

# Creating a Trans-Welcoming Environment

A tips sheet for sexual assault service providers

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*"It takes no compromising to give people their rights.  
It takes no money to respect the individual.  
It takes no survey to remove repressions."  
~ Harvey Milk*

## Language.

Everyone deserves respect. For transgender individuals, respect must be shown for their identity and history, for their personal style (clothes, accessories), for their bodily configuration, and for their name and pronoun. Respect extends beyond direct interactions to include what you say and how you behave even outside of their presence. If you are unsure which pronoun a client prefers, ask.

## Manners.

If you wouldn't discuss your genitals with a colleague, it is probably inappropriate to ask a client about theirs. A person's genitals do not determine their gender for the purposes of social behavior, service provision, or legal status. Do not discuss a person's transgender status with others unless it is absolutely necessary to provide them with appropriate care or services.

## Signage.

First impressions have a long-lasting impact. Having prominently displayed signs and posters of (LGB)T individuals, brochures specific to (LGB)T survivors, "Safe Space" stickers, and other overt signs of welcoming create an environment where survivors can immediately recognize that staff knows about and cares about (LGB)T survivors.

## Client Resources.

Agencies often provide referrals and resources to clients. Preparing packets specific to transgender clients lets clients know you have vetted the resources and lets the survivor know they are likely to receive respectful, competent care when pursuing the referral. If a specific resource packet is not possible, having a transgender survivor brochure validates transgender survivors by letting them know you are aware they exist and want to serve them.

## Supplies.

Offering all clients a range of post-assault supplies (e.g. toiletry items, clothing) that can be used by people of all genders indicates that your agency serves multiple genders. When all individuals have options to choose from, they don't need to ask for specific items, which may add additional undue stress after an assault. Providing clothing in all genders and a wide range of sizes also encourages transgender clients to consider leaving their clothing for forensic evidence if they can find clothes that both fit and align with their gender identity.

## Bathrooms.

Providing unisex, single stall, or gender neutral bathrooms supports all survivors who often feel a need for greater privacy. If it is not possible to make every bathroom gender neutral, find at least one option and have it clearly and prominently marked as gender neutral.

## Paperwork.

Clients notice when intake forms only have two choices for gender, or have no option to check that captures their relationship. Make sure your intake forms, client history forms, body maps and other forms that clients may fill out, as well as those clinicians/internal office staff may complete, are inclusive of all genders, a wide range of bodily configurations, and all sexual orientations.

## Connect.

Connecting with the local transgender community will both provide your agency with valuable resources and let the transgender community know about your services and that your agency is open to and welcoming of transgender individuals. Consider advertising in (LGB)T press or having a section on your website devoted to (LGB)T individuals.

## Train.

All agency staff should have regular diversity training, including on transgender issues. Training can be formal (conferences, speakers), or can take place in staff meetings. The goal is to have transgender issues and concerns brought to the attention of all staff so a transgender client will receive culturally competent care from the moment they call or enter your agency to the time they leave.

## Follow the leader.

Many transgender individuals use nontraditional names for parts of their bodies (particularly genitals and other body features that are seen as sex-linked). These may be unique words (not found in any dictionary) or names usually used by “the other gender.” Show respect for the transgender person’s right to self-determination by also using the terms they use to refer to their body, life, relationships, or identity.

## Be an advocate.

Although anti-transgender prejudice is still legal in many places, there are often basic rights that everyone is entitled to – the right to privacy, the right to access services, etc. – that you can refer to if the transgender person you’re caring for is being mistreated. Don’t let someone’s gender identity be an excuse for poor or unprofessional treatment.

## Be creative.

Transgender people may not fit into existing systems or forms. Respect the transgender person you are caring for by trying to get the form or system to adapt to their needs, rather than forcing them into a pre-determined and ill-fitting box.

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