Coming Out Safely

And Socially Transitioning for Trans People

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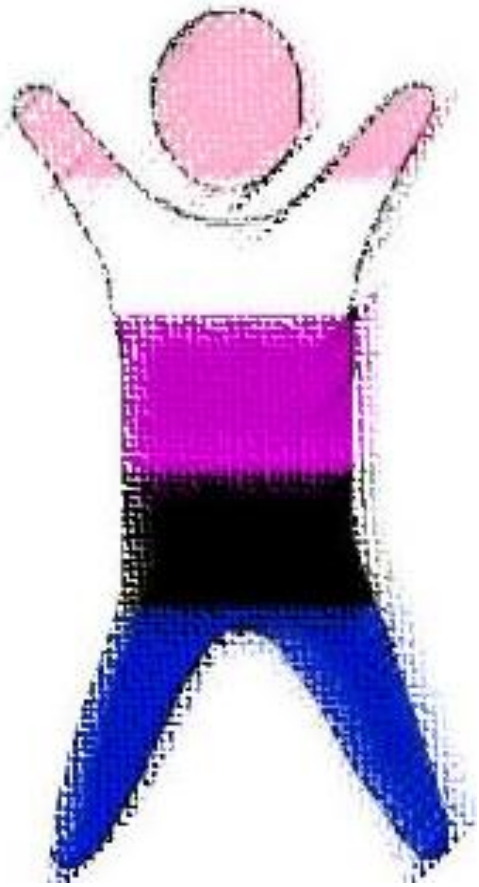


How Do I Use this Booklet?

Who was this booklet made for?

This booklet was made for anyone who is questioning their gender and anyone who might identity as transgender. The information in this booklet is an introduction to trans identities, how to plan for coming out, how to come out to those close to you, how to navigate things after coming out, information about passing, and information about LGBTQ+ resources that exist in Indiana. There is also a booklet called "Legally Transitioning for Trans People" and a booklet called "Trans Inclusive Health Insurance and Health Care" amongst others available at http://indianatransgendernetwork.com/category/resources/ or www.pridelafayette.org/translafayette.

How was this booklet made?

This booklet was constructed by the author after 10 years of being part of the trans community and working with those who identify as part of trans, gender non-conforming, and/or intersex/DSD communities. Input from people of color, undocumented individuals, and immigrants who are trans and gender non-conforming (GNC) was used to make this document and there is information included specifically for individuals whose identities intersect here. The contents of this booklet cannot possibly describe the experiences of ALL trans people – instead this is only an effort to alleviate some of the stress of navigating a society, services, and legal system that are often very trans unaware and exclusionary.

What should this booklet be used for & what should it not be used for?

This booklet is an educational tool only. It does not reflect the views of all trans or intersex people, or people with differences in sexual development. This booklet also does not necessarily reflect the views of any organization that distributes this material. It should not be used as a legal document, legal aid, or replace medical/health information or legal advice given by a professional. This document was not made by any organization but may be offered through organizations as a supportive and educational material.

The Basics!

Sex: all the physical aspects of a person's body that contribute to their gender identity, including (but not limited to): chromosomes, hormones, genitals, reproductive organs, secondary sex characteristics, etc.
Gender Identity: how a person understands their gender in the context of socially defined gender norms
Gender Expression: the social cues a person displays to present their gender identity
Sexual Identity: how a person experiences physical and sexual attraction towards others
Affectional Identity: how a person experiences emotional and romantic attraction towards others

These definitions are given not as "rules" but as guidelines to help people process how they identify. Some people see their gender and sexuality are one identity or their gender and gender expression as a singular identity, etc. If these definitions or framework don't fit you that's okay – you can make your own! This booklet will explore many identities, but will focus mostly on gender identity and gender expression.

Identities

What does it mean to be a trans person?

Being trans means you deserve respect, love, and kindness because you are a person. Identifying as a trans person or having a trans history is different for everyone. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to be trans. There is no "better" way to be trans, and gender diversity should always be celebrated.

What are FtM and MtF? What other gender identities exist?

FtM refers to female to male trans people; these individuals were assigned a female gender category at birth and now identify as male. MtF refers to male to female trans people; these individuals were assigned a male gender category at birth and now identify as female. Although these are two more well-known trans identities, there are probably as many genders as there are people. No person's gender is *exactly* like anyone else's. Gender identity labels might include: Trans, Transgender, Transmasculine, Trans man, Trans guy/boi/boy, Trans woman, Trans girl/grrl, Transfeminine, Feminine of Center, Masculine of Center, Transsexual, Genderqueer, Genderfluid, Gender Performing, Cross Dresser, Pangender, Multigender, Omnigender, Polygender, Bigender, Ambigender, Two Spirit, Agender, Genderless, Neutrois, Nongenderm, Genderquestioning, Genderfucked, Gender Creative, Third Gender, Metrosexual, Monogender, Intersex, Non-binary, Binary, Boi, Grrl, Boigrrl, Drag King, Drag Prince, Drag Queen, Drag Princess, Drag Monarch, FtM, MtF, FtX/MtX (female or male to a non-binary gender/undescribed gender), FtI/MtI (female or male to intersex), Ft3/Mt3 (female or male to third gender), XtF/XtM (non-binary/undescribed gender to female or male), XtX (one gender to another), Xt3 (non-binary gender/undescribed gender to third gender), FtMtF, MtFtM, and many, many more.

This very brief list is not at all comprehensive and is only intended to show the beginning of the extraordinary amount of gender diversity that exists. Some terms in this introductory list are considered gender expressions or descriptive of someone's physical sex to some people, while the same term may describe someone's gender identity to someone else. Many of the terms listed here are terms used in American and European trans communities, but do not include the enormous gender diversity and language around gender diversity in non-Eurocentric populations. Notice that Two Spirit is an Indigenous identity and many people who are Two Spirit, do not consider this to be a trans identity. Even within the U.S., there are some terms embraced by certain communities that are not used in others.

Why bother with labels at all?

Labels aren't for everyone – some people feel that labels box them into a category. However, for some people, labels help them find community. Identifying as a trans man for someone might be important to that person because it may describe a community that they are a part of. Many trans people go years of their lives being ostracized from spaces and communities and it can be very powerful to finally feel like part of a group that is affirming. If you find a label or many labels that fit you – fantastic! If you don't like labels for yourself – that's great, too! Either way, be respectful of how people feel about labels and only use words to describe someone that the person feels affirmed by.

Why don't you use "trans*" – with an asterisk?

These documents have recently been updated to remove the asterisk from "trans". Language is a constantly growing aspect in LGBTQ+ communities so we hope to use language that is the most supportive and inclusive to very diverse and constantly changing national and international trans communities. The contributors recognize that while "trans*" was intended to be an inclusive term, it has become a term used to divide the trans community by class and sometimes by masculine/feminine identities. Therefore, we have removed it from these documents. For more information, read this article by the Trans Student Educational Resources: http://www.transstudent.org/asterisk.

What is the difference between sexual identities and affectional identities?

Sexual identities describe the physical attraction one person may have towards others. Affectional identities describes the romantic and emotional attraction one person may have towards others. These types of attraction are separated in part to recognize that attraction and relationships are complicated and multi-dimensional. Some people experience only physical attraction. Some people experience only emotional attraction. Some people experience both or neither, or they experience attraction in a different way entirely. Using this framework is just a tool for better understanding attraction, but is definitely not the only way to discuss the way people feel attraction.

Can I still have a sexual orientation and/or an affectional orientation if I am trans?

Yes, gender identity and the attraction a person has for others are separate (but interacting) identities. For example: A person may have been assigned male at birth, identify as female, and be attracted to others who identify as female – it is possible that this person may identify as a trans woman and a lesbian or as same-gender loving (SGL). Another example: A person may have been assigned female at birth, identify as genderqueer, and be attracted towards masculine people – it is possible that this person may identify as a trans person and be attracted towards queer masculinity. These are not the only labels these individuals might identify with, but they can give you an idea of how people navigate sexuality and gender identities simultaneously.

Transitioning

What is transitioning?

Transitioning is the active process of better understanding your own gender, letting your friends, family, partners, allies, coworkers, and others know about your gender identity, changing your gender expression to better reflect your gender identity, getting your gender legally recognized and protected, and/or going through gender-related body modification. In this booklet, transitioning is broken down into social, legal, and physical components. Transitioning means different things to different people, and there is no "correct" way to transition. Ultimately, transitioning is about feeling comfortable with yourself, figuring out how you feel safest, and having pride in your identities. Most of the time when people discuss "transitioning", they are specifically referring to physically transitioning. This booklet uses the word more broadly to discuss any form of transitioning.

What might be involved in socially transitioning?

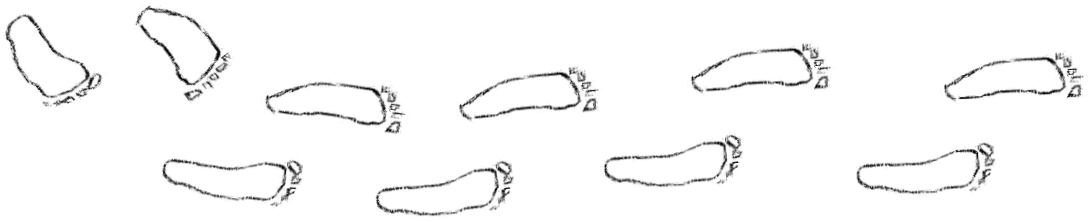
Socially transitioning might involve coming out to those close to you and asking friends, family, coworkers, and partners to refer to you using your correct name and/or pronouns. It also means processing how you feel about yourself and how your interactions with others change as you transition. Socially transitioning involves planning – emotionally and financially – for bad reactions by those close to you and enjoying positive reactions. Lastly, socially transitioning can also include non-permanent modifications to your body that change your gender expression, such as wearing or not wearing make-up, painting or not painting your nails, changing the length of hair you have, changing what parts of your body you shave, if any, etc.

What might be involved in legally transitioning?

Legally transitioning might involve getting your gender marker or name (on driver's license, birth certificate, passport, with the social security administration, and other documents) changed to your correct gender marker and name. Legally transitioning also involves planning for coming out at work and school and finding a way to be protected from discrimination in those professional settings or finding employment at a place that has protections.

What processes might be involved in physically transitioning?

Physically transitioning might involve any of a number of semi-permanent or permanent body modifications. Some examples could include: chest binding, changing your voice pitch, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), facial feminization surgery, getting a tracheal shave, body sculpting, electrolysis and/or laser hair removal, breast augmentation or removal, or any of a variety of genital altering surgeries. Some people also consider getting certain tattoos and piercings as part of their transition. Some people choose not to modify their body while others do modify their body.



Do I have to transition to be a trans person or be accepted into trans communities?

Absolutely not. The point of transitioning or not transitioning is to be comfortable (and safe) with yourself and your own body. Every person's path is going to be different depending on how they identity and what processes they feel will give them more security and comfort. Also, do not feel pressured into figuring out how you want to transition (if at all) before coming out. Figure things out at your own pace.

Before Coming Out

What is "coming out"?

The mainstream definition of "coming out" usually entails verbally communicating with those close to you about your identities. However, coming out can be much more broad than that and has a different meaning to different people. How you come out depends on what communities you are a part of, how you think your identities will be received, how you think it will be safest and most effective to come out, and whether it is important to you to have an explicit discussion with those around you. In many communities, gender diversity is affirmed more readily when there is no direct conversation and instead the individual simply lives as their authentic selves. Coming out is different for everyone! Coming out can be a one-time process or a lifetime process.

How?

As discussed a little previously, there is no right way to come out. You could post something on a social media site (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), send someone an email, mail or give someone a letter, or have a discussion with someone over a video chat program, the phone, or in person. Most people use a mix of these methods depending on their relationship with the person they are coming out to and depending on the medium preference of the person they are coming out to. The methods listed below are not the only ways to come out, but hopefully they will give you ideas about what to think about when figuring out how to come out.

Social Media considerations:

- Reaches many people quickly
- High control over message content
- Optional direct and/or indirect contact with people (easier boundary setting)
- Less control over who accesses and uses the information

Email, Letters, Video Blogs considerations:

- Reaches many people quickly
- More control over message content
- Optional direct and/or indirect contact with people (easier boundary setting)
- People can send/copy these messages to others

Video Chat and Phone considerations:

- Reaches fewer people at once
- Less control over message content because direct conversation is less predictable
- More personal conversation
- Easier boundary-setting than in-person conversation

In Person considerations:

- Reaches fewer people at once
- Less control over message content because direct conversation is less predictable
- More personal conversation
- Most challenging situation for setting boundaries

Who and When?

Before you come out, figure out who you want to come out to, how you want to come out to each person, and whether you want to come out to each person individually in a certain order, come out to groups of people in a certain order, or come out to everyone at once. When deciding who to come out to, think about:

- How much weight does this person hold in my life?
- Can this person impact me emotionally, financially, or both?
- Does this person control my access to shelter, food, other friends or family, school, work, or transportation?
- What are the best and worst things that could happen if I came out to this person?
- If this person reacts poorly, how else will be able to support me?
- If I come out to this person/people, who else will they tell?

What gender pronouns exist? How can I ask others to respect the pronouns I would like them to use for me?

She/her/hers…he/him/his…ze/hir/hirs…and they/them/theirs are the most commonly used pronouns. Some people use other neutral pronouns, or use the first letter of their name to make their own pronouns. There has also been a big movement lead by youth of color on the east coast using "yo" as a gender neutral pronoun. For example "Yo (instead of "he" or "she") went to the store to get more of yo's (instead of "his" or "her") favorite snacks. Do you want to go with yo (instead of "him" or "her")?"

If you decide to switch gender pronoun sets, it can be challenging to ask people to respect your decision because of the social pressure to keep using the pronouns you were assigned. Let the person know which pronouns you would like the person to begin using and gently correct them if they use the wrong ones. Let them know that it's okay to make mistakes and you appreciate them learning to change. Before you come out, you may want to think about how to handle someone accidentally or purposefully using the wrong name or pronouns.

Subject	She	He	Ze	Yo	They
Object	Her	Him	Hir	Yo	Them
Possessive Adjective	Her	His	Hir	Yo's	Their
Possessive Pronouns	Hers	His	Hirs	Yo's	Theirs
Reflexive	Herself	Himself	Hirself	Yo'self	Themselves

Why do some people call pronouns "preferred gender pronouns" and some people do not?

The idea behind using the phrase "preferred gender pronouns" (sometimes shortened to PGP's) or preferred pronouns is to have a consistent phrase by which you can tell others what pronouns you would like them to use. People sometimes say " My PGP's are he/him/his," or they can write "PGP: they/them/theirs" in their signature line in their emails. However, many people are now rejecting these phrases because they suggest that the pronouns you want used are only "preferred" – and that people do not necessarily need to respect your preference. For that reason, this document will always refer to pronouns as "the pronouns you use". The pronouns you use are yours and not up for debate by those around you. The pronouns others use for you are your pronouns and not simply a preference. This is a detail in language and this document is not suggesting it is "wrong" to use "PGP" when discussing your pronouns. This is only an explanation about why this booklet does not use that phrase.

Name Changes

Some people choose to change their name to better reflect their gender and some do not. If the name you have gone by previously does not fit you, you can change it to better fit your identity socially as well as legally. Many people find it helpful to choose a name before coming out so that they can ask people to use their chosen name when they do come out. Others prefer to come out first to get input from supportive family or friends. Some people use multiple names depending on who they are interacting with.

Make a Timeline

Some people make a timeline for who they want to come out to when. This can also be helpful for you as you come out to people to let those you have come out to know who you have not come out to in case you would like to ask them not to talk to those you have not yet spoken to. Be prepared for the unexpected, though, and use the timeline more as a guideline than a set of rules.

Prepare for the Unexpected & Find Resources

As they say: hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Even if you think you have a good idea how someone will respond to your coming out, prepare for their worst reaction. Look up resources (or ask for help looking up resources) in case you need to become financially independent, and/ or control your own access to housing, work, and transportation. If your parents are paying for your education, do you have a back-up plan to fund your education and housing? If you are receiving care from your children, do you have someone else who might be able to give you the same care if your children react poorly? Do you have a plan for coming out at work? No one wants to think about these situations, but take time to do so for your own wellbeing. Ask allies for support!

What if I didn't prepare or do any of this?

Everything in this booklet is only a suggestion based on others' experiences. If you already came out and didn't do any of this (at least consciously), that is okay. Most people go through these thought processes informally to help navigate when and how to come out to different people. Preparing for coming out is mostly for your own safety. Not everything written here will be helpful to everyone and you know your own situation best. Do what works for you!

"National Coming Out Day" by Keith Haring

For Minors

The average age for coming out as trans decreasing. Unfortunately, many families are not prepared to be supportive of the trans-identified youth in their family. Many young trans people end up experiencing homeless and are without access to education and other resources. If you are under 18, your parents and/or legal guardians have control over much of your wellbeing and access to jobs, education, and health care. Before coming out as a minor, do some research about any LGBTQ+ resources in your area. If your parents ask you to leave their house – where will you go? How will you get food and get to school? Some young people choose to come out to their friends' families first, both as a test-run AND so that if their parents kick them out, they have an arrangement set up so they will not end up on the streets. No young person should have to answer these questions or prepare for their families not supporting them. Things are changing, but in the meantime, play it safe and plan ahead!

For Undocumented Individuals

A person who does not have citizenship or some legal status that protects them from deportation from the U.S. is considered "undocumented". Undocumented individuals should consider their legal status when coming out as well. The U.S. government has recently made a lot of progress in recognizing trans peoples' right to safety and employment while simultaneously rapidly increasing the rate of deportation for undocumented individuals. The laws and practices for LGBTQ+ people and undocumented individuals in the U.S. are rapidly changing.

In 2013, a provision of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was deemed unconstitutional making it legal for the federal government to recognize same-sex (and queer) partnerships between couples. This means if you are undocumented and your partner is a lawful permanent resident (LPR), the government could recognize that it would create a hardship for you and your partner to be separated (as a result of deporting you). This means an undocumented partner in a relationship with a legal permanent resident (LPR) can use their marriage status to acquire a hardship waiver AND that undocumented partners are eligible for K visas.

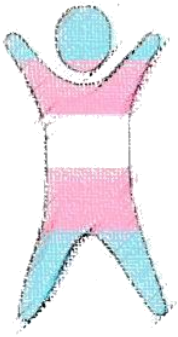
Sometimes when undocumented partners come out to their partners, the partner may retaliate with verbal, physical, or sexual violence against their LGBTQ+ undocumented partner. In 2013 the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was reauthorized and had several provisions for LGBTQ+ people. Since shortly after the reauthorization of VAWA, the federal government started recognizing LGBTQ+ marriages, VAWA now protects undocumented people from being deported if they leave an abusive relationship. Do not feel like your immigration status depends on your current relationship!

Know that while it is legal for someone to report you to ICE for being undocumented, you can also declare your LGBTQ+ identities as a reason NOT to be deported as many countries are known as unsafe for LGBTQ+ individuals. For more information about protections and resources check out the following links:

- *How the repeal of DOMA affected undocumented LGBTQ+ people*: http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2013/07/17/69826/additional-immigration-benefits-are-available-for-same-sex-couples-after-doma-repeal/
- *Not One More organization that does activism and advocacy*: http://www.notonemoredeportation.com/
- *National Day Laborer Organizing Network*: http://ndlon.org/en/
- *United we DREAM for Undocumented Students & Youth*: http://unitedwedream.org/
- *DREAM ACTivist for Undocumented Students & Youth*: http://action.dreamactivist.org/

Coming Out

To Yourself!



Thinking about how you feel to yourself first is not only helpful to understanding yourself but will also help others understand. While you have no responsibility or obligation to educate those around you, many trans people do choose to help their friends and family learn about their identities. Do you feel like you are in the "wrong" body or do you simply feel like changing your body would allow your body fit you better? Both? Neither? Do you feel that you have always understood that you were transgender and you just finally found the words to describe yourself or do you feel your identity changed recently? Do you feel like you identified with your body for some time and that has changed now? Do you feel "male" and/or "female" or do you feel that you identify outside of this binary spectrum? What pronouns, if any, feel good for people to use to refer to you? What do you find attractive – if anything – in other people? You do not need to answer these questions, but they may help you start thinking about how you identify.

To your parents/guardians and mentors

Parents hold a lot of importance for many people and they often hold a lot of power over their children's lives. For these reasons, parents are often some of the first or the last people individuals come out to. If you feel you have strong supporters in your parent(s), they may be valuable to come out to early on. If you are worried about losing their support emotionally or financially, you may want to build a support network of other family members and friends, first. Non-guardian mentors can be great people to come out to since they are often supportive and if not, they are unlikely to have the power to remove your access to food, housing, or education.

To your siblings

When siblings are supportive, they can be huge allies when coming out to parents and other family members. Some people find that their siblings are the best people to come out to first when coming out to family members since they can encourage family members to respect your name and pronouns.

To your friends

Friends tend to be the first group of people trans individuals come out to since people often know their friends views on different issues well. Find out if and how friends can support you as you come out to others.

To your committed partner(s)

Committed partnerships could include having one or more stable partners as well as having one or more stable partners with various uncommitted partners weaving through the relationship(s). A committed partnership is any partnership with at least two consenting adults that have the intention to maintain a relationship for a some amount of time. For those in committed partnerships with one or more partners that have been together for several years, it is likely your partner either helped you come out to yourself or you have an idea about how they will react if and when you come out to them.

If you feel you have a healthy, supportive, and communicative relationship with your partner or partners, they can be some of the strongest supporters in your life. If you sometimes feel controlled by your partner, if you have never discussed LGBTQ+ issues with your partner, or you are just unsure how they may react try to plan on coming out with your safety in mind. Will you still have access to money, food, and housing if they are unsupportive? Especially if you are concerned about your partner(s) reaction, figure out details regarding how you can take care of yourself with the support of others. If you do not have an opportunity to plan for this situation that arises, you can always use the emergency resources listed in the "After Coming Out" section. So – what are some possible reactions and how can you handle them?

1. Affirmation: In this situation, your partner has a positive and loving reaction and feels thankful that you shared this part of yourself with them. They will mostly ask respectful and supportive questions, and your trans identity is not viewed as a burden on the relationship, but instead as another chapter of your relationship or another chapter of your life that they want to support you in. An affirmative reaction means the person may not be fully aware of trans identities or experiences, but that they understand that the identity is important to you is a part of who you are – but not all of who you are.

If a partner reacts in this way, you are probably ready to start talking about if you would like to transition, what your timeline is, and what transitioning and your trans identity means to you individually and in the partnership. It is important to discuss how you foresee this affecting your partnership as well, both privately and publically. This does not need to happen immediately, but these are things to think about and talk about over time. Notice that being affirming does not necessarily mean your partner(s) and you will remain in a relationship, but that your partner is loving, supportive, and communicative regardless of your partnership status.

2. Acceptance: An accepting reaction is one in which your partner is positive about your trans identity, but feels there is something about you that needs to be accepted. This suggests that your partner has internalized some of the negative imagery and misinformation spread by media and society. A partner accepting your trans identity can easily grow into an affirming reaction with some education, time, and communication.

If you partner is accepting in their reaction, you can give them resources and information to help them continue learning. As they learn and as you learn about your own identity, they will often be able to move towards affirmation of your trans identity.

It is completely possible, however, for a partner to be affirming in their reaction and also recognize that they are not attracted towards the gender you identify as. If your partner is positive and supportive, but also being honest about the implications for your relationship, this does not mean they are being unaccepting or intolerant, necessarily.

3. Tolerance: A tolerant reaction would involve your partner being upset or disgusted by your trans identity, but "willing to work through it". In this case, they may try to control your trans identity by making up rules about what they think you can or cannot do. For example, they may say that they will call you by your chosen name and pronouns, but they will not "allow" you to get hormones or surgery. Or they may "allow" you to be the gender you identity with at home, but try to prevent you from expressing yourself in public. In this situation, your partner is likely very unaware about trans identities and experiences and the importance of your identity to you. They may be somewhat scared of trans identities, or think that your identity "reflects poorly" on them.

If your partner reacts this way, you should weigh whether you want to help them learn or if the relationship is going to be unhealthy or unsafe. Your partner should never be allowed to dictate what kind body you have, what body modifications you do or do not get, how "masculine" or "feminine" you express yourself, how you behave sexually, or what sexual positions or roles you participate in. If you see these signs of a tolerant response and a controlling partner, get help from a counselor, a trusted mentor or friend, or get in contact with an agency that can help like the National GLBT Helpline (toll free) at 1-888-843-4564.

4. Unacceptance: This reaction is similar to denial. Your partner may try to tell you how you identify or feel. For example, "You don't feel like you are in the wrong body," or "You aren't transgender, you're just confused." They may also "forbid" you from talking about your trans identity or expressing your gender the way you identify. A partner who is unaccepting can be very difficult to talk to since they often do not want to have a conversation that would allow them to learn.

Navigating this situation comes down to two major questions: Are you able (safe!) and willing to be a person in their life that helps them learn? And is your partner willing to learn and change? You have NO responsibility to educate those close to you – even your partner(s). If the idea of educating your partner is overwhelming or stressful, you have no obligation to do so. If you partner is controlling or trying to prevent you from transitioning, it may be a good idea to get some space. Move in with a friend, family, or get in contact with social services to help you stay safe and cared for.

If you do feel able to help educate your partner, it does not mean you should take abuse. No person has the right to tell you how you feel, make rules about whether you can access doctors or health care, prevent you from seeking transition-related care, prevent you from seeing family and friends, or force or coerce you into sex. If you experience any of these situations or are worried you might be, get help as soon as possible – from family and friends as well as social service providers. Remember that if your partner(s) make the choice not to learn about who you are and what is important to you, they are making the choice to take a break from the relationship, not you. Your decision here lies in keeping yourself safe, happy, and healthy.

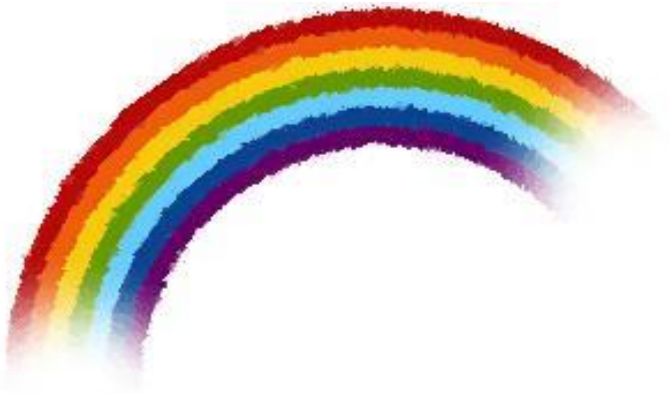
5. Intolerance: If your partner has an intolerant reaction, they may recognize that you are trans-identified, but view this as a very negative part of who you are or view your identity as a character flaw – something that can or should be "fixed". Someone who is intolerant of trans identities may try to actively prevent you from identifying as a trans person, prevent you from accessing transition-related care, or information about trans identities and experiences, and convince you that being trans is "bad" or "wrong". This reaction can be very dangerous to deal with alone and if you see your partner reacting in this way, you should look for support right away. The priority is to keep yourself safe and around people who are supportive!

To your uncommitted partner(s)

An uncommitted relationship means any partnership between two or more consenting adults without the expectation of a time commitment. This might include someone you have a sexual relationship with once, someone you date over a period of time, and/or a non-sexual romantic relationship – all without the expectation of an extended commitment among partners. Coming out to one or more partners in an uncommitted relationship may be slightly different than coming out to partners in a committed relationship, depending on your goals. Some reasons for coming out to uncommitted partners might include: involving them in your process of self-discovery, involving them in your transition, and/or to ask them to be more affirming of your identity during sexual or romantic activities.

For relationships that are relatively short, many trans people choose not to disclose their identity since they feel it makes their relationships simpler. For example, a partner does not necessarily need to know why a trans masculine partner does not want their chest touched – they only need to respect the boundary.

If you are involved in the hook-up scene (where people meet for uncommitted sexual relationships) and/or predominately or exclusively have uncommitted sexual partnerships, there is a component of safety involved in choosing to come out or not to come out. As described previously, some partners react with "intolerance" and this can be particularly dangerous to navigate in uncommitted sexual relationships. For example, if a trans feminine person passes as female, has not had any genital altering surgeries, and is in a heterosexual hook-up space, the person they pick up may assume they identify as a cisgender women and have stereotyped "female" anatomy. In this example, the trans person may choose not to come out until they get to a private location. However, this leaves the trans person vulnerable to violence if their partner reacts poorly to the trans person's body or identity. Coming out in uncommitted sexual partnerships is not a simple decision to make – the important thing is to stay as safe as possible. Some people navigate hook-up spaces by coming out to their partners in the public setting where they meet up.



Coming Out as a Minor

As discussed previously, coming out as a minor can be very complicated and you should not have to do it alone! Here are some online resources about staying safe, ending bullying, helping you if you are struggling with hurting yourself or thinking about suicide, or want help with coming out:
Advocates for Youth: http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php
Live Out Loud: http://www.liveoutloud.info/
The It Gets Better Project: http://www.itgetsbetter.org/
The Trevor Project: http://www.thetrevorproject.org/

If you are struggling with understanding what being transgender means to you, or you want to talk to someone about making a plan for staying safe and coming out to your family, friends, and other people important to you, you can also try calling the following hotlines. If they cannot directly help you, they WILL get you in contact with an organization or hotline that can help.
GLBT National Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-7743
Trevor Lifeline: 866-488-7386
GLBT Hate Crimes Hotline: 1-800-686-4283
National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-786-2929

No one I come out to will be supportive – now what?

Some people do not believe anyone in their lives will be supportive during your coming out process. If this situation fits you, it is still important to talk to someone and build a support network. The best way to get this process started is contacting people who can help you sort through what resources you have available to you. Sometimes services exist in your area or nearby that you don't know about and others can help you find these and help you build a safety/back-up plan. Try calling one of these to get started:

GLBT National Helpline: 1-888-843-4564
Fenway's LGBT Helpline: 617-267-9001 or 888-340-4528
National LGBT Youth Hotline: 1-800-246-7743

Coming Out without Words

Most of this booklet is involved with how to have a discussion about being trans, but having a discussion about this may be too direct or culturally inappropriate for some people. So, what are ways to come out besides writing something down or having a discussion? The following is not intended to be a comprehensive list of how you might come out without having a direct discussion, but it may give your ideas to help you in your own process.

Altering Gender Expression: You can gradually or suddenly alter your gender expression to better fit your gender identity. In families and communities where there is an expectation of non-verbal communication, this can be a really effective method for coming out. If you would like to go by a different name or pronouns, you may still need to communicate this more directly. One way to communicate less directly about name or pronoun changes is to invite your partner(s) or friends to be around your family and community and have them use your correct name and pronouns.

Changing Personal Affects: This method involves changing the items that you surround yourself with to convey a non-verbal message. A subtle message might include putting up pictures of famous trans people, changing your computer/laptop desktop to have images of gender non-conforming people, or using colors that are not gender binary ("baby blue" and "baby pink" for example). More direct methods of communication might include hanging a trans pride flag in your living space, wearing shirts or other clothing that denotes trans pride, and/or deliberately having your family and friends meet friends who are also trans and gender non-conforming.

Bringing up Current Events: You can also begin incorporating news about trans and gender non-conforming people into conversation. This is not only a great way to increase the amount of time family and friends think about trans issues, but it will also help you gauge how supportive or unsupportive they are about trans identities.

General Principles of Coming Out

The following includes some general ideas to think about when coming out.

1. *Big deal or no big deal?* Often the way you approach someone sets the tone for the conversation. If you approach a coming out conversation with the mentality and tone that it will be a scary, negative, or unsupportive conversation, it sets the standard for their reaction very low. Many people find that if they approach their coming out conversations like any other conversation that it sets the tone of the conversation to be relaxed instead of tense. This approach can be particularly effective with people who have had little to no experience with trans issues because they often are unaware of how they are expected they react. If you come out in a way that expects them to be supportive and respectful, they will be more likely to do so.

2. *Come out last to those you are most dependent upon.* If you have the ability to control who you come out to when, try to come out to those you are less dependent upon for housing, food, health care, and financial stability first.

3. *Remember your responsibility.* What are your responsibilities during your coming out process? To keep yourself safe, healthy, and happy! You have no responsibility to be an educator for all your friends and family or to put up with violent or abusive responses.

4. *Hold your boundaries.* When discussing your identities with those close to you, the conversation may sometimes be respectful and other times not. You never have to answer questions that are intrusive and inappropriate to you – but these are common and it is important to think about how you can deal with these as they happen. For example, if someone asks a rude question, such as, "Did you already have 'the' surgery?" do you want to reinforce your boundaries and say, "I do not want to answer that question," or do you want to redirect the conversation in an educational way by explaining why that is in an inappropriate question? Either of these responses are constructive, but not the only way to respond. It is the responsibility of everyone in the conversation to keep things respectful and to communicate when they feel that boundaries has been breached. Unfortunately, that responsibility is often put entirely on the person who is coming out. Do not feel obligated to explain yourself or "why" you are trans. Discuss what you are comfortable discussing.

5. *People have many reactions over time.* Recognize that when you come out, the person's initial reaction is unlikely to be their only reaction. If you come out to a partner and they get upset – they may be shocked by the suddenness of your honesty, relieved to be able to finally discuss the impacts of not talking about it for the length of your relationship, or be trying to process too much about the past and future at once. They may appear upset initially, but may become a huge supporter within an hour or a few days. Some people take years to become great supporters and others never do. Regardless, recognize that it probably took you months or years to understand yourself and if possible, you should try to give your loved ones some space to process their emotions as well.

Getting Dragged Out of the Closet

What if someone outs you to someone else? What if your parents or friends approach you and ask whether you are trans before you are ready to talk about it? How you handle these situations heavily depends on where you are at in your own coming out process, what kind of support system you have, if those outing you are supportive or threatening, and how your life could be impacted by getting further outed. There is not universal advice in this situation and if you are worried about your safety or just need an objective view to help you figure out how to handle the situation, call one of the helplines listed later on in the booklet.

The Importance of Family and Community Spaces for People of Color and Undocumented People

Indiana is overwhelmingly populated by people who are white and who have citizenship or legal permanent residency. This often creates very tight-knit communities of people of color (POC) and undocumented individuals. Because Indiana is so rural, LGBTQ+ POC and undocumented people often feel that losing the support of even one person in their family, a leader in their faith community, or another mentor will be a huge blow to their ability to be included and involved in their community. Or that losing support from that one person will result in others in their family or larger community no longer supporting them. These are real and scary consequences of homophobia and transphobia in rural, (multiply) marginalized communities. This does not mean that communities of color or undocumented communities are "more" homophobia or transphobia than white, documented communities. Instead, it means that mainstream resources are often less accessible to (or less appropriate for) POC and undocumented people and that this intensifies the importance of the community that individual identifies with.

If you are worried about losing access to your family, faith community, or any other space after coming out, it is especially important that you reach out to organizations in your area. For example, in Lafayette, there is a Latino Center for Wellness and Education, the Hanna Community Center that focuses on serving POC, and the Pride Lafayette Community Center. At Purdue University there is a Native American Education and Cultural Center, Black Culture Center, Asian and Asian American Resource and Cultural Center, Latino Cultural Center, and LGBTQ Center – all of which are open to the community at large.

After Coming Out

The process of coming out is different for everyone. Some trans elders in particular were instructed by medical professionals – or chose on their own – to start a new life after transitioning rather than coming out to those close to them. Some people come out once to close family and friends and stop coming out once they begin passing as they gender they identity as. Others chose to come out their entire lives to educate those close to them, to let people know about an important aspect of their lives, or come out because they are noticeably gender non-conforming and/or non-binary identified. "After Coming Out" here does not mean once you have "finished" coming out. Instead, it means the time after which you BEGIN coming out to yourself and/or begin having discussions with others. The time right after you start coming out can be a blur of discussions, figuring out your transition plans, redefining your relationships and partnerships, understanding your identities in the context of your body, and juggling other things going on in your life. This section is about navigating that dynamic time.

Resources

Below is a list of resources that may be valuable to any aspect of your life and coming out process. These are not all the resources that exist, but they are a great starting place.

Support with Coming Out

GLBT National Help Center: 1-888-843-4564
GLBT National Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-7743
The Trevor Project: www.thetrevorproject.org, 866-488-7386
The It Gets Better Project: www.itgetsbetter.org

Support against Violence, Self-Harm, and Suicide

Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860 (this number is run by trans people for trans people!!)
GLBT Hate Crimes Hotline: 1-800-686-4283
GLBT National Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-7743
The Trevor Project: www.thetrevorproject.org, 866-488-7386
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
National Runaway Switchboard: 1-800-786-2929

Support against Intimate Partner Violence and Domestic Violence

Survivor Project (Trans and Intersex/DSD Survivors)
www.survivorproject.org, 502.288.3191
FORGE (Trans Survivor Resources): www.forge-forward.org, 414.559.2123
Rainbow Services: www.rainbowdomesticviolence.itgo.com
National DV Hotline: 1-800-799.7233, TDD: 800.787.3224
Male Survivor: www.malesurvivor.org, 800.738.4181
NCAVP (The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs)
www.ncavp.org, 212.714.1184, TTY: 212.714.1134
Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (INCADV): www.icadvinc.org

Support against Sexual Violence

Survivor Project (Trans and Intersex/DSD Survivors)
www.survivorproject.org, 502.288.3191
FORGE (Trans Survivor Resources): www.forge-forward.org, 414.559.2123
RAINN: www.rainn.org, 1-800-656-4673
NCAVP (The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs)
www.ncavp.org, 212.714.1184, TTY: 212.714.1134
NSVRC (National Sexual Violence Resource Center)
www.nsvrc.org, 717.909.0710, TTY: 717.909.0715
Male Survivor: www.malesurvivor.org, 800.738.4181
VAW (The National Online Resources on Violence Against Women)
www.vawnet.org, 800.537.2238, TTY: 800.553.2508
Multicultural Efforts to end Sexual Assault (MESA)
http://www.ydae.purdue.edu/mesa/

Holding Yourself Accountable

Hold yourself accountable to yourself by recognizing what changes you need in your life to stay safe, healthy, and happy. Figure out what your boundaries are among your relationships with family, friends, and partners and uphold those boundaries.

Give yourself permission to get out of violent relationships. If your partner is bullying you into not transitioning, seek help to work through or end the relationship. Experiencing violence in a relationship is not your fault and there are people who can help you! Give a call to one of the resources listed beforehand. If your children react poorly to your coming out and are being verbally inappropriate and abusive, take a break from talking and visiting. Remember that putting some distance between you and anyone who reacts poorly to your coming out does not mean you won't get to have a relationship with them. You both just may need some time to process.

Stay honest with others and do not try to represent all trans people. If you don't want to talk about something, say so instead of making up an answer you think the person wants to hear or will be more comfortable hearing (as long as you will be able to stay safe). Every trans person's identities and experiences are a little different. When you are talking about your experiences, be sure that whoever you are talking to knows you are discussing <u>your</u> own experiences – not all trans men or trans women or gender non-conforming people or trans people, etc.

Holding Others Responsible

Holding others responsible is one of the most challenging aspects to coming out and transitioning for many trans people because it means advocating for yourself. Not every trans person is at a point in their life where they feel safe and empowered enough to hold others responsible and advocate for themselves – that's okay. Do whatever supports your process. For those who are empowered enough to do some personal advocacy: remind those close to you to use the correct name and pronouns, respect the words you use to describe your partner(s), and use appropriate and affirming language and behavior. When you advocate for yourself, you are not only making it a better world for yourself, but for others as well.

Maintaining Consent in Partnerships

"Consent" does not mean sexual consent only. Consent means the process of everyone in a relationship agreeing to the language being used, behavior, and activities going on currently or in the near future. Creating and maintaining consent in romantic partnerships involves communication. Notice that these discussions are not one-time events, but ongoing conversations that should happen periodically. Here are some topics that may be important to discuss:

- **Give each other space!** This is especially important advice for those in committed partnerships. If one of you is transitioning and/or coming out, you are all transitioning and coming out together. Let each other react and feel emotions and then talk about them. Do not pressure each other to do or not do anything. Do not expect all the answers to happen at once – take your time in figuring out how you each feel about your transition and identities and how this impacts you as individuals and partners.

- **Discuss what name and pronouns partners will use with one another in various settings**. Some trans people prefer different pronouns in public and private and/or during sexual activities. Think about whether there are safety reasons for using one name over the other in various settings or around certain people in your lives. Also, think about how you will each be perceived and how your interactions might change if you are changing pronouns. For example, if you were perceived to be in a same-sex female partnership and one partner identifies as a trans man, will it affect your interactions in lesbian and womens' same-gender-loving community spaces?

- **Discuss and agree to terms for gendered body parts** in public settings, around friends, at the doctor's office, and anywhere else where you may discuss body parts that you have a different name for than mainstream society uses.

- **Discuss what body parts each partner is comfortable being touched or acknowledged sexually and non-sexually**. For example, some trans men do not enjoy having their chest touched sexually or romantically, even after top surgery or while binding. Some trans people are completely comfortable with every part of their body being engaged during romantic or sexual activities. For many trans people, their relationship to their body changes as they progress through their transition (if they transition) and/or as their identities develop.

- **Discuss how to navigate partnership questions in public and among friends and family**. For example, in a partnership between a cisgender woman and a trans woman, people may ask questions like, "Are you still 'straight' or are you lesbians now?" People sometimes ask awkward, inappropriate, and invasive questions of partners in relationships with trans people – especially if there are more than two partners. Think about how you want to handle these situations if they arise.

- **Discuss how at least one partner transitioning may affect the relationship socially**. If one partner was previously perceived as female and will begin getting perceived as male – will this change the trans partner's privilege? Will you now be perceived as gay men? As straight? If one partner was previously perceived as binary and will now be perceived as gender non-conforming and/or non-binary, how will this affect your interactions with others as individuals and as partners? How might your interactions be affected if more than one partner is transitioning? Remember that when one of you is coming out, everyone in the partnership will experience some kind of coming out.

- **Discuss how at least one partner transitioning may affect the relationship sexually**. Besides what body parts you are all comfortable being touched and touching, what positions are you comfortable and uncomfortable with? Is there a certain activity that you would like to try out? Do you think your attraction to one another may change, increase, or decrease in some ways?

- **Talk about insecurities about transitioning and coming out.** Are you worried your partner may not find you attractive anymore? Is your partner confused about how they identify in the context of your transition? This aspect of transitioning is sometimes not talked about or there is a lot of pressure not to talk. You or your partner(s) being worried about things is to be expected and getting your concerns out in the open will help you figure out solutions together.

- **Be supportive of differing family reactions.** Even if only one partner is transitioning, partners will often come out to their respective families. Before coming out to your families and relatives (if you decide to do so), strategize together to figure out what order you want to come out in and how, whether you think different family members will be supportive or unsupportive, how supportive family members can help you handle unsupportive family members, AND how you can both stay relaxed during the process of coming out to your families. Remember that if one person's family is intolerant, it affects all the partners. If you are the partner of the person whose family is unaccepting, you have every right to be upset for your partner, but make sure you acknowledge the impact it has on your partner and support them through it.

- **Surround yourself with supportive friends and mentors.** Creating a support network is important for your health and wellbeing!

- **Celebrate milestones and positive events.** Trans identities and transitioning should not just be about the struggles but also about the successes. Some partners throw their trans-identified partner a "Man Party" or a "Woman Party" to celebrate them getting their hormone prescription. At Man Party, for example, supportive family and friends could come to congratulate the person on getting to a milestone in their transition. Some people ask those invited to bring an inexpensive present to help them "prepare for being a man" as a joke – people will bring things like tools, shaving gel, and other silly gifts. Find ways to celebrate successes in whatever ways are important to your relationship. ☺

- **Re-evaluate your safer sex needs**. If you decide to transition physically in a way that will change your body, look into how reduce your risk for transmitting or receiving sexually transmitted infections. There are several online resources available to educate trans people and their partners about safer sex throughout their transition. Get tested frequently.

Passing & Gender Expression

What is 'passing'?

Passing is a word that describes when someone is perceived in a way different from their personal history or current or past identity, and it usually suggests that the person gains privilege by how they are being perceived. Privilege includes any rights or resources that one group of people has greater access to than other groups. In the trans community, passing is usually used to describe when someone is perceived as male or female. For example, if someone is raised male, begins transitioning, and begins being perceived as female, they might tell their friends, "I passed in the restroom today!" or "I passed as female."

Passing is an incredibly complicated topic since passing depends on social gender norms and gender norms are different in different communities. Some people use the word "passing" to indicate that their gender was read correctly, in contrast to their history or how they were raised. For example, if someone identifies as a trans man, they might tell others that they passed as male to tell people that they were able to be perceived in the way they identify. Some people use the word "passing" to explain when they are perceived in a way that they do not identify. For example, if someone identifies as genderqueer, they may say that they passed as female to explain that they were perceived in a way that was different than how they identify. The common theme between these two examples is that both of these individuals gained privilege by passing. People experience more safety, are better able to access restrooms and health care, and be treated respectfully when they are perceived as a cisgender man than as a trans man or transmasculine. A person may also experience more safety and greater access to resources when they pass as female (or simply as binary) rather than genderqueer or non-binary.

Passing Full Time and Part Time

Historically, when people began transitioning, socially and/or physically, they had to live for a year as their current gender before they would be prescribed hormones. This was part of the transition-related care standards set out by the World Professional Association of Transgender Professionals (WPATH) and the goal of this requirement was for transgender people to learn how to pass as their preferred gender. This means people were almost only ever given medical support to transition if they wanted to transition from female to male or male to female. Someone who was socially or physically transitioning and began passing as the gender with which they identified was usually called "going full time".

This terminology is more common among trans women and transfeminine individuals and is sometimes still used, especially among binary trans people (those who identify as male or female). "Going full time" just means actively expressing gender in public in the way someone would like to express their gender. Some people would also change their gender expression "part time". For example, if they want out to party, date, or see friends, they may express themselves in the gender they identify as, but when they go to work, business meetings, or the doctor, they would express themselves as the gender assigned at birth. Going part time is usually a decision made related to safety.

In conclusion: "full time" and "part time" are words used to describe a person's passing preferences and abilities and although many people continue to use these words, many do not since there is no "full time" requirement in the WPATH standards of care. For many years now, professionals have recognized how unsafe and unnecessary it is to require people to live full time before gaining access to hormones and surgeries. It is much easier for people to gain access to hormones and surgeries than it used to be and you no longer have to be binary identified to transition.

Passing Tips? Nope, not here!

Many resources online describe "passing tips" which are supposed to help people be perceived as male, female, genderless, genderqueer, etc, by helping people figure out how to modify their behavior and gender expression. For many people, passing is an important aspect for their personal safety. For some people, passing is important for affirming how they identify. Some people have both of these motivations for passing and other reasons that passing is important to them. However, no single document can accurately explain to any person how they can effectively pass. In fact, most online "passing tips" are written from a white, formally educated, middle class, able-bodied perspective and for this reason do not reflect the experiences of many trans people.

A white trans man in rural Indiana is going to express his gender very differently than a latino trans man in Chicago to convey his masculinity in a way that is true for him and relevant to his social environment. An Asian American trans woman who is experiencing homelessness is going to experience different standards of femininity than a wealthy African American trans woman. A trans man with down syndrome, a deaf transmasculine person, and a trans guy with an invisible disability are all going to experience different pressures for expressing their gender, especially in comparison to an able-bodied trans guy.

For all these reasons and many more, this resource does not offer "passing tips". Each person knows the gender norms for their community better than someone not in that community. If you are concerned for your safety, it may be worth your while to ask someone in your community for passing tips. You might ask someone who you are out to who was raised as the gender you identify or ask another trans person who began transitioning before you for lessons they have learned. Many people find that the most shocking and challenging aspect of transitioning is how drastically their interactions with others change as they are perceived differently. Even if you do not want passing tips from someone in your community (or do not have someone to ask), it is worthwhile to get a counselor if possible. Counselors can help you process your interactions with people as you change the way you are perceived and how this affects your own privilege.

To Pass or Not to Pass

As discussed previously, some people want to pass in some way and some people do not. There are some people who say or think that trans men are only "real" men if they can pass, or that trans women are only "real" women if they can pass. All of that is ridiculous – you are a man or a woman if you identify as one, regardless of whether you pass. Many trans people do not want to pass as male or female at all. No one should be allowed to define a "real" gender for you except yourself.

The Parts of Passing that Few People Talk About

People often do not get a chance to talk about how passing or not passing will affect their daily lives, especially how gender intersects with other identities. This is a complicated topic and one that is too long for this brief document. However, here are a couple of great publications written by bloggers:

10 Things I Wish I'd Known When I Started my Transition by Annika Penelope
http://www.autostraddle.com/ten-things-i-wish-id-known-when-i-started-my-transition-156538/

5 Things I Wish I Knew Prior to Transitioning by Queer Speak Word Press
http://queerspeak.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/5-things-i-wish-i-knew-prior-to-transitioning/

Resources in Indiana

What organizations exist in Indiana to support people who identify as trans, gender non-conforming, gender diverse, and their friends, family, significant others, partners, and allies? You can find information about support groups, advocacy organizations, and much more by going to the Indiana Transgender Network website: http://indianatransgendernetwork.com/. The Indiana Transgender Network "aggregates resources available to transgender and gender diverse people living in Indiana. Our goal is to make it easier for people making a gender transition or trying to understand the subject of gender identity to find counselors, medical resources, legal information, support groups, advocacy organizations and other help on their journey."

About the Contributors

Authored by Skye Brown with the support of many community members
Contributions by Aiden Powell

About Skye:
i'm a loud and proud queer –
of the transmasculine genderfluid variety.
i'm a pan femme butch,
a survivor and a fighter.
i'm an activist for respect and a public disturbance.
i'm in love with humanity
and determined to support the end to all oppression.
i'm a fabulous unicorn made
of glitter and spice, and civil disobedience
coming to a public demonstration near you.
i'm a partner and a sibling, a dog parent, and a hopeful romantic
i believe in supporting bodies and bending minds
and my life is your life since your life is my life's advocacy
i'm a second generation American
and a first generation revolutionary,
walking on the supportive shoulders of centuries of activists before.
i'm bilingual and bad at both languages
and a feminist who demands radical change.
i learned how to DREAM with undocumented queer
students of color in Texas
and now strive to create a nexus
of LGBTQ+ empowerment in Indiana,
to support a state without fear
or violence, where love knows no bounds.
Will you join me
to create communities free
from violence and oppression,
take us in a new direction
of reflection and action, social change
until there is no more hate, only love to exchange?

If you want to reach Skye in their capacity as the Program Director for Trans Lafayette, please email: translafayette@gmail.com. If you want to reach Skye in their capacity as the LGBTQ Outreach Coordinator for MESA, please email brown810@purdue.edu. If you want to reach Skye personally, please email: skyeashtonbrown@gmail.com.

About Aiden: Aiden attended Texas A&M University where he got his bachelors in Anthropology with a cultural and applied focus. During his time at Texas A&M, he advocated tirelessly for LGBTQ+ student rights by marching on campus, speaking in front of student senate meetings, and mentoring incoming students. He will soon graduate from Purdue University with his masters in Anthropology where he studied applied medical anthropology. Aiden's master's project involved working with students and staff at the Purdue University Student Health (PUSH) center to increase the capacity of the center and staff to serve LGBTQ+ students. During Aiden's time at Purdue, he has successfully led the establishment of Purdue's first LGBTQ living and learning community called the Diversity in Gender and Sexuality Studies Learning Community and has successfully led the movement for getting hormone replacement therapy and surgical benefits covered on student health insurance. Aiden is accomplished in policy development and implementation, project design and evaluation, and is now to using his experiences and degree as the inaugural Program Coordinator at the Purdue LGBTQ Center. You can reach Aiden at powell61@purdue.edu.

As domestic partners, Skye and Aiden have dedicated their relationship to supporting each other's development as social justice advocates and activists. Together they strive to develop their communities' capacity for social change - synergistically.