

Be the Light...

a toolkit for LGBTQIA+ folks, their families, and
their communities

Part of the “Be the Light” series

Presented by



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Table of Contents

<u>Glossary</u>	2
<u>FAQs</u>	5
<u>LGBTQIA+ Introductory Info</u>	7
<u>Creating an Inclusive Community</u>	10
<u>A Guide to Positive Parenting</u>	13
<u>Notes from an LGBTQIA+ panel</u>	15
<u>Additional Resources</u>	20
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	22

Glossary

LGBTQIA+ — an acronym that stands for lesbian (L), gay (G), bisexual (B), transgender (T), queer (or questioning, Q), intersex (I), asexual (A) as well as many other identities related to sexual orientation and gender.

SOGIE — an acronym that stands for sexual orientation (SO), gender identity (GI), and expression (E).

Biological Sex — A medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female, male, or intersex.

Gender — The social and cultural division of people according to their biological sex as well as associated learned behaviors and attitudes.

Sexual Orientation — How one identifies who they are attracted to and how (i.e gay, lesbian, asexual, etc.).

Gender Identity — One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. How individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves (i.e transman, transwoman, agender, etc.).

Gender Binary — The idea that there are only two genders and that every person is one of those two, though there are many examples to the contrary.

Gender Dysphoria — Strong, persistent feelings of identification with a gender identity other than that assigned at birth and discomfort with one's own assigned sex that results in significant distress or impairment. Replaced Gender Identity Disorder in the DSM-V.

Transgender — an umbrella term that covers a range of identities that challenge socially defined gender norms. Generally, having a gender that varies from the sex/gender one was assigned at birth.

Transman — Generally, someone who was assigned female at birth but who identifies with a masculine gender.

Transwoman — Generally, someone who was assigned male at birth but who identifies with a feminine gender.

Non-binary — Someone who identifies as outside of the gender binary (i.e. traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine). Also, existing outside of the concept of binary gender.

Genderqueer — A person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of masculine and feminine genders. Sometimes used as an umbrella term for those individuals who identify outside of binary gender.

Gender Fluid — A person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender and whose gender identity may vary along binary or non-binary lines.

Agender — One with little to no adherence to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender.

Intersex — A combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and/or genitals that differs from the two expected patterns of male or female. Also, a person who possesses these characteristics.

Cisgender — a term for a person whose gender identity and biological sex assigned at birth align. Generally, having a gender that does not vary from the sex/gender one was assigned at birth.

Gay — Individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. In this case, most often men who are attracted to men. This is also often used as an umbrella term for anyone who is attracted to the same or multiple genders.

Lesbian — Individuals who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. In this case, most often women who are attracted to women.

Bisexual — One who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to people of multiple genders. This attraction doesn't have to be equally split or indicate a level of interest that is the same across genders or sexes.

Asexual — A person who experiences little to no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior.

Pansexual — A person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for individuals regardless of their gender identities/expressions.

Queer — Used as an umbrella term to describe individuals who don't identify as straight and/or cisgender. Once used as a derogatory term, this is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQIA+ community but some have reclaimed it for their own use and identity purposes.

Ally — a term for someone who supports and respects members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Often, this term is applied to people who are straight (heterosexual) and/or cisgender, or do not identify as LGBTQIA+.

Heteronormativity — The assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual (straight) and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities. This leads to invisibility and stigmatization of other sexualities and contributes to the assumption that only masculine men and feminine women are straight.

Cissexism — Behavior that grants preferential treatment to cisgender people, reinforces the idea that being cisgender is somehow superior to being transgender, and/or makes non-cisgender identities invisible.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between sex and gender?

Gender is generally described as how someone perceives themselves to fit into the world along masculine, feminine, or neutral lines while sex is a medical term used to refer to the chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics that are used to classify an individual as female, male, or intersex.

Can my family still be a part of a faith organization if my child identifies as LGBTQIA+?

Yes, many faith-based organizations even have specific LGBTQIA+ oriented services, groups, camps, and even congregations. Talk to the leaders of your group or organization to find out what their stances are regarding LGBTQIA+ community members. Don't be afraid to branch out within your faith to find a supportive and accepting community.

How can I best help my child once they come out?

While this doesn't have one easy answer, the best thing you can be is supportive and understanding. Advocate for them in situations where they may be feeling discriminated against or where they may be facing obstacles. Educate yourself and connect with others who may be having similar experiences to your own. Celebrate who they are and the identities that they claim as their own.

“Queer” used to be an offensive term. What does it mean today?

Though it still is an offensive term for many and should not be used to describe anyone unless they have specifically told you it is okay to do so, the word “queer” has been reclaimed by some (particularly in younger generations) who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. It is a term that many use when they do not feel that their identity is represented accurately by other LGBTQIA+ identity terms.

Is there a scientific way to determine if someone is transgender?

There is no “scientific” way to determine someone's gender identity or expression. There are no specific tests that one can do to determine if a person is transgender. The best way to know is to have someone tell you

for themselves and to believe them when they say they identify a certain way.

Should gender stereotypes be broken?

Though this is really up to personal preference, challenging gender stereotypes often lets children understand who they are as people regardless of their gender. Letting all children play with all types of toys, for example, is a positive for it gives them a chance to really determine their likes and dislikes as an individual.

Are depression and anxiety a cause or an effect of being transgender?

Neither. While transgender people can experience depression and anxiety at higher rates than the general population, this is often seen to be caused by outside factors such as societal pressures and general discrimination towards transgender people. Gender dysphoria may be a part of being transgender for some people, but once this is alleviated depression and anxiety seem to decrease dramatically.

Where does Jewish law stand on this?

As with many other aspects of our current social and cultural world, it's complicated. Jewish spiritual leaders have been arguing specific understandings of gender, sex, and what they mean for over one thousand years. For some, this means a push towards letting individuals practice in what they feel to be the most appropriate ways for their own gender identity and expression. For example, a transgender woman can choose to participate in a Bat Mitzvah.

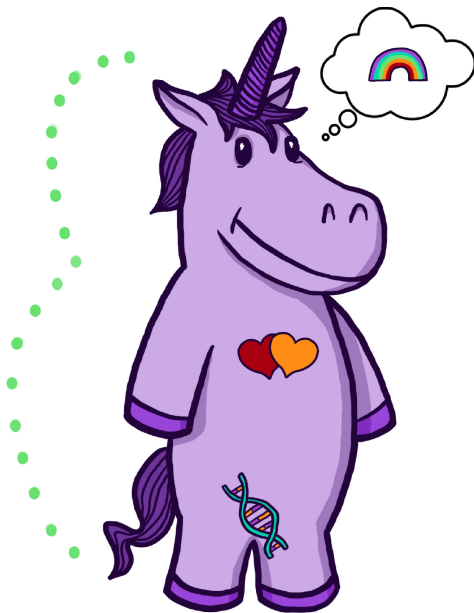
Is it okay to ask personal questions (name or sex assigned at birth) to transgender people?

Generally, the answer is no. Unless the person you are talking with decides to offer this information to you, it is seen as rude to seek it out. It is their personal information to decide what to do with and at what point, if ever, to disclose to you or anyone else. A good rule of thumb to follow is, if you wouldn't ask the question you are considering at a dinner party, you shouldn't ask it.

An LGBTQIA+ Introduction

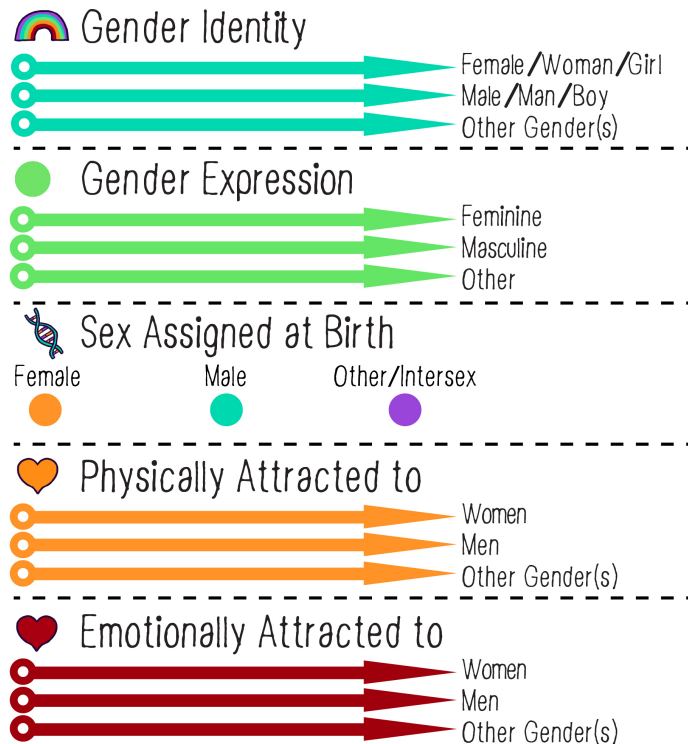
The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



Any one person can find themselves on any point on the lines above, or not on a particular line at all.

Gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are all different aspects of a person's sense of self. Anyone, regardless of gender identity, can be attracted to any gender, or none at all.

A person can be physically attracted to a particular gender, or none at all, while still being attracted emotionally to a different gender, or none at all. For example, a person can be only physically attracted to men but emotionally attracted to anyone regardless of their gender.

While it is true that there is a high correlation between being LGBTQIA+ and having anxiety and/or depression, this does not mean that LGBTQIA+ people are inherently more anxious or depressed than non LGBTQIA+ people. In fact, a lot of these negative emotions have to do with society's current view on LGBTQIA+ populations as well as perceived and actual support from family and community.

There is no difference in levels of anxiety or depression between transgender men and transgender women.*

Gender Dysphoria is the term that replaces Gender Identity Disorder in the diagnostic and statistical manual used by the American Psychological Association. This term change attempts to move away from the pathology model regarding transgender people. Being transgender is not considered pathological in any way.

For transgender people with Gender Dysphoria, there are many different interventions. Social transition is seen as presenting according to the gender with which a person identifies to the people around them. Medical transition can have varying degrees, including hormone blockers for before or to pause puberty, hormone therapy, and surgical interventions.

After taking these steps, for those with Gender Dysphoria, their dysphoria can be alleviated. This can lead to an improvement in their mental health as well, particularly anxiety and depression.

There is no one surgery for any transgender individual. Some people decide not to have surgeries at all while others may have surgery to augment or alter their primary and/or secondary sex characteristics.

Gender Dysphoria is not present for all transgender individuals. However, this does not mean that they are not transgender. It simply means that they don't experience the overwhelming psychological distress associated with their gender and sex that other transgender people with Gender Dysphoria experience.

LGBTQIA+ youth in homes which reject them are 8.4 times more likely to commit suicide**

LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to be in the foster care system, but less likely to get adopted.

LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to be fired or not hired simply based on their identity as an LGBTQIA+ person. This is legal in the majority of US states.

LGBTQIA+ youth, especially transgender youth, are less likely to seek out help for mental or physical health. This is because the current system does not respect their identities in ways such as having appropriate name, sex, and gender spots on required forms.

*According to Reisner et. al. (2015). Mental health of transgender youth in care at an adolescent urban community health center: A matched retrospective cohort study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56(3), 274-279.

**According to Ryan et. al, 2009

Creating An Inclusive Community

Many people, whether they have LGBTQIA+ people in their lives or not, want to create an inclusive community for those who identify as LGBTQIA+. This guide gives a few ideas as to where to start, including noting the specific Jewish values that underlie the importance of LGBTQIA+ support and acceptance.

Normalize stating and asking pronouns

When everyone either states their pronouns when introducing themselves, or asks a person's pronouns when they meet them, this takes the burden off of those whose gender identity may not be obvious from their gender expression.

Respect an individual's pronoun choices

A person's pronouns, when respected, can be cause for that person to feel welcomed, celebrated, accepted, and understood. Even if it is difficult at first, attempt to make sure to use whatever pronouns a person tells you that they use.

Create inclusive spaces

Creating inclusive spaces means broadcasting your support. When putting up pictures or discussing stories, attempt to make them as diverse as possible. Hold trainings for the community to help make them better allies.

Have gender neutral bathrooms

Having gender neutral bathrooms allows for all people to feel safe and comfortable when using your space. Even if they don't have to use the bathroom when they are there, it communicates that you have a place for them and that they are seen and understood.

Include LGBTQIA+ people in your faith services

Have LGBTQIA+ people be active in your faith community. Let them know they are welcomed, wanted, and needed as community members. Have particular services that are devoted to LGBTQIA+ people, such as gender-affirming b'nai mitzvah or Pride shabbat.

Include members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the planning and practice of these particular services and take their direction when it comes to what to do.

Include LGBTQIA+ people in your faith practices

Allow for LGBTQIA+ people to partake in the faith practices which fit with their identity. If a person wants to wear a certain religious garment, allow them to do so. If they want to partake in a certain ritual practice in a particular way, allow the space for this to take place. Try to minimize the gendered distinctions while allowing everyone to practice their faith in a way that makes them feel comfortable.

Be aware of microaggressions

Microaggressions are the slights and insults that come from well-meaning people on a regular basis. Some of these include saying “preferred pronoun” when asking which pronouns someone uses or “I’m sure when you all marry, your husbands...” in a group of people assumed to be heterosexual, cisgender women. These can be seen as aggressions because they minimize the experiences of people who identify as LGBTQIA+, or suggest that their pronouns are choices and not necessities. Being aware of these potential slights can make it much easier for LGBTQIA+ people to feel welcomed in your community.

Jewish values behind supporting LGBTQIA+ Youth (Provided by Rabbi Becca Walker)

Value	What it means	Where is it located
Pikuach Nefesh	Saving a life	Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5
B'tselem Elohim	In God's image	Genesis 1:27
K'vod Habriyot	Human dignity	Berakhot 19b; Megillah 3b:10
Chesed	Kindness	Sotah 14a:6; Pirkei Avot 1:2

Pikuach Nefesh - Saving a Life

This is the general concept that saving one life is equivalent to saving the world. Given that acceptance and support are a driving factor behind life and death situations, including suicide rates, for LGBTQIA+ (especially transgender) youth, this particular value stands out. This is considered one of the highest values in Judaism.

B'tselem Elohim - In God's Image

If all are created in God's image, then everyone is fully equal and fully an image of God. Seeing the divinity in each person leads to loving each individual and wanting to make sure that they are treated well and helped when they are in need. Love, acceptance, affirmation, and support are major parts of treating others as if they are created in the image of God, including LGBTQIA+ people.

K'vod Habriyot - Human Dignity

The concept of human dignity comes first, even when met with negative opposition from Jewish law. Respect and honor are due to all human beings, including those who identify as LGBTQIA+, even above ritual things.

Chesed - Kindness

Kindness is so important that the Torah begins and ends with it. It is one of the three things that holds up the world, so it is extremely important to be kind to all including LGBTQIA+ people.

Tikkun Olam - Repairing the World

Repairing the world is an important part of living Jewishly, and can be accomplished in a multitude of ways. By respecting LGBTQIA+ people and their identities, the world is being repaired by allowing these individuals to live as their authentic selves which allows them to act in ways that better the world itself.

A Guide to Positive Parenting

My child just came out to me as LGBTQIA+. What now? How can I be a positive presence in my child's life while still balancing what it means to be a parent? This guide aims to aid parents in how to be a positive parent in their children's lives and was put together with the help of Monica D. Sampson, LMSW.

Be supportive

Even when you are having difficulty accepting that your child is LGBTQIA+, it is important that you continue to be supportive and show love and encouragement.

Start conversations

Start conversations with your child about their identity and how they are feeling. Open the door for communication so that they feel comfortable in doing so themselves, but don't push them to talk.

Listen and trust

Listen to what your child has to say about their identity and believe them. They know themselves better than anyone else and are choosing to share an intimate piece of their lives with you as their parent.

Recognize your own emotions

When you recognize your own emotions, it's much easier to process them in a positive way. A sense of loss is a perfectly normal emotion when your child comes out.

Process your own emotions without putting them on your child

Take space to process your own emotions away from your child so that they don't feel like they have failed or disappointed you as a parent. Support groups are a great place to process difficult emotions and help you feel as if you are not alone.

Require respect

Require respect for your child from absolutely everyone. This includes faith organizations, schools, sports teams, and even other family members.

Treat them the same as your non-LGBTQIA+ children

If you show affection in a particular way towards one child, don't stop showing this type of affection towards your LGBTQIA+ child. If you allow your non-LGBTQIA+ child to have friends and partners over, allow your LGBTQIA+ child to do the same. This shows them that they don't deserve to be treated differently just because of their LGBTQIA+ identity. It also communicates that your love for them as a child is unconditional.

Bring your child to LGBTQIA+ organizations or events

Letting your child know that there are other people like them in the world helps them to be more comfortable in being themselves, and helps you to see that they can still have all the positive things that you have wanted for them like family, friends, and a fulfilling life. This can also be a helpful way for you to get more access to resources that you or your child might need now or in the future.

“Be their biggest cheerleader”

Always be there to support your child by advocating for them in situations where it may be difficult for them to advocate for themselves. Be the person who stands up in support of their child when they are facing difficult situations such as discrimination in settings such as school, work, or faith based communities.

Connect your child with an LGBTQIA+ adult role model

It is important for LGBTQIA+ youth to see the options that are available to them in terms of where they can go and what they can achieve as people who identify as LGBTQIA+. Interacting with people who share that identity and who have shaped positive lives for themselves can be extremely important to your child's development of not only their identity but of themselves as members of society.

Notes from an LGBTQIA+ Panel

These questions were asked to a panel of three people. They identified as genderqueer (used they/them/theirs pronouns), a transgender woman (used she/her/hers pronouns), and a transgender man (used he/him/his pronouns). Their responses have been condensed here for ease of use and understanding.

What was your biggest motivator to coming out?

For most of the panelists, the biggest motivator to coming out was that it was either to “come out or suffer”. Before coming out, things were difficult in ways that are hard to describe to others. Other motivators were wanting to present as the gender that made them feel the most comfortable. Coming out was described as no longer feeling “homesick” for the gender identity they held but could not express. There was also a lot of hope as motivation, with panelists knowing that if they came out things could get better and that there was a “light at the end of the tunnel”.

What did or would have made things easier when you were coming out? Is there anything that might be helpful for others to know?

All of the panelists agreed that being met with calm by the person they were coming out to was or would have been one of the best reactions that could be had. Normalized responses were stressed, and one panelist in particular talked about the fact that their mother just calmly said “okay” and this was a real positive. Another panelist, who had a rougher time coming out to their father and stepmother, said their mother had a similar reaction and that her response was definitely the better of the two. This panelist also said that their mother had joined parent support groups instead of venting directly at them as they came out, so it may be helpful to deal with any feelings you may be having as a parent or other important person in an LGBTQIA+ person’s life in a space that is specifically dedicated to this type of interaction. The third panelist stressed that, when someone comes out to you, you should be aware of your intent but also aware of the impact that may have. Even if you intend something positively, it may not come across that way to the person coming out.

How did the Jewish community support you?

Even though one panelist initially resented Judaism for its gendered practices and felt like there was no space for them, all three panelists agreed that eventually Jewish support was clear and present for them as LGBTQIA+ individuals. This same panelist even said that their best and most celebratory experiences as a transgender person happened as a direct result of Judaism. One panelist said that they never felt any conflict between their identity as an LGBTQIA+ person and their identity as Jewish. Keshet played a major role in the lives of each of these panelists, particularly a panelist who attended a Jewish “queer retreat” with Keshet. Here, they had a particularly meaningful conversation about it being completely okay to be both Jewish and LGBTQIA+. Another panelist described themselves as choosing to be “queer over Jewish” until they found Keshet, and now this panelist works for the organization as well. The final panelist described that their own congregation had undergone a Keshet training around LGBTQIA+ individuals and how they could be a part of the community. In general, Judaism was seen as an extreme positive and a clear and constant support when it was made clear that LGBTQIA+ people were both welcomed and accepted in the Jewish community.

How did the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity impact your coming out process?

Panelists identified as a variety of different sexual orientations, and so the idea of this impacted each differently. Though things may be subject to change over time for some people, this does not mean that they change for everyone. Panelists described the fact that just because you are coming out as transgender doesn’t mean that you are coming out as gay or straight. This can make things complicated for some people, given that sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are often conflated. You can be transgender and gay, transgender and straight, or any other combination of identities. However, there can be a lot of transphobia, or negative attitudes towards transgender people, particularly in the masculine gay community, as one panelist pointed out.

But how do you know (you’re transgender)?

This seemed to be a question that all panelists were used to hearing, but at the same time not one that was seen warmly. Mostly, it was described as something that you just innately know and cannot explain to

another person. One panelist explained their answer to this question as like “trying to explain why something is green”. Knowing your own gender identity was seen as very personal, and something that people wouldn’t choose to lie about given that it is still dangerous to be a transgender person in the United States and many other places around the world. One panelist posed the question, “how can you say you don’t know?” in response, and to trust whoever is coming out to you as transgender. There was also the description of not just gender dysphoria, but gender euphoria, or a sense of “happiness and centeredness” when being able to find one’s gender identity. In terms of others knowing, the phrase “insistent, consistent, persistent” was used when referring to children who come out as transgender. This means that if a person is insistent, consistent, and persistent about their particular gender identity, they are most likely a person describable by that gender identity. This is true whether their identity falls under the cisgender or transgender umbrella. Often, this is used by psychologists and other health professionals to further demonstrate the need for intervention for a particular individual if they are transgender.

Is there anything you’ve learned from being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community?

Panelists had a variety of insights when it came to being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. One panelist said they had learned that you don’t have to understand something to accept it, particularly because you cannot know what goes on in someone else’s head or their situation entirely. It is important to both embrace your lack of understanding so that you can learn while also embracing the reality that you cannot completely understand where another person is coming from. Panelists also asserted that every transgender person is different, and so all transgender journeys are different. There is not one right way to be transgender, and you can come out to yourself and to others at any age. They also affirmed that a person does not need to medically transition to be transgender, and the presence or absence of surgeries does not make one person any more or less transgender than another. One panelist also encouraged people to make mistakes, but to recognize those mistakes when you have learned from them. Finally, one panelist noted that when all voices are allowed to speak, there is a great amount of power that comes from those voices.

How can cisgender people be better allies?

The core of what was said most by panelists about this question was to listen and believe people when they tell you what their identity is, even if that identity changes over time, and to respect that identity. This includes using the right name and pronouns for an individual no matter what. Panelists also stressed the importance of knowing what questions to ask and not to ask, and doing research and teaching yourself instead of turning to transgender people as if each one can answer all of your transgender-related questions. It was also stressed that open communication goes both ways, so be prepared to have conversations and be willing to start the conversation around difficult topics. Panelists also stressed the importance of “standing up and standing in”, or being a voice for transgender people when there is a situation in which they are threatened or their voices are being silenced. It should not be the burden of the transgender person to always be defending themselves, and a good ally will know the difference between speaking up versus speaking for someone. When something transphobic is happening, don’t just sit by and let it happen. One panelist noted that “transphobic people won’t listen to transgender people” so it is often up to cisgender allies to create atmospheres of learning and understanding in these types of situations in order to have a chance at shifting a person’s negative perceptions.

What is a butch lesbian?

One panelist had brought this up in their answer to another question. They described being a butch lesbian as a type of intersection of gender identity and sexual orientation, with butch lesbians still identifying as women but having a very masculine gender expression. This particular type of gender expression and identity was seen as an important part of representation that opened the door for exploration of gender for some individuals.

How do you navigate gender differentiated boxes on forms such as job applications?

These limiting types of gender identity questions were seen as extremely invalidating to the gender identity of transgender people, particularly those who identify as non-binary. In fact, if this question were asked in an optional setting, it may cause the company asking to lose a person’s business, as put forward by one panelist. For forms required on a computer, one panelist would put their sex assigned at birth. For required

forms that are written, such as those in doctor's offices, one panelist said they would write in their own answer to the question. However, this was often met with the person who took the form filling it out for them based on what they perceived. Panelists agreed that the best way to go about this would be to let people self-identify, and make a judgment call for themselves as to what answer is best fitting at the time.

Additional Resources

Family Acceptance Project.....<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu>

Keshet.....keshetonline.org

TransTorah.org.....<http://transtorah.org/index.html>

Trans Lifeline.....www.translifeline.org

US: (877)565-8860

Canada: (877)330-6366

The Trevor Project.....www.thetrevorproject.org

TrevorLifelineUS: (866)488-7386

TrevorText: text START to 678678

The Transgender Law Center.....<http://transgenderlawcenter.org>

Trans Youth Equality Foundation.....www.transyouthequality.org

Trans Youth Family Allies.....<http://imatyfa.org/>

LAMBDA Legal.....<https://www.lambdalegal.org/>

PFLAG.....<https://community.pflag.org>

National Center for Transgender Equality..<https://transequality.org>

GLSEN.....<https://www.glsen.org>

TLDEF.....<http://www.transgenderlegal.org/>

Trans Family SOS.....<https://www.transfamilysos.org/>

ACLU.....<https://www.aclu.org/>

Gender Spectrum.....<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>

Child and Adolescent Gender Clinic, Mott Children's Hospital, University of
Michigan.....

<https://www.mottchildren.org/conditions-treatments/gender-management>

Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Detroit....<http://jwfdetroit.org>

Stand with Trans.....www.standwithtrans.org

(248)739-9254

facebook.com/standwithtrans

Support groups www.standwithtrans.org/resources/support-groups

Ally parents www.standwithtrans.org/ally-parents

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