

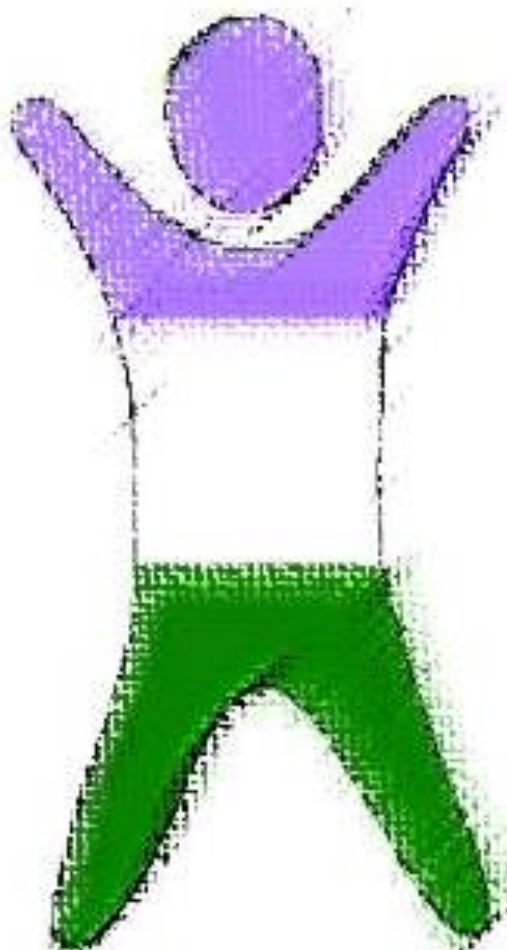
# Trans 201

**For Significant Others, Partners, Friends, Family,  
and Allies (SOFFAs) of Trans People**



## Table of Contents

- [3] How to Use this Booklet
- [3] The Basics!
- [4] More Frequently Asked Questions
- [9] Stereotypes about Trans People
- [13] Things NOT to Say. Ever.
- [16] Being a Trans Ally
- [25] About the Contributors



## How Do I Use this Booklet?

### What should this booklet be used for and what should it not be used for?

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This booklet is an educational tool only. It does not reflect the views of all trans, gender non-conforming, or intersex people or 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.

### Who was this booklet made for?

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This booklet was made for anyone who is interested in learning more about gender, transgender identities and experiences, and being a better ally, friend, family member, or partner/significant other to a trans person. The information in this booklet is mostly in a Q&A format and is directed towards people who have some understanding of topics relating to trans identities and experiences. If you are a trans-identified person, someone with a trans gender history, or identify as intersex, this booklet may be a helpful tool for you to discuss your experiences and identity/identities with those close to you. If this booklet is difficult for you to understand, try reading the Trans 101 for SOFFAs booklet first.

### How was this booklet made?

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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. The contents of this booklet cannot possibly describe the experiences of ALL trans, gender non-conforming, and intersex people – instead this is only an effort to raise awareness about some people's experiences and offer support to trans people who would like a resource that they can give to those close to them.

## 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 (haircut, mannerisms, clothing, etc.)

**Sexual Identity:** how a person describes their physical and sexual attraction towards others and/or the sexual activities they enjoy or do not enjoy

**Affectional Identity:** how a person describes their emotional and romantic attraction towards others

**The golden rule of labels:**  
Only use words to describe people that they use to describe themselves.

## More Frequently Asked Questions

### What do “trans” and “transgender” mean?

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Trans is a term that embraces gender diversity. People who identify as trans or transgender are those people whose gender identity is different than the gender they were assigned at birth. Both trans and transgender are considered inclusive “umbrella” terms, meaning a lot of identities/labels fall under them. Examples of trans identities might include someone who was assigned “female” at birth and identifies as androgynous; someone who was assigned “male” at birth and identifies as “female”.

### What does “cisgender” mean?

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Cisgender is a term used to describe someone whose gender identity is in line with the gender assigned at birth. An example of a cisgender identity might include someone assigned “male” at birth and who identifies as “male”.

### What does “gender non-conforming” mean?

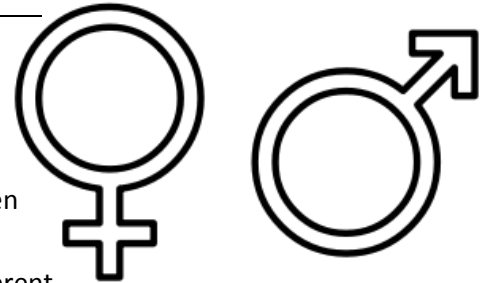
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“Gender non-conforming” (GNC) refers to when someone’s gender expression does not follow gender norms (for example, if a woman is wearing “men’s” pants). Some trans people are GNC and some cisgender people are GNC. GNC people – whether they identify as transgender or cisgender – often experience similar stereotypes and discrimination that trans-identified individuals experience. Therefore, GNC people will be considered part of the trans community in this booklet.

### What is the gender binary?

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The gender binary is the assumption that only male and female bodies and identities exist. The binary is different across space and time and is sometimes used to police people into certain gender expressions. For example, in the U.S.: men are expected to be physically strong and not cry or wear dresses; women are expected to be good at cooking and parenting and be clean. Gender norms that are used to reinforce the gender binary are different depending on the society and subculture – they may be different among Asian Americans vs. white Americans, younger vs. elder people, and those who grew up in different countries and communities.



The gender binary frequently ignores those who live and identify as non-binary (not female or male). There have been people who do not identify within the binary at every time in human history and in every place in the world. Being aware that the gender binary exists and its effects can help you be more aware of how to be respectful towards all genders.

## How does “trans” differ from “transgender”, “transsexual”, “transvestite”, and “hermaphrodite”?



**Trans** and **transgender** are both terms that are considered affirming of gender diversity and can be used to describe a trans/transgender-identified person or the trans/transgender community at large.



**Transsexual** is sometimes used to describe a transgender person who plans to physically transition and/or is currently physically transitioning. As all terms, this word has a complicated history, so it should only be used for someone when they are comfortable with it and uses it for themselves. Some trans people who physically transition do not identify as transsexual.



**Transvestite** is now almost always used as a trans slur because it has historically used by medical professionals to diagnose trans and gender non-conforming people with mental illness and force or coerce them into undergoing harmful medical “treatments”. Transvestite usually refers to someone who does not identify with the gender they are assigned and cannot or does not try to conform to strictly “male” or strictly “female” gender expression norms. It should not be used unless an individual identifies with this label and uses it for themselves.



**Hermaphrodite** is a medical term that refers to someone who is born with testicular tissue as well as ovarian tissue. This kind of body is relatively rare and this term is- rarely used in an affirming way. Since this physical state has no direct relationship to a person’s gender identity, the word “hermaphrodite” almost never accurately or positively represents a trans identity and therefore should not be used to describe someone.

## What words should not be used to describe trans people?



**Tranny:** This word was originally developed by trans women as a positive way to refer to other trans women. It is a shortened version of transvestite or transsexual. However, it has also often been used by unaware cisgender people to describe trans people who are forced into survival sex work, choose to work in the sex industry, and/or as a slur used deliberately to dehumanize trans people (especially trans women). Even if someone is comfortable with this word, it should still be avoided in public since someone overhearing this word being used could imply to the person listening that it is an acceptable word to use for any trans person. Do not use this word unless you have permission for the person you are using it for, you have an excellent knowledge of the past and current uses and impact, and you are using it in a setting where it cannot be overheard out of context.



**Shemale:** This term dehumanizes trans people – especially trans women – by suggesting that they can be summed up by their genitals. Shemale refers to someone who is femininely identified, but has some aspects of their body that society considered “male”. This term is frequently used in porn and should never be used to describe someone.



**It:** It refers to an object, *never a person*.

**✗ Tranny-chaser:** The term is used to describe people interested in dating trans people (usually trans women) because they see trans people as “exotic” or sexually “interesting”. This word dehumanizes trans people as sexual objects and when applied to partners of trans people, invalidates their relationship and attraction as a sexual fetish. This term can refer either to: 1. Individuals who fetishize trans identities and bodies as a sexual object, or 2. to partners of gender diverse people, partners of trans people who medically transition, and those who are attracted to non-binary bodies or identities. While these are two very different groups of people, this term should never be used for either. A word with positive connotation that some people are using to describe their attraction towards trans and non-binary people is skoliosexual or skolioromantic.

**✗ Crossdresser:** Since this word suggests the person is dressing “opposite” of how they should, it also suggests that they are not the gender which they are expressing. Some trans people DO identify as part of the crossdressing community. However, many times this word is used to describe a person when they are wearing gendered clothing that is viewed as different than their assigned gender. This label is often used to invalidate the gender expression of trans people if they cannot pass as male or female, or if they are gender non-confirming. Only use this word to describe someone who identifies as a crossdresser.

**✗ He-she:** This term is often used to describe trans people who have started hormone replacement therapy and have not undergone any gender-related surgeries. It dehumanizes trans people by suggesting that trans people cannot be “real” men and women, implying binary trans people will always be “stuck in between”. It also makes fun of non-female and non-male (non-binary) gender identity, expression, or body and invalidates non-binary identified people by placing gender binary identities (male and female) on a pedestal as being the “best” or “only” genders.

**✗ Transgendered:** Trans and transgender are both adjectives because they describe a person. Transgendered is not a word because it is grammatically incorrect. For example, saying, “Mika is a transgendered man,” suggests that Mika had transgender happen to him – which *does not* make sense. “Mika is a transgender man,” states that Mika is a man that identifies as transgender or is transgender-identified – which *does* make sense.



#### How do I know what labels to use with trans people?

Follow the golden rule for labels! Only use labels for people if they identify with them and use the label for themselves. If someone does not call themselves “transgender”, then do not use the word “transgender” to describe them. If someone uses the word “queer” to describe themselves, it is probably alright to describe them as a queer person. If you are unsure whether a person is comfortable with a label or if you are unsure whether the person would be comfortable with you using a label to describe them, it is usually better to just ask respectfully.

### How do I know what pronouns to use with a trans person?

Just ask! Ideally, you should ask every person you meet what pronouns they use. This is a great way to be respectful and avoid singling out people you think might be trans-identified. Many people get worried about coming off as rude for asking about a person's pronouns. If someone gets offended when you ask, you can easily say something like, "I usually ask people about their pronouns so I do not make assumptions about how they identify." This type of statement will help people understand you are coming from a place of respect and not ridicule.

This question is also an excellent way to have a conversation about being an ally to trans people. The most common pronouns people use are she/her/hers, he/him/his, ze/hir/hirs, and they pronouns, but there are many other sets of pronouns. Here are some examples: "Zach identifies as agender and ze uses gender neutral pronouns," or "Taylor identifies as genderqueer and they use gender neutral pronouns."

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

### What are social, legal, and physical transitioning?

Socially transitioning refers to when a trans-identified person goes through the social process of having their identity recognized and affirmed by their partners, family, friends, and community. This might involve changing their name, changing the pronouns they ask people use for them, changing non-permanent aspects of their gender expression (haircut, voice changes, etc.).

Legal transitioning may include the legal process of getting a name and/or gender marker change on legal identification like driver's license, passport, with the social security administration, etc.

Physically or medically transitioning involves any and all aspects of a person expressing their gender identity through semi-permanent or permanent body modification. This might include (or might not include): hormone therapy, body hair changes, bone restructuring surgeries, genital altering surgeries, breast augmentation or removal, tracheal shave, etc.

*Gender equity affects all people in every aspect of life.*



## How does someone know they are trans-identified?

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Everyone knows how they feel about themselves and sometimes labels help each of us build communities with others who have had similar experiences. If someone identifies as Christian, other people do not question whether they are “really Christian” because each of us recognizes that we each know ourselves best. If someone identifies as trans, then they are trans. If someone identifies as genderfluid, then they are genderfluid. If someone identifies as female, then they are female. Respect each person’s own understanding of themselves.

CHANGE ATTITUDES.  
CHANGE BEHAVIORS.  
CHANGE DIRECTIONS.  
CHANGE LIVES.  
CHANGE POLICIES.  
CHANGE VOICES.  
BE AN ALLY.  
BE THE CHANGE.

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

## Why is it important to be knowledgeable about trans issues?

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Gender equity and inequity affects all people in every aspect of life. When trans people are denied employment because of discriminatory practices, it increases unemployment, underemployment, and poverty in our communities. When trans people are denied access to transition-related health care, they are more likely to be at risk for health disparities, hate crimes, suicide, unemployment, and denial of general health services. When trans people are kicked out of their homes and rejected by family and friends, they are more likely to experience homelessness and less likely to

complete school, be less likely to be able to afford college, and be more likely to commit suicide. All of situations have major health, economic, and generational effects on other individuals and communities. Plus, the social pressures about masculinity and femininity that trans people have to face are the same social pressures and norms that cisgender and gender conforming people face!

## Why is it important to be an ally of trans people?

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Trans people are people, which means they deserve respect and love. Trans people face extraordinary amounts of violence, oppression, and discrimination every day. The only way to change this is to develop allies who want to be aware of trans issues and trans experiences. Allies are vital to creating safe spaces for trans people, for educating their friends and family about trans inclusion, and for creating a support system for trans people and other allies so we can create change together. Ending violence and discrimination against trans people also puts an end to many cycles of violence and loosens some of the gender norms that cisgender and gender conforming people face.



## Stereotypes About Trans People

**Once a trans person determines their gender, that gender is how they identify forever.**

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Gender identity is a lifelong process and a very dynamic one at that. The way one person views their body, their identities, and the expectations of society, their family, and their community changes with time. Bodies change with age – not only at puberty, but throughout the lifetime. All these things affect the way each person will view their own gender identity, sexuality, and how they want to express their gender. Some people identify their gender one way for their whole life, and some people identify their gender differently every minute.

**All trans people identify as “male” or “female” but were born in the “wrong body” or “opposite body”.**

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First, gender identity is much more complicated than just a person’s body parts. Society says being female means things like: wearing dresses, skirts, and tight fitting shorts, having two breasts and a vagina, being able to give birth to children, and having many, many other “feminine” attributes. Society says being male means things like: not wearing dresses, skirts, or earrings, wearing looser fitting clothing, having a penis and two testicles but no breasts, being able to get a person with a uterus pregnant, and having many, many other “masculine” attributes. However, many people do not follow all socially defined gender roles, either by choice or by necessity. Surviving cancer and losing breast tissue does not make a woman less female. Some men must be on anti-androgens (testosterone) to stop the formation and spread of prostate cancer – this does not make the person “less male”. Some women prefer the fit of men’s clothing. Some men enjoy cooking. The point is, definitions of “male” and “female” are complicated and many trans people embrace their body as a part of their gender identity.

Second, the idea that all people are born “male” or “female” is not true for many individuals. Approximately 1 in every 2000 live births is a child born with “ambiguous” genitals. This does not include all other types of non-female and non-male bodies that can arise through genetics, hormones, etc. Non-binary bodies are very common and it is important to recognize that there is a lot of physical diversity – even within the loose categories of “male” and “female”.

Third, many trans people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned are not unhappy with their body. A trans woman can identify as female and still enjoy having a body parts associated with “male” bodies.

Lastly, many people do not identify as “male” or “female”. Some people identify as neutrois, genderfluid, butch, queer, androgynous, etc. You do not need to know all the labels – just that there a lot more than “male” and “female” out there! In fact, many people do not believe “male” and “female” are opposites because there are so many genders.

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**Trans people are born with “ambiguous” genitals or have both “male” and “female” body parts.**

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Body parts and genitals are not “male” or “female”, but have been labeled this way by medical professionals and scientists over time. Medical professionals frequently label new born infants as “female” if they have an external genital part that is “small”, have a vaginal cavity, and/or have separated labial/scrotal tissue. Medical professionals frequently label new born infants as “male” if they have an external genital part that is “large”, have no vaginal cavity, and/or have connected labial/scrotal tissue. However, labeling these body parts as “male” or “female” does not convey how a person may feel about their body, how they use their body, who they are attracted to, what type of sex they have, what gender expression or gender roles they will or will not take on, or any other information. Any person – transgender, cisgender, or any person with any gender identity – can have any combination of genes, gene expression, reproductive organs, genitals, and hormones. Trans people are no more or less likely to be born with a certain type of body than anyone else.

## Body positivity is for ALL bodies.

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**All trans people physically transition.**

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Some trans people do choose to modify their bodies to better reflect their gender. Some trans-identified people choose not to modify their bodies because they already feel their body reflects their gender or they may feel that the options for body modification will not allow them to get closer to a body that reflects their gender. Some trans people do not modify their bodies because they are unable to for others reasons, like social pressure, financial limitations, or legal limitations. These are not all the reasons someone may choose to physically transition, may choose not to physically transition, or may be unable to physically transition. However, the point is that the trans community is very diverse and an individual does not have to change their body to be transgender.

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**Trans people are mentally ill and that is why they transition.**

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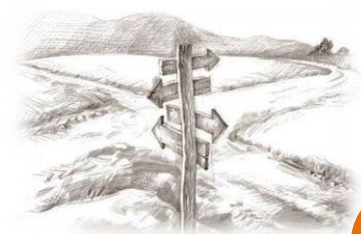
Trans people are not “unstable” and do not inherently struggle with mental health. Gender diversity exists in many countries and cultures and has existed as long as human history. People transition medically or socially because their gender identity is different than the gender assigned to them at birth. No one knows why so many people identify with the gender they were assigned at birth or why many people do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. However, just as being assigned female and identifying as female is not an illness, neither is being assigned female at birth and identifying as male, pangender, or agender, etc. Anyone from any background or with any gender can struggle with mental health challenges.

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**Trans people have no other identities.**

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False! Trans people can be trans people of color, trans and disabled, a same-gender loving trans person, a trans elder or a trans youth, trans with English as a second language, and millions of other



identities. Trans and intersex communities contain an extraordinary amount of diversity and complexity, which is why individuals and communities can be so unique.

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**Trans people all think the same socially and politically and share the same values.**

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This is absolutely false. Trans communities are incredibly diverse and individual's values and beliefs are no different. As mentioned earlier, trans people often have many different identities, come from different backgrounds, and have varied experiences in life.

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**Trans peoples' bodies or appearance is obviously different than cisgender peoples' bodies or appearance.**

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False. There is nothing inherently different about how transgender and cisgender people look and there is nothing inherently different about their bodies. It is not uncommon for a trans person to physically transition and decide to live their life as the gender they identify without disclosing their trans history to others, even their partners. This sometimes means a partner may not know their partner is trans or has a trans history previously. Bodies and appearance all depend on the person, not on label categories.

## **Support people's restroom choices. Don't police who belongs or does not belong in restrooms and changing rooms.**

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**Trans men are masculine, trans women are feminine, and those who identify as non-binary express their gender androgynously.**

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There is no one way a trans person can be, look, or express themselves. Someone who identifies as male does not have to be masculine. Someone who identifies as female does not have to be feminine. Those who identify as neither female nor male might look masculine, feminine, androgynous, or present their gender in any way imaginable. Also, just because someone expresses their gender masculinely does not mean they identify as male. Just because someone expresses their gender femininely does not mean they identify as female. And just because you cannot tell if someone is "male" or "female", it does not mean they cannot be or identify as male or female.

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**Anyone who does not identify as "male" or "female" is just confused.**

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This is false. Many people identify as a gender other than "male" or "female" and these identities are just as real, legitimate, and stable as "female" or "male" identities. Gender identities often change over time as well, and this does not mean the person's gender is "unstable" or they are confused.

People grow and learn more about themselves with time and some people learn new words or find words that fit them better as they grow and get older.

## Respect the person's gender history and confidentiality.

### Trans people do not have sexual or affectional identities.



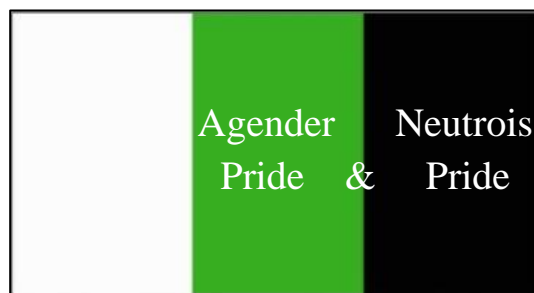
All people have sexual and/or affectional identities and the most important thing is to use the language that the person uses for themselves. If a trans woman identifies as a lesbian, then she is a lesbian. If a trans woman identifies as queer, then ze (neutral gender pronoun!) is queer.

### Trans people are always attracted to the “opposite” gender.

As this packet has discussed a little in previous sections, there is no “opposite” gender. There are hundreds, thousands, millions of gender identities all of which just are. They are not comparable, similar, or different – but they exist. The understanding that gender is not binary makes sexual and affectional identities seem more complicated because there are fewer boxes to fit people into, BUT this also allows people to describe themselves with more freedom. Just like gender identities, there are an infinite number of sexual and affectional identities. Simply respect the language that people use for themselves.

### Trans people are not able to have jobs, a family, or go to college.

Many trans people do have jobs, find partners and have children and/or pets, and get a formal education. The reason so many trans people do not have access to these things is social stigma and other institutional barriers. When people hold stereotypes that trans people are dangerous, abnormal, or mentally ill, they are frequently not hired, paid less, not able to access health care, not given access to housing, rejected by family, friends, and partners, denied the opportunity to adopt or foster children, and/or lack the financial and emotional support to attend college. These are the reasons that reading this information, becoming aware of trans issues, and becoming an ally and advocate for trans people is so important. *You* have the opportunity to be a safe space, ask friends and family to be respectful, and change your personal and professional environments.



### Things NOT to Say. Ever.

The following describes questions you should never ask and statements you should never say to a person. This is true whether you think or know they identify as trans or not. The following statements are inappropriate because they are invasive, dehumanizing, transphobic, and/or tokenizing. If you have

questions about why these are inappropriate or want the answer to some of the questions, try reading other booklets and looking in the “Trans, DSD, and Intersex Resource Consolidation Packet” at [www.pridelafayette.org/translafayette](http://www.pridelafayette.org/translafayette).

Are you a he-she/shemale/crossdresser/transvestite/transgender?

Are you a trans person? Are you transgender?

Are you one of those...?

What are you?

You are an abomination. You are against God.

What you are doing is an abomination against God.

God hates trannies/fags/queers.

Trans people cannot be religious/spiritual.

You are being overly sensitive – lots of people say “tranny/shemale/he-she/transvestite”.

If you do \_\_\_\_\_ or don’t do \_\_\_\_\_, then you aren’t really a trans person.

You don’t seem like a transgender person?

Are you really trans?

I won’t love you anymore if you do/don’t do \_\_\_\_\_.

You will always be female to me.

You are a more attractive woman than man.

Why would you want to be a man?

Are you transitioning to get male privilege?

You will always be male to me.

You are a more attractive man than woman.

Why would you want to be a woman?

I can still see your male/female characteristics.

You are way too attractive to have been born male.

You are really attractive for a trans guy.

You are way too attractive to have been born female.

You are really attractive for a trans woman.

If you just did your hair/clothing/make-up/nails/shoes differently you would be very pretty/handsome/attractive and/or pass better.

Wow, you don’t look like a trans person. Good job.

What did you look like before you transitioned?

But you used to be so pretty/handsome/beautiful? Why did you change?

What’s your real name? No, I mean your *real* name?

It’s too hard for me to switch to your new name/pronouns – can I just keep using the old ones?

I’ll use your pronouns once you get “the” surgery.

“They” is not a pronoun.

Oh, I can tell you are trans!

Oh, I can tell [you are trans] because of \_\_\_\_\_!

I know someone else who is trans.

Oh, I know Chaz Bono.

Do you know [name]? They are a trans person, too.  
 You should be on RuPaul's drag race!  
 Are you sure this isn't a phase?  
 Are you doing this for attention?  
 Are you doing this to get back at me?  
 Why can't you just stay a man or a woman?  
 Are you a different person now?  
 Were you born in the wrong body?  
 It's not possible to be anything but male or female.  
 You have to be one or the other [male or female] – just pick one.  
 You must be making this entire thing up.  
 How did you become trans?  
 Why would you make things harder on yourself?  
 Why would you want to go through puberty again?  
 I have known [name] since before they transitioned.  
 You won't be able to get a job, have a family, or get married now.  
 No one will hire you.  
 You are going to get fired.  
 Did your mother smoke/drink/ do drugs while she was pregnant with you?  
 Did you have a mental breakdown?  
 Where you hospitalized for that?  
 Have you seen a doctor for that?  
 Can they fix that/you?  
 You don't belong in here.  
 You don't belong/shouldn't be in this restroom/fitting room.  
 What bra size are you? You do a great job hiding your breasts.  
 How do you hide your penis?  
 How did you get a date?  
 You have a date/partner? Have you told them you are trans?  
 Does that make your partner gay/lesbian/SGL/straight?  
 I could never date a trans person because I don't want HIV.  
 How many people are you dating right now?  
 I could never date a trans person because I'm monogamous.  
 If you had a penis/vagina, I'd date you!  
 If I was drunk, I'd sleep with you.  
 Have you ever had a real relationship?  
 You know no one will date or marry you, right?  
 No one will date or marry you if you do/don't get "the" surgery.  
 You know if you have "the" surgery, you won't be able to have children.  
 Just don't have children.  
 It's wrong for transgender people to have children.  
 Transgender people are too mentally unstable to raise children.

You're in a bad mood – it's the hormones, right?  
 Do hormones make you crazy or moody?  
 Do you have a penis or a vagina?  
 Oh, you have both a penis and a vagina?  
 Can I feel? Can I touch your chest/butt/genitals/hair, etc.?  
 Are your breasts real? Is your chest actually flat?  
 You know you can't REALLY be male if you have a vagina.  
 You know you can't REALLY be female if you have a penis.  
 How do you make a penis into a vagina?  
 How do you make a vagina into a penis?  
 Are you going to have "the" surgery?  
 I'm so happy that after your surgery you will finally be male or female.  
 After the surgery will you have a "REAL" penis/vagina?  
 Will your penis/vagina work after you have surgery?  
 Why would you do that (physical transition) to your body?  
 Why do you want that kind of surgery?  
 What if you change your mind later?  
 Won't it hurt for them to do surgery on your genitals?  
 Won't you die if you try to transition?  
 How do you pee?  
 How do you have sex?  
 Can I watch?  
 You will always be a virgin.  
 That's not "real" sex.  
 Did you used to be a prostitute/sex worker?  
 Do you have HIV/AIDS?  
 You know all transgender people get HIV and die.  
 When did you get HIV?  
 Were you homeless? What was that like?

## Being a Trans Ally

### Ask people what pronouns they use.

Everyone has pronouns they would like used for them or they may not care what pronouns are used for them– but you will not know how to be respectful until you have asked. The easiest thing to do is ask, "What pronouns do you use?" He/him/his, she/her/her, ze/hir/hirs, and they pronouns are the most common gender pronouns. Some people are comfortable with any pronouns. Some people want no pronouns used for them.





Some people get offended when asked what pronouns they would like used for them. One effective way to navigate this situation is to just explain that you were asking to be respectful and avoid assuming things about them, and that you ask everyone this question. If you are in a situation that you cannot ask about the person's pronouns, use "they" pronouns. For example, "Sam is going to the store soon. Do you want them to get you anything?" Instead of saying, "Sam is going to the store soon. Do you want him/her to get you anything?"

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**Use the pronouns and name the person asks you to use.**

Do your best to remember and use the person's name and pronouns. Some people find this more difficult if they knew the person when they went by another name or different pronouns. The best policy is to be respectful by learning to switch name/pronouns and if you accidentally use an old name or pronouns, correct yourself and move on with the conversation. Dwelling on the mistake only makes the situation awkward for everyone. One quick way to start remembering is to change their name in your phone – every time you type in their name, you will have to use their current name. If you have a learning or language disability that makes it difficult to make these kinds of changes, have a conversation with the person about it.

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**Use the language the person uses!**

Besides name and pronouns, follow the Golden Rule of Labels. Use words to describe each person that the person is comfortable with and uses for themselves.

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**Do not ask questions for the sake of your curiosity.**

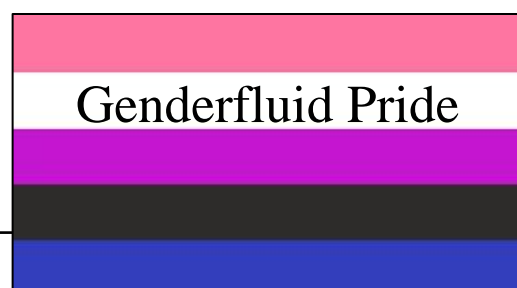
Trans people – especially those who are viewed as non-binary or "in between" – get asked a lot of personal questions. Many times these questions are only asked so the person asking can get an answer and feel more comfortable, while simultaneously creating a very uncomfortable, hostile, or unsafe space for the trans person. Questions about a person's body, transition status/progress, or identity are inappropriate. If someone asked you whether you have a penis or vagina, wouldn't you be upset, offended, or feel that your personal space was invaded? The section titled "Things NOT to Say. Ever" has a long list of questions and statements that are inappropriate to say to anyone, but which trans people are asked, sometimes daily.

If and when a trans person feels comfortable disclosing personal information to you, they will. Otherwise, it is respectful not to ask. If you are looking for information to help a friend with their transition, to better understand information for your gender diverse child, or otherwise get informed, please contact your local/regional LGBTQ+ community center or initiative by finding one at the Indiana Transgender Network page: [www.indianatransgendernetwork.com](http://www.indianatransgendernetwork.com). You can also search online for information or access other resources online at [www.pridelafayette.org/translafayette](http://www.pridelafayette.org/translafayette)

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**Respect the person's gender history and confidentiality.**

Do not ask what the person's "real" or "original" name was. Do not ask to see pictures of the person before they began transitioning. If the person does show you pictures of themselves before they began



transitioning, do not make comments like, “But you were so handsome/pretty before!” or “Why would you do this to yourself when you were so beautiful before.” Or “So that was when you had a vagina/penis?” Do not ask the person questions about their current or past body, especially their genitals or other body parts that cannot be seen in public. Do not “test” the person by asking them questions “only a real woman” or “only a real man” would know the answers to. Never ask a person “what” they are – a person is not a thing and their body and identity are personal. If a person wants you to know more about their body or identity, they will tell you.

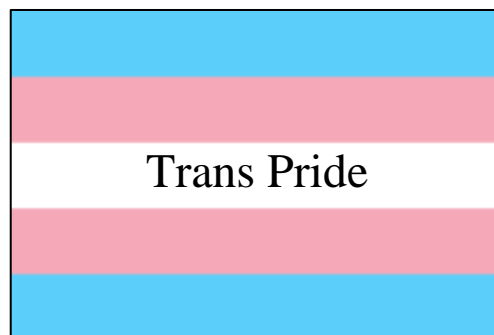
If you see someone whose gender you cannot identify, do not try to “figure out” what body parts they have or how they identify their gender. Under no circumstances should you ever approach someone to ask what gender they are or what body parts they have, and you should also be sure never to stare. This is especially important in restrooms, locker rooms, and other gendered spaces!!! Staring or asking invasive questions makes people uncomfortable, is very rude, and happens to many trans people very often.

Do not out the person by discussing their birth name, gender history, transition status, etc., unless the person has explicitly stated that they are comfortable with others knowing their gender history. Never sensationalize a trans person’s experiences and identity by saying, “Would you believe [name] used to be [birth name]?” or saying, “Would you believe “he” used to be a “she”?” or any other statement/question that has the same effect.

### **Respect labels and choosing to have no labels.**

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Some people use many words to describe their identities and experiences and others do not. Labels and words that describe people are very personal and hold meaning to each person who chooses to use or not to use certain words. The words that people use to describe themselves are always right for that person in that moment – do not question if they are “really” an identity. Some people feel strongly that many labels do not fit them and that should be respected. For example, some people with a trans history stop identifying as trans or part of the trans community at some point. This is their truth and their reality. In this example, it would be inappropriate to tell this person that they “are really a trans person and just in denial,” or something to that effect. Lastly, some people do not identify with any labels. Be comfortable with the knowledge that many people are trying to find the right words to describe themselves and others do not like to use labels to describe themselves.



### **Avoid generalizations.**

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Do not assume all trans people are binary or not binary identified, transition or do not transition, identify sexually or romantically in some way, are all a certain race or ethnicity, are all American, all have a certain ability level or documented status, have a certain kind of family or a certain relationship with their family or relatives.... Or anything else. Trans identities and trans experiences are very diverse and should be respected as diverse. Every person is an individual with their own experiences and identities. Listen to trans-identified peoples’ stories! They are beautiful and personal to the individual.

### **Do not regulate people’s gender expression or give passing tips.**

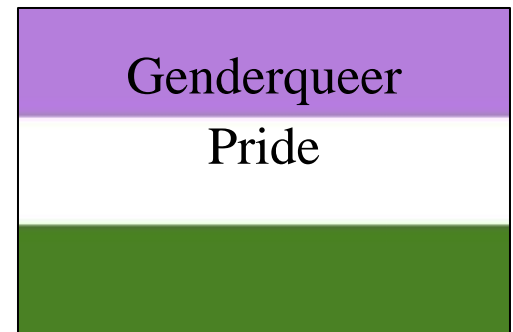
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Do not tell someone they can or cannot wear or do something because they are \_\_\_\_\_. For example, do not tell your trans male partner that “real men” pay for everything. If you have a friend who is trans femininely identified, do not tell her that her body is “too [anything] to look good” in a certain type of dress, pants, or other clothing, or assume they need your help applying make-up if they wear any. If you have a friend who is transmasculine, do not try to “help” your friend learn how to walk or talk “more masculinely”. These statements impact people by making them feel that they are not good enough at expressing their gender however they feel comfortable. Lastly, do not tell someone that when they DO something, they “really look female” or “really look male”. Remember that some trans people do not aspire to pass. In conclusion: do not comment on whether a trans person is passing or not and do not offer help unless they ask you for support and advice on passing.

**Remember that each trans person cannot represent the entire community and no single person can be an expert on all trans experiences.**

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If you are asking an individual about their experiences, they can tell you about their own experiences. They cannot represent the entire trans community. Every person is at their own point in learning – whether they are transgender or cisgender. Do not expect the trans person in your life to have all the answers for themselves or others. Try to find the answers to your questions by reading and becoming more aware before you ask trans people questions.



**Do not sexually objectify trans people.**

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Never tell any person – whether they are trans or not – that you think trans men/women/people are “hott” or “exotic” because they are a trans person. Do not tell someone that you’ve “always wanted to see what it would be like to have sex with a trans person.” Every person in the world has sex a little differently (if they are sexually active). Trans people are not there for anyone’s sexual gratification but their own. A trans person’s body is not a sex object or a sex toy. A trans person’s body does not sum up their gender identity, their sexual identities, or whether they are romantically or sexually compatible with any given person. Just like some cisgender people, some trans people are asexual and/or choose not to have sex or sexual relationships.

**Do not make assumptions about a trans person’s sexual or affectional identities/practices.**

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Trans people can be gay, lesbian, same-gender-loving, bisexual/biromantic, pansexual/panromantic, asexual, questioning, heterosexual/heteroromantic, queer or have any other sexual or affectional identities. Trans people can have romantic or sexual relationships with people with any kind of body or gender history. Trans people can be attracted to people of any gender identity or expression. Trans people can be tops, bottoms, or versatile, can be involved in kink, BDSM, leather, rubber, or other fetish communities, and engage in any sexual practice that any given person might enjoy. Just because a trans woman might identify as female does not mean she has to have sexual or romantic identities that are stereotyped for women. Just because a trans person identifies as genderqueer does not mean they cannot have sexual or romantic identities that are stereotyped to belong to “men” or “women”. Everyone’s sexual and romantic identities and practices are personal, not based on their trans identity or status.

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### Educate yourself, keep learning, and know your limits.

Instead of asking the trans people in your life questions, do as much research as possible on your own. Read about trans identities and check out trans community blogs, websites, and youtube channels. As you learn about trans identities and experiences, keep in mind the diversity present in the trans community. Every person is an expert in their own experiences only. A single trans person cannot know what ALL trans people experience, just as no single person can know everything about an entire community. Stay aware of what you need to learn more about and what trans issues you are comfortable with and understand well. Never pretend to understand terms or trans issues that you do not. Do research, be respectful, and always keep learning!



### Support people's restroom choices.

Do not get upset if you cannot figure out if someone is "male" or "female" in a restroom. Do not stare and do not question if they are in the "right" restroom.

If you are worried about your friend/partner experiencing violence in a public restroom or if your friend/partner tells you have experienced violence in a public restroom, many trans people appreciate if you offer to go with them to the restroom or stand watch outside of the restroom. If you choose to enter a restroom with them where you might be perceived as "not belonging", be extremely careful so that you are also safe! For example, if you are perceived as female and your friend/partner is a trans man and you both enter the men's restroom, be sure you understand the legal risks and prepare accordingly.



Image from Transgender Law Center

## Do not tokenize the trans people in your life.

Do not tell people about your “trans friend” – can’t you simply talk about your friend? When you are introducing your partner to others, do not go out of your way to introduce them as a trans person. Simply give others your partner’s name (and pronouns if this is something you mutually agree is important). You will not gain “cool points” for having trans friends, partners, or family members. Do not tell trans people that they are cool/awesome/interesting for being trans. Trans people ARE cool, awesome, and interesting for many different reasons – but they are personal reasons. Giving someone credit for identifying in a certain way erases their experiences and identities by clumping all trans people together and suggests they all have the same qualities, personality, values, or experiences.



## Interrupt Inappropriate/Harmful Language and Behavior

First, make sure you are safe and consider how much influence you have in the situation. If you are at home and your parents keep using the wrong pronouns for your sibling, ask yourself if it is safe for you to correct them, whether your sibling wants you to correct them, and figure out how much influence you may have over your parents. Most likely if you are interacting with people close to you, you will have a greater influence on their beliefs and behaviors and you may be safer when interrupting inappropriate or harmful behaviors and language.

One effective way to interrupt harmful language or behavior is to ask a question to the person doing the harm. For example, if your parents are using the wrong pronouns for your sibling, you might ask, “Why are you using those pronouns when [my sibling] asked you to use these pronouns?” This gets the person to think about what they are doing and why. Then you can follow up with, “I understand why you are doing that, but it is upsetting [my sibling] and that also upsets me.” This lets your parents know how important it is to you and the trans person in your life that they be respectful. Lastly, let them know how much you appreciate it when they change their language or behavior.



# One effective way to interrupt harmful language or behavior is to ask a clarifying question.

## Being an Ally of Gender Diverse Children

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If your child tells you that they do not identify with the gender they were assigned or behaves in gender non-confirming ways, it is extremely important to treat the child with respect and not assume it is a phase. When parents are trying to be affirming of their child's gender identity and expression, sometimes their instinct is to prevent the child from expressing this in public to protect the child. Navigating public spaces is complicated, but the child should be involved in every step of the decision making process. Have a discussion with the child to show your support and love, and discuss how society expects "boys" and "girls" to behave and dress. Discuss possible outcomes (positive and negative) if the child dresses or behaves in the way they are most comfortable. It is important to have this discussion in an open and honest way, not in a way that instills fear or causes shame.



Be sure to discuss different settings – school, home, shopping for clothing and going into dressing rooms, getting groceries, how to navigate restrooms, etc. Also, once the parents/guardians have discussed identity and how to be affirming and safe with the child's gender expression, parents/guardians should facilitate discussion with other family members, educators, and other adults the children may encounter depending on the needs/wants of the child.

Once the child is aware of all their options and the possible outcomes for all these decisions support them! Always keep in mind that as the child gets older, their decisions may change and it is important to remain flexible and affirming as children grow.

## Being an Ally of Gender Diverse People as a Friend

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If a friend comes out as trans-identified, the most empowering and supportive responses you could give might include "Thank you for sharing something so personal with me," and "I'm so proud of you for coming out and being honest." These sound really cheesy, but saying something similar will mean an extraordinary amount to whoever is coming out to you. Resist the urge to ask questions out of curiosity and instead focus on their wellbeing by asking things like, "How are you doing?" or "How are you feeling?" Your friend may or may not know whether they want to physically transition, they may not have a word or label that they identify with, and all of that is OKAY. Sometimes the most affirming thing you can do is be okay with your friend not having all the answers.



## Being an Ally of Gender Diverse People as a Partner

Being an ally of a trans partner means keeping open, honest, and frequent communication. When someone transitions, all their friends and family transition with them. This is especially true for partners of trans people. If a trans person socially or medically transitions, it will also create changes in the way partner(s) are perceived. Let's use this example: one partner is cisgender and female identified and femininely expressing, and one partner identifies as a trans man. If the trans man medically transitions from female to male, both partners may now be perceived as being in a heterosexual relationship rather than a lesbian or queer relationship. This is a simplified example, but the point is



that transitioning is not just a process the person transitioning goes through.

For those in committed partnerships (exclusive or open, coupled or poly, etc.), having discussions about what aspects of transitioning are exciting, intimidating, or unexpected can be not only healthy and helpful, but also fun. It can be really interesting to see where each partner is at in

the transition process, and help each partner navigate concerns respectfully. For those in uncommitted relationships, it is also extremely important to have discussions about gender, transitioning, and sexual activity and sexual consent!

The greatest thing a partner can do to be an ally to their trans partner is listen and respect. If more than one partner is trans-identified, the same guideline applies – keep talking!

Lastly, it is very important to be respectful of each partners' boundaries during sex, if partners are engaging in sexual activity. Before any sexual activity (yes, EACH TIME), set out rules about what each person is completely comfortable with, what each person is completely uncomfortable with, and what gray spaces exist. Each time you change positions, roles, people involved, or scenarios, check that everyone is still comfortable and having fun. Some people find it more exciting to come up with safe words for "stop", "slow down", and "go", but you can also just use "stop", "slow down", and "go". It is very common for those involved in a sexual activity to agree on some position, but someone to realize beforehand or during that they are no longer comfortable. Find verbal and non-verbal ways to keep everyone feeling comfortable and safe and consensual. All relationships and friendships should be mutual and honest.

## Being an Ally of Gender Diverse People as a Service Provider

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Social service providers, such as those working in poverty alleviation and homelessness alleviation programs, child and elder protective services, social security, welfare and workfare programs, public health programs, adoption and foster care systems, hospitals, etc., being trans aware and trans affirming is extremely important. Social services often overlook trans specific needs and unknowingly create unsafe and unwelcoming environments for trans youth and trans adults. Some simple ways to increase gender diverse inclusion at a social services facility are to train employees and volunteers on terminology, pronouns, and etiquette, create gender inclusive forms, put up statements, signs, and symbols of trans inclusion, and develop procedures for gender inclusive restrooms, showers, housing arrangements, and other traditionally gendered spaces.



## About the Contributors

Authored by Skye Brown with the support of many community members  
Contributions & Editing by Aiden Powell, Editing by Tim Luttermoser

### *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  
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### *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  
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experiences and degree as the inaugural Program  
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**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.**