

BEING A TRANS PERSON'S ALLY

Introduction

This sheet is intended to offer pointers for folk who have learned that a loved one is trans, and who may be coming to terms with their own reactions and want to know how they may best support and advocate for them. We take a broad definition of 'trans,' which may include occasional crossdressers through to individuals who feel "trapped in the wrong body," and who may feel they wish to, or are already, taking steps to transition toward their desired gender.

What does it mean to be an ally?

As an ally, you may play a vital role in helping your friend, partner or family member come to terms with who they are, feel accepted, and be able to express and resolve what is likely a deep-felt, existential and potentially very distressing matter for them. To be an ally may require courage and a readiness to embrace change, but can be equally rewarding and deeply strengthen a relationship you have with a loved one. It is about serving and supporting, but also about receiving, learning and growing.

Coming to terms with your own reactions

Shock, awe, repulsion or fear are more likely to be the initial reaction of many when learning that a friend, partner, family member or other loved one is trans, rather than instant acceptance and a sense of normal relations being resumed (although, happily, this happens too!).

Most of us have implicit bias, an unconscious tendency to judge people who appear different to ourselves, based on what is usually a false perception of what their difference may mean for us. For a partner, this may often take the form of fearing a sexual relationship taking a course that you do not wish. For a parent, fear of being associated with someone whose child's genes marks them out as being different from their own social group, or believing they have "failed" in some aspect of their parenting, are among common, if usually false, assumptions. A realisation that you don't truly know someone who may be very close to you may follow. Suspicion, or not feeling able to trust that they may be harbouring other secrets, and feeling hurt that they didn't share their secret before, may also feature among responses. Given such reactions, one important initial step is NOT TO RUSH TO JUDGEMENT! Non disclosure usually has nothing to do with a deliberate desire to deceive, while

many who are trans aren't set upon a course of changing sex or want things to change in the bedroom. Similarly, what makes someone trans may not mainly be down to genes and nurture. When you realise both the possibility of and likelihood of such realities, you should be able to release any such worries. Buy time to overcome any shock and think through whether any initial fears you had are fully justified. It might help to consider that non-binary identities and lifestyles are much more common than many believe and aren't invariably about sex. The range of expressions and motivations defined as trans is also very broad, and there's no one way or one reason a loved one may express themselves or relate to being trans.

Gender and sexual orientation are distinct. Sexuality embraces even broader ground, and few of us are truly totally binary. You may want to challenge yourself to question whether your own sexuality can be so neatly boxed (check out this [guide](#) for help with this).

With your initial reactions checked, you may next want to consider—can you, or do you want to be an ally to your trans loved one, and what might this involve? You may be the only person, or one of a very few, acting for your loved one in this way if you do. You may wish to consider what you might learn or discover on this new journey, having possible opportunities to grow yourself. Understand that any assumptions about or what you may know about the trans world may not be accurate or adequate. For example, labelling a trans person as having a medical disorder or problem may both be incorrect and offensive. Understand that the cause or why? of it all may never be known. Your loved one likely doesn't know the why? either; they just know that their need is lifelong, deep-rooted, real and existential.



HOW MIGHT YOU BE ABLE TO HELP?

What does being an ally involve? How might you be able to help your loved one? How much of this may feel new or uncomfortable for you? There is, of course, no one answer for these questions. Where an individual is on their gender journey, their desire to pour out their story, and the challenges they may be facing vary from person to person. The first step for knowing where they may want help is then simply to listen, offering assurance of your support as best you feel able.

None-the-less, the following may be common among what you may feel able to offer, depending on your own level of comfort and readiness to play these roles:

01 ACKNOWLEDGE

For many trans people, simply to be acknowledged for who they are is most important. Using a preferred name or pronoun, being ready to see a photo of their other self, or simply allowing them a little freedom to be themselves can make a world of difference.

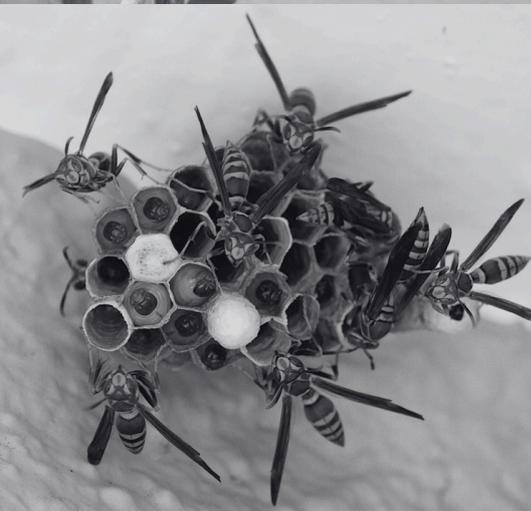
02 INQUIRE

Find out more about the trans world, educate yourself about the wide diversity of lifestyles and experiences it embraces. Several accessible sources offering ways in are listed below. These include the [Crossdream Life forum](#) for loved ones of trans people, where you can ask any question and learn from others who care for a trans friend, partner or family member. In seeking to understand the why? of being trans, be wary of those who characterise being trans as a medical condition or disorder—this is not usually the case.

03 EXPLORE

Allow your loved one the chance to explore their trans nature with you, if you are comfortable with this, and to the extent you feel ready to. This may be as simple as acknowledging their alternative name or pronoun, or being ready to see and compliment a photo. You may discover that there is much to learn, celebrate and enjoy. Without ignoring your boundaries, on occasion, you may feel ready to bear some discomfort for yourself to give much joy to your partner. Realise that the experience can be beautiful and beneficial for both of you, and may even grow your relationship as well as helping you grow individually. It's not something that has to be a "problem."





04 REACH OUT

Know whether you want external help, or whether your loved one does. In considering your own reactions, you may feel that you want to talk these out with someone. Unless your loved one has said that they're happy for you to share what they've revealed to you, this means searching out someone who is truly independent, and who doesn't personally know your loved one. I offer myself as an independent in this regard. Always respect confidentiality.

05 KNOW YOUR BOUNDARIES

Quite apart from what your loved one may hope for from you, it's important that they understand that your needs and comfort zones need to be respected. If you feel uncomfortable about meeting their other self face to face, say so. If you fear your sexual relations changing, be open about this. If you feel there are limits to how much and how often you currently feel ready to be exposed to this new person, say so. False expectations, such as your ability or otherwise to act as a counsellor, need to be challenged. You don't need to have answers or be a counsellor. While your loved one may want to bring you fully into their world, and may initially want to pour out everything with you, they need to recognise and respect where you are and what you're ready to embrace. Of course, you may be ready to fully embrace their trans self, but don't feel pressured to do this if you're not ready to. Neither should you feel pressured to act in ways that others you interact with expect or seek to influence you.

06 DEFEND

Where a trans loved one is subject to hate speech and abuse in public, and where you feel able to, you judge it to be safe and it is timely to do so, be ready call this out. This doesn't mean needing to explain why or make excuses; simply, to challenge hatred. Or if your loved one is taking steps to give expression to themselves in public, see whether you are ready to, and how you may help them gain courage to do this (e.g. acting as an escort as they venture out).

07 ADVOCATE

If needed, and if this is a role you can play, be ready to speak up for trans people's rights. Understand how they may be discriminated against and that often there are few others than trans people themselves speaking out for them. Advocating needn't mean taking sides, but working toward respect and tolerance in society, especially to challenge viewpoints that demonise trans and non-binary people simply for being different.

IN SUMMARY

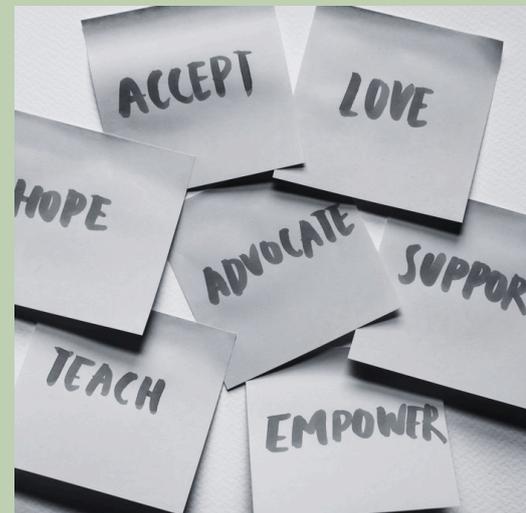
To summarise—what can you do? Listen, give space, be sensitive, be careful not to unwittingly out someone who is not ready for this, accept your loved one with compassion. At the same time, don't take on what's an unreasonable demand for you or anything you're not ready for. Your loved one should understand this is a two-way coming out experience, and respect your response and space.

Points to consider

Know your limits when offering your views. Know when to point to specialist help. Be very wary about playing the role of counsellor or therapist if you're not trained in this field: you may end up inadvertently not helping.

Know that more may be going on for your loved one than they may be saying, or aware of. How they are feeling about being trans may be being complicated by other factors. For example, autism or an unknown or undiagnosed health condition may also be at play, or a younger person may be coming to terms with their changing body and facing up to the challenges of adolescence. Be mindful of the possibility that such other layers are sometimes present, and be wary of rushing to offer advice. Networking with others or seeking advice for yourself may help here, e.g. to know how not to inadvertently lead a young son or a daughter to reject what you want to offer as help, but which they see as interference.

Being an ally needn't mean compromising your beliefs or values. You may still be able to be a highly valued and important supporter even if you don't approve of your loved one's lifestyle.



Resources for finding out about what it means to be trans



Help and information:

Crossdream Life. Includes discussion forum and help for families, partners and significant others of trans people, and a dedicated area for transmen.

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/crossdreamlife/>

Resources on Crossdreaming, Transgender and Transsexual Issues. <https://www.crossdreamers.com/>

My YouTube channel, A Gender Fluid Life:

<https://www.youtube.com/@transformationsontuesday>.

Offers reflections, explainers, inquiries into “all things trans,” including dedicated playlists aimed at offering help for parents and loved ones of trans people, reflections on being trans and having faith, and help for coming out.

My guide to coming out as trans or a crossdresser:

<https://www.clivejohnsonministry.com/tmg/tmcomingout.html> (see also the supporting video,

<https://youtu.be/qJt3maFQNI>).

My guide to understanding your gender and sexuality:

<https://www.clivejohnsonministry.com/tmg/tmdownloads.html> (see also the supporting video,

https://youtu.be/_1SpFYUxvDc).

Directory of help sources for trans folks in Wayfarer Magazine

<https://www.wayfarermagazine.com/p/trans-and-queer-emergency-resource> (mainly USA-focussed).

Books

‘The Heart of Allyship: A Guide to Trans and Nonbinary Support’ by Elle Deran.

‘The Transgender Issue’ by Shon Faye.

‘Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity’ by Julia Serano. (includes discussion of the theory of subconscious sex).

‘Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say’ by Preston M. Sprinkle.

Forums, social media and web-based help

Crossdream Life, Forum for Families or Significant Others

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/crossdreamlife/forum-for-families-or-significant-others-f74/>

[Transgender, Nonbinary and Queer Glossary](#).

Directory of trans terms.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE HELP SOURCES BY COUNTRY (SELECTED)

These resources provide education, support, helplines, community connections, and advocacy opportunities for allies.

Australia

TransHub: Comprehensive resource for learning how to be an ally to trans people at home, school, work, and in public life, including language guides and practical tips.

Transgender Victoria (TGV): Provides workshops, events, and training for allies, workplaces, and communities to foster inclusion and support for trans people.

Canada

Pflag Canada: National charitable organisation supporting families and allies of LGBTQ individuals, including trans people.

Egale: Focuses on education, awareness, and advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights, with resources for allies.

Gender Creative Kids: Provides resources for families and allies of trans, non-binary, and gender-fluid youth.

TransSask Support Services: Province-wide resource network for trans people and their allies in Saskatchewan.

Rainbow Health Ontario: Offers education and resources to improve access to services for LGBTQ+ communities, including allies.

New Zealand

OutLine Aotearoa: Free, nationwide support line and online chat for anyone, including allies, seeking support or information about rainbow communities.

RainbowYOUTH: Offers peer support and resources for queer and gender-diverse youth and their families, including guidance for allies.

Gender Minorities Aotearoa: Nationwide organisation providing peer support and information for trans people and their allies.

Parents and Guardians of Gender Diverse Children in NZ: Parent-led group offering support and advice for families and allies of trans children.

United Kingdom

Stonewall: National charity campaigning for LGBT equality, offering resources for allies and educational materials.

Switchboard: LGBT+ helpline providing support for anyone, including allies, with questions about sexuality and gender identity.

Mermaids: Supports trans and gender-diverse young people and their families, with resources for parents and allies.

Gendered Intelligence: Focuses on improving the lives of trans and non-binary people, especially youth, and provides allyship resources.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE HELP SOURCES BY COUNTRY (SELECTED)

These resources provide education, support, helplines, community connections, and advocacy opportunities for allies.

United Kingdom (continued)

MindLine Trans+: Emotional and mental health support helpline for trans people and their friends, families, and allies.

TransActual: Trans-led organisation focusing on healthcare and legal protections, with resources for allies.

TranzWiki & Trans Unite: Directories of local and online support groups, including those for allies.

International Resources

World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH): Promotes evidence-based care, education, and advocacy for trans health globally, with resources for allies and professionals.

CONTACT ME

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United States

The Trevor Project: Offers a comprehensive guide to being an ally to transgender and nonbinary young people, including terminology and best practices.

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE): Provides guides and advocacy tools for allies, including "Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally."

PFLAG: National organisation supporting LGBTQ+ people and their families, with specific resources for allies of trans individuals.

MY BACKGROUND

I am not an expert in the field of being an ally, as a counsellor or other specialist. This sheet draws on the experience and reflections of some who are, but is not intended to be comprehensive or perfect. Use your own discretion when considering what are meant as suggestions for reflection rather than recommendations to follow. Every trans person's situation and needs are different: there is no one way or right way to help all.