

How to be a good ally to trans people at work

We all need people on our side, celebrating with us when things go well and supporting us when times are hard. Trans people and trans rights are becoming increasingly visible but many people still face real isolation. UNISON and trade unionism are all about solidarity, with no one left to face trouble alone. We are stronger together.

Every non-trans person can be an ally for trans equality, but not everyone feels confident doing this. It's not complicated.

Read on to find out more.



trade ally

Tips for being a good trans ally

How to be a good trans ally.

Every non-trans person can be an ally for trans equality, but not everyone feels confident doing this. It's not complicated, so here are some tips on how to be a good trans ally.

It really comes down to three things:

- Listen to trans people
- Challenge transphobia
- Be a good person

In general

- Speak up for trans people and trans equality and against transphobia.
- Speak up when there are trans people present. Don't leave it to trans people to defend trans equality.
- Speak up when there are no trans people present. Transphobia is always wrong and shouldn't be ignored.
- Do this in meetings, on social media, with family and friends.
- Don't assume you know who is trans or who is affected by anti-trans discrimination. There may be people with a trans history in your branch or workplace who are now just living their lives. Other colleagues may have trans family members.
- Transphobia is no laughing matter. It's just as important to challenge it when it is presented in a jokey way.

In your union

- Raise trans equality in your union branch.
- Check your employer's policies – do they have a trans equality policy? If not, propose UNISON's model policy. If yes, compare it to UNISON's model policy and seek improvements.
- Don't think you have to be an 'expert'. But do inform yourself. UNISON has some excellent and accessible resources at **unison.org.uk/out**
- Publicise UNISON's work for trans equality and our national trans network.

Talking with trans people

- When you talk to a trans person, listen. Listen to how they talk about themselves and follow their lead.
- Don't worry too much about the right terminology – the most important thing is to show support.
- It is important to make every effort to use people's correct name and pronoun (she, he or they) when you are talking to them and when you are talking about them.
- Misgendering someone or using their previous name (sometimes called 'deadnaming') is hurtful and may be unlawful harassment.
- If you are speaking briefly with someone and are unsure how they wish to be addressed, avoid gendered terms (such as 'sir' or 'madam').



- Remember that while most people transition to live solely and permanently as women or men, not everyone has a binary gender. Some trans people identify as non-binary – as both female and male, as neither, or as something entirely different.
- If you do make a mistake, apologise and move on. Don't make a big thing of it.
- Never 'out' someone as trans unless they agree – never talk about someone's gender identity or gender history unless they have given you permission to do so. They may have told you in confidence.
- Remember, they may be out in some circles, such as in an LGBT group, or with close colleagues, but not others.
- Be aware of the wide spectrum of issues that affect trans people.
- If you want information, there's plenty on the internet.
- Don't tell trans people that they're 'brave' or that they made a 'difficult decision' instead, ask them if they need support and what support they need.
- Recognise that trans people can be used to being excluded – make an effort to include them.

People are people

- Try not to make assumptions. Although there aren't many trans people (which is why allies are so important) they are all individual. There is no one way of being trans.
- Don't ask personal questions that are more intimate than you would ask someone who is not trans. It is certainly inappropriate to quiz people about their bodies.
- Trans people have rights, but it's fine for you to have questions and try and understand the issues around gender identity. In fact, you have a responsibility to get yourself informed! There's lots of information around for you to do that, without having to quiz trans people in an intrusive way.

And finally...

- Remember that being trans is just one part of trans people's identity – talk to them about other stuff!

A part of every community

Transgender people are a part of every community not apart from society. We are not seeking additional rights. We want to live in a society of equals where each is treated with dignity and respect and recognised for the unique contribution they make. We are your children, your siblings, your parents, your grandparents, your work colleagues, your neighbours and hopefully, your friends. I don't want to be merely "tolerated"; I expect my trans allies to speak out against every instance of transphobia, in all its guises, to help me and every transgender individual achieve the acceptance and respect we deserve!

Frances

'UNISON and trade unionism are all about solidarity, with no one left to face trouble alone. We are stronger together.'

It can be very lonely

It can be very lonely being a trans person; be that in work, at home or in wider society. To have trans allies is so important, especially right now as we face hurtful negativity in the press and other media. Whenever I am down or struggling to cope, receiving support from those outside our community is a tremendous help.

Jenny

Allies empower us

When trans people challenge transphobia they become a target. Every time an ally stands up for us it can empower us to stand up to the shaming and stigma – and to viscerally feel the solidarity that is the cornerstone value that our trade union, socialist and feminist movements grew out of.

Sam

Not special or different

For me good trans allies have proven to be people who never question my gender identity. They treat me according to how I identify. Not special, different or vulnerable, just as me, a woman. They publicly support my right to be the person I am and that solidarity gives me strength.

Jennifer

UNISON resources

We have lots of resources to help you understand and negotiate around trans equality. Many are downloadable for free at: www.unison.org.uk/out. They include:

- A factsheet on transgender workers' rights
- Gender identity – an introductory guide for trade union reps supporting trans members
- Talking about gender – a jargon buster
- A model trans equality policy
- A model motion for UNISON branches.

If you are LGBT and want to get more involved in UNISON's work for equality, or hear more about what we do, then talk to your branch, or email out@unison.co.uk in confidence.

Not in UNISON?

Join today at joinunison.org or call **0800 171 2193** or ask your UNISON rep for an application form.

