

# TRANS 101

GENDER DIVERSITY CRASH COURSE

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## GENDER DIVERSITY CRASH COURSE

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# TRANS 101

## THE BASICS

### WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

When we think of the word gender a whole bunch of images rush to mind.

Most of us are taught the idea that everyone's either born a boy or a girl, and expected to identify a certain way based on what's between your legs. But that actually isn't true for everyone, and totally ignores the huge and amazing world of people who are trans and gender diverse.

That's what we're going to dive into during this series, being trans, gender identity, and what it's all about. Welcome to Trans 101.

### Gender

Gender is part of a person's internal sense of self. It can be female, male, neither, a combination of the two, or exist completely outside of that!

A person's relationship with their gender can also change over time as well.

### Bodies

Bodies and gender are totally different things, but people sometimes conflate the two, or think that having a certain body type means you must be a certain gender.

In reality, anyone of any gender can have any body parts!

### Assigned Gender

Most of us are assigned a gender when we're born.

This happens when someone, usually a doctor, nurse, or parent, says "it's a girl!" or "it's a boy!".

This is then reinforced by the people around us as we grow up.

### Transgender/Gender Diverse

Transgender/gender diverse, or trans for short, is when you don't exclusively identify as the gender you were assigned at birth.

### Non-binary

Non-binary is an umbrella term people use to describe gender that doesn't fit squarely into male or female.

This can include people who feel their gender is a mix of both, changes often, is something totally separate, or have no strong sense of a gender at all.

### Cisgender

Cisgender, or cis for short, is when you do exclusively identify as the gender you were assigned at birth.

### Sexuality and Gender

Gender and sexuality are two different things.

Trans people can be bisexual, asexual, straight, gay, or any other sexuality, but we're all those things in addition to being trans, they're not the reason we're trans.

### Transitioning

Transitioning is when someone takes steps to socially or physically feel more aligned with their gender identity.

It's not about appealing to other people, or trying to look like a cisgender person, but rather doing what feels right for yourself, and what that means for each person is different. It's also a gradual thing, and people might change their mind about what works best for them!

### Social Transitioning

Socially transitioning involves the way we interact with other people.

For example, coming out as transgender, asking people to use different pronouns to describe us, or changing the way we interact with gendered spaces, like the bathroom we use.

### Physical Transitioning

Physical transitioning usually involves a person altering their appearance to what feels right for them, like clothes, makeup and hair, or seeking medical treatment like hormones or surgery.

### Gender Dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is an intense discomfort a trans person may feel about physical attributes, or the way they're gendered by others. Gender dysphoria can be on a social level, a physical level or even a purely emotional level.

Dysphoria can be really overwhelming sometimes, and having to live with a body or expression that you're not comfortable with can really impact your wellbeing and interfere with day-to-day life.

Not all trans people experience dysphoria, and it doesn't make anyone more or less trans.

### Language

All language evolves at a community level, so when trans-people coin new terms for our experiences, that's totally fine!

We're developing language that describes who we are, because in the past a lot of the words either haven't existed, or those that have, have been created by people outside the trans community, and don't always reflect our experiences.

### COMING OUT OR AFFIRMING YOUR GENDER

There are heaps of ways someone might come out; in person, on Facebook; in a letter; or shouting it from the roof! The most important thing is that it's done on our terms, when we feel ready.

Coming out can look completely different for different people. Some people might want to tell others directly, while others might prefer a subtler approach, or not want to come out at all.

### PRIVACY

If someone comes out to you, but you're not sure who else knows, or whether it's okay to talk about it with other people, check in with them first.

Just because they've told you, doesn't mean they'll want to tell everyone!

### NAMES AND PRONOUNS

Names and pronouns can represent a big part of who we are, so calling everyone by the names and pronouns they ask you to use is really important. It can make trans people feel affirmed and welcome, and it's just more accurate too!

### EVERYONE'S DIFFERENT

Trans people come in all shapes and sizes. How you look, how you act, and what feels most authentically you is a really individual thing.

It's not really possible to tell someone's identity by looking at them.

Expecting that all trans girls will be super feminine, or all trans guys will be super masculine, or all non-binary people will be super androgynous, is actually pretty different from the reality, so try not to make those assumptions!

### TALKING ABOUT THE PAST

When talking about someone before they came out, still use their current names and pronouns unless they ask you not to, because hearing our old names and pronouns can be really uncomfortable.

A trans person's real name is whatever name they prefer, and our birth names aren't something anyone else needs to know unless we choose to tell them.

### QUESTIONS

Sometimes people will ask trans people a lot of questions about some pretty personal topics.

Being curious about gender diversity is totally fine and wanting to learn more is great, but treating a trans person like they have to answer every question can make things pretty uncomfortable.

Questions about our bodies, relationships, sex, or other stuff like that are personal for most people.

A good rule is think about how well you know the person, and whether you'd ask a cis person that same question. If you're still not sure, ask if they're okay discussing a topic before you ask specific questions.

### GETTING IT WRONG!

Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. It's not great; but it does happen.

Wrongly assuming or stating a person's gender is called misgendering. And using a person's old name when they've provided you with a new one is called deadnaming.

Try not to get defensive towards the person if you get it wrong. The best thing to do is say a quick sorry, correct yourself, and move on.

For trans people, sometimes we get misgendered a lot, and you might not even realize it, but you could be the 10<sup>th</sup> person who's misgendered them that day. That sort of thing adds up, and can get really exhausting.

### GETTING IT RIGHT!

When people do get it right, it's a pretty great feeling. It makes us feel safe and included, and it can be validating too.

- Always use a person's preferred name and pronouns
- Stick to gender neutral language (e.g., "they" instead of "she/he", "everyone" instead of "ladies and gentlemen") if you don't know that terms someone prefers, to help avoid assumptions and misgendering.
- When talking about a trans person in the past, still use their current name and pronouns unless they say otherwise.

# TRANS 101

## HOW TO BE AN ALLY

### WHAT IS AN ALLY?

An ally is more than just someone who treats trans people with respect. An ally goes the extra mile to stand with the trans community and fight against transphobia, and they can make a huge difference!

That might involve going to protests, setting up a Gay-Straight Alliance at your school, speaking up when you hear someone say something transphobic, or lots of other things!

### UNDERSTANDING TRANSPHOBIA

Transphobia refers to anything that insults, discriminates or oppresses transgender and gender diverse people.

It comes in all shapes and forms, and familiarizing yourself with the different types will help you combat against them.

### INTENTIONAL TRANSPHOBIA

Intentional transphobia is when someone actively goes out of their way to insult or belittle a person because they're trans.

Things like name calling, excluding someone from social events, being cruel, and deliberately misgendering someone all fall under this category.

### UNINTENTIONAL TRANSPHOBIA

Unintentional transphobia tends to be more subtle, and can even include slip ups or mistakes.

Subconsciously making assumptions about a person's gender, believing someone should look a certain way, and automatically assuming someone's pronouns based on their appearance can all be examples of unintentional transphobia.

### SYSTEMIC TRANSPHOBIA

This refers to large-scale society-wide issues, like employment discrimination, gendered toilets, or lack of representation. What all of these issues have in common is that they impact trans people's rights and inclusion at a system-wide level, and affect how people think about trans people, even if they aren't aware of it.

These aren't set in stone, and they do overlap. Systemic problems can cause unintentional transphobia by affecting the default assumptions we have about trans people, and intentional transphobia can reinforce systemic issues.

### LISTENING TO TRANS PEOPLE

The best source of info on trans people is, well, trans people! We're living these experiences every day, and we are the experts in ourselves.

It's also really important to listen to a diverse range of trans people, especially those who are often spoken over, including trans women, non-binary people, trans disabled people, and trans people of color. Being an ally to trans people means all trans people, not just the ones who are heard most often.

The best allies are ones who recognize that they're here to help, not to speak over, or take charge of a movement. Step back and make space for people who are often ignored. Celebrating our differences, and providing a platform for transgender voices is an incredibly powerful form of support.

### WAYS TO BE AN ALLY

- Introduce yourself with your name and pronouns. This can let trans people know that it's safe to tell you our pronouns too.
- Fight transphobia when you see it. Let people know that their behavior or language could be harmful towards someone who's trans.
- Don't assume someone's gender identity, and use gender neutral language until they let you know what they use.
- Put up posters and resources that include or focus on gender identity in common spaces in your school, university, or workplace, and make sure they were created by trans people.
- Raise money for an organization that's by and for trans people, and support community-led change.
- Elevate the voices of trans people whenever possible. Host an event that includes a trans guest speaker, and consult trans people on how to make your spaces trans inclusive.
- Trans representation is important even when your group or project isn't specifically about gender. Trans people are part of every community, so we should have the chance to be part of the leadership in every community too! Whatever you're part of, ask yourself who is and isn't being represented, and why.

### GENDER DIVERSITY ISN'T A "WHITE PEOPLE THING"

Arguments are sometimes made that gender diversity is a new concept that was invented by a western society. Not only is this a tool often used to discredit trans people's identities and to silence us, but it's simply not true. There's actually a long history of gender diversity that goes back thousands of years outside of a western context, and that shouldn't be erased.

### RACISM AND TRANSPHOBIA

When you're gender diverse and a person of color, racism and transphobia can intersect in unique ways.

- **Beauty Standards**

A lot of the beauty standards we're held to are very white-centric, so trans and gender diverse people of color can sometimes feel like they need to work even harder for acceptance.

How a person looks should not be a factor in whether or not their gender is respected, but unfortunately we know that as a society, the way we are treated and whether or not we are respected can be based largely on the way we appear, and the appearance of people of color is judged more harshly.

- **Role Models**

For people of color, and for trans people, finding role models that we can look up to can be tricky. But when you're trans and a person of color and looking for role models, our options become even more limited.

- **Being Used as a Talking Point**

People will sometimes accuse certain cultures or religions of being transphobic, while being kind of transphobic themselves. We end up just being used as a cover for racism or an excuse for transphobia. Rather than focusing on what people outside our communities say our experiences are, listen to trans people of color, because we actually know what our lives are like.

### ENGAGING RESPECTFULLY WITH GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE OF COLOR

We sometimes hear things like "they/them pronouns are too complicated" or "gender diverse people of color have a more basic understanding". Assuming that people of color are ignorant or can't understand our own identities is actually pretty racist. Don't assume that people can't understand the terms you use, but show patience if they're new to others. That doesn't mean assuming it's "all too hard for us" by default, it means using the language you're comfortable with and explaining it if someone asks you to.

The best way to learn about the experiences of gender diverse people of color is from gender diverse people of color!

No one can speak for everyone else, but these are some of our views to get you started!

#### ERIK (HE/HIM) – VIETNAMESE

I was born in Viet Nam, and in mainstream indigenous Vietnamese culture, there's a religion called Dao Mau which has been around since before Buddhism was introduced to Viet Nam over 2500 years ago.

Within this religion, there's a spiritual person called dong co. Typically, this person is assigned male at birth. Some people said that some of the dong co are gay while others say that dong co were assigned male at birth and have the spirit of a woman, and it's sort of similar to being trans. They were very well respected in the past, and still very well respected by people who are Dao Mau followers in modern Viet Nam.

#### ASIEL (THEY/THEM) – MEXICAN

As a Mexican non-binary person, questioning Mexican notions of masculinity was part of my coming out process. Reconciling my cultural identity with my gender identity has taken significantly more work than just coming to terms with my gender, but I find very little space to have these conversations, both within the trans community and within the Mexican community.

For me, coming out never came down to a single moment where I said it out loud. Many of us come out in silence; in actions rather than words. That doesn't mean that I'm closeted or ashamed. Quite the opposite; being trans has been a wonderful source of self-love. I'm just discovering how to come out on my own terms, how to celebrate my queerness in my own culture. Sometimes the best way is silent validation.

#### ZACH (HE/HIM) – ABORIGINAL

Sistergirls and brotherboys have existed within indigenous culture for thousands of years before western cultures invaded Australia. Originally, indigenous people believed that sometimes people could be born as a male, who was then assigned the body of a female, and vice versa. However, as communities became closer tied, knowledge expanded and the meaning became ever changing and continuously evolved to our current definition, a definition that we see today as trans.

"Brotherboy" and "sistergirl" is now lovingly used within communities of trans indigenous people, as well as communities which surround them. Language within indigenous cultures has changed but the casual nature in which brotherboys and sistergirls are mentioned remains the same. The variation of the terms brotherboy and sistergirl change from tribe to tribe/group to group, but essentially most indigenous tribes and groups have a term for trans people. Trans people and brotherboys and sistergirls will always have a place within the Indigenous community.