

# The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide

PART  
7



Where's the  
"T" in GSA?

Making Your  
Student Club  
Trans-Inclusive

**GLSEN**<sup>®</sup>

GAY, LESBIAN & STRAIGHT  
EDUCATION NETWORK

# The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide

PART  
7

## WELCOME!

Welcome to *The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide*! GLSEN's student organizing team has created this resource to support new and established Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and similar groups that are working to make schools safer and more inclusive for all students. We've been hearing from many organizers that they need concrete ideas for building, shaping and activating their groups, and that's what this guide is all about. It takes you through the process of establishing your student club, identifying your mission and goals, assessing your school's climate, and engaging in projects and activities throughout the year. It also offers resources for further exploration.

This guide consists of eight self-contained sections; all are designed to help you *jump-start*—or bring fresh and creative energy to—your student club. Topics include:

- Building and Activating Your GSA
- Tips and Tools for Organizing an Action Campaign
- Strategies for Training Teachers
- Understanding Direct-Action Organizing
- Examining Power, Privilege and Oppression
- Creating Youth-Adult Partnerships
- Making Your Student Club Trans-Inclusive
- Evaluation, Continuation, Celebration!

Please note that we have chosen to use gender-neutral language in this resource. We recognize that replacing “he” and “she” with the gender-neutral “they” is grammatically questionable, but we hope you will overlook this in support of students who do not use “he” or “she” to identify themselves.

If you would like to receive more information about GLSEN, or to get involved in the safer schools movement, please register online at [www.studentorganizing.org](http://www.studentorganizing.org)! We welcome your feedback on the activities in this guide—and we salute you for the important work you are doing to create safer schools for all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

## Where's the “T” in GSA?

### Making Your Student Club

### Trans-Inclusive

# The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide

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## Where’s the “T” in GSA?

**Making Your  
Student Club  
Trans-Inclusive**

# What Is Transgender?

All too often,  
 the **“T”**  
 in **“LGBT”** is  
**forgotten**  
 or **ignored**

“Transgender,” often shortened to “trans,” is a term used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression does not conform to societal expectations of what it means to be female or male, meaning sex assigned at birth. Transgender is often interpreted as an umbrella term to include crossdressers, transsexuals, genderqueers, drag kings and drag queens. (These terms will be defined in Activity 7.1.)

## What does it mean to be trans-inclusive?

Being inclusive means that your student club and its members commit to an ongoing process of education, and that you make an effort to ensure that all of your club’s activities and advocacy efforts are inclusive of transgender people and issues. Although all student clubs should address these issues, it is even more important when using the acronym “LGBT.” All too often the “T” is forgotten or ignored.

## Why is it important for student clubs to work to be trans-inclusive?

Being familiar with transgender issues and working to protect people on the basis of the way they conceive of and express their gender should be important to everyone committed to making schools safer for all students, as well as to anyone involved in social-justice work. As with other forms of oppression, everyone is affected by bias, harassment and name-calling based on gender identity/expression.

For people who don’t understand the connections among sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, a simple explanation follows. Many people who encounter discrimination because of their real or perceived sexual orientation are targeted because of their gender expression, whether as a butch dyke or an effeminate gay man. Transgender people are also discriminated against on the basis of their gender expressions and identities. In the safer schools movement, gender identity and expression are all the more significant because they are frequently the cause of teasing in school hallways and on playgrounds. After all, while many youth are not aware of their sexual orientation before middle school, little boys still get called “faggot” for “acting like a sissy,” while girls who “act like boys” are labeled “tomboys.”



## What Is Transgender? (continued)

Although this resource focuses on being inclusive of transgender people, it is important to recognize the connections that exist among gender issues and other forms of oppression, such as race and class. To learn more about creating inclusive environments for all people, check out Part 5 of *The GLSEN Jump-Start Guide*: “Understanding Power, Privilege and Oppression.”

Through the activities in this resource, you will become familiar with gender-related terminology, learn what is included in “transgender” and identify ways in which your student club can be more trans-inclusive.

# Learning the Language

**New terms**  
are being  
**created** as  
people attempt  
to find  
language that  
describes their  
**experiences**

**Ready...** Because gender is almost always presented in our society as a simple “binary” issue—in which people have two options to pick from—it is important to become familiar with relevant terms as you work to expand your thinking about gender. It is equally important to recognize that many terms related to gender are constantly shifting, with definitions evolving and new terms being created and put into use as people attempt to find language that describes their lives and experiences. The glossary presented here is intended to provide basic meanings but not to supply absolute or concrete definitions. It should also be noted that the terminology used in this resource is almost entirely based on terms in English; transgender people and their allies sometimes borrow names and words from languages other than English.

**Set...** **People:** Entire group, prepared facilitator

**Tools:** Colored index cards, markers, enough copies of definitions list for everyone

**Time:** 20 minutes

**GO!** **Copy some of the words and corresponding definitions from the terminology list on pages 4 through 7 onto colored index cards,** using one color

for words and another color for the definitions. Select enough words and definitions for each participant to have at least one card. Do not create a definition for “Man” or “Woman,” and do not include a blank definition color card for either of them, as the first defeats the purpose of the exercise and the second tends to be confusing.

Shuffle the cards so that the definitions and words are no longer near each other. (If you reuse these index cards, it is useful to keep them matched until the activity is about to begin to ensure that none are missing.)



# Learning the Language (continued)

Hand out index cards to each participant. **Then give participants about five minutes to find the matching cards and definitions.** People should ask each other for help as they try to match words to definitions.

Once you have completed this step, go around and have each person read the “words” cards (not the definition cards), one at a time. After each word, the facilitator should read the matched definition from the list below. If the person made the correct match, take both cards for future use. If the person incorrectly matched the word and definition, have the person who has the correct definition say so, and then collect only the word and correct definition cards, leaving the incorrect definition to be volunteered when the card with the correct word is read.

If done correctly, with no cards lost, the word cards for “Man” and “Woman” should have no matches. Ask participants to think for a moment about how there really is no good word-based definition for either man or woman—especially once transgender people are taken into account.

Conclude the activity by providing a list of the words and definitions to everyone for future reference, and answer any lingering questions about the meaning of various words.

## Gender-Related Terminology List

- Androgynous:** Used to describe a person whose gender expression and/or identity may be neither distinctly female or male, usually based on appearance.
- Biological sex or Sex:** A medical term referring to genetic, biological, hormonal and/or physical characteristics (including genitalia), which are used to classify an individual as female, male or intersex at birth.
- Butch:** Used to describe people of all genders and sexes who act and dress in stereotypically masculine ways and who have positively claimed their own masculinity.
- Drag king/queen:** A person who wears the clothing of another gender, often involving the presentation of exaggerated, stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as drag kings (in drag presenting as male) or drag queens (in drag presenting as female) when performing gender as parody, art or entertainment.

# Learning the Language (continued)

- Femme:** Used to describe people of all genders and sexes who act or dress in stereotypically feminine ways, and who have positively claimed their own femininity.
- FTM (female to male):** Used to identify a person who was assigned a female gender at birth and who identifies as male, lives as a man or identifies as masculine.
- Gender:** A social construct based on a group of emotional, behavioral, psychological and physical characteristics that classify an individual as feminine, masculine, androgynous or other. Gender can be understood to have several components, including gender identity, gender expression and gender role.
- Gender expression:** Any combination of how someone outwardly presents external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as masculine or feminine, including dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions.
- Gender identity:** An individual's self-perception or inner sense of being a man, a male, a woman, a female, both, neither, butch, femme, two-spirit, bigender or another configuration of gender. Gender identity often matches the gender typically associated with the person's anatomy but sometimes does not.
- Gender Identity Disorder (GID) or gender dysphoria (GD):** A clinical psychological diagnosis defined as intense, continuous discomfort resulting from an individual's sense of the inappropriateness of their assigned gender at birth and the resulting gender-role expectations. This diagnosis offends many in transgender communities but is often required for those who wish to receive medical supervision of treatments relating to transition, such as hormones or surgery.
- Genderism:** The systematic belief that people need to conform to the gender assigned at birth in a gender-binary system that includes only female and male. Related to sexism, genderism is a form of institutionalized discrimination as well as individually demonstrated prejudice.



# Learning the Language (continued)

<b>Genderqueer:</b>	A term used by people who identify their gender to be somewhere on the continuum in between or outside the binary gender system altogether. Genderqueer people may prefer a gender-neutral pronoun.
<b>Gender role:</b>	The social expectation of how an individual should act, think and/or feel based upon one's assigned gender within the current binary gender system.
<b>Intersex:</b>	A person born with an anatomy or a physiology that differs from societal ideals of female or male. Intersexuals may be born with "ambiguous genitalia" and/or experience hormone production levels that vary from those of societal ideals of females and males. Intersex people were formerly referred to as hermaphrodites; while there is some overlap between transgender and intersex communities, intersex is not the same as transgender.
<b>Man:</b>	[no definition]
<b>MTF (male to female):</b>	Used to identify a person assigned a male gender at birth and who identifies as a female, lives as a woman or identifies as feminine.
<b>Sexual orientation:</b>	One's mental, physical and emotional attraction to people of one or more genders, and subsequent interest in physical relationships or establishing long-term relationships with select people of that/those gender(s).
<b>Transgender (or trans):</b>	A term used to describe people who transgress social gender norms; often used as an umbrella term to include transsexual, genderqueer, gender-nonconforming or cross-dressers. People must self-identify as transgender in order for the term to be appropriately used to describe them.
<b>Transition:</b>	The period during which a transgender person begins to live more fully as their true gender, which may include any combination of the following: alterations to dress, hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery. After transitioning and surgery, some transsexuals identify only as a man or as a woman.

# Learning the Language (continued)

**Transphobia:**

The fear of those who are perceived to break or blur stereotypical gender roles, often expressed as stereotyping, discrimination, harassment and violence. Transphobia is frequently directed at those perceived as expressing their gender in a transgressive way, those who defy stereotypical gender norms, or those who are perceived to exhibit non-heterosexual characteristics regardless of their actual gender identity or sexual orientation.

**Transsexual:**

A person who does not identify with their birth-assigned gender and sometimes alters their body surgically and/or hormonally. The transition (formerly called “sex change”) is a complicated, multi-step process that may take years and may include, but is not limited to, sex reassignment surgery.

**Woman:**

[no definition]

**Zie & hir:**

The most common spelling for gender-neutral pronouns. The first is subjective, replacing “she” or “he,” and the second possessive and objective, replacing “her,” “his” or “him.”

# Responding to **Common Questions**

**Transgender**  
people  
regularly face  
**questions**  
that are either  
inappropriate or  
**impossible**  
**to answer**

**Ready...** As people working on LGBT issues, you may have encountered questions such as these: “Why did you choose to be [insert identity here]?” “How can you *know* you are [insert identity here]?” “And why do you have to be so *open* about it?” Just as gay, lesbian and bisexual people are often asked questions that are not normally asked of straight people, transgender people regularly face questions that are either inappropriate for a school situation or are impossible to answer. Further, transgender people are often expected to answer questions about personal information that is no one’s business but theirs. This activity highlights some of these questions and offers strategies that transgender people and their allies can use in responding.

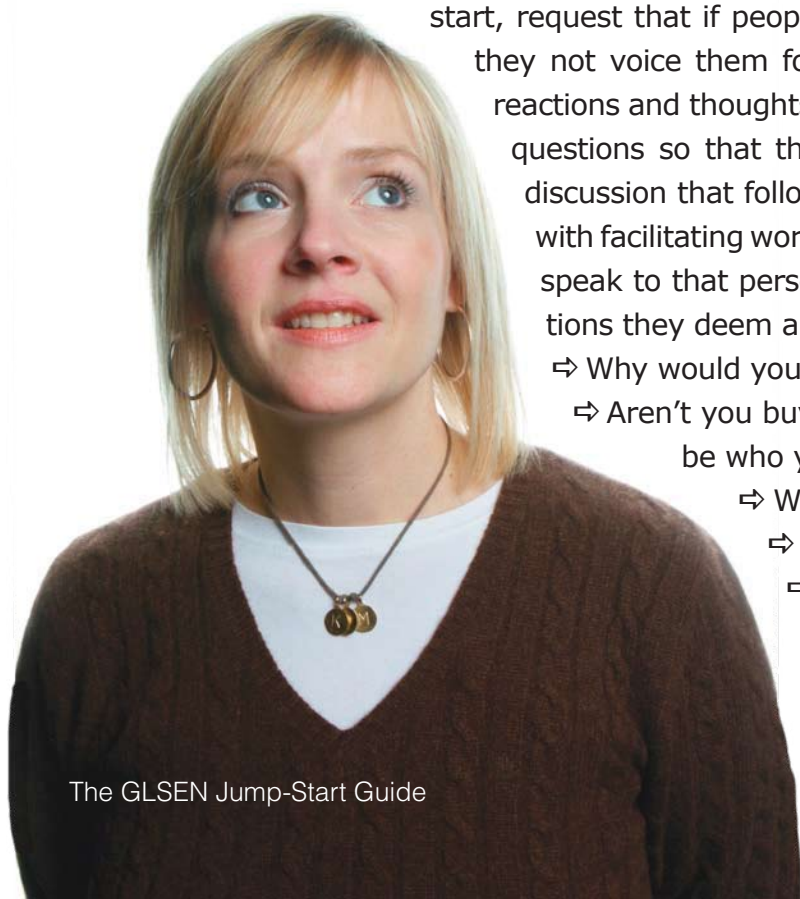
**Set...** **People:** Entire group, facilitator

**Tools:** List of questions below, paper for everyone, pens, flip-chart paper and markers

**Time:** 10–30 minutes

**GO!** After handing out paper and pens for all participants, **read through the following questions one at a time, pausing in between each for about two seconds.** Either have one person read all the questions aloud, or go around the group and have each person read at least one. Before you start, request that if people have actual answers or any responses, that they not voice them for now. Encourage people to write down their reactions and thoughts during the reading, but also to listen to all the questions so that they can understand people’s comments in the discussion that follows. If anyone in the group has any experience with facilitating workshops relating to gender or transgender issues, speak to that person beforehand and ask them to add any questions they deem appropriate to the following list:

- ⇒ Why would you choose to be transgender?
- ⇒ Aren’t you buying into society’s gender roles? Why can’t you be who you are and just stay a [sex assigned at birth]?
- ⇒ What’s your “real” name?
- ⇒ What do your genitals look like?
- ⇒ Have you had the surgery? If not, when are you going to? Doesn’t that mean you’re really a [sex assigned at birth], then?
- ⇒ How do you have sex?



## Common Questions (continued)

- ⇒ How do you know you are [insert gender identity here]?
- ⇒ Why do transgender people mutilate themselves just so they'll like their appearance more?
- ⇒ If you aren't honest with someone about the fact that you're transgender, and if you conceal that you are "really" a [sex assigned at birth], aren't you asking for trouble? Don't people have a right to know the truth about you?



When the statements have been read, let the participants think about them. Then use the following questions to prompt a group discussion:

- ⇒ What were you thinking as the questions were being read?
- ⇒ Were questions read that you think you would have asked or wanted to ask?
- ⇒ If there were, why did you want to know?
- ⇒ Were there questions read that you thought would be okay to ask transgender people? If so, which ones?
- ⇒ Which questions would be inappropriate to ask anyone?
- ⇒ Which questions were you unable to answer in your own minds?
- ⇒ To which questions do you still want answers? Where or how might you be able to find the answers to these? Are there answers to all these questions?
- ⇒ What other thoughts or responses did you have during this activity?

At some point in the discussion, the facilitator should point out that some questions regarding identity could be posed to everyone in a group setting in order to be respectful, while other questions aren't necessary to ask at all except out of pure curiosity. Questions asked out of curiosity should be reserved for people the questioner knows fairly well and feels will be okay being asked (certainly not someone the questioner has met for the first time). Some people are fine with educating others and are skilled at establishing boundaries around appropriate questions, but not everyone is. And remember, lots of general questions around trans issues (or race, class and other equally important topics) can be answered by doing a little research on the Internet or at the library!

## Common Questions (continued)

Another important point to stress as part of this discussion concerns the process of coming out—that is, the decision to be open and visible about one’s sexual identity. While lesbian, gay and bisexual people come out so that people will see them for who they are (rather than assuming that they are straight), it is often much more complicated when transgender people come out. For transgender people—especially transsexuals—coming out as trans often leads people to see them as their assigned sex at birth rather than for how they have chosen to identify. For some members of the transgender community, coming out can be uncomfortable because people may not understand what they are talking about and may not see them as they wish to be seen. You might conclude this discussion by asking: How does the process of coming out for a lesbian, gay or bisexual person differ from the coming-out process for a transgender person? In what ways can allies offer support to members of the transgender community who do choose to come out?

# Leveling the Playing Field

What **privileges** do people get or miss out on as a result of **gender identity** and **expression**?

**Ready...** People who don't defy gender expectations and norms on a regular basis generally have little reason to think about how gender-nonconforming people are treated in our society. But transgender people face an array of challenges every day, ranging from which box to check on forms that ask about gender to which public bathroom might be safer to use. This activity encourages participants to think about the privileges people get or miss out on as a result of their gender identity and expression.

The questions below focus on privileges related to gender identity and expression, but adding statements regarding race, class, ability or other privileges would make this activity a great icebreaker for other anti-oppression workshops. Additionally, this activity is not intended to make anyone feel better or worse than anyone else; people should identify according to what feels comfortable to them, and it is just as okay to identify in a gender-conforming way as it is to be gender-nonconforming.

**Set...** **People:** Entire group

**Materials:** Sheet of statements, masking tape

**Time:** 15–30 minutes

**GO!** Move any furniture in the room to the perimeter, and mark the center of the room's floor with masking tape. Then mark six lines on both sides of the center line with tape, making the distance between the tape marks about a foot apart if possible (this will depend on the room's size).

Have people form a line shoulder to shoulder in the center of the room.

If there are too many people to do this, either find a larger room or split the group in half and have one group do the activity before the other, or send one group to another room. **Ask participants to listen to each statement and follow the instruction at the end if it is true for them;** the instructions are either "move forward" or "move backwards."

When moving, people should stay in a direct line so as not to get in anyone else's way, and should only step back or forward one tape mark with each statement. If the statement is not true for them, people should not move from their spot.



# Leveling the Playing Field (continued)

**Read the following statements.** If space permits, the person reading the statements can also participate. The list can also be passed from person to person in the line, as long as everyone follows all directions, including the one they read. You may also want to review the vocabulary used before starting the activity.

- ⇒ If at a meeting you have ever been asked to make copies or coffee because of your gender, take a step back.
- ⇒ If you have never had difficulty filling out the gender boxes on legal documents, take one step forward.
- ⇒ If you have ever been accused of using a fake ID because of the



- gender listed on your ID, take a step back.
- ⇒ If you have ever been told you have a mental disorder because your gender doesn't "match" your sex, take a step back.
- ⇒ If you have never been afraid to announce your gender, take a step forward.
- ⇒ If you have never been harassed in a public bathroom for your gender presentation, take a step forward.
- ⇒ If your opinions or feelings have never been dismissed through the statement, "It must be that time of the month," take a step forward.

- ⇒ If you are planning to pursue a career in a field dominated by people of your gender (for example, law, medicine and the military are dominated by men, while women tend to dominate the teaching field and clerical positions), take a step forward.
- ⇒ If you have never been told something to the effect of "You're not a real woman" or "You're not a real man," take one step forward.
- ⇒ If you can see representations of your gender identity in the media every day, take one step forward.
- ⇒ If the pronouns you prefer are used regularly in the books you've read in class, take one step forward.
- ⇒ If your gender presentation has ever induced discomfort or confusion in a stranger, take one step back.
- ⇒ If the pronouns you prefer are not used by the people you interact with, take one step back.

## Leveling the Playing Field (continued)

When all the statements have been read, have people look around the room to see where everyone ended up. Then have people break into groups of three to five members and discuss the following questions:

- ⇒ What did you feel during the activity?
- ⇒ What were you thinking as each statement was read?
- ⇒ Did you look around at where other people were standing as more statements were read? Why or why not?
- ⇒ Have you thought about the issues mentioned in these statements before? If so, why and in what situations?
- ⇒ What additional statements could be added to the list?
- ⇒ How do you think this activity is a spatial representation of privilege and oppression?



# Exploring **Transphobia** and **Genderism**

## **Transphobia**

and

## **genderism**

put pressure on all of us to **CONFORM** to “acceptable” standards

### **Ready...**

Transphobia and genderism manifest themselves as prejudice and discrimination on the individual level, and as a system of oppression operating at an institutional level. Transphobia and genderism have close ties to sexism and homophobia; they affect all people, even those who do not identify as trans, by pressuring everyone to conform to “acceptable” standards for men and women. In going through this activity as a group, many people are likely to realize ways in which they perpetuate (or have perpetuated) the binary gender system or otherwise act in transphobic or genderist ways. But rather than getting defensive or feeling guilty, it is important to remember that these are new issues to most people and to realize that we are all part of a culture that perpetuates the binary gender system on a daily basis. The point of working through these activities is to educate ourselves and then to use this knowledge and increased awareness to help change the system.

### **Set...**

**People:** Entire group

**Tools:** Flip-chart paper, markers

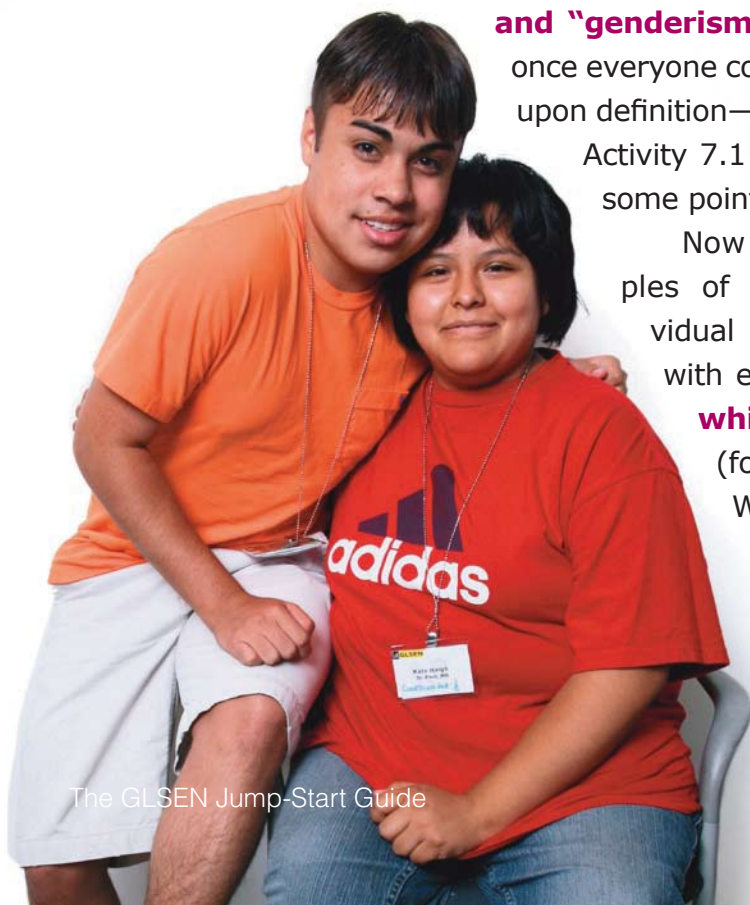
**Time:** 10–20 minutes

### **GO!**

**In a large group, brainstorm a definition of “transphobia” and “genderism.”** Once you have a good working definition—or once everyone concludes that the group cannot develop an agreed-upon definition—read the definitions for these terms that appear in

Activity 7.1 Also read the above explanation to everyone at some point during the activity.

Now it’s time to come up with and discuss examples of transphobia and genderism, both at the individual and institutional levels. If you need some help with examples, prompt people to think about **ways in which the binary gender system is perpetuated** (for example, bathrooms designated for Men and Women) and **ways in which people try to force others to conform to traditional gender roles** (for example, little boys are called sissies for not being interested in sports). Some examples are listed below to provide additional prompts if needed.



# Exploring **Transphobia** and **Genderism** (continued)

## Transphobia is:

- ⇒ People being harassed and/or assaulted for being visibly trans or gender-nonconforming.
- ⇒ Gender-nonconforming people being questioned or harassed for being in gendered bathrooms, regardless of which ones.
- ⇒ Media outlets printing, or people sharing, birth names and pronouns of transgender people who have never said that doing so is okay.
- ⇒ People relying on the only trans people they know to educate them on everything related to gender.



- ⇒ Forcing people to select “female” or “male” on forms that ask about gender.
- ⇒ Having the sex one was assigned at birth printed on one’s driver’s license and passport for anyone requiring ID to see, being forced to pay thousands of dollars to change it (if one is even allowed to do so, depending upon one’s birth state), and never being able to choose to leave it blank.
- ⇒ People viewing transgender folks as only being trans, and ignoring the fact that they are actually multidimensional human beings with interests and concerns beyond trans issues.

- ⇒ Confusion or equating of trans and intersex or trans and gay/lesbian/bisexual identities without considering how each is unique and what specific work should be done to address differences.
- ⇒ The medical establishment acting as a gatekeeper that does not allow transgender people to decide for themselves what is best for their bodies and minds, or to provide informed consent as adults.
- ⇒ Transgender people’s gender identities only being considered “valid” depending on how much surgery they have had or how well they “pass” as a non-transgender person.

# Seeing Beyond Gender

There is enormous **potential** for wider use of **gender-nonspecific** terminology

**Ready...** In recent years, the LGBT movement has encouraged the use of gender-nonspecific language, such as “partner” and “spouse,” around domestic partnership issues. Similarly, the feminist movement has encouraged people to use terms such as “chairperson” and “police officer” rather than “chairman” or “policeman.” But as you will discover by working through this activity, there is still enormous potential for wider use of gender-nonspecific terminology.

This terminology is trans-friendly because it allows people to refer to themselves and others without making reference to gender. Some trans-friendly terms include: **child** (rather than son/daughter), **sibling** (rather than brother/sister), **parent** (rather than mother/father), and **significant other, partner or spouse** (rather than girlfriend/boyfriend or wife/husband). In addition, when talking about someone or telling a story, many of us are in the habit of identifying the people mentioned by gender, either explicitly or by pronoun use. With practice, however, it’s possible to reduce references to gender and to focus on more relevant content.

**Set...** **People:** Entire group

**Tools:** Magazines (enough for all participants)

**Time:** 10–20 minutes

**GO!** **Distribute magazines to the group and ask everyone to cut or rip out photos of people** from the magazine they have been given. Participants can select any photos, as long as they are of people—close-ups of faces, portraits and full body shots are all fine. Everyone should choose one or two images but not show others the photos they have selected. Then people should pair up and sit opposite one another, looking at their respective images without letting the other person see their photos.

**Now have each person talk to their partner for three minutes** about the image without using pronouns or other gendered indicators. If a person runs out of descriptors, they should make up characteristics or relationships for the person in the image, practicing using gender-nonspecific terminology. When the first person’s time is up, the other person in the pair should describe their photo.



# Seeing Beyond Gender (continued)

After all participants have described their photos, everyone should come back to the large group and discuss the following questions.

- ⇒ How did you feel using gender-nonspecific language? Was this difficult or easy for people? Why?
- ⇒ How did you feel listening only to gender-nonspecific language? Did you try to guess the gender of the person in the image being described, or was it a non-issue?
- ⇒ Why do you think you had the responses you did?
- ⇒ What other reactions or thoughts did group members have around this activity? What do these reactions tell us about our views on gender?

# The Pronoun Game

With a little  
practice,  
**gender-  
neutral  
pronouns**  
can roll off your  
tongue without  
a thought!

**Ready...** Many transgender people prefer female or male pronouns (“she” and “he”), but others prefer gender-neutral pronouns. Respecting people’s preferred gender pronouns (PGPs) is an important way to be a supportive ally.

Practicing the use of gender-neutral pronouns also tends to stretch people’s minds and thinking around gender in a way that makes it easier to use the pronouns that people prefer, whatever those may be. Even if people are used to using gender-nonspecific terminology, it can be difficult to get accustomed to using gender-neutral pronouns properly. This is mainly because these pronouns are not heard or used very often in most places. But with a little practice, gender-neutral pronouns can roll off your tongue without a thought! Even if you do not currently know anyone who wishes to be referred to with gender-neutral pronouns, chances are that you will at some point in your life, and as an ally it’s valuable to do all that you can to be respectful.

**Set...** **People:** Entire group, facilitator

**Tools:** Flip-chart paper, markers

**Time:** 15 minutes

**GO!** **Divide the group into pairs.** This is a good get-to-know-each-other activity, so pair each person with someone they do not know well. Before the activity begins, the facilitator should write several questions on the flip-chart paper. These should be guiding questions—about family, pets, interests or jobs—that will encourage participants to talk about themselves.

Before people start talking to each other, review gender-neutral pronouns and make sure that everyone understands how they should be used. Remember, **“zie”** (pronounced “z”) is subjective and is used instead of “she” or “he,” while **“hir”** (pronounced “here”) is both objective and possessive and is used instead of “her,” “him” or “his.” Using “it” to refer to people can be offensive and dehumanizing, and using “they” to refer to an individual is less than ideal because it is plural, so make sure that people stick to using gender-neutral pronouns. Writing the pronouns down (or having everyone write them down in their own notebooks or on scrap paper) can be a helpful visual cue.



# The Pronoun Game (continued)

**Start the activity by having one person in each pair spend about five minutes talking about herself/himself/hirself,** addressing whatever topics or questions have been presented on the flip-chart. Then the second person in the pair should do the same. Throughout this conversation, all people should try to use gender-nonspecific terms and pronouns.

After everyone has shared, bring the group back together. Read through the following guideline as a group:

- ⇒ Once people are clear on proper pronoun usage, establish that if people mess up on someone else's pronoun and don't correct themselves, the most efficient way to deal with it is for anyone else who notices to speak up immediately—and politely—with the correct pronoun and then be quiet. In turn, people who mess up should acknowledge their mistake with a simple "sorry" or nod and save any discussion for later.

**Next, each person will introduce her/his/hir partner to the group** (as often happens in getting-to-know-you activities) and tell a little about her/him/hir using only gender-neutral terms or gender-nonspecific terminology. If group members mess up, people should politely respond according to the guideline provided above. When all participants have made their presentations, take a few minutes to discuss the rationale on the next page, which can be a useful explanation for pronoun etiquette.



# The Pronoun Game (continued)

## Rationale:

- ⇒ Discussions about preferred gender pronouns (PGPs) can be time-consuming and can easily derail an agenda, meeting or conversation, so quick and polite is generally the best approach.
- ⇒ If people don't know the pronoun of someone and arbitrarily pick a pronoun, they could unknowingly make the person feel disrespected or uncomfortable. Correcting mistakes immediately is quick, respectful to all, and treats transgender people like everyone else.
- ⇒ Establishing this as the polite thing to do generally helps not only make sure that people are respectful, but also that people are not offended when others publicly correct them on a pronoun.
- ⇒ Ideally, this will also make everyone more comfortable in correcting people if they mess up, rather than leaving it only to the person being referenced or to that person's friends to correct any mistakes.

Finally, stress the importance of asking people respectfully what pronouns they prefer—or if they reject pronouns and wish to be referred to by name only. Make sure everyone tries to limit assumptions about pronouns for transgender people, and also remember that using different pronouns is new to most people and that mistakes will happen. However, practice makes perfect, so keep up the amazing work!

# Making It Yours

By anticipating answers to **common questions**, you can play a key role in **educating** people about **trans issues**

**Ready...** Coming up with intelligent, coherent answers to questions that one does not feel prepared to answer can be a challenge. But many questions asked by people learning about trans- and gender-related issues can be anticipated. After all, people are fairly predictable and generally tend to ask for similar introductory information.

A key goal in creating trans-inclusive student clubs is making sure that members are not only educated about trans issues, but also that they are comfortable enough with the information that they can educate others in an articulate and informed way. Although it may initially feel awkward to educate others about these issues, it is important that anyone working to become a trans ally become familiar with such explanations, so that transgender people are not the only folks working to raise awareness of trans issues. Practice can help make members of your group comfortable using new terms and different methods of explaining concepts. This activity is designed to help you anticipate questions you might be asked, to provide you with the confidence necessary to answer these questions, and to help you brainstorm various ways of explaining concepts.

**Set...** **People:** Entire group, facilitator

**Materials:** Pens, markers, notebook or scrap paper, flip-chart paper

**Time:** 15–30 minutes

**GO!** Ask participants to come up with two or three questions they think people new to transgender issues might ask them. They can write these questions on notebook or scrap paper. Once everyone has written down their questions, break into groups of three or four and have one person write them on large flip-chart paper. The person writing the group's questions on flip-chart paper should avoid duplicate questions from within his/her/hir small group.





## Making It Yours (continued)

When all the questions have been written down, arrange chairs in two lines facing each other. Have members of your group sit in the chairs (as close to evenly divided as possible) and take turns asking each other the questions and answering. Because generally education around trans issues takes place over more than one question and response, it may be more useful to role-play a “Trans 101” session, with one person answering questions for small breakout groups. It is not necessary for the person answering to pretend to be trans or anything other than who they are; Trans 101 sessions can be led by people of any identity, although people should feel free to incorporate their own experiences or that of their friends if it seems appropriate or helpful.

When all the questions have been asked and answered, have the large group come back together and discuss the following questions:



- ⇒ **What did it feel like** to answer questions in this manner?
- ⇒ **Were the answers** people gave correct? Coherent? Comprehensive?
- ⇒ **How might they** be improved?
- ⇒ **Were questions asked** or answers given that requested or provided more information than necessary? If so, which questions/answers were these? Why would the information be unnecessary? What are some polite, concise ways to respond to such questions?

- ⇒ **Did people feel comfortable** answering? What questions were less comfortable to answer than others? What are ways of addressing this situation?
- ⇒ **Discuss any other issues** participants wish to raise.

Make sure you write down useful parts of the discussion, such as suggestions for improvement. This way the ideas raised can be incorporated into group materials such as “talking points.” Additionally, it makes the information accessible and useful to new group members and others. If there are questions to which no one in the group knows the answer, make sure that someone agrees to research the issue and bring an answer back to your next meeting.

# Getting It Done

Your student club and school can take **concrete steps** to **raise awareness** of trans issues

**Ready...** Now that your student club has the knowledge necessary to succeed at being trans-inclusive, it's time to plan what your group actually wants to do!

**Set...** **People:** Entire group  
**Tools:** Pens and flip-chart paper  
**Time:** 20 minutes

**GO!** In a large group, **brainstorm a list of activities and actions your student club could undertake that would raise awareness of trans or gender issues**, along with ways to be inclusive of transgender people in activities that your club already does. A number of ideas are listed at the end of this activity.

Have people shout out ideas until everyone has volunteered at least one suggestion. Once you have generated a list, divide all the suggestions into three categories: things to change about your student club; things to change about your school; and other ideas. Now have the group discuss which items on the list are priorities, keeping in mind existing commitments as well as resources that are available to your group.

The next step is to **create an action plan** in which you outline goals, objectives and tasks for the priorities you have identified. Be sure to include details on deadlines, along with assignments for all the tasks. It may be helpful to break into smaller groups of three to five members so that students who are interested in working on specific priorities can work together.

After developing an action plan and assigning tasks to be completed before the next club meeting, make sure that each group writes this information down. Keep these lists for later reference and for checking in on progress at your next meeting. Sending reminders via e-mail or posting responsibilities on flip-chart paper can be very useful to ensure that work gets done. Stress how valuable it is if all group members agree to take on at least a small responsibility related to the project, and note that if people know they are already overcommitted and will not be able to get a large amount done, then they should volunteer for the smaller tasks.



## Getting It Done (continued)

### Actions your group can take to expand awareness of trans issues:

- ⇒ **Start each meeting** of your student club with introductions, inviting each person to share her/his/hir name and preferred gender pronoun (PGP).
- ⇒ **Leave a blank line** on forms that your student club or school uses when asking for gender, rather than having only two boxes for female and male. Also, think about why students are being asked to identify their gender: Is it medically necessary information? Is it to track demographics and diversity? If there does not appear to be a good reason to ask the question, request that it be removed.
- ⇒ **Launch a campaign** to create a gender-neutral, all-genders or multi-

gendered bathroom at your school. This would probably be a single-stall bathroom and could provide a safe space where students of any sex, gender or gender identity would be able to change for a sport or use the bathroom and feel safe.

- ⇒ **Help parents and teachers** learn more about transgender issues.
- ⇒ **Join or create a coalition** with transgender advocacy groups in your community.
- ⇒ **Create a poster campaign** to advertise a meeting or rally or to raise awareness about transgender issues, such as Transgender Day of Remembrance or other gender-related days of action.
- ⇒ **Print up some T-shirts** and give them away or use them to help raise funds for your group's projects.
- ⇒ **Show and discuss a feature film or documentary** about transgender issues, or make one of your own!

