



Being an Ally to Transgender People

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You may know a friend, family member, or coworker who is transgender, or you may have seen a transgender person in the media. You might have questions such as what pronouns to use when referring to this person or wondering about how you can support them. Transgender people encounter [significant challenges](#) including heightened poverty, harassment, homelessness, unemployment, and suicide rates. Additionally, the transgender community lacks adequate legal protection. There can be increased challenges for transgender people who are also members of other minority groups, such as people of color. This makes it crucial for everyone to support and advocate for transgender people.

First, it's important to [understand](#) who transgender people are. A *transgender* person is someone whose gender identity (their internal knowledge of their own gender) differs from their sex assigned at birth (male, female, or intersex, based on the appearance of the baby's external anatomy at birth). For example, a transgender woman is a woman who was assigned male at birth. People whose gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth are referred to as *cisgender*. *Non-binary* people are those holding gender identities that do not fit neatly into either of the two options of male or female.

Being an ally helps not only the transgender people you know personally; it also helps create a safer and more welcoming world for all transgender people. Here are some tips for how you can act as an ally for the transgender community:

- **Respect the terminology a transgender person uses:** Not all transgender people use the same terminology to describe themselves and their experiences. Make sure to respect the terms each individual person uses and do not make assumptions or tell them how you think they should refer to themselves.
- **Be patient with people who are questioning or exploring their gender identity:** Gender identity is each person's *internal* knowledge of their *own* gender, so do not impose a specific gender identity on someone. Instead, give them time to figure this out for themselves. This exploration may involve the use of one name or pronouns at first, then a change to a different name and/or pronouns later. Try to be respectful of this and use the name and pronouns requested at any given time.

- **Recognize the diversity among transgender people:** There is no single way to exist as a transgender person, just as there is no single way to live as a cisgender person. Some transgender people may undergo a medical transition involving hormone therapy and surgeries, while others may not. Accept transgender people in their gender identity regardless of whether they have medically transitioned. Also, be aware that there is not a certain “look” that indicates a person is transgender, so you cannot know who is or is not transgender just from looking around. Do not assume that everyone is cisgender.
- **Listen to others and introduce your own pronouns if you are uncertain about what pronouns to use:** If you are unsure of what pronouns to use, listen to others who know the person to see what pronouns they use. If you need to ask which pronouns the person uses, start by introducing yourself with your own pronouns (“I’m Emily, I use the pronouns she and her. What pronouns do you use?”).
- **Apologize and be open to corrections if you misgender someone:** Misgendering might occur by using the incorrect pronouns and/or name when referring to a transgender person. If you accidentally do this, apologize to the person right away but do not belabor your mistake. Make conscious efforts to use their correct name and pronouns moving forward.
- **Respect boundaries:** Do not ask personal questions just because someone is transgender. Asking about a transgender person’s birth name can be anxiety-provoking or upsetting, and their birth name may be something they want to leave behind. Avoid using or sharing their birth name if you know it. Additionally, avoid questions related to a transgender person’s surgical status, sex life, or genitals. You likely would not ask these questions of people who are cisgender, so extend the same respect and boundaries to transgender people. If they wish to discuss these aspects of their personal life, allow them to bring it up first.
- **Listen to transgender people, learn more, and recognize your limits as an ally:** Recognize that transgender people are the experts of their own experiences. Listen to them with an open mind and allow them to speak for themselves. Utilize social media, books, films, etc. created by transgender people to learn more about the community. Learn more about the history of transgender people as well. Also, acknowledge that you may not know everything and be willing to admit when you do not know something. Avoid making assumptions, which could be incorrect or hurtful.

Remember that help is available. If you are struggling with your own gender identity or that of someone close to you, seek out [information and support](#) in your community and/or online.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA’s Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then “Resources” and then “Public Resources”. PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.