

Supporting Your Friend Through Transphobic Experiences

Many trans people deal with transphobic acts on a daily basis, ranging from microaggressions such as deadnaming (using a previous and incorrect name) or misgendering (using incorrect pronouns or nouns), to harassment and outright discrimination, such as street harassment or hate speech on social media. Learning to support your trans friends through experiences of violence is an important way of supporting trans people.

Ask Your Friend How to Support Them

The best way to learn how to support your friend through transphobic experiences is to consult with them. By opening up a conversation, you can better understand what they need during transphobic experiences (i.e., during acts of misgendering), if and how they might want you to intervene, and how you can support them in the moments and hours after. While there are some key practices you can implement to support your trans friends, it is always best to check with them first.

Acknowledge Acts of Transphobia

Transphobic acts are common, often ignored and unaddressed. When trans friends are misgendered, are targeted with a slur or cat called, it is important to show your trans friends that you 1) witnessed what happened and 2) recognize the harm it caused, big or small. This can be done of harm, you show that you won't normalize those moments of violence, and that you're there to support them through such experiences.

Understand the Papercut Effect

Acts of bullying are often described as papercuts - incessant small acts of harm that build up to deeper wounds. The same concept applies to acts of misgendering, deadnaming or other microaggressions. These acts might seem small, but when they take place every day, and sometimes every hour, they cause compounded harm and exhaustion. This often results in a build up of hurt. As a friend, you can recognize that even if an incident seems small to you, it

is part of a continuum of violence for your trans friends; a constant and exhausting denial of their identity and experience. Friends can support trans people in their lives by understanding the compounded effect, and therefore sometimes emotional reactions, imposed by systemic transphobia through the papercut effect.

Let Them Know You Can be an Ear or a Shoulder

Everyday microaggressions, street harassment and other forms of violence have an impact on the mental health and well-being of trans people. While not all trans people need or will take you up on an offer for emotional support, checking in with trans people in your life to let them know that you're an open ear if they need to vent, or a willing shoulder if they need one to cry on, is a good way to support trans people in your life. While providing emotional support to your trans friends, it is also important to manage your own boundaries and needs, to care for yourself as you care for your peers.

Be Consistent in Your Support

Many trans people go through the peculiar experience of being gendered accurately to their faces, but misgendered or dead-named behind their backs. To support your trans friends, and after consultation with trans people in your life, you should interrupt other people when they engage in such microaggressions. By remaining silent in these situations, we enable other people to mistreat our trans friends. It can feel difficult to correct our peers, but these actions make a significant difference for trans people, and have a much greater than often understood impact: they contribute to a culture of trans inclusivity that benefits all trans people.