

# Supporting LGBTQ folks in the workplace

Equip yourself with terms your LGBTQ peers may use to identify themselves.

LGBTQ Key Terms:

**Transgender** A term that describes someone whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. There are a few things worth noting when considering transgender experiences:

- Transgender can be both a standalone identity and an umbrella term that encompasses many different gender identities, including nonbinary gender identities.
- Transgender people represent a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, and not all transgender people have undergone a process of physical transition.
- “Trans” is often used as shorthand for transgender.

**Nonbinary** The term nonbinary is used to refer to people who do not fit within the traditional “man/woman” gender binary.

- Like the term transgender, nonbinary can be a standalone gender identity, or it can be an umbrella term.
- Some folks who are nonbinary may also identify as trans, and some may not.
- The initials “NB” are sometimes used to reference nonbinary identity.

**Queer** Umbrella term used to describe someone who is a sexual or gender minority (generally, not heterosexual and/or cisgender). “Queer” has historically been used as a slur against LGBTQ people, but it has been increasingly reclaimed by LGBTQ communities and is now used by and among some people who are LGBTQ. Note that many folks are still not comfortable using the word queer or being referred to as queer, so it’s best to mirror their language while using this term.

**Questioning** Refers to someone who is in the process of discovering or exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity, and who has not claimed a precise identity to use to describe these characteristics.

**Lesbian** Commonly used to describe someone who identifies as a woman whose attractions are to some other women.

**Gay** Commonly used to describe an individual who identifies as a man whose attractions are to some other men. “Gay” has previously been used as an umbrella term for all LGBTQ people, but the more inclusive term is now the “LGBTQ” or “queer” community.

**Bisexual** Used to describe an individual who is attracted to more than one gender. Individuals who identify as bisexual need not have had equal sexual experience with people of multiple genders; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual. Historically framed as being attracted to “both” genders, bisexuality has been reframed to include attraction to people who fall outside the gender binary.

**Asexual/Ace** Used to describe someone who experiences little or no sexual attraction. While most people who identify this way desire emotionally intimate relationships, they are not drawn to sex as a way to express that intimacy.

# Pronouns

One common way people express their gender identity is through pronouns. Pronouns are the words people use to refer to themselves or others, without using a proper noun.

## Some pronouns that you may recognize include:

They/them/theirs  
He/him/his  
She/her/hers  
Ze/hir/hirs  
He/She/They (interchangeable pronouns)  
Xe/xem/xyrs

## When considering pronouns, there are a few things we want to keep in mind:

People can define what pronouns work best for them; there is no objective rule of thumb for what pronouns someone can use. A person might choose not to use any pronouns at all, or just their name.

While certain pronouns are commonly used by people of a specific gender identity or experience, pronouns cannot be prescribed or assumed based on the way someone identifies or expresses their gender.

Some people use more than one set of pronouns to describe themselves and will let you know if they want you to use them interchangeably or at specific times.

Pronouns change and it is always important to mirror the language someone uses to identify themselves.

## What You Can Do

**Educate yourself** There are a lot of resources that can help you educate yourself about the LGBTQ community. Take the time to educate yourself. Here are a few places to get started:

- Trevor Resource Center - [thetrevorproject.org/resources](https://thetrevorproject.org/resources)
- Trevor Research - [thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021](https://thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021)
- Out & Equal Toolkits & Guides - [outandequal.org/toolkits-guides](https://outandequal.org/toolkits-guides)

## Support LGBTQ Colleagues

- Be a safe space - when discussing difficult topics utilize empathetic listening practices such as reflecting language, validating experiences, staying present, being non-judgemental and expressing care, concern and encouragement.
- Use colleagues' pronouns correctly and consistently. Model sharing pronouns in meetings, in email signatures, and on web platforms.

## Advocate for LGBTQ People

- Advocate for policies within your company that are highlighted in the "Considerations for Employers" section
- Trevor Advocacy: text "Trevor" to 40649 to get involved

**Volunteer for The Trevor Project** Our volunteers go through extensive training to provide 24/7 support to LGBTQ young people in crisis.

# Considerations for Employers

The Gender Binary (Man/Woman) does not include all gender identities. Not only does this system fail folks who don't see themselves as a man or a woman, it also fails folks who don't fit into certain narrow expectations about what it means to be a man or a woman. This binary system often shows up at work in the following areas:

- Bathrooms
- New-hire paperwork
- Personnel files
- Events
- Dress codes

## What can we do to make our spaces safer and more inclusive to trans and nonbinary folks?

**Bathrooms:** Ensure that you have a written policy that allows every employee and guest to use the bathroom that aligns with their specific gender identity. It is also very important to offer folks access to an "All-Gender Bathroom" that is designed to be used by one person at a time and has a private, locking door.

**New-Hire Paperwork/Personnel Files:** Be sure to allow space for any employee to tell you how they identify and what name and pronouns they use. These should be the only publicly listed names and pronouns used. Some employers will need access to legal names or a person's sex assigned at birth for background checks or legal forms. This should be requested with the utmost empathy and respect, acknowledging that it can be traumatizing and scary for some folks to share this information. When requests like this are made, it's important to explain exactly how you will use this information and ensure that it will not be shared outside the people operations or human resources teams.

**Email Address:** Many employers use employee first and last names as the standard format for company emails. Asking the employee what name they wish to use for their email will help facilitate easier communication and ensure the employee is referred to by the name they choose to use. This is beneficial to not only transgender employees but is also helpful for employees that go by middle names, nicknames, or other variations of their legal name.

**Events:** Events should be open to folks across all gender identities and not target folks based on their gender assigned at birth. If there is a specific reason to create an event that focuses on the topic of gender (i.e. Women's History Month), make sure that this event includes trans and nonbinary folks as well.

**Dress Code:** Should you find that a dress code is appropriate for your work environment, do not divide that code based on gender identity. Instead, create one code that applies to all people regardless of their gender identity. There is never a justification to create two separate standards for dress codes.

**Gender Transition on the Job:** When an employee is transitioning it is important to let them lead the process. However, it is helpful to have processes in place to facilitate their transition. Having a single form to submit requesting change of employee records, email addresses, and other name or gender related documentation can help ease the process for the employee. Consideration of what stakeholders need to be informed\* of name and pronoun changes and having a simple but normalized form letter or email can also be proactive ways of ensuring that transgender employees are able to seamlessly continue their work during transition.



# The LGBTQ Experience in the Workplace

**Coming out:** Coming out can refer to someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, or both. Unfortunately, most folks are assumed to be straight and cisgender until explicitly stated otherwise. You should never assume anything about another person's lived experiences or identity. Assumptions can lead to the erasure of how a person identifies, making it harder to navigate daily tasks comfortably. It's important to know that coming out is a process. A person comes out every time they enter into a new space. Just because someone is open about their gender identity or sexual orientation with you does not mean they will be comfortable sharing it with others. If a person comes out to you or shares information about their identity, you should not share that information with anyone else unless you are given explicit instructions to do so by that person.

**Consistent and Inclusive Policies:** Be sure to create policies that reflect the unique needs of LGBTQ folks. Create parental leave policies that don't differ for foster parents, adoptive parents, or biological parents. Ensure that health benefits are inclusive of the medical needs that LGBTQ folks may have. Ensure that all staff receive education/attend training that focuses on how to support LGBTQ folks in the workplace.

**Employee Benefits:** Ensure that medical insurance and other employee benefit providers are LGBTQ competent and follow best practices in working with LGBTQ clients. Any company provided medical insurance should seek to include transition related care (including but not limited to transgender competent mental health care, hormone replacement therapy, and gender affirming surgeries). Further, insurance providers should have policies in place that allow for sex specific procedures to be accessed by those that need them, no matter what their gender marker may be.

**Employee Resource Groups:** Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can help foster a safe, supportive space for employees who share a common identity. Forming an LGBTQ ERG can help create a sense of belonging and bring new ways to look at issues and ultimately drive innovation.