

21 Ways to be an Ally to Your Trans Youth Clients

1. Ask what the client would like you to do to be a good ally. Would they like you to correct other peoples' pronoun usage? Should you stand up for them when their peers harass them? Should you advocate for them with your coworkers? Or not?

2. Take youth and their gender identity and expression seriously. You may be the first – or only – person in their life to do so.

3. If you are not sure what pronoun or name to use, ask. Then respect the person's choice.

4. Treat trans people as members of their chosen gender.

5. Don't second-guess what gender someone "really" is. This is disrespectful. With trans people, birth sex or anatomy isn't always the same as our gender.

6. Don't assume that passing means success, and not passing means failure. It is not every trans person's priority or goal to conform to gender stereotypes.

7. Do NOT out anyone (or allow their peers to do so) without their consent – this can create dangerous situations for the trans person in question. Gwen Araujo and many others have been killed because they were outed. Different trans people have different attitudes toward outness; some want to be out and others don't. Always ask before you out a trans person to anyone at all.

8. There are many ways to be transgendered. Don't assume that everyone will conform to gender norms. Nontraditional gender expressions are valid. Some trans youth's ideal for gender is to be gender-fluid, genderqueer or androgynous.

9. Some transgender folks conform to gender norms for their chosen gender – hypermasculine or hyperfeminine behaviour. Encourage youth to understand that while this is one option, it is not necessary to be successful in their chosen gender.

10. Years of hostility and abuse can take a toll on youth. Many trans youth have social and emotional difficulties resulting from this. Be aware and respectful when dealing with them.

11. The majority of transgendered people experience body dysphoria; in other words, they are extremely uncomfortable with their bodies – some might go as far as to say they are in the "wrong body". Be aware of this, and try to be sensitive and respectful.

Doctors: Avoid unnecessary nudity, and let your patients get dressed as soon as possible. When discussing gendered body parts with a trans person, ask them what terms they use to refer to their body – and then use those terms. (What you might call a penis, a transwoman may call her clitoris. A transman may refer to his genitals as his bits" or "junk", or his breasts as his "chest" or "pecs".)

12. Many trans youth develop unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, eating disorders, self-harm, etc. Be aware of the connection.

13. Don't assume that all transgender people are heterosexual. A good number of us are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or celibate.

14. There is a high rate of unemployment in the transgender community, around 70%. This is due in very large part to discrimination and transphobia. Many transwomen, transmen and other gender-variant people engage in survival sex. However, don't assume that all transgender people are sex workers, or that they are sex workers because they have no other choice.

15. For many transgendered people, the most important relationships in their lives are not with their family of origin.

Instead of asking a transgendered client how their birth families will react to their transition, ask them about what support systems they have in place (friends, lovers, mentors, etc.) and help them figure out what they will do if these people react negatively to their transition.

16. Similarly, don't assume that a transgender person is struggling to reconcile their being transgendered with the religion of their upbringing. Some of us have embraced a different faith that values transgendered people and honours our contributions, others grew up with a religion that does this, and for still others religion/spirituality is not an important part of their life.

17. Transgender people can and do lead healthy sexual lives. Many of us have fulfilling sex lives, whether that means respectful, loving long-term relationships, or satisfying short encounters. There are plenty of people, transgender or non-transgender, who find us desirable.

18. Do not ask us what our former names were. Most of us are very embarrassed to hear our old names or be called by them. Most of us do not disclose our former/legal names unless absolutely necessary, and we prefer to keep this information confidential.

19. If we haven't been able to officially change our names yet, legal transactions like paychecks and air plane tickets must involve our former names. However, please call us by the names that we go by in your interactions with us. If you're not sure what name to use, just ask.

20. Educate yourself on transgender issues – it is not your transgender clients' responsibility to educate you.

21. Don't assume that all of the above holds true for all transgendered people! We all have different experiences. All of the above many not apply equally to all of our lives.

**"I think
all the teachers
knew and they
cleared the path
for me"**
Fa'afafine