

# How to be a trans ally

A beginner's guide

Trans  
rights  
are  
human  
rights.

**Transgender, non-  
binary and gender  
diverse people are...**  
**our classmates, our coworkers,  
our neighbours and our friends.**

Millions of people across the world have a lived transgender experience, chances are you've met a transgender person, and you don't even know it.

2018 has been the best and worst year for trans people. Despite the political victories, greater trans representation in the media and new policies protecting trans rights advancing every day, trans people still face disproportionately higher rates of discrimination.

It's time for us—all of us—to become stronger, louder allies and create an inclusive and accepting society for all.

# What does it mean to be transgender, non-binary and gender diverse?

The term **transgender** describes people whose gender identity is different than the identity they were assigned at birth.

The term **non-binary** describes people who don't identify as male or female, but rather as neither or as a combination. These people live as both, either or neither gender.

The term **gender diverse** is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of different gender identities.

For more terms associated with gender identity, see the glossary at the back of this book.

Trigger warning: this page contains statistics regarding suicide and violence.

## The Youth 12 University of Auckland study showed that:

- Nearly 40% of transgender students had been unable to access healthcare when needed.
- Approximately 4 out of every 100 students reported that they were either transgender (1.2%) or that they were not sure of their gender (2.5%)
- Approximately 40% of transgender students had significant depressive symptoms and nearly half had self-harmed in the previous 12 months.
- One in five transgender students had attempted suicide in the last year.
- Nearly one in five transgender students had experienced bullying at school on a weekly (or more frequent) basis – this was nearly 5 times higher than the proportion of students who were non-transgender.
- More than half of transgender students were afraid someone at school would hurt or bother them.

**In Aotearoa New Zealand, most schools and communities are not built to uplift or affirm queer, gender diverse or intersex young people. Every young person deserves to thrive in their community, no matter who they love or how they identify.**

**There is little population data identifying the size of the rainbow population in New Zealand, however indications are that it comprises between 6% and 15% of the population.**

- The Census does not include direct questions about sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. In the 2006 and 2013 Census results, about 1% of cohabiting couples were in same-sex relationships.
- In a nationally-representative sample of New Zealand adults, 5.8% self-identified with a nonheterosexual orientation. Researchers identified this number as an underestimate of those who are attracted to the same gender or engage in same-gender sexual behaviour but do not use a non-heterosexual identity label.

- For comparison, in Australia, 9% of adult men and 15% of women report same-sex attraction or having had sexual contact with someone of the same sex, although only approximately 2% identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- In a 2012 study of secondary school students across New Zealand, 4% of students reported that they were attracted to the same sex or both sexes and an additional 4% indicated they were unsure/attracted to neither. **1.2% of students reported that they were transgender**, and 2.5% that they were not sure of their gender
- Estimates of the numbers of intersex people vary from 1 in every 300 people to 1 in 2000. Reviewing the range of estimates, the Organisation Intersex International Australia (2013) concludes that a reasonable population estimate is 1.7%

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## Mental Health.

The 2007 Transnation study looked at health and wellbeing issues for transgender people in Australia and New Zealand. One in four respondents to this study reported having suicidal thoughts in the last two weeks.

Similarly, the First Australian National Trans Mental Health Study 2013 found 20.9% of participants reported suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm on at least half of the days in the last 2 weeks. This compared with a 12-month prevalence of suicidal ideation (excluding self-harm) in the general Australian population of 2.3%.

“Transphobia in New Zealand often gets swept under the rug by mainstream society. People don’t understand it, or think it’s strange or that being trans is just the punchline of a joke. But it is real, and we have many people in our community who are struggling.”

- *BLANCHE*

**Our nearest neighbours Australia have gathered data that shows**

**71%**

**of trans and gender diverse folks have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives.**

However, in Aotearoa our communities are excluded from meaningful information gathering, to give us a true NZ context to the issues at play for our trans whanāu.

## **Housing.**

Having a safe, stable place to live is one of life's necessities. Yet we know the trans community are disproportionately affected by housing instability or discrimination—such as being evicted from their homes or denied housing—because of their gender identity.

Homelessness is also a critical issue for transgender people. Family rejection, stigma and violence contribute to this disproportionately high rate of homelessness in the transgender community.

And because Aotearoa is not adequately gathering information, this means we are flying blind in the face of issues that affect the lives of our transgender whānau. It sends a message that if you aren't being counted that you don't count. **A safe place to call home, and place where you can live your life with authenticity is a human right for everyone.**

# Trans people of colour.

Violence against trans people isn't just about being trans, it intersects with other types of discrimination too. Parts of the rainbow population experience intersecting and multi-layered minority stress related to other aspects of their identity. For example, Takatāpui may experience minority stress related to being Māori, as well as related to their sexuality, sex or gender. Similarly, members of the rainbow community living with disabilities may experience discrimination related to their disability as well as their rainbow identity.

## What is an ally?

An ally is someone who supports and advocates for the equal treatment of a community other than their own.

If you're not okay with the disproportionate challenges trans and non-binary folks face, it's time to use your voice and actions and establish yourself as a trans ally. Allyship is also active and this is an important part of being an ally. "Ally" is not a label you can give yourself, it is something you have to continually work towards.

## How to be an ally?

Becoming an ally to people who are transgender and non-binary is an ongoing process. Keep reading for important tips on how to be an ally.

# Pronouns.

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). Gender pronouns (he/she/they/ze etc.) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

It is important to respect people's pronouns. You can't always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.



“ Learning to use a person’s preferred pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show respect for that person’s gender. Making mistakes is okay, but refusing to use the correct pronouns shows disrespect and can make that person feel hurt and invalidated. It doesn’t cost a thing to be kind!”

- ALICE, AKL

# Tips for trans and non-binary allies.

**The following are several tips that can be used as you work towards becoming a better ally. This list isn't exhaustive but will provide you with a starting place as you learn more about gender identities.**

## **Don't tolerate disrespect**

Whether it's hurtful language, remarks or jokes, call it out if it's inappropriate. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

## **Respect pronouns**

Not sure which pronouns someone uses? Just ask! Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so. It's okay if you make a mistake—just be sure to correct it and move on.

## **Be patient with those questioning their gender identity**

A person who's questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what pronoun works best for them. Be kind and respectful—this includes being respectful of their names, pronouns and bodies.

## **Don't worry about what bathrooms people use**

Recognise that gender diverse people may not match the signs on restroom doors. If there are no gender neutral bathrooms available, offer to accompany a gender diverse person to the bathroom in a buddy system.

## **Listen to trans and gender diverse voices**

Listen with an open mind and heart to the experiences of gender diverse people—they're the experts on their own lives, and one of the most important parts of being an ally is listening, giving others the space to speak. It's also good to remember that every person who is transgender has a unique experience. One narrative doesn't fit all.

**Don't assume you can tell if someone is transgender**

Transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people don't all look a certain way, and many may not appear to be trans or non-binary. You should not pressure someone you know into disclosing if they're gender diverse. If they want you to know, they will tell you. It's important you know their pronouns, so you can refer to them correctly, but other than that, you should not need more information.

**Be careful about confidentiality, disclosure and outing**

If someone has shared their gender identity with you, don't tell others. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it can also have devastating consequences in a world that can be intolerant of gender differences.

**Use gender-neutral language**

Our everyday words and phrases are often gendered unnecessarily. By using terms like "hi guys" or addressing a group with "welcome ladies and gentlemen", we assume genders and exclude people. Consider using gender inclusive language

like "hi friends" or "welcome folks" instead. Instead of "brother/sister" use "sibling" and instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend" use "partner".

**Learning and unlearning**

Most of us have grown up with ideas about what are the 'right' ways to be a man or a woman. We've been taught to think of this strict gender binary as natural, when in fact, there are lots of different gender identities and ways that people can express them.

Your journey as an ally means questioning and unlearning many of these ideas about gender that you take for granted as natural and being open to different concepts which embrace and include gender diversity.

**Keep it appropriate**

Don't ask trans people about their genitals, surgical status or sex lives. Bottom line: if you wouldn't ask a cisgender person, don't ask a trans person either!

# Glossary

## **Cisgender (non-transgender)**

Cisgender or cis is used to describe people whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex assigned to them at birth. Cis means 'in alignment with' or 'on the same side'. The prefixes cis and trans work together as umbrella terms to classify all gender identities, so no identity is normalised.

## **Gender**

The social classification of people as masculine and/or feminine. Whereas sex is an externally assigned classification, gender is something that becomes evident in a social context.

## **Gender Confirming / Affirming Surgery**

Refers to surgical alteration of anatomy to affirm one's gender identity. This is only one of many routes of transition. Whether for financial, medical or social reasons, many trans people do not opt for surgery. This term is also evolving and some activists refer to surgeries as 'assisted puberty'.

## **Gender Diverse**

For many years, trans has been used as an umbrella term to describe people with gender identities or presentations that differed from what was expected. However, gender diverse is being used increasingly as a substitute for trans, to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural limitations of trans as a word to describe all gendered ways of being.

## **Gender Expression**

Characteristics and behaviors that may be perceived as masculine or feminine, such as appearance, clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions.

## **Gender Identity**

A person's deeply held internal sense of being male or female or some other gender, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth. The ability to determine someone's gender identity rests with the individual.

## **LGBTQIA+**

The umbrella abbreviation for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/ Questioning, Intersex, A-Sexual and + community. The + represents that gender definitions are fluid and subject to change, and that those questioning are welcome in the community.

**Non-Binary**

Some people don't identify as male or female, but rather as neither or as a combination.

These people live as both, either or neither gender. These folks may identify as non-binary or genderqueer and may ask others to refer to them with the pronoun they/them/theirs or xe/xim/xir (pronounced ze, zim, zeer), or faer or hir.

**Pronouns**

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). Gender pronouns (he/she/they/ze etc.) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

**Takatāpui**

Takatāpui is a Māori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) word, historically meaning 'intimate companion of the same sex'. The term was reclaimed in the 1980s and used by individuals who were gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or part of the rainbow community.

The use of 'takatāpui' emphasises one's identity as Māori as inextricably linked to their gender identity or sexuality.

**Transgender (non-cisgender)**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender is a broad and respectful term that is generally the most appropriate term to use. Trans is also acceptable.

**Transgender Man and Transgender Woman**

Use these terms to refer to how a person identifies and lives today. For example, someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman is a transgender woman.

**Transition/Gender Transition**

The period during which a person begins to live to be consistent with their gender identity. There is no one way to transition. Transition may involve 'coming out' by telling family, friends or coworkers, using a different name, changing pronouns (she/he/they), changing clothing or appearance, and/ or accessing medical treatment such as counseling, hormone therapy or different types of surgery; however, none of these steps are required.

**Transphobia**

An irrational fear or hatred of trans people. This is often expressed in the form of harassment, violence, targeted misinformation, institutionalised discrimination and murder.

## RESOURCES

**InsideOUT:** InsideOUT is a national organisation which works to make Aotearoa a safer place for all young people of minority sexualities, genders and sex characteristics live and be in.  
[www.insideout.org.nz](http://www.insideout.org.nz)

**RainbowYOUTH:** is a charitable organisation dedicated to helping young queer and gender diverse (LGBTIQ) people up to the ages of 27, as well as their wider communities.  
[www.ry.org.nz](http://www.ry.org.nz)

### Acknowledgments:

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

InsideOUT

RainbowYOUTH

Suicide prevention and the rainbow population.

June 2016. A submission on A Strategy to Prevent Suicide in New Zealand 2017: Draft for public consultation

Youth12 Survey

Tranznation. A report on the health and wellbeing of transgendered people in Australia and New Zealand

Some of the tips for trans and non-binary allies were adapted from the trans@MIT Action Tips for Allies of Trans People resource, available at [web.mit.edu/trans](http://web.mit.edu/trans).

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