

glossary of Transgender Terms

This is a glossary of some of the more common terms that are used when discussing transgender identities and experiences. Definitions and preferred terms will vary by location and group.

Affirming:

The unequivocal support for an individual person's gender identity or expression, regardless of the biological sex they were assigned at birth; the systematic support to ensure that transgender people and communities are fully represented, included, valued and honored.

Affirming Pronouns:

Refers to the most respectful and accurate pronouns for a person, as defined by that person. This is also sometimes referred to as "preferred gender pronouns," although this phrasing is increasingly outdated. To ascertain someone's affirming pronouns, ask: "What are your pronouns?"

Agender:

A person who does not identify as having a gender identity that can be categorized as male or female, and sometimes indicates identifying as not having a gender identity.

AG/ Aggressive:

A term used to describe a female-bodied and identified person who prefers presenting as masculine. This term is most commonly used in urban communities of color.

Biological Sex:

A person's combination of genitals, chromosomes and hormones, usually categorized as "male" or "female" based on visual inspection of genitals via ultrasound or at birth. Many assume that a person's gender identity will be congruent with their sex assignment. Everyone has a biological sex.

Bigender:

A person who experiences gender identity as two genders at the same time, or whose gender identity may vary between two genders. These may be

masculine and feminine, or could also include non-binary identities.

Butch:

A term used to describe a masculine person or gender expression.

Cisgender: (pronounced /sis-gender/):

An adjective to describe a person whose gender identity is congruent with (or "matches") the biological sex they were assigned at birth. (Some people abbreviate this as "cis").

Coming Out:

The process through which a transgender person acknowledges and explains their gender identity to themselves and others.

(Anti-Transgender) Discrimination:

Any of a broad range of actions taken to deny transgender people access to situations/places or to inflict harm upon transgender people. Examples of discrimination include: not hiring a transgender person, threatening a gender non-conforming person's physical safety, denying a transgender person access to services, or reporting someone for using the "wrong" bathroom.

Gender Binary:

The idea that gender is strictly an either/or option of male/men/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth, rather than a continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions. The gender binary is often considered to be limiting and problematic for all people, and especially for those who do not fit neatly into the either/or categories.



Femme:

A term used to describe a feminine person or gender expression.

Femme Queen:

A term used to describe someone who is male bodied but identifies as and expresses feminine gender. Used primarily in urban communities, particularly in communities of color and ballroom communities.

Gender Conforming:

A person whose gender expression is perceived as being consistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. According to these norms, boys/men are or should be masculine, and girls/women are or should be feminine. Not all cisgender people are gender conforming and not all transgender people are gender non-conforming. (For example, a transgender woman may have a very feminine gender expression).

Gender Dysphoria (GD):

The formal diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM 5)*, used by psychologists and physicians to indicate that a person meets the diagnostic criteria to engage in *medical transition*. In other words, the medical diagnosis for being transgender. Formerly known as *Gender Identity Disorder (GID)*. The inclusion of Gender Dysphoria as a diagnosis in the DSM 5 is controversial in transgender communities because it implies that being transgender is a mental illness rather than a valid identity. On the other hand, since a formal diagnosis is generally required in order to receive or provide treatment in the US, it does provide access to medical care for some people who wouldn't ordinarily be eligible to receive it.

Gender Expression:

A person's outward gender presentation, usually comprised of personal style, clothing, hairstyle, makeup, jewelry, vocal inflection and body language. Gender expression is typically categorized as masculine or feminine, less commonly as androgynous. All people express a gender. Gender expression can be congruent with a person's gender identity, but it can also be incongruent if a person does not feel safe or supported, or does not have the resources needed to engage in gender expression that authentically reflects their gender identity.

Genderfluid:

A person whose gender identity or expression shifts between masculine and feminine, or falls somewhere along this spectrum.

Gender Identity:

A person's deep-seated, internal sense of who they are as a gendered being—specifically, the gender with which they identify themselves. All people have a gender identity.

Gender Marker:

The marker (male or female) that appears on a person's identity documents (e.g., birth certificate, driver's license, passport, travel or work visas, green cards, etc.). The gender marker on a transgender person's identity documents will be their sex assigned at birth until they undergo a legal and logistical process to change it, where possible.

Gender Neutral:

A term that describes something (sometimes a space, such as a bathroom; or an item, such as a piece of clothing) that is not segregated by sex/gender.

Gender Neutral Language:

Language that does not assume or confer gender. For example "person" instead of "man" or "woman."

Gender Non-Conforming:

A person whose gender expression is perceived as being inconsistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. Specifically, boys/men are not masculine enough or are feminine, while girls/women are not feminine enough or are masculine. Not all transgender people are gender non-conforming, and not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender. Cisgender people may also be gender non-conforming. Gender non-conformity is often inaccurately confused with sexual orientation.

Genderqueer:

A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.



Intersex or Disorder of Sex Development (DSD):

A category that describes a person with a genetic, genital, reproductive or hormonal configuration that results in a body that often cannot be easily categorized as male or female. Intersex is frequently confused with transgender, but the two are completely distinct and generally unconnected. Participants may be more familiar with the term *hermaphrodite*, which is considered outdated and offensive

LGBTQ:

An acronym commonly used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning individuals and communities. LGBTQ is often erroneously used as a synonym for “non-heterosexual,” which incorrectly implies that transgender is a *sexual orientation*.

Medical Transition:

A long-term series of medical interventions that utilizes hormonal treatments and/or surgical interventions to change a person’s body to be more congruent with their gender identity. Medical transition is the approved medical treatment for *Gender Dysphoria*.

Microaggressions:

Small, individual acts of hostility or derision toward transgender or gender non-conforming people, which can sometimes be unintentional. Examples of microaggressions include: use of non-affirming name or pronouns, derogatory language, asking inappropriate or offensive questions, and exhibiting looks that reveal distaste or confusion.

Non-Binary:

A continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions, often based on the rejection of the gender binary’s assumption that gender is strictly an either/or option of male/men/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth. Words that people may use to express their non-binary gender identity include “agender,” “bigender,” “genderqueer,” “genderfluid,” and “pangender.”

Pangender:

A person who identifies as all genders.

(Anti-Transgender) Prejudice:

An individual’s negative attitudes, beliefs, or reactions to transgender people. Examples of anti-transgender prejudice include: believing that transgender people are mentally disturbed, being uncomfortable sharing space with a transgender person, or thinking that transgender people should not be allowed to use public bathrooms.

Pubertal Suppression:

A low-risk medical process that “pauses” the hormonal changes that activate puberty in young adolescents. The result is a purposeful delay of the development of secondary sex characteristics (e.g. breast growth, testicular enlargement, facial hair, body fat redistribution, voice changes, etc.). Suppression allows more time to make decisions about hormonal interventions and can prevent the increased dysphoria that often accompanies puberty for transgender youth.

Questioning:

A person who is exploring or questioning their gender identity or expression. Some may later identify as *transgender* or *gender non-conforming*, while others may not. Can also refer to someone who is questioning or exploring their sexual orientation.

Same-Gender Loving A label sometimes used by members of the African-American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation without relying on terms and symbols of European descent. The term emerged in the early 1990’s with the intention of offering Black women who love women and Black men who love men a voice, a way of identifying and being that resonated with the uniqueness of Black culture. (Sometimes abbreviated “SGL.”)

Sex Assigned at Birth:

The determination of a person’s sex based on the visual appearance of the genitals at birth. The sex someone is labeled at birth.



Sexual Orientation:

A person's feelings of attraction (emotional, psychological, physical, and/or sexual) towards other people. A person may be attracted to people of the same sex, to those of the opposite sex, to those of both sexes, or without reference to sex or gender. And some people do not experience primary sexual attraction, and may identify as asexual. Sexual orientation is about attraction to other people (external), while *gender identity* is a deep-seated sense of *self* (internal). All people have a sexual orientation that is separate from their biological sex, gender identity and gender expression.

Social Transition:

A transgender person's process of creating a life that is congruent with their gender identity, which often includes asking others to use a name, pronoun, or gender that is more congruent with their gender identity. It may also involve a person changing their gender expression to match their gender identity.

Trans:

This is sometimes used as an abbreviation for "transgender."

Transgender:

An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not "match") the biological sex they were assigned at birth. "Transgender" serves an umbrella term to refer to the full range and diversity of identities within transgender communities because it is currently the most widely used and recognized term.

(Transgender) Ally:

A cisgender person who supports, affirms, is in solidarity with, or advocates for transgender people.

Transgender men and boys:

People who identify as male, but were assigned female at birth. Also sometimes referred to as transmen.

Transgender women and girls:

People who identify as female, but were assigned male at birth. Also sometimes referred to as trans women.

Transexual/Transsexual:

This is an older term that has been used to refer to a transgender person who has had hormonal or surgical interventions to change their bodies to be more aligned with their gender identity than the sex that they were assigned at birth. While still used as an identity label by some, "transgender" has generally become the preferred term.

Two Spirit:

A term used by Native and Indigenous Peoples to indicate that they embody both a masculine and a feminine spirit. Is sometimes also used to describe Native Peoples of diverse sexual orientations, and has nuanced meanings in various indigenous sub-cultures.

AVOIDING OUTDATED & OFFENSIVE TERMINOLOGY

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The following terms are generally considered to be outdated, offensive or derogatory when discussing people who are, or are perceived to be, transgender or gender non-conforming. And as noted in the lesson, usage and preferred terms can vary by audience and community. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Tranny, or Trannie
- Hermaphrodite
- Transvestite
- Transgendered
- Transgendering
- Transgenders
- It
- She-Male, or He-She
- "The Surgery"
- Pre-Op, or Post-Op
- Deviant
- Fooling, or Deceiving
- "Real" sex
- Sex Change
- Cross-Dressing

Instead of
saying this:

Say this:

"Real" sex, "real" gender, genital sex

Sex assigned at birth

A transgender

Transgender person, or,
Person who is transgender

Transgenders

Transgender people, or,
People who are transgender

Transgendered

Transgender

FTM, used to be a woman, born a female

Transgender man, or, Transman

MTF, used to be a man, born a male

Transgender woman, or, Transwoman

Sex Change, The Surgery, Transgendering,
pre-operative, post-operative

Medical Transition

Hermaphrodite

Intersex person or Person who is intersex

Sexual preference, homosexual

Sexual orientation

REMEMBER

It is very likely that these terms and definitions will continue to evolve over time. Check out www.teachingtransgender.com for updated references and resources.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Strategies for...

BETTER SERVING TRANSGENDER PATIENTS*

- **Transgender people are a lot more like cisgender people** (“those whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex”) **than unlike them.** Get to know transgender people as *people*.
- **Focus on the client’s specific needs, rather than on their gender identity** (unless the client’s issue is specifically gender related). You don’t have to be an endocrinologist or gender specialist to help transgender patients, and they probably will not expect this of you. Transgender people need routine preventative care in a safe and welcoming environment, just like everyone. In the words of transgender educator Rebecca Kling: *“I often joke that I don’t go to the trans-dentist to get my trans-teeth trans-cleaned. That’s a healthcare situation where my trans identity is irrelevant.”*
- **Don’t rely solely on your clients to educate you.** Do your own homework as well. Check out the resources on the following page as a great place to start! Also accept that there are things you don’t/won’t know or understand, and *be willing to be humble and listen.*
- **Offer sex and gender blanks on the intake forms, rather than male/female check boxes.** Ask ALL clients about preferred names and pronouns, including those who “appear” cisgender. This questions assumptions based on appearances, and offers a teachable moment for cisgender patients to understand why these issues matter. Also respect that not all transgender patients may feel comfortable disclosing this information to you.
- **Understand the power you have as a provider when navigating insurance and other bureaucratic challenges.** Help your clients determine what services their insurance (if they have it) will cover, offer support with obtaining insurance (if needed), and work with your billing department to determine the best way to code services to maximize coverage.
- **Understand the importance of intersectionality.** Transgender people who are People of Color, disabled, female-identified, or a member of another oppressed group may struggle with discrimination on multiple levels. Be sensitive as to how intersectionality may affect the healthcare experiences of your clients.
- **Involve transgender people in your practice.** Hire transgender-identified health educators and advocates to educate you and your staff about inclusivity. Invite transgender people to apply for open positions in your practice or organization. Promote your practice or organization as a transgender-affirming space.
- **Network with transgender-affirming clinicians and organizations in your field.** They may be able to offer additional models and strategies for creating more transgender-affirming environments, and can serve as referrals for clients when needed.

* Crowdsourced from transgender and gender non-conforming people and those who serve them; compiled by Bianca Jarvis, MPH. Used with permission.



Educational Resources:

Understanding Health Disparities in Transgender Populations www.indiana.edu/~isitjust/

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey Report www.endtransdiscrimination.org/report.html

Transgender Health Learning Center (UCSF) www.transhealth.ucsf.edu/trans?page=lib-00-00

American Medical Student Association: Transgender Health
www.amsa.org/advocacy/action-committees/gender-sexuality/transgender-health/

Resources for Transgender People and Their Friends and Families (pamphlets)
www.kinseyconfidential.org/resources-transgender-people-friends-families

Organizations:

UCSF Center of Excellence for Transgender Health (SF) www.transhealth.ucsf.edu

Tom Waddell Transgender Clinic (SF) www.sfdph.org/dph/comupg/oservices/medSvs/hlthCtrs/TransgenderHlthCtr.asp

Howard Brown Health Center (Chicago) www.howardbrown.org/

Chicago Women's Health Center (Chicago) www.chicagowomenshealthcenter.org/services-page/trans-health-services

Lurie Children's Hospital Gender & Sex Development Program (Chicago)
www.luriechildrens.org/en-us/care-services/specialties-services/gender-program/Pages/index.aspx

Callen Lorde Transgender Health Services (NYC)
www.callen-lorde.org/our-services/sexual-health-clinic/transgender-health-services/

Fenway Institute National LGBT Health Education Center (Boston) www.lgbthealtheducation.org

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Tips for Providing Transgender-Affirming Services

Use Affirming Name & Pronouns

Always use the name and pronouns that are most affirming to a person. This is one of the most fundamental signs of respect. If you accidentally use the wrong name or pronoun, apologize, correct yourself and move on. Acknowledging the mistake and offering a sincere, simple, and brief correction and apology is key. Don't make excuses or give explanations as it often shifts the burden onto the transgender person to have to make you feel better about your mistake. Be aware that some clients may wish to be addressed differently in different spaces. For example, some clients may wish to use one name when being addressed in a public waiting room but use a more affirming name when they are in a one-on-one setting.

Review Intake Forms & Procedures

Review all of your clients' paperwork and note where clients are asked to identify their gender. Remove any instances where this information is not required. In case the gender marker is needed for official reasons (insurance billing, grant reporting, government databases), consider including a blank line for affirming name and pronouns. Let transgender patients know if and when you are required to use their legal name. Inform the patient by saying, "I wanted to let you know we will need to use your legal name to submit this paperwork, but we will continue to use the name that is most affirming for you in all of our other interactions."

Consider Confidentiality

Being "outed" as transgender can be a major safety risk for that individual. It is essential to consider if/ how this information will be recorded, with whom it will be shared and what the potential consequences of disclosure might be. Let the client know who will have access to the information, under what circumstances and why, so that they can create a safety plan as needed. Avoid referring to the client as "the transgender client" or having conversations in spaces where this information might be overheard.

Staff Training

Make sure that all staff—including security personnel, hotline workers, front desk staff, maintenance employees—attend at least a Trans 101 training. This will help ensure that all staff, particularly those who see clients first, have basic cultural competency skills and can contribute to creating an affirming space and organization. From a client perspective, even one negative interaction reflects upon the organization as a whole.

Resources & Referrals

Do some proactive work to figure out which other organizations also provide transgender-affirming services so that you know where you can make referrals when needed. Call and ask in advance to inquire about policies and procedures for working with transgender clients, and inquire if there is a particular staff member for whom someone should ask. Create a referral list and update it periodically.