



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Transgender Etiquette

Interacting with transgender co-workers, students, and other members of the campus community isn't actually different from interacting with anyone else; we should treat everyone on campus with civility and respect. However, cisgender (non-trans) people sometimes have questions about what is and isn't polite in conversations with transgender people or how to interact with a colleague who is gender transitioning. Some general guidance is provided below.

If it would be rude to do to someone else, it is rude to do to a transgender person.

Treat transgender people with the same courtesy you would give anyone else. Don't draw attention to the fact that they are transgender. Don't focus on their gender more than you would for cisgender men and women. Don't pry into their sex lives, bodies, or physical appearance. You wouldn't ask a cisgender co-worker what their genitals look like; when they realized they were a man or a woman; or how they have sex, so don't ask a transgender person these questions unless they have initiated those topics of conversation or invited you to "ask anything" about their gender. Don't police anyone's gender expression. Remember to keep the workplace professional.

What Does Transgender Mean?

Transgender or trans is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression is different from those typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Cisgender or cis, is the term used for people whose gender identity or expression conforms with those typically associated with their sex assigned at birth.

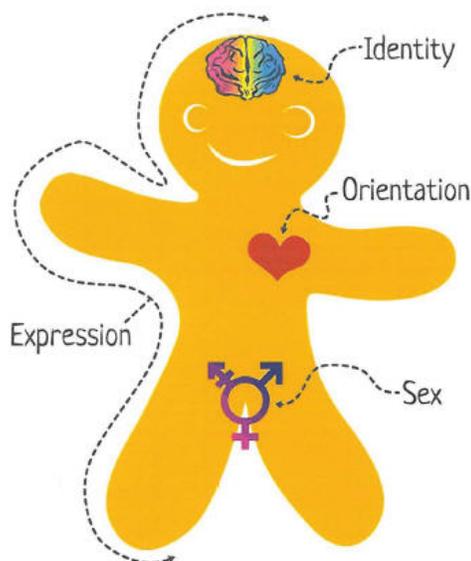


Image from: itspronounaetrosexual.com

Use the person's preferred name and personal pronoun.

Use the name that the person gives you; whether or not it matches your preconception of their gender. If the person's name doesn't match the gender you expected there is no reason to point that out any more than you would point out to someone that they weren't the race you expected them to be.

Generally, it is socially acceptable to use the personal pronoun (he/him/his; she/her/hers) that matches the gender the person seems to be presenting. This can be based on their name and whether their dress appears stereotypically masculine or feminine. However, if the person tells you to use a different pronoun than the one you assumed was correct, use the pronoun they tell you they prefer. This might even be a new or unusual pronoun to you. Some trans people prefer the use of plural pronouns as their singular pronoun, they/their/theirs, or gender neutral pronouns like ze/zim/zirs.

If you don't know what pronouns to use, ask.

If you aren't sure what personal pronoun to use, politely ask the person which pronoun they prefer. Then use the pronoun the person has given you. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun, apologize sincerely and then move on. It is more uncomfortable for everyone if you make a big deal out of the slip up.

Don't make assumptions.

Don't assume you can tell whether someone is transgender by looking. You should always assume there may be a transgender person present in any gathering and communicate respectfully.

Don't assume that you know a person's sexual orientation just because you know they are transgender. Gender identity (how someone internally understands their own gender) is different from sexual orientation (who someone is sexually attracted to). Trans people can be gay, straight, bisexual, asexual, or any other orientation.

- **Biological Sex:** refers to a combination of gonads, chromosomes, external sex organs, secondary sexual characteristics, and hormone balances.
- **Gender Expression:** how a person outwardly expresses their gender.
- **Gender Identity:** an individual's internal sense of what gender they are.
- **Sexual Orientation:** who someone is sexually attracted to.

Also, don't assume that a trans person is pursuing genital reassignment surgery. Many transgender individuals do not use medical intervention (surgery, hormones, etc.) to change their bodies. Transgender identity is not dependent on medical procedures; if someone tells you they are trans—they are. Furthermore, like for many cisgender people, the topic of medical procedures is a private topic for many trans people.

Finally, don't assume you know a transgender person's political views, religious affiliation, or family background. Transgender people are individuals with different political affiliations, religious beliefs, socioeconomic backgrounds, and perspectives.

Avoid giving backhanded compliments or tips.

Even if you mean to be supportive comments like the following can be hurtful or insulting:

"You look just like a real man/woman!"

"You seem so normal."

"You're so pretty, I never would have known!"

"You pass really well!"

"When did you decide you were a man/woman?"

"You'll always be a man/woman to me"

"Are you pre or post op?"

"If you just ___ you'd look more like a real man/woman."

Unless the trans person specifically asked you for advice, avoid giving tips on how they could appear more masculine/feminine. If you want to complement a trans person give them the same kind of compliments you would anyone else: "You look great today," "I love that color on you," etc.

Don't make your transgender colleague into a resident expert.

While it might be tempting to go to a transgender person in your workplace to answer questions about trans issues, they might not want to educate others or even discuss their own gender identity at work. It is exhausting for anyone to be used as a spokesperson for their race, sex, gender, religion, etc. If the person wants to talk about transgender topics, they will bring them up. If you want to learn more about transgender identities and issues the University offers several training courses through the [Allies & Safe Zones](#) program.

Be careful about confidentiality.

Knowing a trans person's gender identity is personal information. Don't gossip about or share that information with others unless the person has told you it's ok to share that information. Transgender people still face discrimination and even violence due to intolerance of their gender. Don't "out" a transgender person against their will.

Don't worry about what bathroom people use.

Every member of the FSU community is free to use whichever restroom aligns with their gender identity. Transgender people use the bathroom for the same reason cisgender people do. It isn't up to other people to decide whether a person is in the "right" restroom. If a person chooses that bathroom, it is the right bathroom for them. The mere presence of a person in the restroom is not dangerous or harassing activity and is not a cause for alarm or complaint. If anyone acts dangerously in a bathroom, contact the FSU PD for assistance.

Learn More

- **FSU's Nondiscrimination Policy:** <http://compliance.hr.fsu.edu/?page=eoo>
- **LGBTQ+ Training:** http://sga.fsu.edu/safe_zone/program-info.shtml
- **Diversity & Inclusion Training:** http://hr.fsu.edu/index.cfm?page=FacultyStaff_Training_ProfessionalSkills_DI
- **Transgender FAQ from the Human Rights Campaign:** <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/transgender-faq>
- **National Center for Transgender Equality:** <http://transequality.org/>