

# HOW TO SUPPORT AN EMPLOYEE'S GENDER TRANSITION

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## THE INSTITUTE

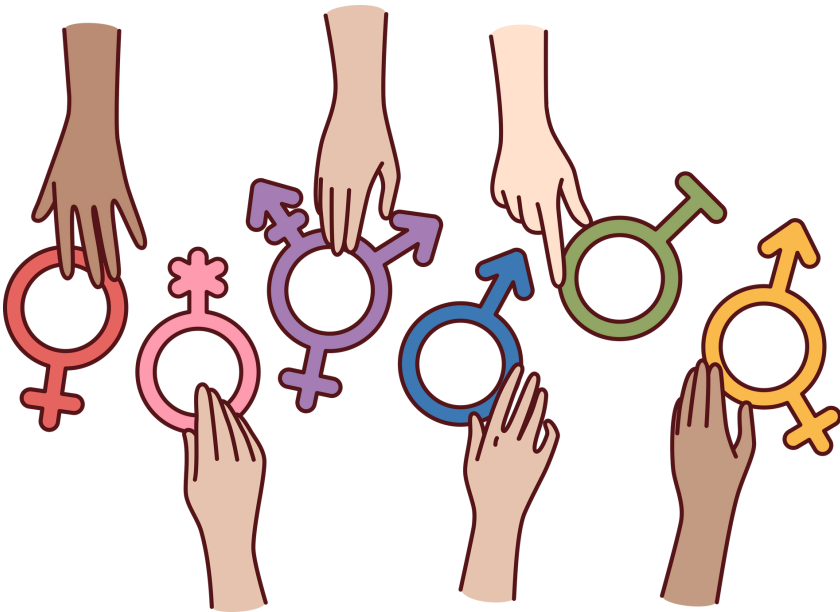
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<a href="#">Understanding and differentiating sex and gender</a>	3
<a href="#">What is gender transition?</a>	4
<a href="#">Why is supporting a trans employee so crucial?</a>	5
<a href="#">How to support a colleague during their gender transition?</a>	5
<a href="#">The role of managers during an employee's transition</a>	6
<a href="#">Resources</a>	7
<a href="#">References</a>	8



This fact sheet is designed to support team leaders and colleagues when a team member shares their need to **express a different position along the gender spectrum**. It offers guidance on how to respond with respect and inclusion. Additional resources are provided at the end to help you continue learning and supporting your team.

# UNDERSTANDING AND DIFFERENTIATING SEX AND GENDER

**Sex is a biological and physiological category** that refers to being female, male or intersex (having biologically both sexes).

Unlike sex, **gender** is a social and individual construction, relating to our inner sense of identity and exists along a spectrum of possibilities. It is continuously shaped through our interactions with our body, with other people, and with the groups we identify with. These interactions influence our bodies, our social roles, what is expected from us, and in some cases, our opportunities : “Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct and can therefore be subject to variations and evolutions” (Coulomb-Gully, 2010, free translation).

Since sex and gender are not automatically connected, we may for example have male sexual characteristics and identify as a man, a woman or anywhere along the gender spectrum, including as non-binary — meaning neither exclusively man nor woman. For this reason, people may come to identify differently from the gender assigned to them at birth.





# WHAT IS GENDER TRANSITION?

## A gradual and personal journey

Gender transitioning is not an isolated event happening suddenly but an evolving process. Many trans individuals begin this journey in adolescence when they start expressing their individual identity. Many publicly express these changes many years after (Zaliznyak et al., 2020).

## A natural part of identity development

Gender transitioning is not a pathological process but a scientifically recognized process of self-affirmation. It is part of building the identity through which we situate ourselves in society (Doyle, 2022).

## A social and workplace experience

This process is both individual and collective. A person's transition may involve changes in name, pronouns, appearance, and gender expression. Transitioning at the workplace simply aims at aligning their outward presentation with their gender identity (Beauregard et al., 2021).

## An essential part of well-being

For trans people, gender **transition is not a personal choice, it is a fundamental need**. Just like anyone, trans people need to express their gender in a way that reflects with their inner sense of identity. This is an emotional, psychological and even physiological need that can affect their mental and physical health (Nelson, 2016).

## A shared responsibility

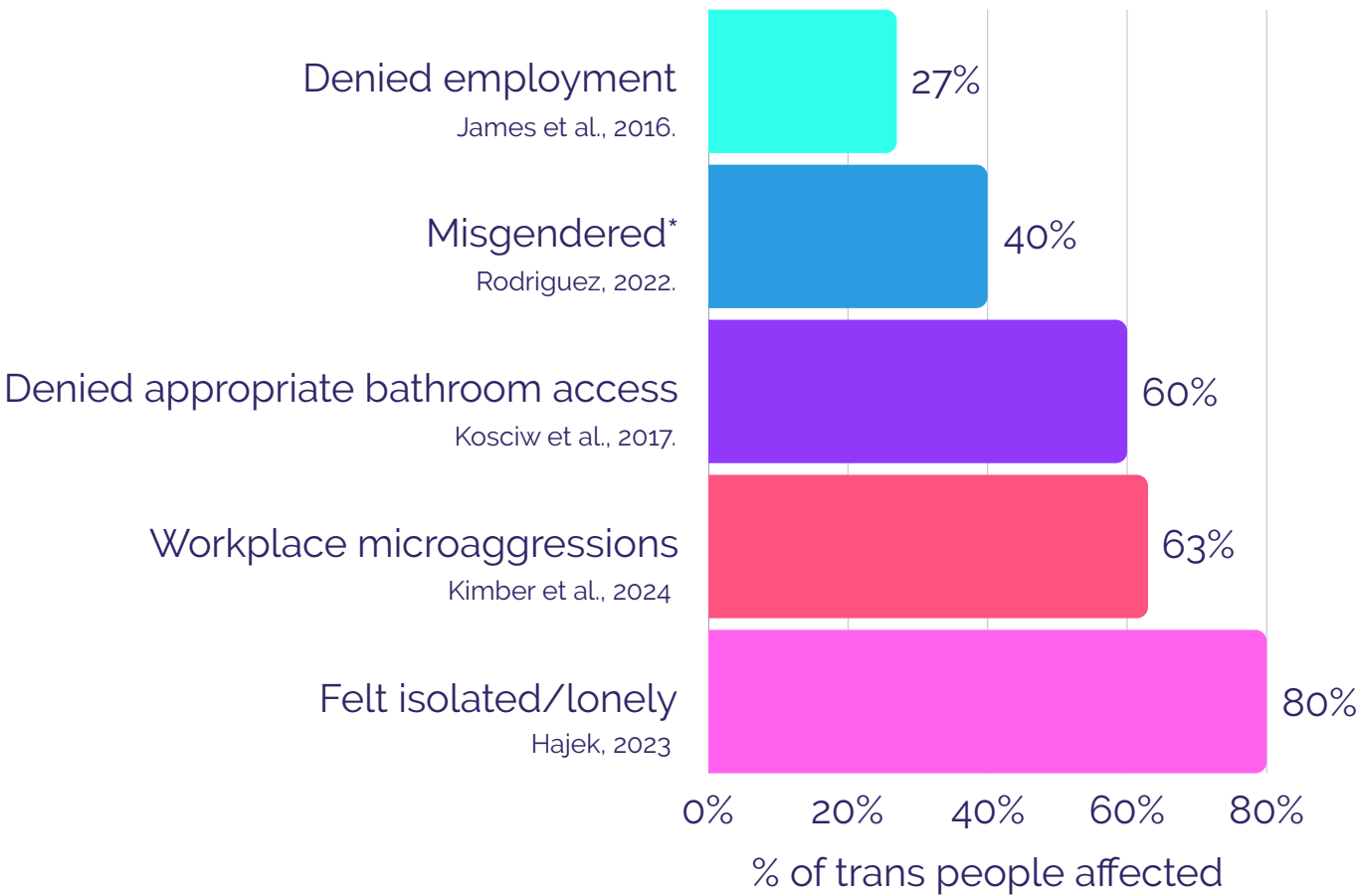
A respectful and inclusive and safe workplace ensures that every team member can be themselves and contribute their best work (Huffman et al, 2021).

## A matter of support, not judgment

Regardless of our personal views or beliefs, all our team members need to be heard and supported, not judged (Huffman et al, 2021).

# WHY IS SUPPORTING A TRANS EMPLOYEE SO CRUCIAL?

Discrimination and challenges faced by trans individuals



\*Misgendering: Assigning a gender that does not align with a person's gender identity.

# HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT A COLLEAGUE DURING THEIR GENDER TRANSITION?

1

## Listen with empathy

Many trans individuals have experienced discrimination or invisibility. Create space for open, non-judgmental conversations.

2

## Keep learning

Educate yourself and encourage your team to learn about **trans inclusion**. Interacting with trans individuals offers a valuable opportunity to deepen one's understanding of gender identity and self-expression.

3

## Be part of the change

Review your institutional/team policies and practices and consider which could be changed to be more trans-inclusive.

## THE ROLE OF MANAGERS DURING AN EMPLOYEE'S TRANSITION

Managers play a crucial role in ensuring a smooth transition process.

**Are you a manager or team leader?** Listen to the person who is transitioning and ask them how they want to address their transitioning process:

- Would they like their team leader to prepare the team for their gender transition?
- Would they like to set boundaries on team questions?
- Would they prefer to manage this transition themselves?
- How do they wish to communicate their gender transition to external stakeholders, such as patients, research participants, and other professionals?

**Ensure that the person transitioning is at the centre of the support offered, that they are heard and empowered, and that their rights are actively respected.**

## DO

### Collectively share and use pronouns

Disclose your own pronouns, ask others for theirs, and use them. This helps create a space where people can choose how they are named beyond assumptions. Always use the pronouns the person chooses (e.g., she/he/they etc.). If you're unsure, ask how to use them correctly. Mistakes might happen as you adjust — stay open to correction and maintain a positive, respectful attitude.

### Respect privacy

Allow individuals to share details about their transition in their own time and on their own terms. Offer support without asking intrusive or personal questions.

### Stay supportive

If you're unsure, keep conversations welcoming and affirming. Focus on being a positive, respectful presence.

## DON'T

### Avoid "deadnaming"

Don't use the person's former name or pronouns. If a mistake happens, recognize it, apologize, and correct yourself. **Avoid preemptively excusing future mistakes, as this can come across as minimizing their impact.**

### Don't ask about bodies or surgeries

We do not discuss genitals at work. Just as you wouldn't ask a cisgender person (someone whose gender aligns with the one assigned at birth) about their genitals, the same respect should be extended to a trans person.

### Avoid assumptions and comparisons

Every transition is personal. Don't assume people experience transition the same way, and avoid offering unsolicited advice or opinions.

# RESOURCES

TRAINING AND RESOURCES FOR CREATING SAFER SPACES	<u>Conference Board of Canada – Safer Spaces Video</u> Short video on fostering inclusive environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.	<u>Transdiversité (Université de Montréal) – French only</u> Course on gender identity and best practices for supporting trans individuals in education and daily life.	<u>The 519 – Resources for Safer Spaces</u> Practical guides for creating inclusive environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.	<u>Egale Canada</u> Training and tools to advance 2SLGBTQIA+ workplace inclusion and human rights. Free workshop registration available.	<u>The Safe Zone Project</u> Free activities and materials for LGBTQ+ inclusion training, covering gender identity, pronouns, and allyship.
COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATION	<u>Rainbow Health Ontario</u> Community-based research methods for engaging LGBTQ+ communities.			<u>NIH – LGBTQI+ Communication Tips</u> Guidance for respectful, inclusive communication with and for LGBTQI+ communities.	
DISCRIMINATION AND MICROAGGRESSIONS	<u>Micropedia of Microaggressions</u> Interactive tool to identify and address microaggressions based on gender, orientation, race, and more.		<u>How to Respond to Racial Microaggressions</u> Practical steps to address microaggressions in the moment.	<u>Commission des droits de la personne (CDPDJ)</u> Definitions, complaint procedures, and a <u>comic explaining discrimination (French only)</u> in Quebec.	
MONTREAL-BASED SUPPORT FOR THE TRANS COMMUNITY	<u>CACTUS Montréal</u> Support, counseling, and assistance with medical and legal needs for trans individuals.	<u>ATQ (Aide aux Trans du Québec)</u> Health, legal, and social support services for the trans community in Quebec.	<u>ACCM – Montreal Trans Resources</u> Comprehensive list of local trans-related services, including clinics, counseling, and community groups.	<u>Juri-Trans</u> Free legal info and support for name and gender marker changes in Quebec.	
RESEARCH INVOLVING TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES	<u>CPATH Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Transgender People &amp; Communities</u> This document provides guidance for student, academic, community or clinical researchers who are working with, or considering working with, trans communities. CPATH strongly recommends that researchers give these issues serious consideration before and while proceeding.				

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