Important "Do"s & "Don't"s Around Gender & Sexuality

Don't assume that everyone around you is straight and/or cisgender.

Do always use the name or pronouns a person has asked you to use for them.

Don't question a person's right to be in a gendered public space, such as a restroom, based on their appearance.

Don't say “biologically male/female”, “genetically male/female”, or “born male/female”. This is where, if it was absolutely, essentially, completely necessary, you could use AFAB or AMAB. Definitely do not ask a non-binary or trans person if they are any of these things! It can be very triggering, and, in all honesty, is just none of your business. Your only job is to refer to them with whatever name and pronouns they have asked you to use.

Do apologize if you misgender a person by using either an incorrect name or an incorrect pronoun. Your apology should be timely, brief, sincere, and private if necessary. Don't turn it on them, such as guilting them by talking about “how hard it is to remember” or anything of that sort.

Don't ask a trans and/or non-binary person if they have had medical procedures, or why or why not. This assumes that there's a “right” way to be trans. A lot of trans people do not want to go through medical procedures. Some are never able to because of how expensive they are; some even see their bodies as political statements, and believe that hormone therapy and gender confirmation surgeries only enforce the gender binary. In general, the cultural obsession with trans and non-binary peoples' bodies is objectifying and dehumanizing.

Do ask people what pronouns they would like you to use! If people are confused by this, it is an awesome opportunity to explain why you're asking, and it will really mean a lot to those who are often mis-identified, or those who really care about the issue. A great way to ask for pronouns is to incorporate pronoun usage into your own introduction. For example: “I’m Meg, I’m from Utah, I studied English in college, and my pronouns are they/them!”.

Created by Cadence Pentheny, at the Center for Inclusion & Cross Cultural Engagement, University of Mississippi
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**Don't** use the word “queer” for a person or persons who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community without their permission, due to its history of use in hate speech. Its pretty recent reclamation by many members of the community does not open up its use to outsiders. In general, it’s best to avoid the term, unless you’re academically discussing queer theory.

**Do** use people-first language! Instead of using transgender as a noun (i.e. “He is a transgender”) or adding a suffix to it (“They are transgendered”), just say something like: “She is transgender”. It’s also almost always okay to use “trans” as an abbreviation as well (i.e. “He is trans”.)

**Don’t** say “sex change operation”. “Gender confirmation surgery” is the correct term.

**Do** avoid the term “homosexual.” It makes many people uncomfortable, as it has historically been used to pathologize anyone who engages in sexual acts with a person or persons of their same gender. The American Psychological Association considered homosexuality a psychological disorder until 1973. “Transsexual” has the same history for trans and non-binary people.

**Don’t** use the terms “hermaphrodite”, “transvestite”, “transsexual”, or “tr*nny.”

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