

Trans Ally 101

Transgender folks are a big and important part of LCFD. Some folks aren't sure how to interact around gender issues, and some folks make mistakes without realizing it. Here are a few hints we hope you'll find helpful in making our community more trans-inclusive.

Respecting Pronouns:

For many trans folks, pronouns matter a lot (more info under Definitions, below). This is one of the simplest and most powerful ways to be a supportive trans ally:

- **Ask** about pronoun preference. If you make a mistake, briefly apologize and move on (and make a mental note to get it right next time). If you keep getting pronouns wrong for the same person, try harder. Practice at home if necessary.
- If someone else gets a pronoun wrong, take the time to correct them.
- If someone corrects you (whether it's a trans person or an ally), try to avoid being defensive; e.g., avoid explaining how a preferred pronoun doesn't match someone's gender presentation.

Respecting Identity:

Some folks, both trans and non-trans, feel quite comfortable with male/female gender roles while others, both trans and non-trans, have been hurt by gender stereotypes. Since we've all been socialized by a gender binary system, thinking outside of this can be overwhelming and confusing at first, but it's an important step in respecting everyone's identity:

- **Never** 'out' a trans person or disclose their identity history unless you have their explicit permission. This is extremely important for the safety and comfort of trans folks.
- Accept how a person identifies even if it doesn't make sense to you. If someone has told you how they identify, don't continue to make other assumptions about their identity. If you think someone is "really" one sex even though they've told you they're another, you're mistaken.
- Avoid comments and try to avoid attitudes about how well or poorly someone 'passes'. Not every trans person is trying to pass, or wants to.
- Remember, unless you're hoping to directly interact with someone's genitals, they're none of your business.

Being a Trans Ally:

Trans folks spend a lot of time educating people around them (families, co-workers, friends, etc.) It can be draining. Advocate for your trans community members:

- **Educate yourself.** Take the time to look things up when you come across a new pronoun, identity, or lingo you've never heard. There are lots of trans-related books, websites, films, and workshops. (We list some below.)

- If someone else makes a trans-related mistake, gently correct them; if they make an anti-trans remark, be the brave trans ally who calls them on it. Sometimes this can be more effective coming from an ally than from a trans person themselves.
- If you have (respectful, appropriate) questions, it's ok to ask, but give the person an 'out': e.g., "Could I ask you some time about . . . ?"

Some Definitions

Transgender is an umbrella term for people who defy social expectations of how they should look, act, or identify based on their birth sex. Under this umbrella are **transsexuals**—male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM); **crossdressers**—people who dress in clothes associated with a sex different from their identity; and anyone else whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. That can include people who don't see the world or their own lives in a strictly male/female division (often called the **gender binary**). Some trans identities include: **gender variant**, **gender fluid**, **non-gendered**, **gender neutral**, and **genderqueer**.

Sex vs. gender. There are some contexts where there's a useful distinction between these two concepts, but you'll find it easier to think and talk about trans stuff in a trans-inclusive way if you don't focus on the difference.

'Pronouns'? Words that stand in for specific people or things. The gendered personal pronouns are She, Her, Hers, Herself; He, Him, His, Himself. There are also **gender-neutral pronouns**: They, Them, Their, Theirs, Themselves; Ze, Hir, Hirs, Hirself (pronounced zee, here, heres, hereself) are used by some trans folks who don't feel comfortable with typically male or female pronouns.

Resource List

The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) has one of the most thorough [resource lists](#), around, organized as a wiki so it's continuously updated—highly recommended

Some of our favorite sites/books/etc.:

- One of the best [transgender FAQs](#)
- "[52 Things You Can Do for Transgender Equality](#)," including light-hearted and imaginative suggestions
- *My Gender Workbook*, by Kate Bornstein—a witty and accessible book that addresses identity for pretty much everyone
- [gendertalk.com](#) and [gendervision.org](#)—radio and video series

Advanced Trans Ally: 201

Encourage your fellow LCFD community members to **read this**.

Most of us in LCFD understand that **gender identity** is different from **sexual orientation**. Maybe less obvious is how they can interact. If your own gender identity is fluid, or that of your partner, words like 'lesbian', 'gay', and 'straight'

may not be a good description of sexual orientation. Even 'bisexual' assumes two distinct genders. At the same time, many trans folks do identify in a simple and straightforward way as gay, lesbian, straight, or bi.

A lot of us are playful about gender here. Compliments about a trans-person's different-from-their-usual gender expression can be tricky—they can sound like a criticism of their usual gender expression. But, of course, compliments are always nice—you'll have to use your best judgment.

While it's usually appropriate to ask someone's pronoun preferences, it can sometimes come across as challenging the gender they're presenting. If someone seems pretty obviously presenting themselves as male or female (gender-specific name, clothes, etc.), it may be appropriate to just go with the flow—again, sometimes you just have to use your best judgment.

Pronouns matter. Gender identity is something trans folks have had to fight for and put a lot of effort towards despite being told things like, "You may think you're a guy, but you're really a girl" (or much worse). Even if gender and pronouns aren't important to you, try to accept that they are crucial details for many trans folks.

This is new stuff for a lot of us, but other groups, especially youth groups, have been making this a central part of their group identity for years. We have the experience of lots of organizations to draw on.

Beyond LCFD: there are resources available to make groups you're a part of more trans-inclusive. The MTPC offers [workshops](#) (and can be a resource for folks in other areas), and we know a couple good online books for [organizations](#) and [schools](#).

Yes, we've used 'they' as a singular pronoun a lot in this flyer. "God send every one their heart's desire!"—*Much Ado About Nothing*. ". . . each of them was busy in arranging their particular concerns . . ."—*Sense and Sensibility*.

"Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes"—*Lady Windermere's Fan*. "Let nothing be done through strife, or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."—Philippians 2:3. If it's good enough for Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde, and God . . .



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