

STRONG PRACTICES GUIDE



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Tips for allies

You can practice being gender affirming everywhere!

Lead by example. Offering your own pronouns first shows your commitment to creating a space where it is safe and accepted to talk about pronouns, and doesn't rely on trans people to be the ones to bring it up.

Check your assumptions.

a) Ask everyone. There is no one way to “look trans.” Remember that most often, people have very little control over their sexual characteristics (i.e. body hair, voice pitch, chest size, etc) and that someone's gender expression may not give you information about their gender identity. Instead, create opportunities (but not obligations) for everyone to self-identify.

b) Ask often. Asking everyone about pronouns on an ongoing basis will reflect your understanding that gender and identities are fluid and can change over time.

c) Use the language you are asked to use. If someone has told you what terms, pronouns, or name they use, be sure to use them! If you make a mistake, apologize once and move on.

d) Until you ask, keep it neutral! Use a person's name, or a gender neutral pronoun like they/them/theirs until you have an opportunity to ask about pronouns.

Be mindful of other gendered terms. Think of alternatives to ladies, gentlemen, sir, ma'am, guys, gals, boys, girls, Mr./Mrs., and family terms like mother/father, son/daughter, brother/sister, etc. Try, instead, to use terms like folks, everyone, you three, person, individual, parent, child, sibling. When greeting someone, you can also just say “hello there” or “welcome” and leave out the gendered word altogether.



Know & tell why. Trans folks are often asked invasive and unnecessary questions. Being able to communicate why you're asking certain questions, and what you'll do with the answers, will not only help you clarify your own intentions, but may help to ease anxieties.

Practice consent. When engaging in physical contact, always practice informed consent. If you anticipate that a question may be sensitive, you can also practice consent by asking if you can ask.

Acknowledge your limitations. Sometimes, you may be working in a system that requires legal information from someone. Acknowledging your limitations can indicate to the trans person that you're aware that the system you are working with is inadequate, and does not reflect the diversity of people you serve. It also positions the system as the problem instead of positioning the trans person as the problem.

Find compromises. You may need someone's legal name for some purposes, but you could still put their chosen name on their file, and use their chosen name in communications.

Acknowledge cis privilege and use it for change. Remember, allyship means not only transforming your own behaviours, but using your privilege to push for systemic change. Use your position to intervene in challenging moments with friends, family, and community members whether you perceive trans people to be in the room or not.



If someone comes out to you

'Coming out' can feel vulnerable and risky - when trans people receive a positive and validating response, this helps maintain a trusting relationship.

How to respond:

- 1. "Thanks for telling me."
- *Note: There's no need to ask the term itself, whether you fully know what the term means or not:*
 - ◆ *If you **have** heard the term before, you might internally think: "I know some about that, but also know that being _____ will mean something different to everyone."*
 - ◆ *If you **haven't** heard the term, you might internally think: "That's a new term for me, but this person might not want to educate me in this moment. I'll make sure to look this up later!"*
- "How can I best support you?"

Check in about context and confidentiality:

- Would you like me to use these pronouns around other people?
- Would you like me to take initiative on letting people know about your pronouns, or would you prefer to have that conversation with people one-on-one/on your own time?
- How would you like me to support you if mistakes are made with your name or pronouns?
 - ◆ i.e. "I'm happy to use your name and pronoun for you. I really want you to be in control of if/how this information gets shared. At this point, should I use this name and pronoun when other colleagues are around? What about in front of clients?..."



Asking sensitive questions

The “know and tell why” model

Trans people are often put in positions where they are asked irrelevant and invasive questions about their gender and/or body. In some settings, the person asking does need to know certain information in order to give the trans person the best support they can offer.

Know why you are asking the question:

- What kind of information do you need from the person?
- Is the question asked in a way that will get you the information necessary?
- Do you ask everyone this question, or are you only asking this client because they are (or you perceive them to be) trans?
- Are you asking the question in a caring and gender-affirming or gender-neutral way?
- Who does the question serve? i.e. Are you asking to satisfy your own curiosity (in this case, the answer will primarily serve you) or are you asking in order to provide the best service possible (the answer will primarily serve them)?
- Also consider where you're asking: will the question/answer be overheard, or are you in a private space?

Before you ask, tell why:

- If you determine that you **do** need to ask a question, tell the person why you are asking the question, what information you need from them, how the information will be used, whether this question is asked of everyone, and with whom the information will be shared (if anyone).
- Having the knowledge of what information you're after and why can make a person feel more secure and safe knowing the question is necessary for the work you are doing together.



If you make a mistake

How to recover and heal relationships

- 1. Take a breath.** Practice self-compassion: you're not the first person to make a mistake, you will not be the last. It is important to move forward.
- 2. Apologize.** Allow yourself to feel sorry and/or remorse for your actions, and at the same time, remember that in this moment, it's not about you.
- 3. Acknowledge the harm.** Being able to locate where, when, and how you messed up can help you know what needs to happen to make amends, and shows a person that you know that you caused harm.
- 4. Believe & receive.** Sometimes you won't realize you made a mistake until someone else lets you know. The best thing to do in this situation is to not get defensive, and simply believe & receive this information. If you are still unclear about how you messed up, you can ask for clarification or commit to doing further learning.
- 5. Invite feedback.** The best way to know how to move forward is to ask the person or group who experienced harm what healing and repair would look like or mean to them. Take guidance and invite feedback, knowing that healing is not achieved with one-time gestures, but with long-term commitment to fostering relationships.
- 6. Be accountable.** Engage in work that can repair the damage done. This doesn't mean undoing the harm and might not even mean receiving an apology, but it does mean moving forward. This might mean pursuing further learning, working to change systems, or engaging in other reparative actions as identified by those who have experienced harm.
- 7. Move forward.** Forgiveness is possible, but not mandatory. It is possible to move forward without receiving forgiveness for the harm that was done.

And Then...

Use your experiences to help others with their learning, too. For example, part of minimizing harm for a trans person could be to remind colleagues about their name and pronouns so that the trans person doesn't have to. It can be part of your allyship to trans people to use your personal learning process for systemic change.