

June Health Tips

Happy Pride Month!

This month, we celebrate the diversity and progress of the LGBTQIA+ community! However, while Pride is a time of celebration, it is also an excellent time to remember that despite the progress of the past few years, members of the LGBTQIA+ community continue to face discrimination and societal pressure. These pressures have more frequently led to poor mental health outcomes, particularly among younger members of the community. This month's health guide is going to focus particularly on supporting the transgender and nonbinary members of our community. As the goal of public health is to ensure that all members of our community have a right to an environment that protects and nourishes their well-being and health (mental and physical), this month's health tips will provide some guidelines for being a good ally, as well as resources for any readers who wish to learn more!

Common Terms

Sex: A classification of a person as male, female, or intersex, typically assigned by a health professional when we are born based on external physical characteristics.

Gender: Our internal experience and understanding of our own gender identity, which tends to be personal and cannot be known by looking at a person. While it is commonly believed that gender is a binary (male/masculine, female/feminine), it is more of a spectrum than clearly defined categories.

Cisgender: People whose gender identity is the same as the sex they are assigned at birth.

Transgender: People whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Nonbinary: People who experience their gender identity, or express their gender, in a way that is outside the male/female gender binary.

Gender Identity: Our internal sense of what our own gender is. Everyone, cisgender or transgender, has a gender identity.

Gender Expression: How we present our gender to others, whether that be through voice, dress, mannerisms, haircut, or other means. Everyone expresses their gender, regardless of whether they are cisgender or transgender.

Gender Nonconforming: A broad umbrella term for an individual whose gender identity does not conform to the common societal understanding of how gender is typically expressed or defined (as masculine/feminine, etc.)



Being a Good Ally

Oftentimes, especially at a young age, children and teenagers will hesitate to come out as transgender or nonbinary to friends or adults, because of the unfortunate stigma and misunderstandings about gender identity that are common in our society. Below, we'll discuss a few tips on how to be a good ally if someone comes out to you.

- **Be Respectful!** Coming out can be a difficult and emotionally vulnerable experience, especially if you are a loved one or trusted adult. When someone comes out to you, listen to their experience and be respectful.
- **Respect Their Wishes** Sometimes, someone may choose not to come out publicly as gender nonconforming, because they are afraid of backlash or discrimination. Remember that the decision to come out belongs to that person and should not be made on their behalf.
- **Use Their Name and Pronouns** Most often when someone comes out to you, they will indicate that they wish to be referred by a different name, and they may ask you to refer to them by a set of pronouns that are better suited to their gender identity. It is important to always refer to someone by their proper pronouns and preferred name.
- **Assure Them That They Have Your Unconditional Love and Support** Especially if the person is a loved one or family member, but even if they are merely a close friend, it is important to assure them that your support and love is unconditional, and you will be there for them. Doing so can dramatically improve their mental well-being, particularly if you take the above steps to show that you mean it.
- **Call Out Transphobia and Discrimination** If they are publicly out, request that others respect your loved one's identity by using their correct pronouns and preferred name. Be their advocate! Even if they are not publicly out, call out discriminatory actions or behavior by others. Make sure to signal that transphobic behavior is not tolerated and cultivate a welcoming and inclusive environment whenever possible.
- **Educate Yourself** These are all very difficult topics, and many of the lived experiences of trans and gender nonconforming people are difficult to empathize with by cisgender individuals, because they may not have experienced such things themselves. Take their concerns and what they choose to share with you seriously, and always be open to learning more about the topic.
- **When You Make a Mistake, Apologize** Everyone makes mistakes, and sometimes ingrained habits (like referring to a transgender individual by their old name) might take time to break. However, if you make a mistake, don't panic. Simply apologize, correct yourself, and make an effort to better yourself in the future. Don't behave overly guilty or dramatic, as that may put a greater emotional burden on the person.

Additional Resources

- **The Trevor Project** (National Education and Resource Program): <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- **Safe Homes** (Local education and resource program): <https://www.safehomesma.org/>
- **Safe Spaces for LGBTQIA+** (State-sponsored resource list): <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/safe-spaces-for-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queerquestioning-intersex-aseexual-andor-allied-lgbtqia>
- **Massachusetts LGBTQIA+ Resource Map:** <https://ma-lgbtq.org/>
- **Human Rights Campaign** (The link below is another list of basic details): <https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics>
- **Gender Spectrum** (National NGO with greater details about resources for children and parents): <https://www.genderspectrum.org/>