

# WELCOME!

The first step to becoming an ally to transgender and nonbinary people is to learn more; thank you for taking that step with us!

It can be tough for transgender and nonbinary people to bear the burden of educating others about their lived experience. That's why we're publishing this guide: to help begin your education on the basics of gender identity and expression. You'll be able to better support the trans and nonbinary folks in your lives, and help to create a safer, kinder and more accepting world.

Our *Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth* is an introductory educational resource that covers a wide range of topics and best practices on how to support transgender and nonbinary people.

## The guide includes:

- The difference between sex and gender
- Basics of gender — identity, expression, and perception
- Forms of address that show respect (names, pronouns, honorifics)
- Helpful tips to increase understanding
- Common mistakes and what to do if you've made one

Learning is an ongoing experience, so it's okay to acknowledge that you might not know some things, even after reading this guide. Part of being a good ally is continuing your education, and we're happy to be part of that journey with you.

*Trans and nonbinary young people in search of support can contact The Trevor Project 24/7 through our TrevorLifeline at 1-866-488-7386, via chat at [TheTrevorProject.org/Help](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/Help), or by texting START to 678-678.*



## About the illustrator:

Damian Alexander is a queer, agender cartoonist and storyteller from Boston. His first graphic novel, *Other Boys*, comes out in 2021 with First Second.

# SEX AND GENDER: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Many people confuse sex and gender, or use the two interchangeably. Many wrongly assume that sex defines gender, when in reality gender identity is a living, growing experience that can change over time.

It can be tough for transgender and nonbinary people to constantly educate or be subjected to the other's curiosity, so one of the best ways to be an ally is to educate yourself on the basics of gender identity and expression, so you can better support others.

## *Gender Identity*

### Sex

Sex is the classification of a person as *male*, *female*, or *intersex*. When we are born, doctors usually decide whether female or male will be listed on our birth certificate. This sex assignment at birth is typically based solely on one's genitals, however sex characteristics also include chromosomes, gonads, and sex hormones. Our sex assigned at birth may or may not correspond to our gender.

Someone's sex characteristics are their personal information, and you do not need to know someone's sex assigned at birth to be respectful of their gender identity. When someone shares their gender identity with you, it's inappropriate to assume or try to deduce that person's sex assigned at birth. Rather, believe others when they share their gender identity with you and support them.

### Gender

Gender describes our internal understanding and experience of our own gender identity. Each person's experience of their gender identity is unique and personal, and cannot be known simply by looking at a person. Common genders include:

- **Cisgender:** people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Transgender:** people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many transgender people will transition to align their gender expression with their gender identity, however you do not have to transition in order to be transgender.
- **Nonbinary:** people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as outside of the male-female gender binary. Many other words for identities outside the traditional categories of man and woman may be used, such as genderfluid, genderqueer, polygender, bigender, demigender, or agender. These identities, while similar, are not necessarily interchangeable or synonymous.
- **Two-Spirit:** a term created by First Nations/Native American/Indigenous peoples whose sexual orientation and/or gender/sex exists in ways that challenge colonial constructions of a gender binary. This term should not be appropriated to describe people who are not First Nations/Native American/Indigenous members.

# GENDER EXPRESSION

Gender expression can be a fun, creative, and affirming way to express yourself. You can be an ally to transgender and nonbinary people in your life by refraining from making assumptions about their gender. Be aware of the expectations you project onto others based on their gender, and strive to support others and validate their experiences.

## *You can't tell someone's gender by looking at them*

### Expression

Gender expression describes the way in which we present or express our gender, which can include physical appearance, clothing, hairstyles, and behavior. We have control over some elements of our gender expression, such as behavior, body modification, or ornamentation.

### Perception

Our perceived gender is based on other people's evaluation of our bodies, which unlike our gender expression, we cannot control. We cannot visually see someone's sex when we look at them, but people perceive gender based on a variety of visual and social cues, including but not limited to a person's gender expression, secondary sex characteristics, and the social role they are playing relative to the expected gender of that role.





# NAMES AND PRONOUNS

Respecting the language that youth use to self-identify their gender is not only polite, it can save lives. In a recent study of transgender youth, using chosen names at home, at school, at work, and with friends reduced depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior.

## *Forms of Address that Show Respect*

### **Names**

Some names can seem gendered, and so some transgender and nonbinary people choose a new name, or a variation of their old name, that aligns with their gender. The process of a legal name change can be expensive and complicated, and may not be possible right away for all transgender and nonbinary people. Whether or not a person's name has been legally changed, you can be supportive of transgender and nonbinary people in your life by honoring the name that they ask to be referred to.

Usage of chosen name resulted in a **29% decrease in suicidal ideation** and a **56% decrease in suicidal behavior**\*

### **Pronouns**

Names and pronouns are a common way to communicate one's gender. Honoring a person's name and pronouns shows respect and acknowledgement of their gender and identity. Here are some examples of pronouns that people use, in order of nominative, objective, possessive determiner, possessive pronoun, and reflexive:

- She, her, her, hers, and herself
- He, him, his, his, and himself
- They, them, their, theirs, and themselves
- Ze/zie, hir, hir, hirs, and hirself
- Xe, xem, xyr, xyrs, and xemself
- Ve, ver, vis, vis, and verself

We cannot assume someone's pronouns, in the same way we cannot assume someone's name. It's always best to confirm with a person what their name and pronouns are. You can do that by asking, or by introducing your own pronouns when you meet a person, which gives them the opportunity to share theirs.

### **Honorifics**

An honorific is a "respectful title or form of address." The honorific Mr., abbreviated from Mister, is sometimes used for men regardless of marital status or age. Ms. is sometimes used for women regardless of marital status or age, and can be used by women who do not want the associations of either Miss (a young, unmarried woman) or Mrs. (a married woman). Recently, Mx. has become a gender-neutral option to anyone who wants a title that can be used regardless of gender, age, or marital status. If you are using honorifics, for example on an intake form or invitation, confirm with the person you are addressing what honorifics they prefer.

# LABELS OR NO LABELS?

## *Your Identity is Yours to Define*

### Why Labels Matter

The LGBTQ acronym is just a small sample of the diversity of the youth The Trevor Project serves. According to our 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, youth respondents identified with more than 100 sexual orientations and more than 100 gender identities.

Labels can be a liberating way to express yourself and find others who relate to your experiences. With the internet, using more specific labels helps to filter through millions of results to connect and build community with other people who share your identity. It's OK if you don't understand all the words being used, but avoid invalidating others for using labels that are unfamiliar to you.

Gender is complicated, and there shouldn't be a limit to the number of words you use to describe your experience of your gender.

### It's OK Not to Label Yourself

If your gender is fluid, sometimes it can feel more liberating to not label yourself. For others who are questioning or exploring their gender, going without a label is more comfortable than committing to one right away.

Be careful not to tell others how you think they should or shouldn't label their gender. Gender is a personal experience. There is no right or wrong way to define your gender, and it's OK if you don't want to label yourself either.



# BEST PRACTICES

## *How You Can Support the Trans and Nonbinary People in Your Life*

### Disclosure

After a friend or loved one shares their experiences with their gender, you may want to inform everyone in your group to make sure that everyone knows to use the correct pronouns, or because you are surprised to find out that someone you know is transgender. Refrain from sharing anyone else's story for them.

Disclosing a transgender or nonbinary person's identity could cause discomfort if they have not come out to others. It could also compromise their safety, as many people or environments can be dangerous for transgender and nonbinary people.

### Transitioning

Transitioning looks different for different people, and there is no right way to express your gender. Some people medically transition, and others do not. This may be related to personal expression, lack of access to gender-affirming healthcare, medical conditions that prevent certain procedures, or other reasons.

Transitioning is more complicated than just a surgery, and can take place over a number of years, involving social, medical, and/or legal aspects of transition. Some people decide not to transition at all. This may be for lack of supportive community, risk to personal safety, or other personal reasons. There is no "right" way to express your gender identity or to live your truth.

Under no circumstances should you ask unprompted questions about a transgender or nonbinary person's body, genitals, medical history, plans for medical procedures, their previous name, or invasive details about their life prior to transition. Imagine how you might feel if a stranger asked you such questions!

### Age

There is no "right" age to understand your gender identity. Some people know their gender from a very young age, and supporting them in this has many positive effects on their mental health and well-being. Other people transition later in life, when they are in an accepting environment to do so and have access to social, medical, or legal resources to support them. Other people explore their gender identity over the course of their entire lives.

### Binary and Nonbinary Genders

Gender is not strictly binary, and while some transgender people are binary in their gender identity and expression, others may express their gender as nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, and many more. Nonbinary people often prefer to identify outside binary categories of gender, whereas binary transgender people usually want to be accepted simply as men or women.

25% of LGBTQ youth identified outside of the gender binary\*

\*Research Brief: Diversity of Youth Gender Identity  
<[www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/10/29/research-brief-diversity-of-youth-gender-identity/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/10/29/research-brief-diversity-of-youth-gender-identity/)>

## MOVEMENT SPEECH STYLE HAIR

Someone's appearance is not indicative of how they identify their gender. There are an infinite amount of amazing ways to be a person of any gender.\*

### Sexuality

Transgender and nonbinary people identify with a wide variety of sexualities. Just because you know someone's gender does not mean you automatically know their sexual orientation.

### “Passing”

“Passing” is a term used to describe whether or not a person is perceived as a certain gender; for example, “passing as a woman” or “passing as a man.” For many transgender people, being able to “pass” as the gender they align with is important for a sense of well-being, and “passing privilege” can allow one to move safely through environments where being perceived as transgender is a danger.

However, the term can be considered problematic because it implies that being perceived as cisgender is the ultimate goal for transgender and nonbinary people. The word “passing” can imply that a person has to “convince” others of their gender, rather than being able to simply express their true self. Implying that transgender people are lying, tricking, or deceiving other people is wrong and hurtful.

### Misgendering

To misgender someone means to use the wrong name, pronouns, or form of address for a person's gender. Whether misgendering happens as an innocent mistake or a malicious attempt to invalidate a person, it is deeply hurtful and can even put a person's safety at risk if they are outed as transgender in an environment that is not tolerant.

Purposefully misgendering is not OK, and you can be a good ally by standing up for others if you witness someone being harassed for their gender. If you misgender someone by accident, apologize swiftly without making an excessive show out of the mistake or your guilt, which can create even more discomfort for the person who has been misgendered. Show that you care by doing better moving forward.

### Microaggressions

Microaggressions are everyday comments and questions that can be hurtful or stigmatizing to marginalized people and groups. Microaggressions are subtle, and the person committing the microaggression may have no idea that their comments are harmful.

For example, a common comment that transgender people may hear is, “You don't look trans!” This is often phrased as a compliment, however it implies that being transgender is a negative thing, or that all people want to be perceived as cisgender. Since microaggressions are subtle, do your best and listen to any feedback you may receive. If someone's feelings are hurt by something you've said or done, take the time to understand and to learn from the experience.



# MISTAKES AND SAYING SORRY

## *What To Do If You've Offended Someone*

While we rarely intend to hurt others, common mistakes such as forgetting a person's pronouns, using their birth name instead of their chosen name, or misgendering a person can hurt feelings or even put another person's safety at risk. In these moments, it's good to have a roadmap for how to make things right. We recommend the three simple steps of listening, being accountable, and doing better next time.

### 1. Listen

Unfortunately, it's common to avoid listening to those we've hurt whether intentional or not, as it inspires uncomfortable feelings of guilt and shame. Stay in your discomfort and be willing to listen, because this is how we can grow.

Seek to understand and empathize with the other person's lived experience.

### 2. Be Accountable

Take responsibility for your actions, privileges, and experiences that you hold which could contribute to your biases. Don't dismiss what the person is sharing with you, justify your behavior, or defend your intentions. It isn't helpful to the people who have been hurt, and it shifts the focus away from the people who have been harmed and onto your personal feelings of guilt, shame, or defensiveness.

Remember, intention is not impact. The best apology is one that doesn't make excuses or invalidate the other person's feelings.

### 3. Commit To Do Better

Treat it as a learning experience. The most authentic apology is meaningless if there is no change or if the behavior is repeated consistently in the future.

Show you care by doing better next time.



# CONCLUSION & RESOURCES

Exploring gender can be daunting, but it's also an exciting way to learn about yourself and to express yourself to the world.

By learning to support transgender and nonbinary people, you can help to create a safer, kinder, more accepting world.



*TrevorLifeline,  
TrevorText & TrevorChat*

[www.TheTrevorProject.org/Help](http://www.TheTrevorProject.org/Help)

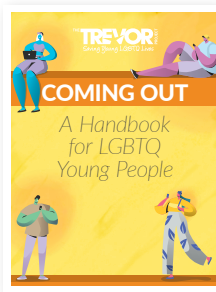
If you or someone you know is feeling hopeless or suicidal, contact The Trevor Project.



## TrevorSpace

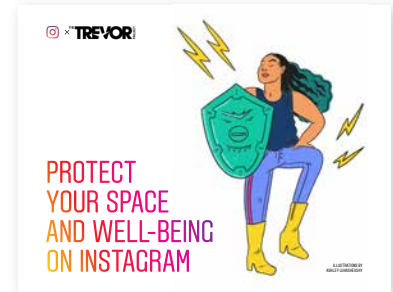
The world's largest safe space social networking community for LGBTQ youth.

[www.TrevorSpace.org](http://www.TrevorSpace.org)



## Coming Out: A Handbook for LGBTQ Young People

[TRVR.org/ComingOut](http://TRVR.org/ComingOut)



## Protect Your Space And Well-being On Instagram

[TRVR.org/InstagramWellBeing](http://TRVR.org/InstagramWellBeing)



The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning young people.



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