

How to Support Someone Who's Trans and Just Come Out to You

WAYS TO RESPOND WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU AS TRANSGENDER

- **Congratulate the person; Say “Mazel Tov!”** This is probably a big step towards living a more authentic life
- **Thank them for sharing**, and thank them for trusting you enough to share
- **Center the need of the person coming out to you:** ask how you can support them at this time, “If you have a different name or pronouns you’d like me to use, I’d love to know about that and use them whenever you feel ready.”
- **While being your authentic self is something to celebrate, the process of coming out is personal, liberating, and at times very difficult.** Outing someone without their permission can be dangerous, so find out if this information is confidential. Who else knows? And who does the person want you to share this information with, if anyone?
- **Check in** with how they’re feeling having shared this information with you
- **Remember that they are still the person you knew before:** don’t make all subsequent conversations/interactions about their coming out. A human has other things to talk about!

WAYS NOT TO RESPOND WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT—AND WHY

- **Don’t downplay what this person just told you:** While responses like “It doesn’t matter to me!” “It’s no big deal” etc. are undoubtedly coming from a place of kindness and a desire to affirm and reassure this person, they also trivialize this person’s coming out. It’s probably a very big deal to them, and it’s important to recognize their bravery in sharing with you.
- **Don’t put yourself in the center of the circle:** It’s OK if you have complicated feelings about this news, and it’s natural that you might feel confused/nervous/anxious. But try to remember to center the need of the person coming out to you. Instead, lean on your friends/family/therapist/community resources for the support you need, so you can in turn offer support and affirmation to the person coming out.
- **“But you said you were _____ last summer!”** Responses like this convey that you are not listening to or accepting what this person is telling you NOW. Identities commonly shift and evolve over time. A person may come out many times over their lifetime as many different identities.
- **“Isn’t that kind of young to be making this kind of decision?”** Responses like this tell the person that they are not autonomous enough to make decisions about themselves. It also implies that you know someone better than they know themselves!
- **A subtle, everyday action/statement/question that inadvertently discriminates against marginalized people or populations is called a Microaggression.** Instead of asking the following problematic questions, try asking yourself why you want to know the answer. If the answer is personal curiosity, you are centering your needs instead of the other person’s needs. See the above note on centering the needs of the person coming out. Examples of Trans Microaggressions are:
 - “What’s your real name?” This implies that a person’s chosen name is not their real name and comes across as invalidating of their identity.
 - “Are you going to do a real/complete transition? How/when?”
 - Why aren’t they “preferred” pronouns? For most people, being referred to by the correct pronouns is a major way of being validated, seen, and respected by others. “Preferred” pronouns implies that there are other, equally acceptable options. Rather, a person’s pronoun choice should be taken at face value and not seen as a “preference.” Instead, say, “what are your pronouns?” or “These are my pronouns.”



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- “What body parts do you have (i.e.: do you have breasts, penis, vagina, etc.)?” You would never ask a non-trans (cisgender) person this, and you shouldn’t ask a trans person either. This highly personal question is triggering and irrelevant in most contexts.

WHAT ABOUT HEBREW?

Like many other languages, Hebrew assigns each noun a gender. But what about those who don’t identify with the only two gender options this language offers? To build a more inclusive community, the youth movement Habonim Dror North America created a singular, gender-neutral/nonbinary ending -ol, “ול” (vav lamed), which is based on the word kol, which means “all.” This ending is used for anyone who doesn’t use either “he” or “she” as a pronoun in English, picking “they” or another nonbinary option instead.

Plural nouns work similarly: Plural masculine nouns in Hebrew—including any group of people that includes at least one man—typically end in -im, while feminine nouns end in -ot. An inclusive, gender-neutral term can end in a blend: -imot, “ימות” (yud mem vav tav-sofit).

Examples:

SINGULAR CAMPER

Male camper: *chanich*

Female camper: *chanichah*

Gender-neutral: *chanichol*

PLURAL CAMPERS

Male campers: *chanichim*

Female camper: *chanichot*

Gender-neutral: *chanichimot*

Adapted from Habonim Dror North America and borrowed from Zauzmer, Julie. “A camp tries to reinvent the Hebrew language, so transgender kids can fit in.” The Washington Post, 11 August 2016. Web.

TERMS 2.0

**Note on terms: Below are some common terms in the LGBTQ and Ally communities. This is not an exhaustive list, and language is always evolving around identities. It’s always best to respectfully check with individuals about what language/labels they use, and it’s never OK to use labels for a person which they don’t use for themselves. For more terms, please see our LGBTQ Terminology sheet.*

ASSIGNED FEMALE AT BIRTH: (adj) “AFAB” – refers to someone who was labeled female at birth. This may or may not reflect their current identity. Also known as DFAB (Designated Female at Birth).

AGENDER: (adj) A term that connotes a lack of gender identity. People who are agender may also describe themselves as gender-neutral or genderless.

ASSIGNED MALE AT BIRTH: (adj) “AMAB” – refers to someone who was labeled male at birth. This may or may not reflect their current identity. Also known as DMAB (Designated Male at Birth).

BIGENDER: (adj) The state of experiencing two gender identities, either simultaneously or varying between the two. These identities could be man or woman, but they can also be other nonbinary genders.

CHOSEN NAME: (n) A name someone has chosen for themselves and by which they would like to be called.

COMING OUT: (v) The process of disclosing one’s identity, usually sexual orientation or gender identity. Coming out is not a one-time occurrence, and queer and trans people usually experience this process over and over again.



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DEAD NAME/GIVEN NAME: (n) Any name by which someone does not want to be called.

FTM/FTM/F to M: (adj) A female-to-male trans person: individuals assigned female at birth who identify as male. Transmen and transboys may also fall into this category. Some transmen feel that “FTM” and similar language reinforces an either/or gender system. Some transmen reject being seen as “FTM,” arguing that they have always been male and are only making this identity visible to other people (instead, they may prefer “MTM”). Remember to use this term only if it is claimed by the individual.

GENDER IDENTITY: (n) A person’s inner understanding of the gender(s) to which they belong or with which they identify. This is each person’s unique knowing or feeling, and is separate from a person’s physical body or appearance (although often related). Examples of gender identities include woman, nonbinary, man, agender, trans, genderqueer, etc.

GENDERFLUID: (adj) A gender identity that varies over time. Someone who is genderfluid may identify as a variety of different genders at different times.

MISGENDER: (v) The act of incorrectly identifying or labeling someone’s gender. Ex: “I’m sorry I misgendered you when I used the wrong pronouns.”

MTF/MTF/M to F: (adj) A male-to-female trans person: individuals assigned male at birth who identify as female. Transwomen and transgirls may also fall into this category. Some transwomen feel that “MTF” and similar language reinforces an either/or gender system. Some transwomen reject being seen as “MTF,” arguing that they have always been female and are only making this identity visible to other people (instead, they may prefer “FTF”). Remember to use this term only if it is claimed by the individual.

NONBINARY: (adj) A term referring to a gender identity that rejects the notion of binary gender; that is, the idea that the only genders are “man” and “woman.” Can sometimes be used interchangeably with genderqueer.

SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH: (n) A person’s assignment at birth, based upon primary and secondary sex characteristics (genitalia, breasts, body hair, chromosomes, hormones, etc.) as male, female, or intersex.

TRANSFEMININE: (adj) A term used to describe transgender people who were assigned male at birth, but identify with femininity to a greater extent than with masculinity.

TRANSGENDER OR TRANS: (adj) An umbrella term for anyone who knows themselves to be a gender that is different than the gender they were assigned at birth. Some trans people may have an alternate gender identity that is neither man nor woman, and for some people their gender identity may vary at different points in their lives. Some transgender people modify their bodies through medical means, and some do not. Common terms that people use about themselves are transman, transwoman, and man or woman of transgender experience. Using the terms ‘Transgendered’ with an ‘-ed’ (verb) or ‘Transgenderers’ with an ‘-s’ (noun) are both incorrect.

TRANSMASCULINE: (adj) A term used to describe transgender people who were assigned female at birth, but identify with masculinity to a greater extent than with femininity.



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