

# How to be a trans ally

A beginner's guide

**Trans  
rights  
are  
human  
rights.**

# Transgender and non-binary people are...

**our classmates, our coworkers, our  
neighbors and our friends.**

With millions of adults across the world with a lived transgender experience, chances are you've met a transgender person, and you don't even know it.

2017 has been called "the best and worst year for trans people". Despite the political victories, greater trans representation in the media and new policies protecting trans rights advancing every day, trans people still face disproportionately higher rates of discrimination than any other community.

It's time for us—all of us—to become stronger, louder allies and create an inclusive and accepting society for all.

# What does it mean to be transgender or non-binary?

The term **transgender** describes people whose gender identity is different than the identity they were assigned at birth.

The term **non-binary** describes people who don't identify as male or female, but rather as neither or as a combination. These people live as both, either or neither gender.

For more terms associated with gender identity, see the glossary at the back of this book.

**The National Center  
for Transgender  
Equality estimates  
that there are**

**1.4** million  
adults

**with a lived trans  
life experience in  
the United States.**

# Mistreatment and violence

Transgender people face disproportionately higher rates of physical and sexual violence than any other community. In 2017, over 300 transgender people were fatally shot or killed by other violent means in the world. At least 26 of those were in North America—and these are just the cases that have been reported and investigated. According to the United States Transgender Survey, nearly half of trans people have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime, and those rates are even higher for trans people of color.

**“ I never  
feel safe  
going  
anywhere  
alone.”**

**-Aaron, California**

**More than**

**80%**

**of murdered trans  
people in the U.S.  
are trans women  
of color.**

# Transgender people of color

Violence against trans people isn't just about being trans, it intersects with other types of discrimination too. Based on responses to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, transgender people of color experience deeper and broader patterns of discrimination than white respondents.

**30%**

**of trans folks  
have experienced  
homelessness  
at some point in  
their lives.**

# Housing

Having a safe, stable place to live is one of life's necessities. Yet one in four transgender people who responded to the U.S. Transgender Survey have faced housing instability or discrimination—such as being evicted from their homes or denied housing—because of their gender identity.

Homelessness is also a critical issue for transgender people; one in three trans folks have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Family rejection, discrimination and violence contribute to this disproportionately high rate of homelessness in the transgender community.

**More than**

**25%**

**of trans people  
have lost a job  
due to bias, and  
more than 75%  
have experienced  
some form of  
workplace  
discrimination.**

# Employment

Refusal to hire, privacy violations, harassment and even physical and sexual violence on the job are common occurrences for trans people, and even more commonplace for transgender people of color. Extreme levels of unemployment and poverty contribute to 20% of U.S. Transgender Survey respondents that have been involved in underground economies—such as sex and drug work—to survive.

# What's an ally?

An ally is someone who supports and advocates for the equal treatment of a community other than their own. If you're not okay with the disproportionate challenges trans and non-binary folks face, it's time to use your voice and actions and establish yourself as a trans ally.

# How to be an ally

Becoming an ally to transgender and non-binary people is an ongoing process. The following are several tips that can be used as you move forward in becoming a better ally. This list isn't exhaustive but will provide you with a starting place as you learn more about gender identities and presentations.

# Tips for trans and non-binary allies

## **Don't tolerate disrespect**

Whether it's hurtful language, remarks or jokes, call it out if it's inappropriate. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

## **Respect pronouns**

Not sure which pronouns someone uses? Just ask! Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so. It's okay if you make a mistake—just be sure to correct it and move on.

## **Be patient with those questioning their gender identity**

A person who's questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what's best for them. Be kind and respectful—this includes being respectful of their names, pronouns and bodies.

## **Don't police public restrooms**

Recognize that gender-variant people may not match the signs on restroom doors. If there are no all-gender bathrooms available, offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom in a buddy system, so they're less vulnerable.

## **Listen to trans voices**

Listen with an open mind and heart to the experiences of trans people—they're the experts on their own lives, and one of the most important parts of being an ally is learning what it means to be transgender.

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

Transgender and non-binary people don't all look a certain way, and many may not appear to be trans or non-binary. Indeed, many trans and non-binary people live most of their lives with very few people knowing their status.

## **Be careful about confidentiality, disclosure and outing**

If someone has shared their gender identity with you, don't tell others. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it can also have devastating consequences in a world that can be intolerant of gender differences.

## **Use gender-neutral language**

Our everyday words and phrases are often gendered unnecessarily. By using terms like "hi guys" or addressing a group with "welcome ladies and gentlemen", we assume genders and exclude people. Consider using gender inclusive language like "hi friends" or "welcome folks" instead.

## **Keep it appropriate**

Don't ask trans folks about their genitals, surgical status or sex lives. Bottom line: if you wouldn't ask a cisgender person, don't ask a trans person either!

“ Asking a  
my pro  
makes  
respect  
welcom

about  
nouns  
me feel  
ted and  
ne.”

**-Kameron, Ohio**

# Glossary

## **LGBTQ2+**

The umbrella abbreviation for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/ Questioning, Two-Spirit and + community. The + represents that gender definitions are fluid and subject to change, and that those questioning are welcome in the community.

## **Gender**

The social classification of people as masculine and/or feminine. Whereas sex is an externally assigned classification, gender is something that becomes evident in a social context.

## **Transgender (non-cisgender)**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad and respectful term that is generally the most appropriate term to use. Trans is also acceptable.

## **Non-Binary**

Some people don't identify as male or female, but rather as neither or as a combination. These people live as both, either or neither gender. These folks may identify as non-binary or genderqueer and may ask others to refer to them with the pronoun they/them/theirs or xe/xim/xir (pronounced ze, zim, zeer), or faer or hir.

## **Two-Spirit**

A cultural and spiritual identity used by some First Nations peoples to describe having both masculine and feminine spirits. It can include people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex. For some, Two-Spirit describes a societal and spiritual role that people played within traditional societies, as mediators, keepers of certain ceremonies, transcending accepted roles of men and women, and filling a role as an established middle gender. It should only be used by, and in reference to, native and First Nations peoples.

## **Cisgender (non-transgender)**

Cisgender or cis is used to describe people whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex assigned to them at birth. Cis means 'in alignment with' or 'on the same side'. The prefixes cis and trans work together as umbrella terms to classify all gender identities, so no identity is normalized.

## **Gender-Diverse**

For many years, trans has been used as an umbrella term to describe people with gender identities or presentations that differed from what was expected. However, gender-diverse is being used increasingly as a substitute for trans, to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural limitations of trans as a word to describe all gendered ways of being.

## **Gender Identity**

A person's deeply held internal sense of being male or female or some other gender, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth. The ability to determine someone's gender identity rests with the individual.

## **Gender Expression**

Characteristics and behaviors that may be perceived as masculine or feminine, such as appearance, clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions.

## **Transition/Gender Transition**

The period during which a person begins to live to be consistent with their gender identity. There is no one way to transition. Transition may involve 'coming out' by telling family, friends or coworkers, using a different name, changing pronouns (she/he/they), changing clothing or appearance, and/or accessing medical treatment such as counseling, hormone therapy or different types of surgery; however, none of these steps are required.

## **Transgender Man and Transgender Woman**

Use these terms to refer to how a person identifies and lives today. For example, someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman is a transgender woman.

## **Gender Confirming/Affirming Surgery**

Refers to surgical alteration of anatomy to affirm one's gender identity. This is only one of many routes of transition. Whether for financial, medical or social reasons, many trans people do not opt for surgery. This term is also evolving and some activists refer to surgeries as 'assisted puberty'.

## **Transphobia**

An irrational fear or hatred of trans people. This is often expressed in the form of harassment, violence, targeted misinformation, institutionalized discrimination and murder.

# Resources

**National Center for Transgender Equality** is a national social justice organization devoted to ending discrimination and violence against transgender people through education and advocacy on national issues of importance to transgender people. They are based in Washington, D.C.

**[transequality.org](https://transequality.org)**

**Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity** intersectionally promotes diversity in gender identity, gender expression and romantic and/or sexual orientation in all its forms on a national level through services in the areas of education, health and advocacy.

**[ccgsd-ccdgs.org](https://ccgsd-ccdgs.org)**

**GSA Network** is a next-generation LGBTQ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.

**[gsanetwork.org](https://gsanetwork.org)**

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