

Transfemme.com.au

INFORMATION FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY OF MEN
WHO DATE TRANS WOMEN OR TRANS FEMININE PEOPLE



Talking respectfully with trans women & their partners

This tip sheet is for the friends and family of men who date trans women or trans feminine people to help them create a welcoming environment and challenge transphobia.*

Summary

- Respectful communication can be a great way to ensure trans women and their partners feel welcome.
- Different trans women prefer different terms to talk about themselves. Using the words she prefers shows respect.
- Some people ask trans women and their partners personal questions that are too invasive. It's good to respect people's privacy.
- Some people feel entitled to make hurtful comments based on derogatory stereotypes or myths. This is harmful and abusive.
- Supportive allies actively challenge transphobia and check in with trans people and their partners to see if they feel safe and welcome.

* "Men" in this resource refers to cisgender men. "Trans women" refers to trans women, trans feminine people, women who have a trans and gender diverse history or experience, but do not identify as transgender - and other trans feminine culturally-specific identities such as Sistergirls, Fa'afafine and Kinner.

Respectful communication can be a great way to ensure trans women and their partners feel welcome and at ease within your family, friendship group or community. Learning about how to be respectful can be a great way to avoid offending people or accidentally saying something hurtful.

Being introduced to your friend's or family member's new partner can be really exciting. However, some people might be nervous when being introduced to transgender women, especially if you don't know a lot about transgender culture or about trans women's experiences in the world. You might even be worried about how other people in your community might treat them.

Trans women commonly want to be treated like everybody else. To be seen as a whole person rather than solely through their trans experience. Conversations about a trans woman's gender should be led by her. Consider how you might start a conversation with any other person. How have you made other people feel welcome and included in your life?



Here is some information to help you show your respect.

Basic terms

Pronouns: the nouns we use instead of someone's name. They often have gendered connotations. Examples of pronouns include: She/her/hers, He/him/his or They/them/theirs.

Pronoun cueing: the deliberate use of words or actions to send a 'cue' to others about someone's gender and pronouns.

Misgendering: the deliberate or accidental use of a pronoun, title, or other gendered language that does not match a person's gender identity.

Misnaming/deadnaming: the deliberate or accidental use of an old name or legal name instead of a person's chosen name.

Outing: Sharing information about someone's sexuality or trans identity without permission. This can be accidental, or in a deliberate effort to cause harm.

Misgendering and deadnaming

Trans and gender diverse people often change their pronouns and/or names to better reflect their gender identity and experiences.

Using the correct names and pronouns is an important way of showing your support.

Try saying: "My pronouns are _____. What pronouns do you use?"



If you do make a mistake, offer a quick simple apology. Be careful not to over-apologise due to feeling embarrassed or ashamed, as this can sometimes make the situation worse.

Something like: *“I’m sorry for using the wrong pronoun/ name. I did not mean to disrespect you.”*

Whilst many people might accidentally make a mistake, some people will deliberately misgender or deadname a trans or gender diverse person as a tool to control or hurt them. Others may simply not make the effort. All of these behaviours are harmful, can cause significant distress and lead to people feeling unsafe and unwelcome.

Tip: It can be polite to ask trans and gender diverse people how they would like you to respond if other people are misgendering or deadnaming them. It’s a great opportunity to check in about their privacy, confidentiality and how they like to handle inappropriate behaviours. Many trans people may appreciate you gently supporting other people to use respectful language and some may even want you to actively challenge people who are being transphobic.

For example, you may ask the trans person:

“I’ve noticed people have been using the wrong pronouns for you. I wanted to check-in about how you would like me to respond. I feel confident reminding people of your pronouns if that feels right for you. I can also raise it with them privately if that’s appropriate.”

When raising the issue with a friend or family member, you can say:

“I really support <name> and want them to feel welcome. I’ve noticed you misgendering them and wondered what I can do to help support you to get their pronouns right?”

Trans feminine identities

We all use different language to describe our identities and experiences in the world. Some of the trans feminine people you meet might identify with a variety of terms including trans women, trans feminine, woman, woman of trans experience, non-binary, whilst others might use other trans feminine culturally-specific identities such as Sistergirls, Fa’afafine and Kinner. Take the time to look up any unfamiliar terms online.

Some trans women might simply identify as a woman, rather than with their transgender history or experience.

“I’ve always wanted to be seen as a woman first who has a trans experience, as a part of my history, as a part of who I am.” Hannah

For other people their transgender experience might be really important to them.

“I like using the word trans women or trans feminine because being transgender is a really important part of my life. I’m super proud to be trans.” Electra

Tip: When getting to know someone better, it’s OK to respectfully ask how they identify to help ensure you use the correct terms when talking to or about someone. Be sure to consider the time, place, context - and their privacy before asking.

For example, you might say:

“I’d like to be respectful. Is it OK if I ask you about the terms you use to describe your gender?”

or

“Thank you for being open with me. Would you feel comfortable sharing what terms and pronouns you would like me to use?”

Don’t assume the terms someone uses to describe their identity. Simply reflect back the language and terms they use to self-describe their identity.

Deliberate disrespect or abuse

Some people feel entitled to behave poorly when they meet transgender women or their partners. They might also make hurtful statements based on harmful myths and stereotypes or use offensive or degrading terminology.

“A few years ago my partner encouraged me to meet some of his very close friends for the first time. Whilst we were all going out for coffee it became really obvious that some of them were whispering amongst themselves speaking about me in a derogatory manner. It made me and my partner feel really uncomfortable. Luckily another one of my partner’s friends intervened. They redirected the conversation to make us feel more comfortable and accepted. Afterwards they talked to everyone about their behaviour, I just really appreciated their support.”
Candy

Consider what can be done to ensure trans women’s safety in your friendship group, family or broader community. Below are some examples of how to identify and respond to inappropriate behaviours and common forms of transphobia.

Asking invasive questions

When having conversations with trans women or their partners it’s good to reflect upon why you are asking a particular question. Are you asking because you want to be respectful, or is it solely out of curiosity? Questions that come from curiosity can sometimes feel objectifying or invasive.

“They asked me questions that I’d only really want to discuss with a therapist. Questions like: How old were you the first time you knew? How long have you had these feelings for? Who was the first person you told? Why did you take so long to tell this person? I found that it was just too deep to go over with a glass of wine. It wasn’t the right environment to talk about that stuff, it felt out of place and intrusive.” Jeffery

In particular, many people are often curious about trans and gender diverse people’s medical or surgical status. This question is highly personal and can feel very invasive, especially in regards to people’s genitalia. Unfortunately, sometimes these questions may take on the form of sexual harassment, or are used to vilify or shame trans and gender diverse people and their partners. If a trans woman wishes to share information about her body or gender affirming surgeries, she will do this in her own time and when she feels safe and comfortable to do so.

“I know that a lot of the time people are just being curious. I am asked about my surgery a lot. I had a really hard time recovering from my surgery and it has sometimes impacted my access to intimacy and relationships. When people ask about it, I can be thrown right back there. It may seem like a simple question but it can have a big impact on me.” Crystal

Tip: Above all, encourage others to remember that trans women deserve the same privacy and dignity afforded to all women.

For example, you might say:

“Asking about a person’s private body parts is inappropriate. This conversation is making me feel really uncomfortable. I don’t need to know that information and neither do you.”

Different ways to respond to inappropriate behaviour

Trans women and their partners deserve our support, especially when they experience abuse or harassment.

It can be challenging to know how to respond. Below are some examples of different ways you may respond depending on the incident, your level of confidence and how safe the situation is.

If you observe inappropriate behaviour, you could:

- Avoid agreeing or laughing
- Use clear body language to demonstrate disapproval e.g. shaking your head
- Redirect, interrupt or shut down an inappropriate conversation
- Change where you are standing or sitting to block someone behaving inappropriately.

You can also directly address the behaviour in the moment. This could include:

- Voicing your support for trans women and their partners, and respectfully naming the positive behaviour you're trying to encourage.
- Interrupting to say *"Hey can we please keep our conversations respectful? That's not an appropriate comment/question."*

It's important to remain calm and to avoid escalating a situation to the point where it puts people at risk.

Afterwards, follow-up with the couple to see how they are, and let them know you support them.

For example: "Hey, I saw what happened. Their behaviour was really inappropriate. Are you ok? I want you to know that I support you and your relationship."

Offering to intervene further can be powerful. This could include offering to have a discussion with other family or friends, or speaking directly to the person causing harm. Always ask for permission first before taking action.

For example: "How would you feel if I had a chat to <name> about their inappropriate behaviour? Is there anything you would like me to say or not say? Your safety and wellbeing is really important to me."

Learning more helps you be an informed ally.

Check out our other tip sheets for family and friends on the [Transfemme website](#).

If you need further advice on how to respond to transphobia or homophobia or need some emotional support and you're in Australia, you can contact:

Qlife

National anonymous and confidential LGBTIQ+ peer support service

Website: qlife.org.au

Phone: 1800 184 527

Opening hours: 3PM to midnight, every day
Telephone and web chat support service

Where to get more information and support

Say It Out Loud

ACON's sexual, domestic and family violence website Say It Out Loud provides information and guidance relating to sexual, family and intimate partner violence in the Australian LGBTIQ+ community. For information on services in your area, click "Find Help Near You".

Website: sayitoutloud.org.au

Transhub

TransHub is ACON's digital information and resource platform for all trans people, and their loved ones, allies and health providers.

Website: transhub.org.au

If you're outside Australia, you can try searching for "LGBTIQA+ help line in my area". Many LGBTIQA+ services provide support to friends and family members.