

Action Tips for Allies of Trans People

As a CSUN student, you are stepping on one of the most diverse campuses in all the CSUs. In addition to that, you will most likely meet people of different backgrounds. This booklet will show the several action tips you and your peers can use in order to become a better trans ally. This will not include all the right things to do or say, because every person and situation is inherently different. This list will be a stepping stone for a starting place as you learn more about the transgender community, including but not limited to; gender identity, expression, activism, and how to be a trans ally.

Don't assume you can tell someone is transgender.

Transgender people do not all look the same, or go through the same situations and for some may even fit your mold about what trans "looks" like. Just because a person looks like they belong as a certain gender mold, it doesn't mean they can be transgender. Even when you hear one transgender person's story, it is not inherently the same as the next person. Race, class, and socioeconomic status also come into play.

Don't make assumptions about a trans person's sexual orientation.

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about who you're attracted too. Gender identity about your own personal sense of gender. Transgender people can be gay, lesbian, straight, and so forth. Think of it this way, sexual orientation is regards in who you want to go to bed with, gender is in regard to who you want to go to bed as.

Ask about Identifying Pronouns

If you are unsure about what pronoun a person would prefer, be polite and respectful. On that note, use that pronoun and encourage others. Be patient with a person who is also questioning their identity, they might shift back and forth to find out which gender identity is best for them. They might for example choose this name and pronoun, and a couple weeks later change their name and pronoun.

Be careful about confidentiality, disclosure, and outing.

Never out a person without their express permission. If you see someone that you know is trans, this is a private matter and not appropriate to tell other people. Do not casually share this information or about a person you know or think is trans. This can lead to negative consequences, trans people can lose jobs, housing, family, or friends to do unwanted outing. This can be very dangerous. Some people feel comfortable about disclosing their trans status to others, and some do not.

Don't police public restrooms.

Recognize that not everyone will match the signs, or words on the door. Do not police restrooms, it is not your place to direct people where to go. Advocate and encourage for gender neutral or unisex restrooms on campuses, businesses, and more public places for bathroom options. And offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom.

Know what's offensive.

Consider the best strategies to confront anti-trans jokes or remarks in the class, lab office and so forth. Make sure you are in a safe space to tell the person why and how it is offensive. Asking invasive questions about operation status or hormones, are misunderstandings and offensive. Not all trans people want surgery or hormones, and even fewer get them.

Don't try to fit a person into an identity.

Do not apply labels to a person that does not specifically address they have chosen from themselves. If a person is not sure of their identity or label, please do not choose it for them. They might not even decide to identify.

Don't assume all trans people have the same experience.

Know that not all trans people have the same experience or want the same things. Not all trans people want surgery or hormones and even few can afford surgery and hormones. Different people have different experience and backgrounds in regards to class, gender, race, ability, economic status and etc. that makes every trans voice different.

Support ALL trans folks.

Recently we all know about big trans names such as Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner. But do more than that, and support more than just the trans people who have passing privilege and look like the typical man or woman. Support non-binary and genderqueer individuals regardless if you can't tell if they are a man or woman.

Don't ask a trans person what their "real name" or gender history is

That is very invasive and can be very anxiety ridden to most people who get asked this question. Use the name they give you, that is all you need to know. Respect the name this person is currently using.

Don't ask about a trans person's genitals or surgical status.

Would this question be appropriate to ask to a non-trans person? So it isn't appropriate to ask a trans person about their genitalia. Don't ask if a trans person has had "the surgery". This is rude, and if a person wanted to tell you, they would. As I said before, not all trans people want surgery, or even obtain it.

Don't ask a trans person how they have sex.

Similar to the one previously about genitalia and surgical status. It would be inappropriate to ask a non-trans person how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to trans people.

Know your limits as an ally.

If you don't know something, ask. If you want to learn more, be sure to educate yourself. It is better to admit to not know something than provide false information.

Listen to trans voices.

The best way to understand is to listen and have an open mind to trans people themselves. That means learning about their experiences. Talk to trans people in your community, consult with the local LGBT resource centers and other resources to learn more about trans lives and activism in your community.