

# Frequently Asked Questions: TRANSGENDER

## What does Transgender mean?

The old understanding of the word meant a person whose gender identity differs from what is culturally associated with their biological sex at birth. However, as information has evolved, it is now an umbrella term that includes a wide range of identities and includes pre-operative/post-operative/ and non-operative transsexual people, gender-queer folks, crossdressers, intersex, drag kings/queens, and other gender non-conforming communities. In its general sense, it refers to anyone whose behavior or identity falls outside of stereotypical expectations for their gender.

## What is the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation?

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man, woman, or somewhere in between. Sexual orientation is someone's sexual, affectional, relational, and emotional attraction to others who may be of the opposite sex, the same sex, or either sex. Like other people, transgender people can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual. In other words, not all trans identified people identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual; and not all lesbian, gay or bisexual people identify as transgender.

## How can I be an ally to transgender individuals?

1. Don't assume you can tell if someone is intersex or transgender. When addressing or speaking about any group of people, speak as though someone in the room might be TG or IS because, well, they might be!
2. Do not tolerate anti-trans or anti-intersex remarks or humor in public spaces.
3. Report all anti-intersex or anti-trans harassment to the proper authorities.
4. Display positive materials for transgender and for intersex persons. If possible, display relevant posters or flyers.
5. Respect the confidentiality of anyone who comes out to you as intersex, transsexual, transgender, or gender non-conforming. If your sense is that the person is "out" to everyone, ask just to be sure. ("Is there anyone with whom you prefer I not share this information?")
6. Deal with feelings first. If a person is coming out or dealing with painful experiences, you can help tremendously just by listening.
7. Know your own limits. When you have reached the limits of your knowledge or patience, refer the person to an appropriate resource.

8. Use the pronouns of the gender they feel themselves to be. For instance, if a person says that she identifies as female, use “she”/”her” – regardless of what kind of body that person may have been born into. If you are not sure which pronouns a person prefers, ask, “Which pronouns would you like me to use / do you prefer?” This is sign of respect and support.
9. Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity. A person may shift back and forth before deciding on what gender expression best matches their identity. A person may ask to be called by one name one day, and another name another day. Do your best to be respectful and call the person by the name they request. Although it can be hard to refer to a person by a new name, a gender questioning person will usually notice and appreciate your concerted effort to respect their wishes.
10. Never try to tell a person what “category” they fit into. For instance, if a person tells you that they feel they are “trapped in the wrong body,” it is inappropriate to respond with “Oh, that means that you are a transsexual.” A person has often spent their entire life being told what gender they are, and as a means of empowerment a person should be allowed to choose the identities they feel best suit them.
11. Just as there is no one way to be male or female, there is no one way to be transgender. Each person will choose a path that they feel is right for them; no one path is better than any other. A way to be supportive of finding this path is to help a person find the best and most appropriate resources and information to be able to make informed decisions.
12. Be aware that a transgender person who chooses to go through hormone therapy or undergo “sexual reassignment surgery” will have to endure an often times long and frustrating process as they try to seek the mandatory medical approval to receive hormones or surgery.
13. A person who is transitioning from one gender to another may appear to be overly obsessed with the changes that their body is going through. For many people these changes are a great relief as they start to develop the body they have always wanted, and each change is a cause to celebrate. Be patient as a person explores the changes.
14. While a person’s sexual orientation is not directly connected to a person’s gender identity, some who are transitioning may question previous understandings of their own sexual orientation and choose a new orientation label for themselves. Don’t assume you know what someone’s sexual orientation is or is going to be.
15. An intersex person may have undergone painful surgeries without their consent that can have permanent effects on their life (e.g. reduced or absent sexual function, increased susceptibility to infections, etc). This non-consensual violation of bodily integrity can have lasting emotional effects as well. Realize that because of these

possibilities, an intersex person may not want to hear that infant genital surgeries are “for the best” or “necessary,” since those judgments may ignore values that they hold dear.

16. Historically speaking, transgender and intersex people have usually been targets of violence. This tradition continues today and is often based on the idea that gender is a rigid, bi-polar category that cannot be violated. A small but useful way to help change this is to examine your own ideas of gender stereotypes and challenge those around you to do the same.
17. If someone assumes that you are transgender or intersex just because you are an TG/IS ally, don't rush to deny it. You might try to determine why someone is asking. If you feel a strong urge to deny it, examine that discomfort and the reasons behind it.
18. Remember: above all, transgender and intersex people are individual human beings who deserve respect and understanding.

### **What are some common terms used in the trans, intersex, and gender non-conforming communities?**

**Cross-dresser** – Someone who wears clothes of another gender/sex.

**Drag** - The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically.

**Drag King** – A person who performs masculinity theatrically.

**Drag Queen** – A person who performs femininity theatrically.

**FTM / F2M** – An abbreviation for female-to-male transgender or transsexual person.

**Gender Identity** – A person's sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

**Gender Normative** – A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender based expectations of society. (Also referred to as 'Genderstraight'.)

**Gender Non-Conforming** – A person who either by nature or by choice does not conform to gender-based expectations of society (e.g. transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, cross-dresser, etc.).

**Genderqueer** – A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Often includes a political agenda to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

**Intersex Person** – Someone whose sex a doctor has a difficult time categorizing as either male or female. A person whose combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, gonads, and/or genitals differs from one of the two expected patterns.

**MTF / M2F** – An abbreviation for male-to-female transgender or transsexual person

**Trans** - An abbreviation that is sometimes used to refer to a gender variant person. This use allows a person to state a gender variant identity without having to disclose hormonal or surgical status/intentions. This term is sometimes used to refer to the gender variant community as a whole.

**Transgender (Trans) Community** – A loose category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation.

**Transphobia** – The irrational fear of those who are gender variant and/or the inability to deal with gender ambiguity.

**Transsexual** – A person who identifies psychologically as a gender/sex other than the one to which they were assigned at birth. Transsexuals often wish to transform their bodies hormonally and surgically to match their inner sense of gender/sex.