

# Transgender Etiquette

## Behaviors to avoid:

- Assumptions. You should try not to assume *anything* about a person who may be trans, for example
  - identity
  - pronoun preference
  - transition status/plans/direction
  - age
  - sexual orientation
- Also, don't assume
  - that all LGB people "get" trans stuff
  - that all trans people "get" each other
- Interrogating. Not every trans person is an expert on gender or on trans issues. Even if they are, they might not want to be explaining trans stuff 24/7.
- Coming to a trans person to work out your discomfort around trans issues.
- Commenting on a trans person's "passing," or not passing, as their gender. For one thing, not all trans people want to pass. For another, commenting on someone's passing can reinforce gender stereotypes, and perpetuate hierarchies that reward trans folks for blending in with the dominant gender culture.

## Behaviors that are helpful:

- Respect. For example you should respect a person's ... pronoun choice. (We all mess up on pronouns. It's okay. Apologize and move on.)
- self identity. If someone tells you they identify as a woman, they are a woman, whether or not they look/seem like a woman to you.
- privacy. Don't ask inappropriately personal questions of a trans person you've just met, like, "What do your genitals look like?" or "How do you have sex?"
- names. Use a person's chosen name, always. That *is* their "real" name, and the only one you need to worry about.
- Be honest about your level of understanding, and your preparedness (or not) to be an ally.
- Educate yourself and others.
- Interrupt bad gender situations. (When you're ready!) This takes a lot of confidence and discernment. It's great, for example, if you know when to pipe up and say "Actually, my friend is a guy, not a lady," or "I'm sure we all know which bathroom we're in, thanks."

And speaking of pronouns . . . Pronouns are possibly one of the most stressful things for people who are learning to be trans allies. But don't feel bad, they're much more stressful for trans people.

It is almost always okay to ask what pronoun someone prefers. Ask in private, not in front of a large group. Ask respectfully.

For example, "Hi, so-and-so. I'm so happy to be working with you. I want to check in with you because I want to be respectful of your identity, and I wondered what pronouns you prefer to use for yourself."

It is also sometimes okay to ask a mutual acquaintance who would know.

## It's a judgment call . . .

- Asking questions. Some trans folks are okay with answering all your questions. But it does get tiring, and we are busy people just like everyone else. So it's good to give people an out rather than just swamping them, e.g. "I have some questions about trans stuff, and I was wondering if you'd be willing to talk with me about it some time?"
- Outing. Sometimes it is great to have a friend/ally "out" us as trans, so we don't have to do it. Sometimes it's disastrous. It's a good idea to check in with your trans friends so that you know what they'd prefer in various situations. Some things to take into account: Safety - will this put my friend at risk? Motive - why am I outing this person? For their comfort? For my own comfort? For someone else's comfort?

