



TOP TIPS

for

working with

TRANS

PEOPLE

Introduction

This guide is designed to give you a basic understanding of trans people and their needs, as well as tips on how you can best support them in your role and in the workplace. It will also point you to sources of further reading and information.

When the word 'trans' is used in this guide, it refers to anyone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were given at birth. This can include, but is not exclusive to: people who transition to male or female through a medical route, (surgery, hormones, GP support), and/or socially, (changing documents, name etc.), people who fit into neither male nor female categories or who feel comfortable inhabiting both, and people who dress in clothing often associated with the opposite gender.

Many trans people feel male or female, but some feel that they are a mix of both, or neither. Some people feel that their identity changes at different times or in different places. It is important to respect everyone's identity, even if you do not understand it.

Some trans people may change the sex on their birth certificate, but others may not. Some trans people need to have surgery or take hormones, but not all do. Even if a trans person has some surgery, it does not mean they will have or want all surgeries available.



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1. Respect

A common experience for trans people is to have their identities ignored or misunderstood. Referring to people by the name and pronoun they identify with shows respect and an understanding of trans people. If you don't know how someone identifies, use clues such as what they're wearing or their name. If you're still unsure, ask them in a polite way. If you make a mistake, apologise and move on.

"When I was asked to give a statement after stopping a shoplifter, the police officer asked me whether I preferred being called 'she' or 'he'. I was right at the beginning of transition and it was amazing to find that someone took the time to consider what I wanted and needed without any prompt or clues from me."

2. Question your assumptions

Many trans people say that service providers make assumptions about their:

- ★ Identity (e.g. that they are either male or female)
- ★ Medical needs (e.g. surgery, hormones)
- ★ Behaviour (e.g. that all trans women wear make up)
- ★ Trans identity being the root of all of their medical or personal problems.

As with non-trans people, every trans person is different. Avoid making assumptions about people, and ensure that you allow them to define their own needs.

"I was really ill and after a couple of days dragged myself to my GP. I tried to dress up a bit, but when I got there, my GP told me, 'I wasn't making much of an effort to look female.' I was really angry as I thought he thinks I should make an extra effort when there were women there with no make up, in their pyjamas. No-one told them they weren't making enough of an effort."

3. Welcoming trans people

Key actions to make your service welcoming for trans people:

- ★ Think about issues that may affect trans service users in advance and plan for them – consult with trans organisations and communities to ensure this is useful and relevant
- ★ Question your beliefs about trans people and encourage others to question theirs
- ★ Where it is possible, do not divide your service or facilities into male and female, but allow everyone to use the same
- ★ Make sure that paperwork includes trans people: Check out this guide to monitoring from Scottish Transgender Alliance – <http://www.scottishtrans.org/guidance/practice/equality-monitoring/>
- ★ Tell people about changes you have made and make it clear to trans clients that your service welcomes them: display posters that feature trans people, have service information in waiting rooms that targets trans people

"I don't feel my GP understood the condition and made no effort over six years to do so. The hospital treated me different even with having a Gender Recognition Certificate I was classed as a gender breach in some wards."

"Told I wasn't allowed to use the swimming pool changing rooms either male or female."



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4. Learn about trans people

Many of the issues which trans people experience relate to a lack of information on the part of others. Think about what questions you have about trans people and seek out the answers to them. It is not OK to ask a client or trans colleague to provide this information. You can contact and attend local groups, read the resources given at the end of this guide and attend training to increase your knowledge.

"I went to my GP and after a while he noticed I had a reminder for a smear test. He laughed and said there must be a mistake. I told him that it wasn't a mistake and that if he read two lines up, it said I had Gender Dysphoria. He then spent the next 10 minutes questioning me about what this was and who I slept with. It was really intrusive, but I didn't have the confidence or know how to ask him to stop. All I wanted was some antibiotics. I can't believe a GP had so little knowledge of what 'trans' is."

"My GP is very respectful and honest about her limited knowledge of trans issues but always endeavours to learn more, and she clearly goes off to find out everything she doesn't know before the next time I attend. I've never had anything other than awesome service from all members of the practice."

5. Confidentiality

Not everyone needs to know if a client is trans; being trans is not relevant to every situation. If you are working with a trans person in public, do not refer to their trans identity or history without their permission. Make sure you only tell colleagues that a client is trans if they absolutely have to know, or to be able to provide the correct



Photo © Sara Davidmann

service to that client, and ask that person's permission first. Be aware of your surroundings and whether your conversation can be overheard, for example on reception or at a student service desk.

"When enrolling I found the staff to be unprepared for receiving a transgender student. There was no sensitivity towards my name change document, one member of staff openly confirmed with me that I had changed my name from my birth name (which they stated) to my new name in a room full of people. "

"I was rushed into hospital with suspected appendicitis. The doctor asked me if I'd had any surgery, but I didn't want to out myself. He kept asking and eventually in front of my partner and her dad said, 'OK, so you still have a vagina then?' I was in a ward full of people and it wasn't very discrete. The doctor had no idea if my partner's dad knew, it could have been very dangerous for me, I was so embarrassed."

*"I live with a long term mental health condition and have done for years. Being under the trans*umbrella can be difficult for me as people often mistakenly think that being trans* is part of my mental health condition...when in fact-being trans* and my mh condition are two completely separate things. This can be stressful as people then ask others for opinions about me instead of taking what I've said on board, [especially regarding the trans*stuff]. This can be soul destroying and although I know I have the same rights as everyone else....it doesn't feel like it and I feel that I'm forever fighting to be heard."*

6. Diversity

Trans people, the same as anyone else, are individuals and each person will have different needs and different ideas about what 'trans' means to them. Not all trans people will refer to themselves as trans, preferring to be known as just male or female as it may be irrelevant, but for others it may be an important part of who they are.

Many trans people will have other aspects of their identity which affects their experience of being trans. Young trans people can have very different experiences for instance from older trans people. Other aspects of identity such as ability, cultural background or heritage, health, religious belief and sexual orientation can all impact on how you experience your gender identity. As with any client, it is important to think about each person as a whole and recognise how different aspects of identity can impact on each other in order to make your service fully accessible and supportive.

7. Policies and procedures

Ensure that you have suitable policies to refer to when working with trans people. If your organisation does not have a policy there are trans organisations that may be able to help: see the resources section. Lack of policy can lead to problems, especially where there are separate services for men and women.

“Support has been amazing; felt able to discuss related issues openly with tutors and received positive responses. College diversity policy has a section dedicated to “gender reassignment (transgender)”, as well as “sexuality” (which is helpful since I’m also not straight).”

Yorkshire and Humber Protocol – Providing Hospital Services To Trans Patients

<http://www.barnsleyhospital.nhs.uk/equalitydiversity/files/2012/01/Providing-Hospital-Services-to-Trans-Patients-Protocol-2012.pdf>

8. The Law

Trans people are protected by law, just like some other groups, such as people with disabilities or religious groups. For example, telling someone that a client is trans without their permission* or refusing them a service because they are trans** may be a criminal offence. To protect yourselves and your employers, make sure you know what the legal requirements are.

*Gender Recognition Act 2004 summary – <http://www.gires.org.uk/GRA.php>

**Equality Act 2010 summary – <http://www.scottishtrans.org/guidance/principles/equality-act-2010/>

Quick Tips

- ★ Respect a person's gender identity, name, title and pronoun preference (e.g. she or he). Showing respect isn't just about what you say to someone's face; it means using their name and the correct pronoun when they aren't there as well. Try to challenge other people's comments if they show disrespect.
- ★ Raise awareness and challenge comments and practice that exclude and disrespect trans people.
- ★ Be sensitive about a person's gender history or trans status. Keep information confidential and do not share without permission.
- ★ Create inclusive services – think about paperwork, single-sex spaces, how welcoming your service is and information displayed in your buildings and online.
- ★ Learn about trans communities and trans people's needs through professional training.
- ★ Create links with local groups and services.
- ★ Be flexible, be inclusive, and be prepared to work in a different way to accommodate others' needs.

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Language

Here are some commonly used terms to help you find the right language. Remember that not all people will use these terms in exactly the same way or feel comfortable with them. Be guided by how they talk about themselves.

- ★ **Gender Identity:** A person's internal sense of the gender they are, e.g. female, male, non gendered etc.
- ★ **Sexual Orientation:** Who a person is sexually attracted to. This is **separate** to a person's gender identity.
- ★ **Gender Variant/Trans:** An umbrella term for all people whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth, whether that be transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer etc.
- ★ **Transsexual:** A person who feels that the sex assigned at birth does not fit with their internal gender identity and will transition from one gender to another (or part way to another). It usually means someone who has medical intervention such as hormones or surgery to ease this process.
- ★ **Crossdresser/Transvestite:** A person who temporarily wears and/or takes on the characteristics associated with a sex different to that assigned at birth.
- ★ **Gender Non-conformity:** A person who feels the gender binary of male and female doesn't fit their gender identity and so they live outside of it. There are many terms for someone who feels like this and is down to personal preference, for example – genderqueer, gender warrior, bi-gendered, poly-gendered.

Resources and Links

Local Support

Switch – A long running West Yorkshire social group for all trans people which meets up every last Tuesday of the month at 6-8pm.

Email: Switch@mesmac.co.uk; Tel: 0113 2444 209

SafeT – SafeT is an organisation for people who are Transgender. We offer Advocacy, Buddying, Social Contact, Information and Training.

Web: <http://www.safetuk.org/>; Email: safet@mesmac.co.uk; Tel: 01274 395815

T-Boys – A Yorkshire-wide support group for anyone assigned female at birth who considers themselves to be on the trans spectrum or is questioning their gender.

Web: <http://www.tboysuk.webspace.virginmedia.com>

Email: tboysuk@yahoo.co.uk; Tel: 07563 233 403

Trans +ve – A group for trans people from around the Bradford district, supported by Equity Partnership. Links to the Keighley group, a partners section, and a BME LGBT group.

Email: trans+@equitypartnership.org.uk; Tel: 01274 727759

Trans Wakefield – A social and support group for anyone with gender related issues in and around West Yorkshire

Web: <http://transwakefield.yolasite.com/>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/TransWakefield

National Support

TransBareAll – Promotes health and wellbeing for trans people.

Web: www.transbareall.co.uk; Email: transbareall@gmail.com

Tel: 07528 810047

GIRES – Information for trans people, their families and the professionals who care for them. Also produced an online e-learning course – <http://www.gires.org.uk/elearning/new/player.html>

Web: <http://www.gires.org.uk>; Email: info@gires.org; Tel: 01372 801554

Scottish Transgender Alliance – The Scottish Transgender Alliance is based within the Equality Network. The Equality Network promotes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality and rights across Scotland.

Web: <http://www.scottishtrans.org/>; Email: info@scottishtrans.org

Tel: 0131 467 6039

T Crime Reporting – Website to report trans hate crime, set up by GIRES.

Web: <http://www.tcrime.net/>

The West Yorkshire Trans Equality Multi Agency Partnership Group has members from the NHS, local authorities, universities, housing organisations, West Yorkshire Police and the prison service who are working together to improve trans equality. The group pooled funding from Bradford District Care Trust, NHS Airedale, Bradford and Leeds and NHS Yorkshire and the Humber to support the production of this guide and the associated training. We hope it will be of use to staff working in any organisation that wants to ensure that its services are meeting the needs of trans people.



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design & cover illustration by Caroline Duffy www.carolineduffy.co.uk