

SERVING TRANSGENDER PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

ABOUT YOUR TRAINER

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Dylan is a New Orleanian who splits time between Baton Rouge and Washington, D.C. He is the Board Chair of Louisiana Trans Advocates, a statewide nonprofit empowering transgender and gender nonconforming Louisianans to transform their communities and lives. He loves providing trainings to schools, health care providers, faith communities, government offices, and social safety net agencies!

LOUISIANA TRANS ADVOCATES

Louisiana Trans Advocates works to advance the core human rights of self-determination and expression for all transgender and gender nonconforming people.

We currently maintain ten monthly support groups across the state and connect trans people with vital health care and safety net resources.

OVERVIEW

- **Trans 101:** key terms and definitions, common experiences
- **Best practices** for personnel who may interact with transgender people, institutional best practices

TRANS 101

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Sex: the classification of a person as male or female as determined by a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

Gender Identity: a person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender.



TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Gender Expression: External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics.

Sexual Orientation: Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.



TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Transgender (adj.): An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transsexual (adj.): An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries.



TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Trans: Used as shorthand to mean *transgender* or *transsexual* - or sometimes to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella.

Transition: The process of altering one's gender expression to align with gender identity.



TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Cisgender: A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender.

Gender Non-Conforming: A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. **Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming.**



TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Non-binary and/or genderqueer: Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman.

WHY ARE PEOPLE TRANSGENDER?

There is no single explanation for why some people are transgender. The diversity of transgender expression and experiences argues against any simple or unitary explanation.

Many experts believe that biological factors such as **genetic influences and prenatal hormone levels, early experiences, and experiences later in adolescence or adulthood** may all contribute to the development of transgender identities.

What we do know? **Gender identity cannot be altered by external pressure, i.e. conversion therapy.**

HOW DOES SOMEONE KNOW THEY'RE TRANS?

Transgender people experience their transgender identity in a variety of ways and **may become aware of their transgender identity at any age.** Some can trace their transgender identities and feelings back to their earliest memories.

Others become aware of their transgender identities or begin to explore and experience gender non-conforming attitudes and behaviors during adolescence or much later in life.

“ *Isn't this just a trend right now? Why are there so many trans people all of the sudden when there weren't before?* ”

Transgender persons have been documented in many indigenous, Western, and Eastern cultures and societies from antiquity until the present day. However, the meaning of gender nonconformity may vary from culture to culture. European colonialism played a major role in erasing gender diversity across the globe. Today, we see more people becoming comfortable to express their gender because of increased awareness, a shift in attitudes, and greater legal protections.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN TRANSITIONING?

- Adopting the appearance of the desired sex through changes in clothing and grooming
- Adopting a new name
- Changing sex designation on identity documents (if possible)
- Using hormone therapy treatment
- Undergoing medical procedures that modify their body to conform with their gender identity
- All or none of these

HEALTH CARE FOR TRANS PEOPLE

From a shelter perspective, knowledge about the use of hormones can be important for many reasons:

- Shelter residents may need assistance in acquiring hormones through a medical service.
- Disruption in hormone treatment may have mental and physical effects. Residents may need assistance or a referral to appropriate sources in order to maintain hormone treatment.

HEALTH CARE FOR TRANS PEOPLE

HORMONES, CONT.

- Transgender residents of a shelter may possess syringes for a valid reason—their hormone injections—rather than for illegal drug use.
- Hormones purchased on the street come with risks. First, if needles are shared there is a risk for HIV or other disease transmission. Second, the dosage of the hormones may not be at the correct level for the person using them; without regular medical check-ups, the hormones may be causing or exacerbating other health problems that go undetected and untreated.

HEALTH CARE FOR TRANS WOMEN

Some transgender women use silicone injections to enhance their appearance. These injections can cause serious complications and may even lead to death. Silicone injections are not the same as silicone implants; silicone injections are when silicone is directly injected into the body.

It is important that shelters provide residents with information about medically safer alternatives such as hormone therapy, both during medical screenings and in pamphlet form.

HEALTH CARE FOR TRANS MEN

Some **transgender men** still need to receive gynecological services or other health services because parts of their bodies remain subject to diseases such as ovarian and breast cancer.

Transgender men may need assistance in **locating a transgender-sensitive medical provider** to acquire these services.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION: IS BEING TRANS A MENTAL ILLNESS?

Gender dysphoria — a state of emotional distress caused by how someone's body or the gender they were assigned at birth conflicts with their gender identity — is a widely recognized medical condition. If untreated, it can lead to severe mental health issues, including debilitating depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

But the AMA, APA, and other medical experts agree that letting someone transition, which can entail medical treatments like hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries, without social stigma is the **main treatment** for gender dysphoria. In this way, being trans isn't the medical condition; living as trans is in fact the *treatment* to the medical condition.

SUBMITTED QUESTION: IS BEING TRANS A MENTAL ILLNESS?

And not all trans people deal with severe dysphoria. It's barely or not present for some trans people, while it's mentally excruciating for others.

These facts show that psychological distress and disability aren't inherent to being trans, so being trans doesn't meet the **definition** of a mental disorder **(a psychological state that causes significant distress and disability)**.

BEST PRACTICES

**PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR
TRANS PEOPLE IN NEED OF SERVICES**

WHAT'S IN A NAME / PRONOUN?

CHOSEN NAME

Transgender people often choose a new name for themselves as a part of socially transitioning. Include the option for clients to identify preferred names, and use them when interacting with clients and when talking about them among staff.

PRONOUNS

If a client shares their chosen name with you or otherwise signals that they might be transitioning, ask for their pronouns and make a note to use them.

HOW TO ASK SOMEONE'S PRONOUNS

"Hi, my name is Dylan and I use he/him/his pronouns. What pronouns do you use?"

SUBMITTED QUESTION: WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I ACCIDENTALLY MISGENDER SOMEONE?

- **DO:** Correct yourself when you realize the mistake and then move on.
- **DON'T:** Make a big deal out of the mistake or fall over yourself apologizing.
- **DON'T:** Try to explain your mistake to the client (Ex. I'm sorry, it's just so hard to remember because x/y/z)

SUMMARIZING ALLYSHIP

- Know that transgender people have membership in various sociocultural identity groups (e.g., race, social class, religion, age, disability, etc.) and there is not one universal way to look or be transgender.
- Use names and pronouns that are appropriate to the person's gender presentation and identity; if in doubt, ask.

SUMMARIZING ALLYSHIP

- Don't make assumptions about transgender people's sexual orientation, desire for hormonal or medical treatment, or other aspects of their identity or transition plans.
- Don't confuse gender nonconformity with being transgender. Not all people who appear androgynous or gender nonconforming identify as transgender or desire gender affirmation treatment.

SUMMARIZING ALLYSHIP

- Keep the lines of communication open with your transgender clients.
- Advocate for transgender rights, including social and economic justice and appropriate psychological care. Familiarize yourself with the local, state and federal laws that can either protect transgender people from discrimination or allow discrimination.

KEY POLICIES FOR ENSURING THE SAFETY OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE CLIENTS

STEP ONE: NONDISCRIMINATION

Ensure that clients know they are protected from discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, national origin, disability, or any other characteristic protected by law.

EXAMPLE:

"At Covenant House, we pride ourselves on the diversity that characterizes the youth in our homes and the staff who welcome and serve them. We are not a niche shelter that welcomes only youth of one gender or one orientation, one race or one class. All are welcome here and all are received with absolute respect and unconditional love."

KEY POLICIES FOR ENSURING THE SAFETY OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE CLIENTS

STEP TWO: PUTTING IT IN PRACTICE WITH A POLICY OF RESPECT

People should be treated according to their self-identified gender.

In other words, people are who they say they are. If someone says she is a woman, she is, and she should be treated as a woman.

This policy of respect is nearly identical to the clarifying language that the National Coalition for the Homeless resolution added to its nondiscrimination resolution:

“Abiding by this non-discrimination resolution means that housing, shelter and services are to be made available to individuals according to the gender that the person self-identifies as”

KEY POLICIES FOR ENSURING THE SAFETY OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE CLIENTS

STEP TWO: PUTTING IT IN PRACTICE WITH A POLICY OF RESPECT

In gender-segregated facilities, housing placements should be made based on self-identified gender.

KEY POLICIES FOR ENSURING THE SAFETY OF TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE CLIENTS

HOW DO WE HOUSE PEOPLE WHO ARE GENDER NONBINARY OR GENDERQUEER?

Each person should be treated as an individual. The best solution for these situations is to have a conversation with the person about his or her privacy and safety needs, and to ask that person, “Would it be better for you to be housed with women or with men?” The transgender resident should be offered all of the housing options that are available under shelter policies.

ADDRESSING THE SAFETY NEEDS OF TRANSGENDER CLIENTS

PROVIDING SAFE SLEEPING QUARTERS

Transgender people are at heightened risk of assault in residential settings. Here are some strategies you can employ to help trans people stay safe:

- **Selecting which bed the transgender person sleeps in.** All shelters are arranged differently, but often there are some beds that are closer to night staff and are thus safer places for transgender residents to sleep.
- **Set-aside sleeping.** Some shelters have certain rooms set aside for people who need to sleep separately from others for various reasons. Other shelters may have some rooms that only house two people at a time.

PROVIDING SAFE SHELTERS FOR TRANSGENDER CLIENTS: A FINAL CHECKLIST

- Have you reached out to the local transgender community for guidance, training, and referrals?
- Have you developed written policies covering issues of respect, confidentiality, housing placements, bathroom and shower policies, harassment, and topics for intake conversation?
- Have you made any alterations to bathrooms and showers, including installing locks or doors and putting up curtains to increase the amount of privacy in your facility?
- Have you changed your intake forms to ask “Gender:_____” followed by a statement that transgender people are respected at your shelter?

PROVIDING SAFE SHELTERS FOR TRANSGENDER CLIENTS: A FINAL CHECKLIST

- Have you put up a sign in your lobby that indicates that transgender people are welcome in your shelter?
- Have you set up a training session for all staff? For shelter residents?
- Have you integrated a training segment into the training program for all new staff?
- Have you reviewed your referral list to ensure that the agencies are welcoming and respectful to your transgender residents you refer there?

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

LOUISIANA TRANS

ADVOCATES is here to help you ensure that your shelter is safe and welcoming for transgender people experiencing homelessness.

Feel free to reach out to us:
dylan@latransadvocates.org
504-450-7496

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- True Colors United
- Transgender Law Center
- National Center for Transgender Equality
- Lambda Legal
- National LGBTQ Task Force



QUESTIONS?

