Gender Identity and Gender Expression FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions

What Does “Transgender” Mean?
A “transgender” person is someone whose self-identity and/or expression doesn’t conform or transgresses traditional notions of “male” and “female.” Their gender identity and/or expression differs from their gender as assigned at birth.

Who Are Transgender People?
Transgender people include female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs or transsexual men), male-to-female transsexuals (MTFs or transsexual women), crossdressers (the term preferred to “transvestites”), drag queens and kings, and individuals who adopt a range of genderqueer identities and labels.

What Does Genderqueer Mean?
A relatively new term, “genderqueer” is used by many transgender youth who do not identify as either male or female and who often seek to blur gender lines. They often will use third gender pronouns (ze/hir). Ze is used instead of he/she and hir is used instead of his/her.

How Are Transsexuals Different from Crossdressers?
Transsexuals feel that their gender identity does not coincide with the gender they were assigned at birth. They may undergo hormone treatments and gender confirmation surgeries to align their anatomy with their core identity, but not all desire or can afford to do so. Although crossdressers wear clothes that are considered by society to be inappropriate for their gender, they do not want to change their birth gender and generally do not alter their bodies through hormones or surgeries.

What does it mean “to transition”?
For a person whose gender identity doesn’t coincide with their birth assigned gender they may transition to the opposite sex/gender. People transition from male to female (MtF) or female to male (FtM) by taking hormones and/or having surgery. The surgeries are referred to as gender confirming surgeries or sexual reassignment surgeries.

What is the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation?
Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. Sexual orientation is someone’s sexual attraction to others who may be of the opposite sex, the same sex, or either sex. Like other people, transgender people can be heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Generally speaking, their gender identity - not their physical sex status - determines their sexual orientation.

How Are Transgender People Discriminated Against?
Like gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, transgender people face discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations and services. They are also potential targets for hate crimes and incidents: verbal harassment, threatening telephone calls and emails, and acts of violence committed by the same people who hate lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. Transgender people fall victim to discrimination and hate crimes because they often possess physical or behavioral characteristics that readily identify them as transgender. They are also often denied health care, including access to hormones and gender confirmation surgeries.