



# HOW TO BE A GOOD TRANS ALLY AT WORK

A guide for trade union members and reps  
on how to support their trans members

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# EVERYONE CAN BE A TRANS ALLY



**Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity, respect and fairness at work. Unfortunately, this isn't the case for all workers. Our research has found that trans workers experience high levels of discrimination in the workplace with almost half of trans people reporting being bullied or harassed at work.**

Seven in ten trans workers say their experience of workplace harassment or discrimination has a negative effect on their mental health.

The trade union movement is built on solidarity among workers in an explicit acknowledgement that we are stronger

together. This is why it's important all working people, union members and trade union representatives are trans allies.

Being an ally isn't difficult, but many members have told us they aren't sure how to be a good trans ally.



## What is an ally?

An ally is someone who is a member of a group that has a level or type of privilege and who takes a stand against oppression, bullying and harassment of a group that does not have that privilege. There are many examples of what this looks like:

- › a white person who speaks out against racism
- › a straight person who works to end heterosexism/homophobia
- › a man who calls out everyday sexism.

☞ Every non-trans person can be a trans ally and work to ensure trans people are treated with dignity and respect. ☞



## What is a trans ally?

A trans ally is a non-trans person who is committed to being open-minded and respectful to people who may have a different gender identity to them or presents their gender in a different way.

They have taken the time to learn more about trans people and their lives and confront assumptions and stereotypes around trans people. Allies work to ensure trans people are treated with respect in and outside of the workplace.

Every non-trans person can be a trans ally and work to ensure trans people are treated with dignity and respect.

There are some simple things you can do to equip yourself to be a trans ally and to help you feel more confident to speak up when you encounter transphobia. A lot of transphobia is born out of ignorance rather than being malignant.

# FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO BE A GOOD ALLY

## TIP 1 Educate yourself

Many people have said they want to be a trans ally and support the trans community but feel they don't know enough about trans people to speak up.

If you feel this way there are many resources you can use to learn more and empower yourself so you are able to be an ally. And there are many online resources you can find using Google, YouTube and by looking at LGBT-friendly media sites such as the LGBT consortium. This represents many charities, whose materials are searchable by following this link [lgbtconsortium.org.uk/resources](https://lgbtconsortium.org.uk/resources)

There may be times when you might use the wrong terminology or misunderstand something. People might point that out, but don't let that stop you being an ally. Trans people will appreciate that you have the right intent. Use the opportunity to learn more.

## TIP 2 Challenge transphobia

Speak up for trans people, for trans equality and against transphobia.

Don't forget your voice and your actions have weight and can change hearts and minds.

Be the first to challenge transphobia or correct misconceptions Do speak up when there are trans people in the room and when there aren't.

Don't leave challenging transphobia to trans people.

☞ Many trans members have told us how isolating work can feel, with some explicitly stating their colleagues did not speak to them or allow them to join into their conversations. ☞

## TIP 3 Include trans colleagues

Many trans members have told us how isolating work can feel, with some explicitly stating their colleagues did not speak to them or allow them to join into their conversations. Some specifically took active steps to exclude them.

Make an effort to include trans colleagues in both work and social conversations. It is good workplace practice and a courtesy that should be extended to all colleagues.

## TIP 4 Listen

Speak to and listen to trans people and colleagues. Listening to how they describe themselves will enable you to follow their lead. And active listening will help you ensure you use the right pronoun and name if you are unsure.

If you realise you've used the wrong name, pronoun or terminology just apologise, correct yourself and move on. Don't make a big deal about it but make an active effort not to make the same error.



### **TIP 5** Respect boundaries

If you've read this far it is likely you want to be an ally and have taken the decision to support the trans community at work and more widely. That's great!

One good way to be an ally is to understand and respect people's boundaries. You would not ask a stranger, acquaintance or close friend about the appearance or status of their genitals. It is equally inappropriate to ask a trans person those types of questions.

A general rule is not to ask a trans personal questions about their transition, for example if they are going to have, or are having, surgery. Each person's transition is different, there is no right or wrong way to transition. Understanding that and respecting a person's privacy are key attributes of an ally.

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# HOW REPS CAN TACKLE TRANSPHOBIA

The trans community has seen positive changes in recent years. However, our research found there is more to do to combat workplace transphobia, with almost half of trans people reporting being bullied or harassed at work.

Unions, reps and members have an essential role to play in fighting all forms of discrimination, including transphobia.

Workplace representatives are key in supporting a trans member before, during and after they transition but also have a key role in making sure workplace policies are trans-inclusive and do not put trans people at a disadvantage throughout recruitment, retention and promotion.

As with all union best practice it is best to negotiate policies on trans inclusion and equality before any issues arise. Here are the TUC's top tips for trans inclusion and bargaining:

- › Review current equal opportunities and bullying and harassment policies to make sure that they promote trans equality.
- › Check other policies and procedures – such as recruitment policies, record-keeping and dress codes – to make sure that they do not discriminate against trans people.
- › Encourage employers to include trans issues in induction training.
- › Make it clear that anti-trans behaviour or comments are unacceptable in the workplace.



- › Negotiate specific policies to support employees who transition.
- › Support trans members experiencing problems at work, especially during transition.
- › Ensure there are robust systems in place to ensure a person's trans status is kept confidential and that all personal records are swiftly updated should they change their gender. (Records referring to a person's previous identity should be destroyed unless there is a very good reason for keeping them.)

For more information see *Transforming the Workplace: A TUC guide for trade union activists on supporting trans members*

Together we can make a real difference to trans people's experiences at work and help ensure workplaces provide a safe and welcoming environment for everyone.

# TOP TIPS FROM TRADE UNION TRANS MEMBERS AND THEIR ALLIES

▶ If someone has changed their name, use their new name! Apologise, correct yourself and move on if you make a mistake.

▶ Don't be afraid to ask a co-worker what their pronouns are if you are not sure or have forgotten. Use the individual's preferred pronouns. If you make a mistake - apologise, correct and move on.

▶ Speak up! If you see or hear any transphobic bullying or mis-gendering, speak up in support of your trans co-workers and be prepared to report things to line managers if need be. Let other colleagues know that a trans person's name or pronouns have changed if you notice this is happening. This is best done in a quiet moment.



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▶ In meetings or gatherings where people are required to introduce themselves, be the one who suggests including pronouns in the intros. It's always more relaxing and empowering when this comes from cis colleagues.

▶ Let trans co-workers know that you are an ally, and that you are there to support them.



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▶ Trans people are individuals – so even if one trans person says something is OK, that doesn't mean that all trans people will agree.

▶ Don't make assumptions about a trans person who comes from a particular ethnic background – for instance, that all Asian trans people will have unsupportive families. Generalisations of that type are rarely helpful.

▶ Use the resources that are available to you to find out more about being a trans ally – don't rely on trans people to educate you. The TUC and individual unions have some great resources available as a good starting point.

▶ Remind everyone else that trans people just need to be treated with normal dignity and respect. But that's difficult to get across in brief quotes.

▶ Correct misconceptions arising from ignorance.

▶ Call out intimidation, harassment and bullying.

▶ Defend your trans friends in their absence.



☞ Remind everyone else that trans people just need to be treated with normal dignity and respect. ☞



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- ▶ Listen to trans people!
- ▶ Remember that being a good trans ally means educating yourself! And that includes LGB people too.
- ▶ Call out discrimination and lack of opportunity.
- ▶ Call out lack of representation.
- ▶ Check for workplace policies and call it out if your trans colleagues and union members are not supported.
- ▶ Remember the trade union movement is built on solidarity among workers in an explicit acknowledgement that we are stronger together. This is why it's important all working people, union members and trade union representatives are trans allies.
- ▶ Being an ally isn't difficult, and if you follow the steps outlined in this guidance you will be well on your way to making a difference to trans people.

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