

RESPONDING TO TRANSGENDER VICTIMS of Sexual Assault

Message From the Director

About This Guide

Transgender 101

Sexual Assault in the Transgender Community

Tips for Those Who Serve Victims

JUNE 2014

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About This Guide

Why This Guide?

For most people, it is normal to be excited or curious when meeting someone with an identity or experience significantly different from their own. This can often spark a desire to ask personal questions with the intention of learning more. While this is an understandable interest, it is important to remember that transgender individuals are asked these questions frequently. Even if well-intentioned, some questions can feel invasive, inappropriate, or even hostile. This is especially true when the person is trying to access care.

A common concern voiced by transgender individuals is that they have to describe what it means to identify as transgender in order to receive sensitive care and services. For example, 50 percent of transgender individuals who participated in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) reported having to provide basic information about their transgender identities, experiences, or bodies before they were given medical services.¹ As a result, many transgender individuals avoid accessing routine and emergency care out of fear or because they don't want to have to educate their providers. If you demonstrate preexisting knowledge of transgender identities and experiences, transgender individuals may feel more comfortable when accessing care, which may increase the success of your services.

Another all-too-common complaint relates to having experienced prejudice, discrimination, or violence, even when accessing medical and social services. According to several studies and surveys, for example—

- Fifty-three percent of transgender respondents to NTDS have been verbally harassed or treated disrespectfully in places of public accommodation, and 44 percent have been denied service because of their transgender identity. Twenty-two percent of respondents who have interacted with law enforcement officers have been harassed by them, 20 percent have been refused assistance, 6 percent have been physically attacked by an officer, and 2 percent have been sexually assaulted by an officer. Transgender people of color faced higher rates of prejudice and violence, with up to 38 percent reporting harassment by officers.²
- Seventy-seven percent of transgender people have felt physically unsafe in public.³
- Twenty percent of transgender people have experienced discrimination in a social service agency, from both clients and staff.⁴

On top of these high rates of discrimination and prejudice, transgender individuals also experience high rates of sexual violence. According to several studies, more than 50 percent have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.⁵

Because transgender people make up a relatively small portion of the population (approximately 0.3 to 3 percent),⁶ service providers may wonder about the cost-benefit ratio of providing additional training or

modifying practices to meet transgender victims' needs. We believe that the concept of universal design—borrowed from the disability rights movement—applies. If the physical world is designed in accessible ways, the structures will better serve all individuals, whether they have disabilities or not. Likewise, if you construct service delivery systems to serve the most marginalized individuals effectively (e.g., transgender clients), these systems better serve all clients. A little effort devoted to increasing your cultural competency regarding transgender victims of sexual assault will have positive, unanticipated results for non-transgender victims as well.

Most professionals already possess what is required to provide victims of sexual assault with respectful and appropriate care:

- **Knowledge:** Knowledge about what is required to provide the service the victim is seeking or needs.
- **Skills:** Ability to ask appropriate questions, listen to the victim's responses, and have those responses shape the services being provided.
- **Attitudes:** Belief that being a professional means serving all victims with respect and fairness, even if that requires (temporarily) ignoring personal beliefs, judgments, and emotions.

With an enhanced understanding of transgender-related issues, professionals and providers who serve victims of sexual assault can be sources of support and care for all victims, including individuals in this high-risk population.



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Information in the Guide

This guide compiles information from multiple quantitative and qualitative datasets as well as collected experiences from transgender survivors who have navigated sexual assault services and from providers who have worked with transgender survivors.

Primary data are largely based on several key studies:

- FORGE's 2004 "Sexual Violence in the Transgender Community Survey" (n=254).
- FORGE's 2011 "Transgender Individuals' Knowledge of and Willingness to Use Sexual Assault Programs" survey (n=1,005).
- FORGE's 2011 "Assessment of Sexual Assault Programs' Efforts to Welcome Transgender Survivors and Appropriately Serve Them, Including Training Preferences" survey (n=310).
- National Center on Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 2011 "National Transgender Discrimination Survey" (n=6,400).

The guide provides practical information supported by the experiences of transgender survivors and some specific challenges that victim service providers may encounter. When possible, information is supported by cited research, which is notably sparse.



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Language

The most important information to know about language in this publication is that **no single term or definition for any given concept is the only term or definition.**

Instead of rigidly following the terms and definitions found here, listen to what the people you are serving say, and mirror what they say.

Keeping this in mind, the following are working definitions for this guide and are not intended to be universally accepted or applied. Do not "correct" victims you are serving if their self-definitions differ from what is found below.

Binary gender

The socially constructed concept that there are only two genders: male and female.

Cisgender (or non-transgender)

Non-transgender individuals who are comfortable in the gender they were assigned at birth.

FTM, or female-to-male

An individual who was assigned female at birth but who may now identify as male or who may have taken medical, legal, or social steps to present in more masculine ways.

Gender expression

How a person expresses gender through clothing, grooming, speech, hair style, body language, social interactions, and other behaviors.

Gender identity

An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or another gender (not necessarily visible to others).

Gender non-conforming

A person who does not adhere to traditional binary gender identity, roles, or expression.

Gender vector

The direction a person's gender may be moving, for example, toward a more feminine or a more masculine identity or expression. The term "gender vector" acknowledges that gender is not necessarily binary (or does not have an end point) and that many peoples' identities evolve over time.

MTF, or male-to-female

READ MORE

In this e-pub*—

- Five Keys to Service: [Don't Categorize; Use Your Client's Terms](#)

*Clicking these links will take you to other sections in this e-pub. To return, hit your browser's "back" button.

READ MORE

- [101 Trans Identity Words](#)

An individual who was assigned male at birth but who may now identify as female or who may have taken medical, legal, or social steps to present in more feminine ways.

Pronouns

Words that can be used to refer to an individual in place of their name. Common masculine pronouns include he, him, his; common feminine pronouns are she, her, hers. Some transgender individuals use gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., ze, s/he, sie, hir), and the singular use of "they" is growing in popularity.

Questioning

An identity or a process of introspection whereby a person learns about their gender identity. This process can happen at any age or at multiple times throughout one's life.

SOFFA

An acronym for significant others, friends, family, and allies. Everyone is a SOFFA to many others. Everyone has a SOFFA circle—the people around them who are a part of their life.

Transgender, or trans

An umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of people whose gender identity or expression may not match the sex they were assigned at birth. "Trans" is used as frequently or more frequently than "transgender."

Transition

Process and time within which a person goes from predominantly being seen as one gender to predominantly being seen as another gender.

READ MORE

[Gender Neutral Pronouns.](#)

FORGE's quick reference guide to the more common traditional and gender-neutral pronouns.

In this e-pub*—

- Transgender 101: [Pronouns](#)

*Clicking these links will take you to other sections in this e-pub. To return, hit your browser's "back" button.

TRANSGENDER

The term "transgender" was coined in the 1970s by Virginia Prince. Prince recognized that some people do not want to take medical steps (hormones or surgery) to live in a gender not assigned at birth and that some peoples' identities are not captured by the words "transsexual" or "transvestite" (a word no longer in common use). She created the word "transgender" to encompass those who don't have words to adequately describe their experiences and identities. She acknowledged that living as male or female is not linked to medical actions and that people's identities and choices about how to embody gender are complex.

At the time, "transgender" described people who fell between genders and who did not want surgical intervention to "change sex." Today, it is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of people whose gender identity or expression may not match the sex they were assigned at birth. FORGE uses "transgender" and "gender non-conforming" to cover hundreds of gender identities, histories, experiences, and expressions, including—

- People who have transitioned from one gender to another (many who transition move from identifying as "transgender" to identifying as either male or female).
- People who intend to transition from one gender to another but have not yet taken any or many steps to do so.
- People who choose to use hormones and surgery and those who use neither.
- People who use hormones for a short while, or may opt for one or more surgeries (e.g., breast augmentation or mastectomy, facial feminization, gender reassignment surgery).
- People who identify as a gender other than male or female.
- Cross-dressers and others who identify as one gender but sometimes dress in clothing usually worn by another gender.
- People who perform as another gender (professionally or not), such as drag performers (both female and male drag).
- People who do not visibly conform to gender stereotypes (whether they want to conform or not).

Although this guide primarily uses the term "transgender," FORGE presumes that many individuals more closely align with other terms (see FORGE's [101 Trans Identity Words](#)).

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FORGE is widely viewed as the national expert on transgender trauma and violence. Founded in 1994, FORGE's work has evolved from general support of transgender individuals and loved ones to incorporating the Transgender Aging Network in 2000 to extensively focusing on anti-violence issues since 2004. FORGE has been federally funded since 2009 to provide training and technical assistance to victim service professionals on how to better serve transgender survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, dating violence, and hate crimes, and to provide direct services to transgender survivors of sexual assault. It is also a partner in the federally funded National Resource Center on LGBT Aging, funded through the Administration on Aging.

FORGE is an active member of the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, the New Beginnings Initiative working on federal LGBT improvements, and the LGBT Aging Roundtable. It actively partners with other anti-violence agencies, statewide coalitions, and transgender/LGBT organizations to enhance the collective work of reducing violence and harm against transgender individuals and improving the cultural competency of professionals working with transgender victims. FORGE maintains a rich selection of free online trainings, fact sheets, publications, and other materials on [its Web site](#).

Multidisciplinary Advisory Council

FORGE is grateful to the dedicated professionals across the country who served on the Multidisciplinary Advisory Council, which reviewed early drafts of some portions of this guide:

- Avy A. Skolnik—Ph.D. graduate student with extensive experience in transgender anti-violence issues, New York, NY.
- Debra K. Donovan, R.N.—Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Sexual Assault Treatment Center, Milwaukee, WI.
- Wendy J. Murphy, J.D.—Attorney, New England School of Law, Boston, MA.
- Curt Rogers—Executive Director, Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project, Boston, MA.
- Cpl. Michael G. Hemond—Law enforcement officer, Burlington Police Department, Burlington, VT.

Consultants

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- Eli R. Green, M.A., M.Ed.—Editor.
- lore m. dickey, Ph.D.—Data analyst and principal investigator.
- Mary Woodruff—Librarian and citation expert.

Demonstration project sites

FORGE is indebted to the four demonstration sites also funded under this project, which provided it

with deeper insight into the challenging issues of working with transgender victims of sexual violence and which continue to work diligently to improve service provision and healing for survivors within their communities. The four communities are—

- Iowa City, IA.
- Boulder, CO.
- The State of Maine.
- Boston, MA.

Survivors and providers

This guide would not be possible without the thousands of transgender survivors and loved ones who courageously shared their stories and experiences and the hundreds of victim service providers who reached out for technical assistance or shared their challenges and successes in working with transgender victims.

Office for Victims of Crime

FORGE is grateful to OVC staff for their dedication to improving the respectful, competent treatment of transgender survivors of sexual assault and for the funding needed to develop this guide. FORGE particularly wants to thank—

- Joye Frost, Director.
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The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) provides federal leadership in developing the Nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found on its Web site.

[U.S. Department of Justice](#)

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⁴ S. Minter and C. Daley, 2003, *Trans Realities: A Legal Needs Assessment of San Francisco's Transgender Communities*, San Francisco, CA: National Center for Lesbian Rights and Transgender Law Center.

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⁶ G. Gates, 2011, [How Many People Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender?](#), Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute, accessed March 20, 2013; L. Conway, 2002, "[How Frequently Does Transsexualism Occur?](#)" accessed March 20, 2013.