Tips for Talking with Transgender Persons

This staff tool provides guidance to provide welcoming conversations with transgender persons. As with all participant contacts, approach the interaction showing respect, empathy, open-mindedness, and without judgement.

1. **Remember all people are more than their gender identity and expression.**
   - Your work is to provide great service and not to judge.
   - Just like you might not want the focus to be only on your gender, don’t focus too much on your participant’s gender identity or expression.
   - If you think someone is trans, don’t ask. This can feel like an invasive question. They’ll tell you if it ever becomes relevant and when trust has been established. You wouldn’t ask if someone has been divorced or adopted.

2. **Don’t assume how someone would like to be referred.**
   - If you don’t know what pronouns to use, listen first. Don’t assume pronouns.
   - Ask respectfully for a person’s pronouns and commit to using them. Document their preferred pronoun in Cascades so other staff can respect the participant’s preference.
   - If you must ask which pronoun the person uses, start with your own. For example, “Hi, I’m Alex and I use the pronouns he and him. What about you?”

   Pronoun Reference Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd Person Singular Subjective</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular Objective</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular Possessive</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular Reflexive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>Her</td>
<td>Her</td>
<td>Herself</td>
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<tr>
<td>He</td>
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<td>They</td>
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<td>Their</td>
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<td>Zir/Zirs</td>
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<td>Hir/Hirs</td>
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<td>Per</td>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Per/Pers</td>
<td>Perself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the University of Alberta Student Union

3. **Refer to a person only by their current and preferred name and identity.**
   - Don’t use a person’s previous name or refer to them as a previous identity. This is called “deadnaming”. It’s disrespectful to trans people, making them feel invalidated.
   - If you’re unsure how to refer to a person previous identity, ask them gently.
   - Don’t out a person. If you happen to learn about a person’s previous name or gender assignment, keep it to yourself and don’t ask them about it.

4. **Correct yourself if you use the wrong name or pronouns.**
   - Understand you’ll make mistakes. This is part of learning and it’s ok.
   - Be open and receptive to feedback from trans people about how your language makes them feel. Avoid explaining yourself or getting defensive, and thank them for taking the time to educate you.
   - Overly apologizing will make a person feel uncomfortable. Apologize, correct yourself and move on.
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5. Avoid the words “real,” “regular,” and “normal.”
   • It wouldn’t be correct to say a transgender friend isn’t “as pretty as a ‘real’ woman.” They’re a beautiful woman, end of sentence.
   • In our scope of work, this may be challenging when using medical terminology. Recognize this does happen and is part of the process of changing the way we use language in our day to day lives.

6. Don’t ask about what genitals a person has or will have.
   • A good rule of thumb is if it would be inappropriate to ask you about your genitals don’t ask about someone else’s.
   • Don’t use this as a factor for deciding how you’ll refer to the person’s pronouns or gender.
   • For purposes of plotting on the correct growth charts, you can ask for the person’s natal identity. Natal identity is the gender the person was at birth. Keep in mind, many people are born intersex, and this can make growth charts more ambiguous.

7. Don’t explain away a person’s gender identity, expression, or preference based on how it affects you.
   • Bottom line is because it doesn’t affect you.

8. Don’t use offensive shorthand slurs.
   • Be respectful of everyone.
   • Using terms like tranny and transsexual are out of date. Use transgender, trans, nonbinary, or the person’s preferred name or pronoun.

To learn more about LGBTQ health and resources for clients:
   • How to be Human: Talking to People Who are Transgender or Nonbinary
   • 10 Tips for Working with Transgender Patients
   • LGBT HEALTH LINK
   • The Q Card Project
   • Fenway Health; Glossary of Gender and Transgender Terms
   • CDC, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: Transgender Persons
   • Webinars, continuing education (free CEUs) more for medical staff working with the LGBTQ community
     o https://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/

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