

Allyship and Being A Better Friend

A short guide on what to do if your friend tells you they are trans.

Knowing more and growing is an essential component to kindness and how we practice it to include marginalised people. Perhaps a friend, family member or colleague has recently come out to you as transgender. The fact that you want to know how to be a better ally to them is an important first step. Allyship may seem like a lot of work, but it may not feel that way when done out of love. Here are some tips.

1. When they say they have a preferred name and pronouns, remember them!

It's usually the first step to re-learn things about the person who came out to you as trans. If they have disclosed their gender to you, it means they trust you enough to treat them with dignity and kindness. Things that are often missing for GNC and trans folks. If they have chosen a new name or pronouns, remember them. The person you knew before wasn't their most authentic self. Re-accustoming yourself to learn a new name may be confusing and it's alright to slip up initially. Just make sure to apologise and carry on with the conversation when you do. Apologies shouldn't be too long or elaborate. It's not about you. A simple way to remember the new name is to update it on your phone. That way every time you call them or get a call, you're reminded of it.

2. Remembering pronouns isn't difficult!

If you are repeatedly messing up their pronouns, think of it this way – are you just memorising pronouns or actively unlearning assigned gender norms? Once you see the person for who they really are, remembering their pronouns isn't an effortful act.

3. When you are unsure of something, just google it

For your friend, most conversations with well-meaning people are probably going to be around transness. Often, these are basic questions that may be repetitive or invasive. When the internet is filled with a plethora of resources and information, why bother your friend with something that they may have already explained plenty of times to other people? The onus of educating people of a minority shouldn't be on the minority. Unless it's something super specific about that individual, which a search engine won't be able to help you with, steer clear of burdening your friend with the task of educating you. There are plenty of transgender influencers and role models who share their thoughts and voices on social media. Follow and learn more from them.

4. Pass it on!

The information and resources you've spent time on are definitely going to help you be a better friend. Why stop there? Pass it onto others. Transphobia has been normalised by films and media. When you see other people say problematic or inaccurate things, help them understand the reality of things. If you see people misgendering or deadnaming your friend, correct them (only if your friend is out as trans to everyone and don't mind you doing so). The world won't become more inclusive to trans people overnight. Allies can and should use their cis privilege to make sure that trans voices are heard.

5. Check in on them

A lot of trans people lose their social circle and family post transition. This may lead to isolation and loneliness. Be there for them when you can. Check in on them every once in a while, to see how they are doing. Letting them know that you're there for them can make a big difference.

6. Listen

No two people have the same experiences and outlook on life. If your friend tells you something that seems unusual, it may be because life works out very differently for cisgender people. Instead of contradicting or invalidating their experiences, learn to listen. Ask questions when needed. All your friend may need sometimes is someone who actively listens to them instead of dismissing their lived experiences. Listening also helps with empathy and knowing how to be a better ally. They may have certain boundaries or things that make them uncomfortable. Try to understand and respect those boundaries.

7. Introducing your friend to others

When you introduce your friend to others, make sure that those people aren't transphobic. You can introduce your friend by stating their name and pronouns when you introduce them to new people. If those people misgender your friend, interrupt them by saying the correct pronouns every time.

8. Personal information is often private

When your friend is disclosing something about themselves or their journey to you it's important to know whether it's information that is confidential or not. Certain aspects of their transness (and life) may not be for everyone even if they are publicly out. Make sure you don't breach that trust with which they share things with you.

9. When you make mistakes and hurt your friend, forgive yourself first

People make mistakes. If you unintentionally hurt your friend, that's alright. Don't be hard on yourself. Allyship is constant work and a part of that work is learning from mistakes. If you make a mistake, don't defend the intention behind it. Apologise, listen and try to make sure that a similar thing doesn't happen.

Thank you, reader, for wanting to grow as a person and trying to make the world a better place!