TRANS HUB

HEALTH & GENDER AFFIRMATION IN NSW

WORDS MATTER

A guide to talking about the trans people in your life

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How to talk about the trans people in your life

When there are trans people in your life, whether they are your child or parent, your best friend, a colleague, or your partner, at some point, you'll probably want to talk about them with other people.

Talking about a trans person because they're cool, you love them, they have amazing hair, or told you a great joke is perfectly fine, but talking about the fact that they're trans, or sharing details about their gender affirmation can be a lot more complicated, and in some cases rude and harmful.

This resource explores how we can talk about the trans people in our lives in a way that affirms them and ensures that the parts of their lives that are private, stay private.

“We love our allies! Thank you allies. Thank you, people who stand up for us.

We don’t want to be tolerated, we don’t want that stuff. We want to be celebrated and respected.

That’s what we all need and deserve!”

ALLIES IN ACTION

Talking about trans people generally

Before talking about any aspect of a trans person's identity, body, or gender affirmation, consider whether you need to.

A good question to ask yourself is if you'd take the same approach with a cis (non-trans) person in your life or perhaps if someone similarly questioned you – if that feels uncomfortable to you, it's probably going to feel uncomfortable for a trans person, too.

It is important to remember that a trans person's history or lived experience is not something to be disclosed without permission. If a trans person tells you they are trans it is because they trust you and hope you will honour that trust. If you've found out without their permission, there's no better time to show that you are the kind of person who can be trusted, by making sure it goes no further than you.

This can include sharing the gender someone was presumed to be at birth, the genitals they have or had, their old pronouns, or a previous name. While some trans people may be comfortable with this information being shared with others, others might find it disrespectful.

It can also be tempting to describe someone as your 'trans friend/colleague/brother', but unless you do the same about cis people, it's probably not relevant and could be harmful.

Talking about trans people in a historical context can be a tough one. It's always a good idea to use your trans person's correct name and pronouns, even when sharing a story from before they told you they were trans.

Your mind may project an image of them from the past, and you may suddenly find yourself stumbling over their name or pronouns. Try to avoid statements like 'I knew Jessica when she was Jim' – that's not your information to share. It can take some practice but just apologise and stick with it.

Don't hesitate to seek out counselling support, if you need it. You can talk as much as you like, about anyone in your life, with a therapist.

Talking to trans people

Sometimes people feel uncomfortable talking to trans people because they are anxious they'll get something wrong or be offensive.

Generally, it's best to avoid asking about, or pointing out, information that could make any stranger or new friend feel uncomfortable, including asking if they're trans or about a previous name, any surgery they've had, or 'how long they've been trans for' (spoiler alert: forever). Instead, consider how you can phrase a question in a way that affirms them.

Parents and carers

If you are the parent or carer of a trans person, it's important to affirm them when talking to others, including not sharing information that is private. This could mean disclosing to friends or family members when your child isn't ready for you to do so, or sharing information about how they're affirming, or planning to affirm, their gender without talking with them first. Before sharing anything private about your child it's important to have their permission.

Try to practice confidentiality and privacy every day when interacting and caring for your children.

This can include:

- Once a person has chosen a new name, do not disclose their old name without permission.
- When people ask about medical treatment, remember that your young person has a right to confidentiality and privacy, even if they are not undergoing any medical affirmation at all.
- It is the school's role to keep a student's affirmation story private, if the student so wishes. Sending letters home to other parents about your child only intrudes upon their right to privacy.

It can be really validating to ask for your young trans person's opinion on any decision-making about their life. Demonstrating that you're in this together can be profoundly meaningful.

Being an ally is a verb

'Ally' is an action word. Allyship might sometimes look like doing research, advocating on behalf of someone, or being someone they can unwind and debrief with.

Sometimes this can also mean being the person that other people turn to for information, advice, or in some cases gossip, instead of talking directly with the trans person in your life. While it can be helpful to take on this burden of labour, it can also be overwhelming for close allies of trans people to field multiple questions and comments.

It can be helpful to share these experiences, especially if they are experiences of struggle, with a mental health professional, GP, counsellor, or peer support worker, they can help provide tools and support.

It's okay and important to find a balance between taking time for yourself, and using your position as an ally to support the trans people in your life.

We appreciate you.

Parents of
Gender Diverse
Children

This resource has been written in collaboration with Parents of Gender Diverse Children.

Parents of Gender Diverse Children offers peer support to parents and those parenting trans and gender diverse children. We know that parents who are well supported are better able to support their children. We believe that no matter your age – you will always be someone's child – so we do not impose any age restrictions on the families that we support.

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TransHub is ACON's digital information and resource platform for all trans and gender diverse people in NSW, their loved ones, allies and health providers.

For more information and resources, visit:
www.transhub.org.au

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