

Inclusive Practices for Service Providers Working with Trans People

Trans people are diverse, and our care-related needs are too. The tips identified below are key practices that service providers can utilize to inform their work with trans and gender diverse communities. These are not comprehensive, nor are they intended to be, but pertinent core practices that are essential to inclusive care.

Tip 1: Respect Pronouns and Chosen Names

Respecting the pronouns of individuals accessing services makes or breaks an inclusive experience. Trans and gender diverse people often experience microaggressions (meaning indirect, subtle, and/ or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group) when accessing services, often through misgendering (use of the wrong gendered term or pronoun) or deadnaming (use of a previous name that is no longer used). Provide inclusive services to trans and gender diverse individuals by asking clients what pronouns they use, using chosen names when speaking with clients, and normalizing the use of gender-neutral pronouns (like “they” and “them”) in instances where you are unsure of someone’s correct pronouns.

Tip 2: Use Gender-Neutral Language

Respecting pronouns and chosen names are a big first step, but we must unpack the assumptions we make in other parts of our language. We often assume that everyone is heterosexual and/or cisgender (i.e., not trans) by default. Our language often reflects that. Using gender-neutral language helps everyone feel welcome and included while accessing services.

Tip 3: Lead with Empathy

Many people within trans and gender diverse communities struggle with isolation, fear of harassment, and higher rates of mental health problems. Many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are not connected to their families due to histories of homophobia and transphobia and don't have access to personal support networks. While we may not be able to completely understand or put ourselves in the shoes of our trans clients, we can lead with empathy.

“Thank you for sharing your story with me. I can imagine it’s been hard to manage being stuck in an unsafe home and family environment. I’m here to help as best I can.”

Tip 4: Acknowledge and Apologize for Mistakes

No one expects you to be perfect. We are all trying our best to provide inclusive, evidence-based care. Mistakes can and will happen. But when it comes to inclusion and equity, we must acknowledge that our mistakes, intentional or not, can cause harm. Apologizing for and correcting our mistakes helps ensure trans and gender diverse clients feel seen and safe accessing services.

Tip 5: Care for Yourself

Care work is hard work. Service providers often have significant case-loads, a huge diversity of clients with distinct needs, and many other stressors. We must care for ourselves in order to provide inclusive and empathetic care to others. Caring for ourselves best positions us to care for and support others. By prioritizing our own health and well-being, we also model those practices with our clients. We deserve time to recuperate and support ourselves.

“It’s been a really hard day, week, month and year. I think I’ll treat myself to some Netflix binge-watching tonight to get my mind off everything going on at the clinic and help me decompress.”