

How colleagues can support colleagues who are transitioning

Transitioning - “The steps a trans person takes to live in their gender. Each person's transition will involve different things” - **Stonewall**.

What is transitioning?

Transitioning is defined by [Stonewall](#) as “the steps a trans person takes to live in their gender. Each person’s transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, using different pronouns, dressing differently and changing official documents”.

How can I support my colleagues who are transitioning?

Being an ally is everyone’s responsibility but what does it mean to be an ally?

Role model acceptance in day-to-day conversation with your colleagues, be the person that speaks positively about trans and non-binary people. If you hear transphobic language or jokes, call them out, although that’s not always easy to do.

If you witness someone being transphobic to a colleague or in front of them, be careful about breaking their confidentiality. You could offer support or ask if they need your help in any way but do not make any decisions for them. It is your colleague’s decision whether they report the incident to their line manager, so it is important to follow your colleague’s lead.

Colleagues should note that if they do wish to report any incident of harassment, including bullying, discrimination, hate or sexual misconduct they should use the university’s online platform ‘Report and Support’ which can be found [here](#). Employees should also refer to the university’s Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy [here](#).

If someone comes out to you, do not share this information without their consent. Breaking confidentiality can have serious consequences for that person when society is still quite intolerant of trans and non-binary people. Some trans people may not be comfortable sharing their personal gender history so check with them first whether they want you to speak up on their behalf.

Respect someone’s choice to identify the way they want to, because it is their choice. Have empathy by trying to put yourself in their shoes.

Listen to your colleague and respect their wishes. Be respectful of someone’s name they have asked you to use. Don’t use their ‘deadname’, i.e. the person’s birth name which they no longer use, but if you do so by mistake, don’t worry, apologise, correct yourself and move on.

Be mindful of using gender neutral language as much as possible in your day-to-day communication. A good example is avoiding gendered terms like ‘he’ or ‘she’ when referring to someone whose gender is unknown or when speaking in general terms.

Correct use of pronouns is key to helping your colleagues feel included at work. You could also rephrase a sentence and use the person’s name or restructure to remove the need for a pronoun altogether. You could use gender neutral pronouns e.g. they/them but you could accidentally misgender someone by doing so. If you’re not sure what pronouns to use for someone it is okay to ask, rather than assuming. Use of pronouns is not just for trans and non-binary people either, everyone can share their pronouns to help create an environment where this is the norm.

Be aware of your own reactions – listen, and don't ask intrusive questions, even if you want to. Take the lead from your colleague, if they wish to open up to you that is up to them, and if they do be respectful.

Like being an ally, **use your voice**. The more everyone talks openly about trans and non-binary choices the more we will break the taboo around being trans or non-binary and normalise the conversation. If you are a trans or non-binary colleague and want to use your own experience and your voice to support others, join the [LGBT+ Staff Community](#).

You don't have to be an expert, and you're not expected to be. Whilst it may be too intrusive to ask a trans person questions about their transition, why not do some research online and **educate yourself**? The following resources are recommended reading:

- [Gendered Intelligence](#)
- [TransActual](#)

Every person's journey is unique and there is not one 'right way' of transitioning. A person may go through one, or any number of the following transitions:

- **Social transition:** This may include changing clothing, makeup, behaviour, mannerisms, voice, name or pronouns. This could be a huge step for the individual.
- **Legal transition:** When someone might want to change the gender shown on their birth certificate which requires a Gender Recognition Certificate although this is not required for someone to change their name or gender on their work records.
- **Medical transition:** Some trans people choose to have hormone treatment and/or surgery. Time off work for this purpose should be treated the same as any other absence (refer to the Sickness Absence policy).

Support your colleagues.