How Can I Support Transgender People?

In an effort to support SLAC’s commitment to inclusion and diversity, we’ve created this infographic about supporting transgender individuals. As we aim to keep learning and adapting in our work, so should we keep learning and adapting to supporting each other.

Terminology

Understanding and using correct terminology can make a big difference for our learning and inclusion.

- **Sex**: noun. The classification of a person as male or female, generally based on their external anatomy at birth. In reality, a person’s sex depends on many bodily characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

- **Gender identity**: noun. A person’s internal, deeply held sense of their gender.

- **Gender expression**: noun. A person’s external manifestations of their gender. This can be expressed through things like name, pronouns, clothes, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics.

- **Transgender**: adjective. An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

- **Cis-gender**: adjective. A person whose sense of gender corresponds with their birth sex.

- **Transition**: verb. Some transgender people decide to go through a transition so that their gender expression better matches their gender identity, while others do not. Many people incorrectly assume a transition is synonymous to “sex reassignment surgery”. However, transitioning is not a one-time procedure, and can include personal, medical, and legal steps.

- **Gender non-conforming**: adjective. This term is used to describe someone with a gender expression that doesn’t match conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. This term is included here so that we have a chance to note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender, and vice-versa.

**A ally tip #1: try to carry the load**

Anyone can challenge transphobia. It’s even more meaningful if you’re challenging transphobia when transgender people aren’t around. One way to do so is to challenge microaggressions - some examples are listed in this infographic.

**A ally tip #2: learn how to apologize without making it about yourself**

Challenging our worldview is hard, and we’ll mess up. Being able to say a quick, “Sorry, I didn’t know and I’ll do better moving forward” in response to a learning moment is a great skill to practice.

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**A ally tip #3: understand that some questions are better left unasked**

There are some topics that, plainly, aren’t cool to ask about. If a person has changed their name, don’t ask about their “real name” (often called a “deadname”). This implies their chosen name is invalid. Another topic would be transition status: what they looked like in the past, if they’ve transitioned, if they have transition plans, etc. In both cases, their past is not important to you, and transgender people don’t owe that information to your curiosity.

**A ally tip #4: use resources to educate yourself**

Information is always at our fingertips. Asking transgender people to educate you can be a heavy load on them, so do your part in learning from reputable sources.

**Challenging Microaggressions**

As mentioned above, a good way to be an ally is to stand up to microaggressions or backhanded compliments. Sometimes, these comments are meant to be nice or supportive, but they actually end up reducing transgender people to a few body parts, assign their value to how well they fit into cis-gender standards, or tokenize them. Some examples of comments to avoid and challenge:

- **Have you had the surgery yet?**
- **I never would have guessed you are trans. You look so good!**
- **You’re too pretty to have ever been a man.**
- **I could tell you are trans because of your voice (or size of your hands, or jawline...)**
- **If you were going to look like a tomboy, why didn’t you just stay a boy?**
- **Are you going to get some work done to look more real?**
- **Be thankful you don’t have periods. They are so annoying.**
- **How do you have sex?**
- **It’s so cool to have a trans friend.**

**Phrases To Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you use...</th>
<th>Shift over to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transgendered; transsexual; transvestite</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real or normal men/women</td>
<td>Cis-gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies and gentlemen; guys</td>
<td>Everyone; y’all; folks; team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biologically male/female</td>
<td>Assigned male/female at birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred pronouns</td>
<td>Pronouns</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*they’re not preferred, they just are!*

Inspired by [this infographic](#). Find more terminology [here](#).