told you:* While responses like “It doesn’t matter to me!” “It’s no big deal” etc. are undoubtedly coming from a place of kindness and a desire to affirm and reassure this person, they also trivialize this person’s coming out. It’s probably a very big deal to them, and it’s important to recognize their bravery in sharing with you.
- *Don’t put yourself in the center of the circle:* It’s OK if you have complicated feelings about this news, and it’s natural that you might feel confused/nervous/anxious. But try to remember to prioritize the needs of the person coming out to you. Lean on your friends/family/therapist/community resources for the support you need, so you can in turn offer support and affirmation to the person coming out.
- *But you said you were \_\_\_ last summer!* Responses like this convey that you are not listening to or accepting what this person is telling you NOW. Identities commonly shift and evolve over time. A person may come out many times over their lifetime as many different identities.
- *Isn’t that kind of young to be making this kind of decision?* Responses like this tell the person that they are not autonomous enough to make decisions about themselves. It also implies that you know someone better than they know themselves! A subtle, everyday action/statement/question that inadvertently discriminates against marginalized people or populations is called a microaggression. Instead of asking the following problematic questions, try asking yourself why you want to know the answer. If the answer is personal curiosity, you are prioritizing your needs over theirs.

Examples of microaggressions:

- What's your real name? This implies that a person's chosen name is not their real name and comes across as invalidating of their identity.
- Are you going to transition? How/when?
- What's a "real/full/complete" transition?
- Why aren't they "preferred" pronouns? For most people, being referred to by the correct pronouns is a major way of being validated, seen, and respected by others. "Preferred" pronouns imply that there are other, equally acceptable options. Rather, a person's pronoun choice should be taken at face value and not seen as a "preference."
- What body parts do you have (i.e.: do you have breasts, penis, vagina, etc.)? You would never ask non-trans (cisgender) person this, and you shouldn't ask a trans person either. This highly personal question is triggering and irrelevant in most contexts.

# Supporting Transgender People in Your Life from National Center for Transgender Equality



## Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally

Learning to be an ally to the transgender people in your life, or to transgender people overall, is an ongoing process. Some ways to be a good ally are relatively simple and easy, while others require more time, energy, and commitment. Whether you're looking for information on supporting a transgender person in your life or looking for tools that will help you to change the world to be better for transgender people overall, this guide can help.

One of the most important parts of being an ally to transgender people is learning what it means to be transgender. For information on identity, language, and other issues facing transgender people you can visit [Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People](#), [Understanding Non-Binary People](#), and [our About Transgender People hub](#), which has links to various resources and educational material.

### The basics: things to remember about being an ally

**There is no one way to be a 'perfect' ally.** The transgender community is diverse and complex, coming from every region of the United States and around the world, from every racial and ethnic background, and from every faith community. This means that different members of the transgender community have different needs and priorities. Similarly, there is no one right way to handle every situation, or interact with every trans person. Be respectful, do your best, and keep trying.

**You don't have to understand someone's identity to respect it.** Some people haven't heard a lot about transgender identity, or have trouble understanding what it means to be trans, and that's okay. But all people, even those whose identities you don't fully understand, deserve respect.

**You can't always tell if someone is transgender simply by looking at them.** Many people expect that they'll "just know" when someone is trans, and may be surprised to learn that this isn't always true. Since there is no one transgender experience, there is no one way for transgender people to look, either. This also means that transgender people may be in groups or gatherings that you attend without you knowing it, making it important to be an outspoken ally and supporter even in spaces that you think don't have any transgender people in them.

**There is no "one right way" to be transgender.** Some transgender people choose to medically transition, and some don't. Some transgender people choose to legally change their names or ID documents, and some don't. Some transgender people choose to change their appearance (like their clothing or hair), and some don't. Likewise, some transgender people may want to do many of those things but are unable to because they can't afford it or for safety reasons. A transgender person's identity does not depend on what things they have or haven't done to transition, and no two transgender people's journeys are exactly alike.

**Continue to educate yourself.** One of the simplest ways to be a strong ally is to take your education into your own hands. It's important to have conversations with the trans people in your life, but it's also important for you to seek out resources and information on your own.

A few great places to start:

- [Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People](#)
- [Understanding Non-Binary People](#)
- [About Transgender People](#)

## Interacting with transgender people

This section includes information on respectfully interacting with transgender individuals one-on-one or when in a small group.

**Use the language a transgender person uses for themselves.** No two transgender people are exactly the same, and different transgender people may use different words to describe themselves. You should follow the lead of each transgender person, as they will best know the language that is right for them.

**If you don't know what pronouns to use, ask.** A simple way to see what pronouns someone uses—he, she, they, or something else—is to wait and see if it comes up naturally in conversation. If you're still unsure, ask politely and respectfully, without making a big deal about it. Sharing your own pronouns is a great way to bring up the topic—for example, “Hi, I'm Rebecca and I use she/her/hers as my pronouns. How about you?” If you accidentally use the wrong pronouns, apologize and move on. Making a big deal out of a pronoun mistake may be awkward and often draws unwanted attention to the transgender person.

**Be careful and considerate about what other questions you ask.** There are many topics—medical transition, life pre-transition, sexual activity—that you may be curious about. That doesn't mean it's appropriate to ask a transgender person about them, or expect a transgender person to be comfortable sharing intimate details about themselves. There are two questions you can ask yourself that may help determine if a topic is appropriate to bring up:

“Do I need to know this information to treat them respectfully?” Asking someone's name and pronoun is almost always appropriate, as we use that information in talking to and about each other every day. Beyond that, though, you may be curious about questions that are not things you truly need to know. For example, a transgender coworker's surgical history is rarely information that you need to know.

“Would I be comfortable if this question was turned around and asked of me?” Another good way to determine if a question is appropriate is to think about how it would feel if someone asked you something similar. For example, it would probably not feel appropriate for a coworker to ask you about your private areas of your body. Likewise, it's probably not appropriate to ask similar questions about a transgender coworker's body.

Here are some specific topics that many transgender people are uncomfortable discussing with anyone but those closest to them:

- Their birth name (never call it their “real” name!) or photographs from before they transitioned
- What hormones they are (or aren't) taking
- What surgeries they have (or have not) had
- Questions related to sexual relationships

**Someone's transgender identity is their private information to share, or not.** Just because someone has told you that they are transgender does not necessarily mean that they have told everyone in their life. A transgender person may not choose to tell others that they are transgender because it is unsafe to do so, because they're worried they'll be mistreated or fired, or simply because they don't want to share that information with someone. It is not up to you to decide who should or shouldn't know that a particular person is transgender. Similarly, transgender people should be the ones to decide how much information is being shared: a transgender person may be open about being trans, but only want to discuss medical issues with certain close friends. Simply because a transgender person has told you something about their experiences doesn't mean they want everyone to know.

**Avoid compliments or advice based on stereotypes about transgender people, or about how men and women should look or act.** People sometimes intend to be supportive but unintentionally hurt transgender people by focusing on their looks or whether they conform to gender stereotypes. Here are some examples of what to avoid, as they often feel like backhanded compliments:

- "You look like a real woman! I never would have known that you're trans."
- "You would look less trans if you just got a wig/shaved better/wore more makeup/etc."
- "No real man would wear clothing like that. You should change if you don't want people to know you're transgender."
- "I'd date him, even though he's transgender."

## Being outspoken

This section includes information on being an outspoken ally in larger groups, at work or at school.

**Speak out in support of transgender people and transgender rights.** Politely correct others if they use the wrong name or pronoun for a transgender person. More broadly, it is important to challenge anti-transgender remarks, jokes, and conversations. It can be scary to speak out, but loud and visible support for transgender rights can show transgender people that they are accepted, encourage other allies to speak out, and help change the minds of people who aren't supportive of transgender people yet.

**Support transgender people who experience discrimination.** Transgender people may feel that they don't have support from others when making complaints about discrimination or bringing their experiences to authorities, administrators, or others in position of power. Make it clear that you will support the transgender people in your life whether or not they decide to make formal complaints.

**Think about how you use gendered language.** Do you regularly greet groups by saying, "Ladies and gentlemen?" Do you have a coworker who refers to everyone as "guys?" Is there a particular gender-based joke your friend loves to tell? Many transgender people are fine being called 'ladies' or 'gentlemen,' but you can't know without first asking. Consider changing your habits to avoid making assumptions about people's gender or pronouns, and encouraging the people in your life to do the same. This can take time and effort, but is an important way to be an ally and support transgender people outside of individual, face-to-face interactions.

**Learn about policies affecting transgender people.** Are there any laws that protect transgender people where you live? Any policies at work or school that are inclusive of transgender people? It's important to learn more about the challenges that transgender people face and the goals of transgender advocates, and, if you're comfortable with it, even help push to change bad laws and policies or support good ones.

## Changing businesses, schools, and more

**Rethink gender on forms and documents.** When creating forms and documents, consider whether you need to include gender at all. Many times, we default to asking for gender without considering why or how that information will be used. If you do need to ask for gender information, consider using a blank space for people to fill in as they feel comfortable, rather than a boxes marked “male” and “female,” or make it clear that people can fill in forms in a way that matches their gender identity.

**Ensure everyone has access to bathrooms and other facilities.** Everyone should be able to safely and comfortably use bathrooms and other gendered facilities. Push to allow people to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity rather than what’s on their ID. In addition, providing gender-neutral or private bathrooms is a great way to provide safe and comfortable space for everyone (but never require anyone to use them if they don’t want!). And if a restroom is designed for just one user at a time, make sure that it’s gender-neutral—there’s no reason to make it a men’s or women’s restroom. Take down that “Women” or “Men” sign and put up new signs that say “Restroom.”

**Push for support and inclusivity, not simply tolerance.** A baseline of tolerance—allowing transgender people to exist—is an important start, but we can do more. If your school brings outside speakers or hosts events, make sure that some of them include transgender people and topics. If your business donates to nonprofits, look into partnering with organizations that support the transgender community. If your organization posts community events on social media, include some from the transgender community.

**Craft a transgender-inclusive nondiscrimination policy.** Shifting the culture of an organization takes time. Crafting a transgender-inclusive nondiscrimination policy can help clarify how your organization supports transgender people, and ensure that there’s a way to respond to those who aren’t supportive.

## Changing the world

**Call your elected officials.** Call your elected local, state, and federal officials to thank them when they do support transgender rights and to provide important criticism when they don’t. Visit [Make Your Voice Heard](#) for more information.

**Work to pass laws** in your city or state, and on the federal level, that outlaw discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and education based on gender identity/expression. This could be as simple as calling your elected officials, or as involved as a letter-writing campaign or collecting signatures for a ballot measure.

**Change the curriculum** of medical, health, crisis response and social work programs, or bring in trainers, to teach these providers about transgender people and how to treat transgender people with respect and professionalism. Include information about the rejection, discrimination and violence that transgender people face and how to provide services and support to transgender clients.

**Work with schools** to make them safe for transgender students by implementing all the recommendations in our [Model School District Policy on Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students](#), and use the many other resources available in our [School Action Center](#).

**Work with homeless shelters** to make them safe for transgender people by implementing all the recommendations in [Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People](#).



**Work with suicide prevention, HIV prevention and treatment, alcohol and drug abuse treatment, and anti-smoking programs** to ensure that their work is trans-inclusive and their staff is knowledgeable about transgender issues. Find trainers and teach them how to deal sensitively with trans people seeking assistance.

**Work with police departments** to have fair written policies with regard to interacting with transgender members of the public, regardless if they are seeking assistance or being arrested, and make sure all police officers are trained on following the policy and treating transgender people with respect.

**Work with jail and prison systems** to ensure the respectful and safe treatment of transgender prisoners, starting with implementing the recommendations of [Standing with LGBT Prisoners](#).

**Take a step back.** Transgender people come from every population, and are of all races, religions, ages, and more. There are transgender immigrants, employees, prisoners, sex workers, and every other category imaginable. Make an effort to be as inclusive as possible of all kinds of transgender people when working to support transgender communities.

## Putting it all into action

Hopefully by this point you feel armed with the tools and knowledge needed to be an ally to the transgender people in your life, as well as the larger transgender community. Remember: no one is able to be the perfect ally at all times, so it's important to provide as much support as you can and to learn from the mistakes you may make along the way.

Thanks for being a strong ally!



## Action Tips for Allies of Trans People

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The following are several actions tips that can be used as you move toward becoming a better trans ally. Of course, this list is not exhaustive and cannot include all the “right” things to do or say—because each person and situation is different, there is not always one single, easy, or right answer! This list should provide you with a starting place as you learn more about trans people, gender identities and expressions, and how to ally yourself with trans communities and activism.

### Don't assume you can tell if someone is transgender.

Transgender and transsexual people don't all look a certain way or come from the same background, and many may not fit your idea of what trans “looks like.” Indeed, many trans people live most of their lives with very few people knowing their trans status.

### Don't make assumptions about a trans person's sexual orientation.

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about who we're attracted to. Gender identity is about how we know our own gender. Trans people can identify as any sexual orientation, such as gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or asexual.

### Be careful about confidentiality, disclosure, and “outing.”

Some trans people feel comfortable disclosing their trans status to others, and some do not. Knowing a trans person's status is personal information. Do not casually share this information, or “gossip” about a person you know or think is trans. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it also can have negative consequences in a world that is very intolerant of gender difference—trans people can lose jobs, housing, family, or friends due to unwanted outing, and sadly many trans people have been killed upon revelation of their gender history.

### Understand what is unique about coming out as trans.

Unlike coming out in a lesbian/gay/bisexual context, where the act of disclosing one's sexuality reveals a “truth” about that person's sexual orientation, disclosing one's trans status often has the opposite effect. That is, when a person “comes out” as trans, the listener often assumes the “truth” about the trans person is that they are somehow more fundamentally a member of their birth sex, rather than the gender/sex they have chosen to live in. In other words, sometimes “coming out” makes it more difficult for a trans person to be fully recognized as the sex/gender they are living in.

### Do not tolerate anti-trans remarks or humor in public spaces.

Consider strategies to best confront anti-trans remarks or jokes in your classroom, lab, office, living group, or organization. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

### If you don't know what pronouns to use, ask.

Be polite and respectful when you ask a person which pronoun they prefer. Then, use that pronoun and encourage others to do so. Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity. A person who is questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what identity and/or gender presentation is best for them. They might, for example, choose a new name or pronoun, and then decide at a later time to change the name or pronoun again. Do your best to be respectful and use the name and/or pronouns requested.

### Don't try to tell a person what “category” or “identity” they fit into.

Do not apply labels or identities to a person that they have not chosen for themselves. If a person is not sure of which identity or path fits them best, give them the time and space to decide for themselves.

---

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Division of Student Life  
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**Don't assume what path a trans person is on regarding surgery or hormones, and don't privilege one path over another.**

Affirm the many ways all of us can and do transcend gender boundaries, including the choices some of us make to use medical technology to change our bodies. Some trans people wish to be recognized as their gender of choice without surgery or hormones; some need support and advocacy to get respectful medical care, hormones, and/or surgery.

**Don't ask a trans person what their "real name" or gender history is.**

For some trans people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. Respect the name a trans person is currently using.

**Don't ask about a trans person's genitals or surgical status.**

Think about it—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about the appearance or status of their genitalia, so it isn't appropriate to ask a trans person that question either. Likewise, don't ask if a trans person has had "the surgery." If a trans person wants to talk to you about such matters, let them bring it up.

**Don't ask a trans person how they have sex.**

Similar to the questions above about genitalia and surgery—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to trans people.

**Don't police public restrooms.**

Recognize that gender variant people may not match the little signs on the restroom door—or your expectations! Encourage schools, businesses and agencies to have unisex bathroom options, and offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom, in a "buddy system," so they are less vulnerable.

**Don't just add the "T" without doing work.**

"LGBT" is now a commonplace acronym that joins lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender under the same umbrella. To be an ally to trans people, gays, lesbians and bisexuals need to examine their own gender stereotypes, their own prejudices and fears about trans people, and be willing to defend and celebrate trans lives.

**Know your own limits as an ally.**

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know everything! When a trans person has sought you out for support or guidance, try to find appropriate resources when you've reached the limit of your knowledge or ability to handle the situation. It is better to admit you don't know something than to provide information that may be incorrect or hurtful.

**Listen to trans voices.**

The best way to be an ally is to listen with an open mind to trans people themselves. They are the experts on their own lives! Talk to trans people in your community. Consult the Resource Library, the LGBT Campus Center, and our other resources to learn more about trans lives and activism.

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*Adapted from the trans@mit Allies Toolkit, "Action Tips for Allies of Trans People." March 31, 2006.  
[web.mit.edu/trans/tipsfortransallies.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/trans/tipsfortransallies.pdf).*



## 52 Things You Can do for Transgender Equality from the National Center for Transgender Equality

**52 things**  
**YOU can do for**  
**TRANSGENDER EQUALITY**

**#1:** Take a trans person to lunch **#2:** Ask your library to carry books that deal positively with trans people **#3:** Attend an anti-racism training and put into practice what you learn **#4:** Run for office **#5:** Invite your mayor or other elected official to address a trans group or town meeting **#6:** Plan an art show of works by trans artists **#7:** Create and publicize a calendar of local events and encourage people to attend them **#8:** Start an online community or a blog that deals with an issue that is important to you **#9:** Change the policy of an organization you belong to **#10:** Donate money to an organization providing direct services for trans people **#11:** Hold a workshop on how to effectively advocate for yourself when seeking medical care or therapy **#12:** Ask your local film festival to show trans-themed movies and then go see them **#13:** Support the Day of Silence **#14:** Preach or speak at a local community of faith, such as a synagogue, church or mosque **#15:** Adopt a highway **#16:** Hold a Trans Pride event in your community **#17:** March as a trans contingent in the Gay Pride parade **#18:** Educate a local homeless shelter about how to be trans-inclusive **#19:** Pass a non-discrimination ordinance in your community **#20:** Visit the offices of your Congressional representative and educate them about trans issues **#21:** Start a local support or education group **#22:** Volunteer with an LGBT advocacy group **#23:** Start a speakers' bureau **#24:** Break a gender rule **#25:** Make a restroom more accessible to trans people **#26:** Compile and share a list of support services **#27:** Collaborate with another group on a community project or social event **#28:** Work to pass a non-discrimination policy at your workplace **#29:** Connect with PFLAG **#30:** Write a regular column for a publication **#31:** Plan to come out on National Coming Out Day **#32:** Register new voters **#33:** Fund scholarships **#34:** Support programs for youth **#35:** Know your rights if you are stopped by the police **#36:** Get involved in the political process—volunteer for a candidate **#37:** Plan and conduct a Day of Remembrance event **#38:** Support or create a radio show or podcast **#39:** Hold a house party for NCTE or another trans organization **#40:** Make jails safer for trans people **#41:** Hold a job fair **#42:** Support a drag community event **#43:** Engage media coverage of trans issues **#44:** Conduct a community needs assessment **#45:** Vote **#46:** Start a discussion group on gender-related books **#47:** Respond to alerts from other organizations **#48:** Collect and share stories of discrimination **#49:** Set up training in a hospital, nursing or medical school **#50:** Write an op-ed **#51:** Help an LGBT organization become more trans-friendly **#52:** Make a New Year's resolution for transgender equality

More information about each of these ideas is available on our web site at [www.NCTEequality.org](http://www.NCTEequality.org).

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# Understanding Transgender People: The Basics from National Center for Transgender Equality



## Understanding Transgender People The Basics

Understanding what it is like to be transgender can be hard, especially if you have never met a transgender person.

**Transgender** is a broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born. “Trans” is often used as shorthand for transgender.

To treat a transgender person with respect, you treat them according to their gender identity, not their sex at birth. So, someone who lives as a woman today is called a **transgender woman** and should be referred to as “she” and “her.” A **transgender man** lives as a man today and should be referred to as “he” and “him.”

**Gender identity** is your internal knowledge of your gender – for example, your knowledge that you’re a man, a woman, or another gender. **Gender expression** is how a person presents their gender on the outside, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice or body characteristics.

When a person begins to live according to their gender identity, rather than the gender they were thought to be when they were born, this time period is called **gender transition**. Deciding to transition can take a lot of reflection. Many transgender people risk social stigma, discrimination, and harassment when they tell other people who they really are. Despite those risks, being open about one’s gender identity can be life-affirming and even life-saving.

Possible steps in a **gender transition** may or may not include changing your clothing, appearance, name, or the pronoun people use to refer to you (like “she,” “he,” or “they”). If they can, some people change their identification documents, like their driver’s license or passport, to better reflect their gender. And some people undergo hormone therapy or other medical procedures to change their physical characteristics and make their body match the gender they know themselves to be. All transgender people are entitled to the same dignity and respect, regardless of whether or not they have been able to take any legal or medical steps.

Some transgender people identify as neither a man nor a woman, or as a combination of male and female, and may use terms like **non-binary** or **genderqueer** to describe their gender identity. Those who are non-binary often prefer to be referred to as “they” and “them.”

It is important to use respectful terminology, and treat transgender people as you would treat any other person. This includes using the name the person has asked you to call them (not their old name) as well as the pronouns they want you to use. If you aren’t sure what pronouns a person uses, just ask politely.

For more information about transgender people generally, see [Understanding Transgender People: Frequently Asked Questions](#).

For more information about non-binary people, see [Understanding Non-Binary People](#).

For more information about how to be supportive of the transgender people in your life, see [Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life](#).



# Questionable Questions About Transgender Identity from National Center for Transgender Equality



## Questionable Questions About Transgender Identity

### ■ Introduction

Many people—particularly those who have never met a transgender person—are naturally curious about what it's like to be transgender. There may be unfamiliar terms, conflicting information, and uncertainty around what is and isn't OK to ask.

Asking transgender people questions about their experiences can be a great way to learn more about what it means to be transgender. Some transgender people are open to answering just about anything, while others may not want to share intimate details about their lives, especially outside of personal conversations with close friends.



This guide is intended to help you decide whether or not a particular question is appropriate to ask a transgender person in your life. It also has answers to specific questions you may have, along with thoughts on why transgender people may be uncomfortable if you ask them those questions directly.

Let's dive in!

### ■ “Should I Ask This Question?”

Because so many of us naturally learn by asking questions, we don't always pause to consider whether or not a person wants to be asked a particular question. Asking personal and intimate questions of transgender people can make them feel like they're being put on the spot, pressured to justify themselves, having their privacy invaded, or worse.

Here are a few things to think about before asking questions:

#### **Why do I want to know this information?**

Curiosity is important, and a legitimate reason to have questions. However, if you're only asking because you're curious, it may be a good idea to turn to Google or other resources on this very website, such as our [Video Introduction to Transgender People](#), our [Transgender Basics](#), and our [Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People](#) for information.

Before you ask a transgender person a question, pause and think whether you're treating them differently—and asking more personal or inappropriate questions—simply because they're transgender.

On the other hand, sometimes we need information to respectfully interact with people. Names and pronouns are a great example of this type of information—knowing someone’s name and the pronouns they use (for example, she/her/hers, he/him/his, or they/their/theirs) allows you to call them what they ask to be called, and treat them with respect.

### **Would I feel comfortable if someone asked these questions of me?**

Take a moment to put yourself in the shoes of the person being asked a question. For example, what surgeries they have or haven’t undergone or what their genitals look like can be very personal. How would you feel if someone asked to talk about your genitals, or share details about personal and intimate surgeries you’ve undergone? Even if you would be comfortable sharing that information, not everyone will feel the same way.

### **Would I ask this question of a non-transgender person in a similar situation?**

If you just met someone at a coffee shop, you probably wouldn’t ask questions about what their genitals look like, what surgeries they have or haven’t undergone, or about intimate details of their childhood. Before you ask a transgender person similar questions, pause and think whether you’re treating them differently—and asking more personal or inappropriate questions—simply because they’re transgender.

## **Specific Questions**

- Have you had “The Surgery?”
- What surgeries have you had?
- Are you planning to have surgery?
- What did your surgery cost?

### **Answering the Question:**

First of all, there isn’t one transition-related surgery that transgender people may have. In fact, there are many different surgeries that transgender people may undergo. These include surgeries that:

- Change facial features (such as brow lifts and rhinoplasties)
- Reconstruct the chest, sometimes known as “top surgery” (such as mastectomies and augmentation mammoplasties)
- Remove internal sex organs (like a uterus or ovaries)
- Reconstruct external genitalia (surgically constructing a penis or a vagina)
- Make one’s voice more typically feminine

Transgender people can have all, some or none of these surgeries. Some people don’t need certain surgeries, or any surgeries, some can’t afford them, and some can’t have them because of other medical conditions.

Like with any other medical treatment, different surgeries costs different amounts. The [Affordable Care Act makes it illegal for insurance companies to automatically deny coverage for transition-related care](#), including surgeries, and more and more private insurance companies are covering transition-related costs. But many people still haven’t been able to get their insurance companies to cover the cost, and may not be able to afford these procedures on their own.

It’s important to remember that no surgeries “turn” someone into a man or a woman, and transgender people’s genders are no less real or worthy of respect if they haven’t had particular surgeries or other medical treatments.

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It's important to remember that no surgeries “turn” someone into a man or a woman, and transgender people's genders are no less real or worthy of respect if they haven't had particular surgeries or other medical treatments.

**Why Pause Before Asking:**

Like anyone else, transgender people may naturally feel uncomfortable sharing personal details about their medical history, so it's important to consider whether you really need this information before asking about it. And, when you ask about surgery, you are basically asking a person to describe their genitals to you, something typically out of bounds. You also wouldn't ask just anyone to disclose their personal medical history. (Again, simply being curious is not the same as needing to know!) Different surgeries can be interesting, so if you want more information you can look at the descriptions and videos of the many surgeries out there.

- What does hormone therapy do?
- How long have you been on hormones?
- Are you planning to go on hormones?
- What hormones do you take?

**Answering the Question:**

Many transgender people take hormones to bring their bodies more in line with their gender identity. Some transgender people take hormones that make their bodies more typically masculine—usually testosterone. Some take hormones that make their bodies more typically feminine, usually a combination of hormones that block testosterone and increase estrogen. Hormones have a variety of effects, many of which are similar to the effects teenagers experience during puberty.

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For example, the effects of taking masculinizing hormones (testosterone) can include:

- Thicker facial and body hair
- A deeper voice
- Increased muscles
- Changes in fat distribution to a more masculine body type

The effects of taking feminizing hormones (estrogen) can include:

- Slower and more sparse facial and body hair growth
- Softer skin
- Breast growth
- Decreased muscles and body strength

Some of these changes are reversible and change back if someone stops taking hormones, and some are not reversible.

There are some things that hormones don't change: for example, taking estrogen or testosterone won't make someone taller or shorter. But hormones do affect many characteristics that people typically rely on when deciding who looks like a man or a woman: for example, a transgender man on hormone therapy might grow a beard and chest hair, and may live his life being seen by everyone as a man regardless of whether he has had any surgeries.

The effects of hormones vary for each person, just like how non-transgender people experience different physical changes while going through puberty. For example, some non-transgender boys grow facial hair early on, and their facial hair might be thicker or thinner depending on their genetics. Much the same way, transgender men who take testosterone might grow thick or sparse facial hair and might grow it quickly or slowly, depending on their genetics and other physical characteristics.

Someone's internal sense of gender is a core part of that person's identity that often forms at an early age. This is true whether or not that person is transgender. Likewise, transgender people exist around the world, in every society and culture.

**Why Pause Before Asking:** Like with surgeries, the hormones a transgender person does (or doesn't) take can be personal and private.

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## ■ What are puberty blockers?

### Answering the Question:

Some transgender people who haven't yet completed puberty may be prescribed puberty blockers, which delay physical effects related to puberty. Unlike hormone therapy, the effects of puberty blockers are reversible: if someone starts puberty blockers, the effects of puberty will kick in if they stop taking them.

Puberty can have many lasting effects on the body. For example, during puberty, testosterone can

cause teenagers to develop broader shoulders, a deeper voice, and more typically masculine facial features (like a prominent brow line and facial hair). Estrogen can cause a person to develop breasts and round hips. For transgender teenagers, these changes can be difficult and even traumatic. Some of these changes—such as the broadening of shoulders caused by testosterone—are permanent, while others can only be changed through a series of often expensive surgeries. For that reason, many doctors prescribe puberty blockers (also called inhibitors) for transgender young people to delay the effects of puberty. They are usually prescribed only after a long decision-making process that involves the transgender youth, the parents, and a therapist or a medical team.

Outside of transgender health, puberty blockers have been used for many years to treat young people with early onset puberty. They are known to be safe and effective.

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## ■ Are children too young to know their gender?

### **Answering the Question:**

For people who aren't transgender, the idea of children being transgender can be difficult to understand. How can someone that young, sometimes as young as two or three, really know?

While no one is sure what causes someone to be transgender, there is [widespread medical consensus](#) that our internal sense of gender is a core part of everyone's identity that can and does form at a young age for most people. Allowing a transgender child to express their true gender is not something taken lightly by parents, and is often done in conversation with doctors or therapists.

To put it more simply? No, children are not too young to know their true gender. Many children—whether they're transgender or not—instinctively know their gender identity.

### **Why Pause Before Asking:**

Asking a parent about how they raise their child can feel invasive or confrontational for the parent. Similarly, asking someone else's child about their identity or deeply held sense of self can be confusing or uncomfortable for the child.

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## ■ Are transgender people confused or going through a phase?

### **Answering the Question:**

Someone's internal sense of gender is a core part of that person's identity that often forms at an early age. This is true whether or not that person is transgender. Likewise, transgender people exist around the world, in every society and culture. From this we know that being transgender is not simply confusion or a phase, but a deeply held part of a person's identity.

### **Why Pause Before Asking:**

The experience and emotions of transitioning are personal and often private. In addition, this type of question can unintentionally sound like the person asking it is skeptical of the transgender person's true identity, or questioning who they are.

---

## ■ What was your birth name?

## ■ Can I see photos of you from before you transitioned?

### **Why Pause Before Asking:**

Many transgender people are uncomfortable sharing personal details of their life from before they transitioned, including the name they were given at birth and photos or videos of what they looked like. This hesitation may come from memories of past harassment, hurtful comments, or physical violence. It may also come from feeling like they want to move away from those memories, and move forward as their true selves.

Some transgender people also feel that 'before' photos can detract from who they are today, and that seeing them may cause others to see them as less of their true gender. Similarly, some transgender people feel that these types of questions may suggest that they are somehow less than non-transgender people, or that the person asking the question is trying to dismiss or deny their true gender.

---

## ■ What bathrooms to trans people use?

## ■ What bathroom do you use?

### **Answering the Question:**

Transgender people generally use the bathroom that matches the gender they live as. Transgender men--people who were thought to be female at birth, but know themselves to be male--generally use the men's room. Transgender women--people who were thought to be male at birth, but know themselves to be female--generally use the women's room. There's a good chance you've already used the same restroom as a transgender person without even realizing it.

Transgender people use the bathroom for the same reason as anyone else: to do their business and move on with their day.

Some trans people prefer to use single-user restrooms or gender-neutral restrooms when available,



as bathrooms can feel unsafe or uncomfortable for many transgender people. Likewise, sometimes transgender people need to make a case-by-case decision about their bathroom use based on safety or privacy.

For people who do not identify as male or female (who are sometimes referred to as “non-binary people”) using either the women’s and the men’s room might feel unsafe, because others may verbally harass them or even physically attack them. Non-binary people should be permitted to use the restroom that they believe they will be safest in. For more information on non-binary people, please visit this [page on non-binary identity](#).

**Why Pause Before Asking:**

Transgender people use the bathroom for the same reason as anyone else: to do their business and move on with their day. Questioning transgender people about bathrooms can make them feel uncomfortable or like they have to justify their identity and true self.

---

- Do transgender people regret transitioning or change their minds?
- Do you regret transitioning?

**Answering the Question:**

People do not transition on a whim, and almost all transgender people have thought deeply about their gender for a long time before transitioning. As such, it is extremely rare for transgender people to change their minds or regret transition. Those who do so are almost exclusively upset not at their transition, but about rejection by family, friends, and sometimes the inability to get a job, as discrimination against transgender people is still very widespread.

**Why Pause Before Asking:**

The experience and emotions of transitioning are personal and often private. In addition, this type of question can unintentionally sound like the person asking it is skeptical of the transgender person’s true identity.

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- How can you tell if someone is transgender?
- Are you transgender?

**Answering the Question:**

The only way to tell for sure if someone is transgender is by having a conversation with them and them telling you. You usually cannot tell if someone is transgender from their appearance, their voice, or anything about their body. Many non-transgender people have physical features that might not conform to stereotypes about how men and women look: for example, some non-transgender women are taller and have broad shoulders, and some non-transgender men have a slight build and higher pitched voices. And many transgender people have an appearance that conforms to common stereotypes about how men and women look, and few people would guess that they're transgender unless they say so. According to transgender people who responded to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, about 21% say that no one ever knows they are transgender, and about 22% say that most or all of the time other people can tell (with the rest saying sometimes or occasionally).

**Why Pause Before Asking:**

Speculating about what someone's body parts looks like or examining ways they conform or don't conform to sex stereotypes can feel uncomfortable or intrusive to many people. For some people, asking if someone is transgender sounds like a comment about their appearance or bodily characteristics, which they may consider offensive regardless of whether they are transgender.

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- What's the difference between a transgender woman and a drag queen?

**Answering the Question:**

A transgender woman is someone who was born a boy, but deeply understands herself to be a woman. Transgender women may dress in ways that appear more feminine, but, like many non-transgender women, may not. Some transgender women love dresses and makeup, while others don't. Being transgender is not performance or acting as a character, it is a deeply held part of someone's identity.

"Drag" is a style of performance that exaggerates feminine or masculine characteristics as part of a performance or simply for fun. Someone's appearance will 'in drag' is a costume used to perform a character, rather than an expression of their true gender. Historically, drag has often been performed by men, often but not always gay men, who are not transgender. These men may call themselves drag queens.

Because of the challenges that transgender people—particularly transgender women—face when seeking employment, it is not uncommon to see transgender women performing in drag. Some transgender women who perform in drag have begun referring to themselves as showgirls, in part to distinguish themselves from non-transgender men who may also perform in drag. Calling a transgender woman a drag queen may be hurtful or insulting because it implies she is not actually a woman, and is simply playing a part or pretending to be a woman.

---

- Why do there seem to be more transgender people now?
- Is being transgender a new thing?

**Answering the Question:**

The experience of those whose deeply held sense of their gender does not match their body at birth has been documented for thousands of years across many cultures.

As transgender people in the United States gain visibility and acceptance, and as more transgender people are able to connect with each other and build strong communities—both online off—more and more transgender people feel safe being open about who they are. Until recently, many transgender people lived in shame and secrecy, didn't have the words to express how they felt, or didn't think that living according to their authentic gender was a real option. But that doesn't mean that there were fewer transgender people out there. Being transgender is not new, is not a fad, and is not going away.

---

- With whom do transgender people have sex?
- How do you have sex?

**Answering the Question:**

There is no one way transgender people have sex, just as there is no one way people who aren't transgender have sex. Just like with anyone else, no two transgender people will enjoy exactly the same thing, use their bodies in exactly the same way during sex, or have the exact same sexual desires. Likewise, some transgender people are comfortable having sex prior to transitioning, while some are not.

Transgender people are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, straight, and every other sexual orientation.

Some people find language such as 'straight' or 'gay' to be confusing when discussing transgender people. It's helpful to remember that transgender men are men, and transgender women are women. So a gay transgender man is a man who is primarily attracted to other men, and was thought to be female when he was born. A straight transgender woman is a woman who is primarily attracted to men, and was thought to be male when she was born.

**Why Pause Before Asking:**

Take a moment to review the 'should I ask this question?' section of this guide. Are you personally hoping to have sex with this transgender person? And, does it seem like they are interested in you? If not, who they have sex with, or how they have sex, is probably none of your business.

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- Are trans men just really masculine lesbians/trans women really feminine gay guys?
- Are you sure you're not just gay?

**Answering the Question:**

Transgender men are men, not masculine women. They might be straight and attracted to women, but they might not be. And transgender women are women, not feminine men, and they might or might not



be attracted to men. It's important to remember that transgender people can be gay (like transgender women who are attracted to other women, and transgender men who are attracted to other men), straight, or have any other sexual orientation.

#### **Why Pause Before Asking:**

Many transgender people are upset with this question because it implies that their “real” gender is the gender they were thought to be when they were born. It also makes assumptions about who they're attracted to.

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### **■ My Question Wasn't Answered!**

If you have a question about transgender people or transgender identity that wasn't answered on this page, first check out our pages [Frequently Asked Questions about Transgender People](#), [Understanding Transgender People: The Basics](#), and [Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally](#).

If you are still stumped, email NCTE's Community Storytelling Advocate, Rebecca Kling, at [rkling@transequality.org](mailto:rkling@transequality.org) and we may choose to include your question in a future update of this page.



**National Center for Transgender Equality**

[www.transequality.org](http://www.transequality.org) | [ncte@transequality.org](mailto:ncte@transequality.org) | 202.642.4542



## Understanding Non-Binary People How to Be Respectful and Supportive

### Non-binary defined

Most people – including most transgender people – are either male or female. But some people don't neatly fit into the categories of "man" or "woman," or "male" or "female." For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female. Some people don't identify with any gender. Some people's gender changes over time.

People whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with **non-binary** being one of the most common. Other terms include **genderqueer**, **agender**, **bigender**, and more. None of these terms mean exactly the same thing – but all speak to an experience of gender that is not simply male or female.

#### Why “non-binary”?

Some societies – like ours – tend to recognize just two genders, male and female. The idea that there are only two genders is sometimes called a “gender binary,” because binary means “having two parts” (male and female). Therefore, “non-binary” is one term people use to describe genders that don't fall into one of these two categories, male or female.

### Basic facts about non-binary people

**Non-binary people are nothing new.** Non-binary people aren't confused about their gender identity or following a new fad – non-binary identities have been recognized for millennia by cultures and societies around the world.

**Some, but not all, non-binary people undergo medical procedures to make their bodies more congruent with their gender identity.** While not all non-binary people need medical care to live a fulfilling life, it's critical and even life-saving for many.

**Most transgender people are not non-binary.** While some transgender people are non-binary, most transgender people have a gender identity that is either male or female, and should be treated like any other man or woman.

**Being non-binary is not the same thing as being intersex.** Intersex people have anatomy or genes that don't fit typical definitions of male and female. Most intersex people identify as either men or women. Non-binary people are usually not intersex: they're usually born with bodies that may fit typical definitions of male and female, but their innate gender identity is something other than male or female.

### How to be respectful and supportive of non-binary people

It isn't as hard as you might think to be supportive and respectful of non-binary people, even if you have just started to learn about them.

**You don't have to understand what it means for someone to be non-binary to respect them.** Some people haven't heard a lot about non-binary genders or have trouble understanding them, and that's okay. But identities that some people don't understand still deserve respect.

**Use the name a person asks you to use.** This is one of the most critical aspects of being respectful of a non-binary person, as the name you may have been using may not reflect their gender identity. Don't ask someone what their old name was.

**Try not to make any assumptions about people's gender.** You can't tell if someone is non-binary simply by looking at them, just like how you can't tell if someone is transgender just by how they look.

**If you're not sure what pronouns someone uses, ask.** Different non-binary people may use different pronouns. Many non-binary people use "they" while others use "he" or "she," and still others use [other pronouns](#). Asking whether someone should be referred to as "he," "she," "they," or another pronoun may feel awkward at first, but is one of the simplest and most important ways to show respect for someone's identity.

**Advocate for non-binary friendly policies.** It's important for non-binary people to be able to live, dress and have their gender respected at work, at school and in public spaces.

**Understand that, for many non-binary people, figuring out which bathroom to use can be challenging.** For many non-binary people, using either the women's or the men's room might feel unsafe, because others may verbally harass them or even physically attack them. Non-binary people should be supported by being able to use the restroom that they believe they will be safest in.

**Talk to non-binary people to learn more about who they are.** There's no one way to be non-binary. The best way to understand what it's like to be non-binary is to talk with non-binary people and listen to their stories.