

## Useful Definitions and Guidelines in Dealing with Transgender Issues

### 1. Definitions

A. Gender Identity - A person's innate, deeply-felt psychological identification as a man, woman, or something else, which may or may not correspond to the person's external body or assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on the birth certificate).

B. Gender expression - The external manifestation of a person's gender identity, which may or may not conform to the socially-defined behaviors and external characteristics that are commonly referred to as either masculine or feminine. These behaviors and characteristics are expressed through movement, dress, grooming, hairstyles, jewelry, mannerisms, physical characteristics, social interactions, and speech patterns (voice).

C. Gender Non-Conforming - A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations and/or stereotypes related to gender.

D. Sexual Orientation - A term describing a person's attraction to members of the same gender and/or different gender. Usually defined as heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual. Sexual orientation and gender identity are different concepts.

E. Transgender - An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on their birth certificates). **Not all transgender people want to live as the sex opposite of the one they were assigned at birth.** Individuals who cross dress, live androgynously or do not live their life in a gender binary manner (genderqueer) are all within the umbrella term "transgender." The preferred use of the word transgender is as an adjective and not a noun or a verb. (*Tony is a transgender man.* NOT *Tony is a transgender.* OR *Tony is transgendered.*)

F. Transsexual - People whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth (i.e., the sex listed on their birth certificates). People who, often on a full-time basis, live their lives as a member of the sex opposite of their birth-designated sex. They may or may not take hormones or have surgery. This term is hotly debated within the transgender community and should be utilized only if the individual is comfortable with the term.

G. Gender Affirmation or Transition - When an individual begins to live as the sex opposite of the one assigned at birth that process is referred to as transitioning or going through the gender affirmation process.

H. Gender Dysphoria - a strong and persistent cross-gender identification and persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex which causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Some, but not all, transgender individuals have gender dysphoria. This has been, and in some literature, still is referred to as "gender identity disorder," however, many in the community consider the use of disorder to be offensive and gender dysphoria is now the preferred technical term.

I. Transgender Man - A term for a transgender individual who, assigned female at birth, currently identifies as a man. This is sometimes shortened to transman.

J. Transgender Woman - A term for a transgender individual who, assigned male at birth, currently identifies as a woman. This is sometimes shortened to transwoman.

K. Gender Queer – A term which generally refers to a person who does not accept a gender binary world and refuses to conform their behavior to any gender stereotypical behavior.

L. Gender Reassignment Surgery (Also referred to as Gender Confirming Surgery or Gender Affirming Surgery) - Terms that refers to various surgical procedures that change one's body to align gender identity and presentation. Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact there are many different surgeries.

M. Hormone Therapy - The administration of hormones to facilitate the development of secondary sex characteristics as part of a medical transition process. Those medically transitioning from female to male may take testosterone while those transitioning from male to female may take estrogen and androgen blockers.

N. Cross-Dresser - A term for people who dress in clothing not typically worn by their assigned birth sex, but who generally do not desire to live full-time as the other gender.

O. WPATH – The acronym for the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. WPATH is an international, multidisciplinary, professional association whose mission is to promote care, education, research, advocacy, public policy, and respect for transgender health. WPATH has designed the standards of health care for transgender individuals know as the *Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*. All reputable physicians in the United States who treat transgender individuals follow WPATH's SOC.

Words not to use because they are out dated or considered offensive – “trannie,” “tranny,” “she-male,” “he-she,” “it,” “transvestite,” “sex change,” “sex change operation.”

## 2. Name, Pronoun and Terminology Usage

**Whenever possible, use a transgender person's chosen name even if it is not their legal name.** Often transgender people cannot afford a legal name change or are not yet old enough to change their name legally. They should be afforded the same respect for their chosen name as anyone else who lives by a name other than their birth name (e.g., celebrities).

**Whenever possible, ask transgender people which pronoun they would like you to use.** A person who identifies as a certain gender, whether or not that person has taken hormones or had some form of surgery, should be referred to using the pronouns appropriate for the gender they identify with or are expressing themselves as.

**If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun he or she prefers, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person's appearance and gender expression.** For example, if a person wears a dress and uses the name Susan, feminine pronouns are appropriate.

**When describing transgender people, please use the correct term or terms to describe their gender identity.** For example, a person who was assigned male at birth and transitions to female is a *transgender woman*, whereas a person who was assigned female at birth and transitions to male is a *transgender man*.