

How to Be an Ally to Transgender and Intersex People

- Validate people's gender expression. It is important to refer to a transgender person by the pronoun appropriate to her or his gender identity. In other words, if someone identifies as female, then refer to the person as "she"; if someone identifies as male, refer to the person as "he". If you are not sure, ask him or her. Never use the word "it" when referring to someone who is transgendered. To do so is incredibly insulting and disrespectful. Some transgender people prefer to use gender-neutral pronouns; "hir" instead of "her" and "his", and "sie" or "ze" instead of "she" and "he".
- Use non-gender specific language. Ask, "are you seeing someone?" or "are you in a committed relationship?," instead of "do you have boyfriend/girlfriend?" or "are you married?" Use the word "partner" or "significant other" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend" or "husband/wife"
- Challenge your own conception about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors. Do not expect people to conform to society's beliefs about "women" and "men"
- Do not assume that someone who is transgendered is lesbian, gay or bisexual or that the person will seek transition to become heterosexual.
- Do not automatically include intersex people in "transgender" and "queer" categories. Many intersex people do not feel included or represented by the trans and queer movements
 - Use the words "crossdresser" and "intersex" instead of "transvestite" and "hermaphrodite" respectively. The latter terms are considered pejorative.
 - Never ask someone who is transgendered or intersexed about how she or he has sex or what his or her genitals look like. This is inappropriate in every situation
 - Do not share the gender identity of individuals without their permission. Do not assume that everyone knows. The decision to tell someone about his or her gender should be left to that person
- When you learn about someone's transgender identity, do not assume that it is a fad or a trend. While public discussions about transgenderism and transsexuality are a relatively recent phenomenon, most transgender people have dealt with their gender identity for many years, often at great personal and professional costs. It is important to trust that someone's decision to present themselves as gender variant is not made lightly or without due consideration

- Educate yourself and others about transgender and intersex histories and concerns. Introduce trainings, readings and other resources to your colleagues to continue education efforts to deconstruct social norms around gender, sex, and sexual orientation
- Work to change campus policies in areas such as housing, employment, student records and forms, and health care that discriminate against transgender people and seek to include gender identity/expression in your school's non-discrimination policy.

*Developed by Brett Beemyn, GLBT Student Services, the Multicultural Center, Ohio State University 614-688-8449, glbtss@osu.edu, <http://multiculturalcenter.osu.edu/glbtss>

