

# Gender Diversity and Judaism

## NCJW Guide

### An Overview

Jewish texts teach that all people are created in the image of G-d, *b'tzelem Elohim*, and the Talmud, the Jewish legal code, emphasizes that all Jewish people are responsible for one another. Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ) community bring a dynamic understanding and energy to the Jewish community. Unfortunately, members of this community continue to face both legal and societal discrimination. As Jews, we know that transgender individuals have dignity and worth and deserve freedom from violence, fear, and systemic injustices.

This guide explores gender diversity and pronouns, answers frequently asked questions, offers tips for making your NCJW section gender inclusive, and links to additional resources to learn more.

### Exploring Gender Diversity

#### Gender Identity

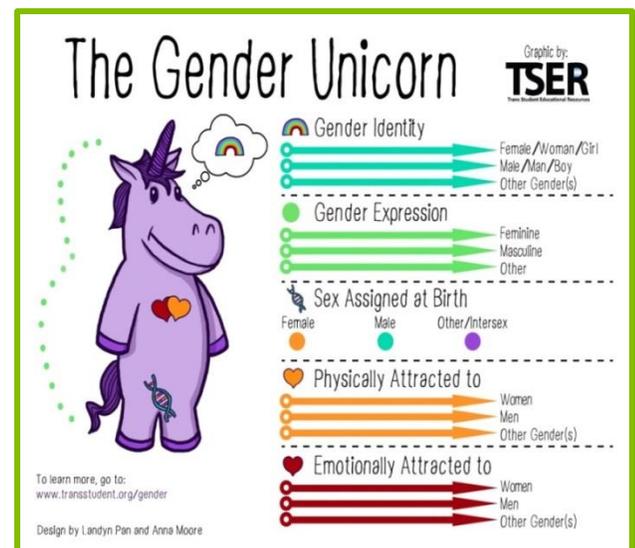
- This is the gender with which a person identifies, which may be different from the sex assigned at birth. This includes male and female, but also includes a plethora of genders in between and outside this binary. Gender is a spectrum, meaning that many individuals do not identify as male or female, but rather that their gender identity is fluid.

#### Gender Expression

- This is the way that an individual presents their gender, whether through clothes, hairstyle, pronouns, etc. The way that an individual expresses their gender may not always align with their gender identity or their sex assigned at birth.

#### Sex Assigned at Birth

- This is the classification of individuals at birth as male, female, intersex, or other based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. In reality, most babies are



assigned a sex at birth based on genitalia alone, which can lead to incorrect assignments. For this reason, and because it connotes a permanent expectation of an individual's gender, the term "biological sex" is not appropriate.

### Sexual Orientation/Attraction

- This describes who an individual is physically or emotionally attracted to, if anyone. This is based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression, and sex assigned at birth.

## Why Pronouns are Important to Gender Diversity

- Pronouns in the English language are used to refer to an individual without using their name. **Since gender is a spectrum, the pronouns one uses to express their gender are important.** To make others feel comfortable, ask an individual's pronouns to allow them to share their pronouns, wherever they may be.
- *He* and *she* are examples of pronouns that are commonly used to allude to a particular gender. There are also many gender neutral pronouns, such as *they* and *ze*. **Not only is asking for an individual's pronouns a way of reaffirming ally-ship, it allows for individuals to make deeper and more authentic connections.**
- Asking for an individual's pronouns can feel awkward initially, but prevents hurtful and more uncomfortable interactions in the future. In a group setting, you can begin by having individuals introduce themselves with their pronouns and explain that pronouns are a way to express one's gender. In a one-on-one setting, feel free to ask an individual to remind you of their pronouns. It is ok to get it wrong, but be willing to apologize and move on when you do, and ask for help when something is confusing.

# Gender Pronouns

Please note that these are not the only pronouns. There are an infinite number of pronouns as new ones emerge in our language. Always ask someone for their pronouns.

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

[transstudent.tumblr.com](https://transstudent.tumblr.com)  
[facebook.com/transstudent](https://facebook.com/transstudent)  
[twitter.com/transstudent](https://twitter.com/transstudent)

For more information, go to [transstudent.org/graphics](https://transstudent.org/graphics)

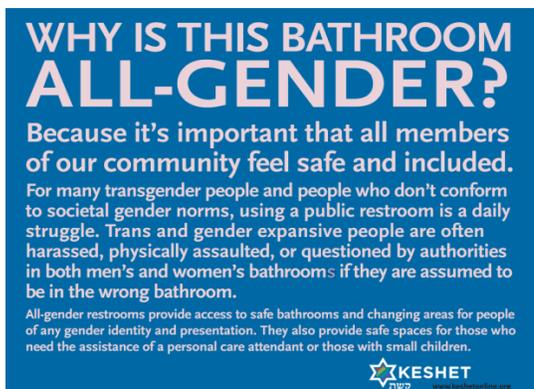

  
 Trans Student Educational Resources



Source: [robot-hugs.com/pronoun-etiquette](https://robot-hugs.com/pronoun-etiquette)

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is the conversation around **gender neutral bathrooms** so prevalent, and why does it matter?
  - Gender neutral bathrooms recognize that gender is a spectrum, not a binary of male and female.
  - Using a public restroom can be a scary struggle for many transgender individuals. They are often harassed, questioned, or even assaulted for using the restroom that corresponds to their gender identity. Proponents of so-called “bathroom bills,” which seek to regulate what bathrooms people can use, argue that transgender individuals put others at risk in a restroom. **However, transgender individuals are the most vulnerable for attack in a restroom.**
  - Using the bathroom that corresponds with an individual’s gender identity is crucial. Use Keshet’s [“Why is This Bathroom All-Gender”](#) resource to make your own gender neutral bathroom sign for your office, event, or meeting.
  - Communities are on different journeys in their acceptance of gender as a spectrum. If your community is just beginning their journey, consider starting by designating one gender-neutral bathroom to start off with.



Source: Keshet



NCJW Washington Office Sign

2. What does **trans** mean?
  - The term ‘trans’ is an umbrella term that indicates the person has a gender that is different from the one they were assigned at birth. This encompasses individuals who are transgender, transsexual, nonbinary, and agender, to name a few.
  - In conversation, it may be important to use the full term to which you are referring, unless you’re referring to the vague umbrella term.
  - Some people who are nonbinary, among other genders, might not identify as trans. Don’t stress or worry about getting it right all the time, ask the person how they identify - **if it’s appropriate to do so.**
3. What does it mean to **transition**?

- Transgender individuals transition in a myriad of ways, only a small percentage of which is medical or surgical.
  - An individual's transition begins as soon as they start to identify with a gender identity different from their current gender. Transitioning can include announcing the transition, changing pronouns, modifying gender presentation, or undergoing medical or surgical procedures. These steps can happen individually, or in any combination or order.
  - Any stage of transitioning is a deeply personal decision, so use extreme discretion when asking a trans person about their transition. Consider if you would ask the same question to a cisgender person. *This is especially important when it's about medical decisions such as hormones, surgeries and trans bodies.*
  - It's okay to have questions about transitioning! Google has a great variety of resources that will explain different aspects of transgender identities and transitions.
4. I thought **queer** was a derogatory term. Is it ok to use?
- The word queer has a complicated history; initially only meaning “unusual, strange, or odd,” it shifted to describe the LGBTQ community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was particularly used as a derogatory word for gay men who acted effeminately. In the 1980s, there was an effort to reclaim the word as an overarching umbrella term for all members of the LGBTQ community. Since queer is a broad label, it is inclusive of those questioning or determining where they fit within the community. Many individuals use it as a way of unifying the community without forcing individuals into categories. That being said, some members of the LGBTQ community still feel uncomfortable with the reclamation of this word. As an ally, it's important to avoid using the word queer to mean “odd, strange, or unusual” or assume without asking that an individual is comfortable identifying as queer.
5. Why is the term “**sex assigned at birth**” preferable to “biological sex?”
- The term biological sex really refers to the sex assigned by a doctor, midwife, or parent at birth. These designations tend to be made based on visible genitalia, which may or may not correspond to other components of our biology, like hormones or chromosomes.
  - Biological sex connotes a permanent expectation of an individual's gender. The term has been used by transmisogynists and transphobes to defend their opposition to transgender rights and individuals by claiming that they are simply supporting the reality of “biological sex.”
6. How do I respond when an individual **comes out** to me?
- Coming out can be at times scary and/or isolating. Reaffirming your support for an individual coming out as transgender is crucial. Below are recommended Do's and Don'ts.
    - **Do's**
      - Tell the person that you care about them and that their decision to share this information with you will not affect your relationship or the way you view them. Those coming out may fear that things will change and that they will be rejected by those closest to them.

- Ask thoughtful and sensitive questions, but know that they may not know all the answers.
  - Offer support as they come out to others. Know that they may lean on you a bit more during this time and talk more often about their sexuality. Check in with them often.
  - Learn more about LGBTQ equality and ask how you can support them.
  - Remember: coming out is an ongoing process.
  - **Don'ts**
    - Downplay what they have shared with you or say “oh I knew that” or “not surprised.” While you may have had assumptions, coming to terms with gender identity or sexuality takes time.
    - Tell others their secret or brag that you have a friend who is queer/gay/transgender.
    - Probe them or cross personal boundaries. Do not ask them questions like “what about kids?” or “are you sure it isn't a phase?” or “so how do you have sex?”
    - Expect them to be exactly the same person you knew/loved before. Remember that each coming out experience is personal and unique.
    - Let them become isolated. Check in often!
7. If an individual is transgender **to whom are they attracted?**
- Just like everyone else, transgender individuals can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or anywhere in between. For example, if a person transitions from male to female and is only attracted to men, they would typically identify as a straight woman. Sometimes the labeling of their sexual orientation may change following transition, but the answer to this question differs with each person. Just because an individual is out as transgender does not always mean they are out with their sexual orientation.
8. How can I serve as an **advocate for and with** the LGBTQ community?
- Learn more about gender inclusion and allyship by researching and asking questions. Read about the history of the LGBTQ community and the laws and policies that impact their lives. Additionally, take the time to learn the terminology and distinctions. (*Check out additional resources on the last page of this guide.*)
  - Talk about gender inclusion in your NCJW planning meetings. Recognize that supporting the LGBTQ community looks different for and by everyone. Not every ally is going to be changing policy or holding up signs at pride parades. You can be an effective ally by listening to individuals in the LGBTQ community share their story, encouraging your rabbi to address LGBTQ issues in their sermon, or holding an education event.
  - Reach out to LGBTQ-led organizations in your community to learn about the issues that matter most to them. For example, homelessness affects a growing number of LGBTQ youth. Work with LGBTQ-led organizations to plan a volunteer event or lobby day on these

issues. Go further by joining forces with more organizations, building an interfaith coalition, or spearheading collective Jewish LGBTQ advocacy in your area.

- Show that you or your section is committed to equality. Form a group to participate in the local LGBTQ Pride Event, World AIDS Day, National Coming out Day, or Transgender Day of Remembrance. These are great opportunities to show educational movies on issues, advocate on related legislative issues, or hold vigils and memorials for those in the community whom we've lost.
- Create LGBTQ specific spaces. Plan events, discussions, social gatherings, and safe spaces for the LGBTQ members of your section or LGBTQ Jews in the area. This is both a great way to diversify your section and create spaces for individuals seeking out LGBTQ and Jewish spaces.



## Tips for Making Your NCJW Section and Events Gender Inclusive

- Use “they” when referring to individuals whose gender you do not know, instead of assuming someone’s pronouns.
- Set an inclusive tone at all meetings and events by having people introduce themselves using their pronouns. This can be done when a speaker introduces themselves (ex: Hello I am \_\_\_ and I use \_\_ pronouns) or when individuals use name tags. It may be helpful to explain what pronouns are and why they are used when introducing this change. When expressing pronouns, it is common to express all grammatical forms of the pronoun. For example, “she, her, and hers” or “they, them, and theirs.”
  - Use trans-inclusive language in resources, event descriptions, and promotional materials.
  - Use spouse or partner instead of husband or wife.
  - Don’t gender your dress code (think business attire rather than “black tie”).
  - If asking for gender on paperwork, provide an open space for individuals to self-identify. Consider if you *need* to know their gender as well.

- Don't use the terms "opposite sex/gender" or "both sexes/genders," as they isolate transgender and non-binary individuals and force them to choose a gender.
- Provide trainings for your members on how to be gender inclusive. Utilize online resources from partner organizations.
- Hold educational events for your section to encourage members to feel more comfortable discussing topics relevant to the LGBTQ community.
- Partner with LGBTQ-led organizations in your area.
- Remember not to ask a transgender person about what gender they were born or about their name prior to their transition to the gender with which they identify.
- Do not ask a transgender person personal questions about their body or transition, such questions are more often than not inappropriate. Consider if you would be okay with someone inquiring about your gender and/or body in a similar way.
- It's okay if you don't understand someone's pronouns! Consider asking someone who does understand or researching it on Google. It can be exhausting for trans people to frequently have to explain their gender and/or pronouns.
- Advocate for issues important to the LGBTQ community, and know that LGBTQ inclusion encompasses far more than marriage equality (ex. poverty, healthcare, civil rights).
- Do not make assumptions about sexual orientation. Just because an individual transitions gender does not mean their sexual orientation changed.
- Allow for individuals to express themselves in a manner conducive to their gender identity and make this intention clear in your materials.
- Know your limits as an ally and don't be afraid to ask appropriate questions and learn more.
- Intentionally welcome LGBTQ members and their families into your section and embrace their unique identity.

### Additional Resources

- [A Wider Bridge](#): Organization devoted to building LGBTQ connections with Israel that offers resources and upcoming programs and trips to Israel. NCJW has funded A Wider Bridge through its Israel Granting Program.
- [Eshel](#): Organization committed to creating inclusive communities for Orthodox LGBTQ Jews and their families whose site offers resources and programming.
- [Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation](#): Institute at Hebrew Union College that offers inclusion resources, policy information, and ways to get involved.
- [Jewish Transitions](#): Organization built around celebrating the sacred within every gender and educating Jewish communities.
- [Keshet](#): Organization committed to the inclusion of the LGBTQ community in Jewish life. Their website contains a comprehensive bank of programs and resources.
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#): Leading advocacy organization working for the rights of transgender individuals.
- [Outspirit](#): Interfaith bank of mind, body, and spirit resources for the LGBTQ community.
- [RitualWell](#): Ritual bank for various points of Jewish life with a large selection of LGBTQ rituals.
- [SOJOURN](#): Organization providing training to advance LGBTQ affirmation and empowerment across the southern United States.
- [Svara](#): Yeshiva centered on reading Jewish texts from an LGBTQ perspective.
- [Trans Student Education Resources](#): Youth-led organization offering resources and educational materials.
- [Trans Torah](#): Resource of text and traditions to make Jewish tradition accessible to individuals of all genders.



**PROUD  
TO BE AN  
ALLY**

**Source: LGBT Inclusive  
Workplaces**