How to be an Awesome Trans Ally

STEP ZERO
Think about your own gender identity. Every single person has some sense of themselves as a gendered being. Take some time and think about when you first became aware of your own gender, and how it developed as you grew older. Then, start to imagine what it would be like if your sense of gender hadn’t matched your body. How would that feel? What would you do about it?

THE EASY STUFF
Be open to using the pronouns/labels/language a trans person wants you to use. If you make a mistake, quickly correct yourself. The most important step of being an ally is allowing others to define their own identity.

If you don’t know what pronouns to use, ask. Politely and respectfully. Everyone has a pronoun preference, even if we often don’t think about it. (See ‘Step Zero’ above.) Asking is a simple way to show your respect for someone else’s self-identification.

...but don’t pry or make assumptions. Don’t ask if someone has had surgery or if they are on hormones or plan to do either of these things. Also understand that not all trans people choose to undergo medical intervention, and that not physically transitioning, taking hormones, or having surgery does not invalidate their trans identity.

Remember: Gender is not the same as sexual orientation, and challenging binary gender systems isn’t always the same thing as being trans. Being trans does not mean a person is gay, and being gay doesn’t mean a person is trans. Likewise, just because someone appears androgynous or not clearly presenting as masculine or feminine does not mean that they are trans.

Don’t out anyone. If someone tells you that they or someone else are trans, please do not share it with others unless you are told that it is okay to do so. That person is trusting you, so don’t break their trust.

A LITTLE BIT HARDER, NOW
Do your research. It is not the responsibility of a trans person to be your teacher, so look things up on your own. Visit www.rebeccakling.com/learn for some additional resources and potential places to start.

Speak up. Politely correct others if they use the wrong pronoun for a trans individual. Call out friends, peers, and media sources who make transphobic, hateful, or simply ignorant remarks.

NOW YOU’RE GETTING IT!
Start thinking about intersectionality. Intersectionality is the idea that different systems of oppression - racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc - all overlap and interact. For example, the experience of a white trans person may be very different than that of a trans person of color. Truly fighting for trans rights requires also fighting against racism, sexism, classism, and all other forms of discrimination.

Don’t use “T” in your group’s name unless you mean it. It is unfair and misleading to add the T to a group or organization’s name if you are not doing anything to help or support the transgender community.

Fight gender policing, especially bathroom policing. Gender policing is when an individual or institution tries to enforce cultural gender roles. Because restrooms are one of the most gendered places in our culture, gender policing can be at its worst around issues of bathroom access. At an individual level, you can offer to escort a trans person to the restroom to ensure their safety and comfort, particularly in unfamiliar places such as bars or restaurants. At an institutional level, encourage businesses and organizations to create gender neutral spaces, paperwork, and policies.

Listen. The best way to be an ally is to listen to trans people themselves. Be open to learn more about terms, identities, and pronouns that you are unsure or unaware of. Likewise, different trans people and different trans communities may not all have the same priorities. For some, healthcare may be a pressing issue. For others, it may be treatment by police or safe housing. Don’t assume that all trans people want and need the exact same thing.

For additional web resources, including links to various Trans 101 worksheets, visit www.rebeccakling.com/learn

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