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 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.

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

Don't ask a trans or non-binary person if they have had medical procedures, or why/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, or because of widespread healthcare and insurance restrictions. Some people may even see choosing not to have procedures as a political statements, believing 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 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. Be sure not to make it about you or turn it on them, such as guilting them by talking about "how hard it is to remember" or anything of that sort.

Don't say "sex change operation". "Gender confirmation surgery" is the most correct and inclusive term.

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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 fairly recent reclamation by many members of the community does not open up its use to all. In general, it's best to avoid the term, unless you're academically discussing queer theory.

Do use people-first language as a best practice! For example, never use transgender as a noun (i.e. "He is a transgender") or add a suffix to it ("They are transgendered"). Using it as a descriptor is fine, i.e. saying something like: "Laverne Cox is a transgender activist and also one of my favorite actresses." (It's also okay to use "trans" as an abbreviation as well, i.e. "She is trans".)

Don't use the terms "transvestite", "transsexual", or "tr*nny." You may hear some trans people, particularly older trans people, use these terms to describe themselves, but they are falling out of use and can be offensive.

Do give people opportunities to tell you their pronouns! Some people may not feel safe sharing this information right away, so a great way to show them that they can is by incorporating pronoun usage into your own introduction, i.e.: "I'm Meg, I'm from Utah, I studied English in college, and my pronouns are they/them!". If people are confused as to what gender pronouns are, this can also be a teaching opportunity.

Don't use the term "hermaphrodite" to describe intersex people. It is a common term used in biology, but it is dehumanizing and offensive to use it to identify a person.

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, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people.