

Ideas for How to be a Trans Ally

- ✚ **Respect the confidentiality** of anyone who comes out to you as trans, or gender questioning. If your sense is that the person is “out” to everyone, ask just to be sure. Try: Is there anyone with whom you prefer I not share this information?
- ✚ **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. This is sign of respect and support. Remember to check-in once and a while and make sure that the preference hasn’t changed. Try: Which pronouns would you like me to use when referring to you? –or- Is there a pronoun that feels more comfortable for you?
- ✚ **Be patient** with a person who is questioning their gender identity. Coming out can be challenging and it takes time to figure out what name and/or pronouns are most comfortable. 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 and pronoun 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. Try: Practice using the person’s new name and/or pronoun in your head when you are thinking about them.
- ✚ Just as there is no one way to be a man or a woman, **there is no right way to be trans.** Each person will choose a path that they feel is right for them; no one path is better than any other. Try: Pick up a book like, “Finding the Real Me: True Tales of Sex and Gender Diversity” to learn more about different transpeople’s experiences.
- ✚ **Be aware that a transgender person who chooses to go through hormone therapy or undergo “sexual re-assignment 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.**
- ✚ **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. Try: Make it a point to complement the person on physical or dress changes toward their new gender expression.
- ✚ 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.**
- ✚ Historically and currently speaking, transpeople can be targets of violence and hate crimes. This tradition continues today and is often based on the idea that gender is a rigid, bi-polar category that cannot be violated. Try: Be conscious of your surroundings and potential safety concerns.
- ✚ **Examine your own ideas of gender stereotypes and challenge those around you to do the same.**

- ✦ *Deal with feelings first.* If a person is coming out or dealing with painful experiences, you can help tremendously just by listening. Sometimes, having someone to listen while you talk things through can be more helpful than receiving advice.
- ✦ **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.
- ✦ **KNOW YOUR OWN LIMITS. WHEN YOU HAVE REACHED THE LIMITS OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE OR PATIENCE, REFER THE PERSON TO AN APPROPRIATE RESOURCE. TRY: HELPING TO FIND A TRANS SUPPORT NETWORK.**
- ✦ **DON’T ASSUME YOU CAN TELL IF SOMEONE IS TRANS. WHEN ADDRESSING OR SPEAKING ABOUT ANY GROUP OF PEOPLE, SPEAK AS THOUGH SOMEONE IN THE ROOM MIGHT BE TRANS BECAUSE, WELL, THEY MIGHT BE!!!**
- ✦ **If someone assumes that you are trans just because you are a trans 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. Try: “Why do you ask? Does it make a difference to you?”
- ✦ **Do not tolerate anti-trans remarks or humor in public spaces, (or private ones!). Try: “I find that to be offensive. Please don’t make jokes like that around me again.”**
- ✦ *Help raise awareness about transpeople. Many times, the only information people have about transpeople come from venues like “Jerry Springer,” which demonizes transpeople. Help to counter this type of information by presenting sensitive and accurate information whenever possible.*
- ✦ Display positive materials that are trans-inclusive. Try: Display relevant posters or flyers that show transpeople.
- ✦ *Work to make institutional changes. Help your school, job, or community become more trans-friendly. Try: Advocating for all forms to have blank lines instead of male or female checkboxes.*
- ✦ **Being a trans ally is a process!** You never know when you might encounter a transperson (and chances are, you already have and didn’t know). In order to create safe spaces successfully, it is important to engage in the work consistently.
- ✦ **REMEMBER: ABOVE ALL, TRANSPeople ARE INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS WHO DESERVE RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING.**