

# Transgender Basics

Ash Wickell, LMFT-T  
asherjmcc@gmail.com

316.351.8083  
[www.ashwickell.com](http://www.ashwickell.com)

## Identity

The language of transgender identity is as complex as that of any other--to an outsider or newcomer, it can seem almost impenetrable! This is especially true because, as a community which is both highly marginalized, and very highly regulated (for instance, by legal and medical requirements for transition; by sociocultural norms around "appropriate" gender expression), transgender people have often had to create our own language, either to clarify identities that are not recognized by a broader culture; or to draw a distinction between the way we see ourselves, and the way others describe us! Some great sources for learning more about trans identity and naming are available online; but it's important to keep in mind that these are highly personal terminologies--they vary across time, generations, regions of the country and world; and sometimes from one person to another. If someone shares their identity with you, and you don't understand what they mean, be open about that--it's a great opportunity for you to learn, and for them to share with a safe audience, if they're comfortable doing so.

## Etiquette

### Names and Gendered Pronouns

Trans people are like most other people, in that we'd prefer you address us in the terms we identify with! Our "real" names and gendered pronouns are what we say they are--so please learn to use them, even if it's challenging at first; and if you make a mistake--a brief acknowledgement and apology is appropriate. Misgendering often has a ripple effect, and can send a whole room spinning off into the wrong set of pronouns; so please don't make us do the work of correcting it alone!

### Personal Questions

Before asking a trans person a question, a useful reflection can be... would I ask a cisgender person this question in this way, in this context, in this relationship? If the answer is no--best to hold off, and find a source whose goal is educating you, not just quietly enjoying their book, dinner, or relationship. If the answer is yes--as with anyone else, it's still polite to ask permission before digging into a personal area like relationships, personal or medical history, or embodiment.

### Stealth vs. Out

Some trans people literally wear it on our shirts! Some of us don't even identify as transgender, anymore, once we complete medical and legal transition. Regardless of our reasons--many transgender folks are out in only some, or none of the contexts where we live our daily lives. When we lose control of who knows our trans history--we may end up in situations where our jobs, housing, close relationships, or even our physical safety are at risk! It's important to be mindful of how and whether you share another person's trans status or history--if you don't have explicit, specific permission to do so, keep it to yourself!