

How to Be an Ally to Transgender People

- Validate people's gender expression. It is important to refer to transgender people by the pronoun appropriate to their gender identity. In other words, if someone identifies as female, then refer to the person as "she"; if someone identifies as male, refer to the person as "he." If you are not sure, ask them. Never use the word "it" when referring to someone who is transgender. To do so is incredibly insulting and disrespectful. Some transgender people prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns: "hir" instead of "her" and "his," and "sie" or "ze" instead of "she" and "he."
- Use non-gendered language to avoid making gender assumptions. Refer to people by name, instead of calling them "sir"/"ma'am" or "Mr.," "Ms."
- Challenge your own conceptions about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors. Do not expect people to conform to society's beliefs about "women" and "men."
- Do not assume that someone who is transgender is lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or that a person will seek to transition to become heterosexual.
- Use the word "crossdresser" instead of "transvestite," as the latter term is often considered pejorative because of the word's clinical and pathological history.
- Never ask transgender people about how they have sex or what their genitals look like. This is inappropriate in every situation.
- Do not share the gender identity of individuals without their permission. Do not assume that everyone knows. The decision to tell others about one's gender should be left to the individual.
- When you learn about someone's transgender identity, do not assume that it is a fad or trend. While public discussions about transgenderism and transsexuality are a relatively recent phenomenon, most transgender people have felt themselves to be gender different from early childhood and have often struggled to be accepted by others. It is important to trust that someone's decision to present themselves as differently gendered is not made lightly or without due consideration.
- Educate yourself and others about the experiences of transgender people. Introduce trainings, readings, and other resources to your colleagues to continue educational efforts to deconstruct social norms around gender, sex, and sexual orientation.
- Work to change campus policies in areas such as housing, employment, student records and forms, and health care that discriminate against transgender people and seek to include "gender identity/expression" in your school's non-discrimination policy.

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Some material adapted from the Southern Arizona Gender Alliance: <http://www.tgnetarizona.org>