

How to be a Trans* Ally

*Why the * (asterisk)? The * is used here as placeholder, or a "fill in the blank" symbol. It is used to ensure the word "trans" includes people who identify as transgender and/or transsexual and also people who do not use either of those terms but still identify somewhere under the trans* umbrella, or as not cis. Examples of such identities include transfeminine, transmasculine, genderqueer, gender fluid, bigender, third gender, genderless, and more.*

1. **Challenge yourself to not make assumptions about people's gender identities.** There are many ways to be trans* or have a trans* experience (e.g. not all trans* folks have access or want access to hormones) and it is important not to assume that you know if someone is or is not trans*-identified. The way you perceive a person's gender may not align with the way they identify and misgendering a person can be disrespectful, invalidating, hurtful, and make a space or resource unsafe and/or inaccessible.
2. **One way of being trans* should not be privileged over another.** For instance, a person who has transitioned with hormones and/or various gender confirmation surgeries is not and should not be understood as "more trans*" than someone who identifies as trans* and has not taken or does not want to take that path.
3. **Use respectful language at all times, not just when you know (or think) there is a trans* person present.** This includes respectful use of pronouns or avoiding gender-specific language, using the words that a person uses to describe themselves when referring to them, and never using pejorative terms such as "tranny," "he-she," "she-male," or "it," (unless they are used to self-identify).
4. **Do not make assumptions about a trans* person's sexual orientation.** Gender identity and sexual orientation are distinct and separate identities. Trans* people can be gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, straight, etc. just as cisgender people can.
5. **Never "out" someone's trans* identity for them.** Most likely, if someone has not "come out" in a certain space or to certain people, they have reasons. Whether you out someone because you think other people have a "right to know" or are casually gossiping about a person, outing someone as trans* could have severe emotional, economic and/or safety repercussions.
6. **Do not police gender identity or expression in the bathroom.** Trans* and gender nonconforming people may not match the "skirt" or "pants" option on the bathroom door; this doesn't mean that they should not access that particular bathroom. Gender policing ranges from intimidating looks and/or questioning whether someone is in the right bathroom, to verbal and/or physical abuse. Allow trans* people to use the gender-specific bathroom that aligns with their gender identity, if one exists. Encourage businesses, schools, and workplaces to provide gender neutral bathroom options.

7. **Be understanding of people as they process their gender identities at their own pace.** This might mean that identities, names, and pronouns shift and change. Meet people where they are at and follow their lead, even if it is confusing to you.
8. **Do not ask trans* people personal questions about their bodies,** i.e. what their genitals look like, if they're taking hormones, or how they have sex. Ask yourself the question, "why do I need to know?" before asking a question to ensure it is not inappropriate or crossing personal boundaries. You do not have the "right to know," about a trans* person's body or medical history.
9. **Only add the "T" if you are doing the work.** "LGBT" is commonly used to show the inclusiveness of an organization or resource. Adding the "T" without education on trans* identities and experiences or without actually serving the trans* community is misleading and perpetuates the history of trans* erasure or exclusion within the LGB(T) rights movement. In order to be allies, LGB people need to examine their own stereotypes, prejudices, and fears about trans* people. If you're adding the "T," be willing to support and celebrate trans* lives.
10. **Know your limits as an ally.** Be willing to admit that you might not know everything and when you see the limits of your understanding, know of various resources to refer people to. Admitting your limits is better than giving incorrect or hurtful information.
11. **Listen to trans* voices.** Trans* people are the experts on their own lives. Additionally, not all trans* people have the same experience or same voice. It is important to listen to a variety of trans* voices, not just a single story from one perspective.
12. **Do your own homework.** All trans* people do not always have the time, emotional capacity or desire to educate you. Find resources that can support your process of becoming an ally. If someone in your life comes out to you as trans*, show that you recognize how difficult it may have been to come out by taking care of yourself and working on your own prejudices, questions and concerns about gender and trans* identities.