

Transgender Awareness Week

November 12 – 19



If you read a newspaper, go on the internet, or turn on the TV at all, you may well have seen some shocking headlines about trans people lately.

It's fine if you don't feel like you know very much about trans people. Lots of people don't. But it's important to know that there are a lot of myths and misconceptions that the media repeats over and over again, which makes it harder to get to the truth on some of these issues. Now is the time to learn more, stop listening to scaremongers, and start having real, honest, respectful conversations.

Stonewall has developed this Question and Answer document to answer some of the common questions that people ask about trans people, and to tackle some of those myths and misconceptions you might have seen in the media. We hope this will help.

How many trans people are there in Britain at the moment?

We don't know. There isn't an accurate figure for how big the trans community is. That's because the census doesn't ask about this, and there isn't any research that covers enough people to be statistically significant.

The best estimate at the moment is that around 1 per cent of the population might identify as trans, including people who identify as **non-binary**. That would mean about 600,000 trans and non-binary people in Britain, out of a population of over 60 million.

How do you know you're trans?

Many people know they're trans from a young age. Some trans people might not have the language or understanding of what it means to be trans until later in life. But it is always something innate and absolutely core to your sense of self. It's not something that's a fad, a 'lifestyle choice' or something that comes and goes.

It is an essential part of who you are that can't be changed. If people don't recognise you as being the gender you know you are, it's extremely damaging.

What's the situation like for trans people in the UK at the moment?

In many ways, trans people in the UK face huge levels of abuse and inequality right now. Two in five trans people have had a hate crime committed against them in the last year, and two in five trans young people have attempted suicide.

One in eight trans people have been physically attacked by colleagues or customers at work. No wonder some trans people are scared to walk down the streets.

It's such an extreme situation, that last year a British trans woman was granted asylum in New Zealand because the UK is so transphobic. It's something we all need to care about, take seriously and work to tackle in whatever way we can – whether that's at work, at school, or in our communities.

But these shocking stats only tell one element of the story. Being trans in no way means you're going to have a bad life – trans people around the UK have rich, rewarding lives, careers, families and relationships, just as any other group of people do.

What process do you have to go through to be recognised as trans in daily life?

For most things, nothing formal or legal. If you're a trans man or woman, your gender is protected under the Equality Act. You can use the bathroom that fits your gender, expect your employers to recognise your gender, and access any public service that's appropriate for your gender (with a few exceptions).

That's what's so frustrating about some of the current media debate – most of the things people are discussing now are already established and protected by law. **Non-binary** people though, aren't currently recognised by the law at all, which is deeply wrong and needs to be changed.

One thing that causes a lot of difficulty and pain for some trans people is getting the gender on their birth certificate changed. This process is something that's governed by the Gender Recognition Act 2004. Stonewall has been campaigning to get it reformed, including ensuring it recognises non-binary identities.

Do you need to have gender reassignment surgery (a 'sex change operation') to be trans?

A lot of media coverage is obsessed with details of body parts and surgical procedures. For some trans people, having gender reassignment surgery is an important part of their transition. Getting access to that surgery is extremely difficult at the moment, and more investment is desperately needed so that trans people can get the procedures they need.

But for other trans people surgery isn't something they want. Being trans isn't about having (or not having) particular body parts. It's something that's absolutely core to a trans person's identity and doesn't alter - whatever outward appearances might be.

And frankly, it's no one else's business: you wouldn't dream of asking someone else what they've got going on under their clothes, so why would anyone think it's appropriate to ask a trans person?!

What does non-binary mean, and what's the right way to talk about it?

Non-binary is a term for people who don't solely identify as either male or female, or may identify as both. Because the binary terms don't fit, using pronouns such as 'he' or 'she' might not be right, so when you talk to someone who's non-binary simply find a good moment and ask them how they would prefer to be addressed. It might be 'they', it might be something different.

It may take a bit of getting used to, but it causes you no harm and it will make that person feel acknowledged and valid. It's not that long ago that some people struggled with accepting that some women wanted to be called Ms instead of Miss, but we got used to the common courtesy of simply asking people how they wanted to be addressed. This is no different.

Are you calling for gender to be removed from documents?

We want language that is inclusive and doesn't discriminate against people because of who they are. We're not suggesting that we remove 'female' and 'male' from all forms and documents, but we do think we can find a way to have processes that include everyone quite easily.

Exam boards, and many companies and organisations, have already found a way to do this that works fine for them (just look at some of our [Top Trans-Inclusive Employers](#) ranging from Vodafone to the National Assembly for Wales).

We need to look at systems sensibly to see what we can do in this area. All that's required is a common-sense approach that lets us describe and categorise people in ways that are inclusive and supportive.

What does 'cis' mean?

Cis is short for 'cisgender' which means somebody whose gender identity matches the sex they were given at birth. Basically, it means 'not trans'.

It all feels complicated and I'm frightened of saying the wrong thing

Understanding gender identity and trans issues can be confusing at first. Nobody is expecting you to know everything right away and it's ok to ask questions if the person you're talking to is happy to answer them. Some trans people feel comfortable discussing their identity, some people don't. If you want to find out more about the experiences of some trans people, you can hear them in their own words in [these videos](#).

If you say the wrong thing by accident (which happens sometimes to most people), just apologise. Recognise you've got it wrong and move on. We're all human and people slip up sometimes. As long as you have good intentions, most trans people will appreciate you acknowledging your blunder and help you get it right. It's important that we have real, honest, respectful conversations.

Can you be trans and gay?

Sexual orientation (who you are attracted to) is completely unrelated to gender identity (who you are). You can be trans and gay, trans and straight, trans and bi, asexual, or anything else – just as a cis person can be. Simple.

So, could a lesbian have a trans woman as a lesbian partner, or a gay man be with a trans man?

Of course. If they fancy each other. First and foremost, we need to recognise that trans women are women, and trans men are men. After that it becomes a matter of who you are attracted to. Adults are free to have relationships with other consenting adults, whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity.

What is a Gender Recognition Certificate and how do you get one?

A Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is a document that legally changes your gender from male to female or vice versa. It allows trans men or trans women to have the right gender on their birth certificate, which can make life easier when it comes to things like starting a new job or flying.

The process of getting a GRC is controlled by the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) 2004. It's very outdated, and is a stressful, dehumanising and traumatic process for trans people to go through.

Currently, in order to get a GRC, trans people have to get a medical diagnosis of 'gender dysphoria' (which is currently classified as a mental illness). They also have to live in their 'acquired gender' for two years – gathering evidence such as photos of themselves at events - to try to convince a panel of legal professionals and medical clinicians (who they don't meet) that they are indeed trans. In England and Wales, if they're married, they also need the consent of their spouse before they can proceed.

What's wrong with this process?

A lot: it's secretive, discriminatory, and it treats being trans as a mental illness. It can also take several years to go through, costs a lot of money and is a bureaucratic mess full of red tape and intrusive medical assessments. It also only allows for people to switch from one binary gender to the other – male to female or vice versa – which means it doesn't work at all for non-binary people who don't identify as either.

The whole process is so traumatic and demeaning that many trans people simply can't face it. There's no need for it to be this way. Lots of other countries, including Ireland, have already reformed this process and (at the time of writing) the world hasn't collapsed around them.

Being able to get a Gender Recognition Certificate matters. It means you can have a birth certificate with the right gender on it. It helps make life admin easier, like making it straightforward to get a passport with the right gender on it so you can travel more easily, but mainly it means that, as a trans person, you can have that piece of paper to show the state believes you are who you are. Just like any other citizen. It's important.

There was a recent consultation in England and Wales on reforming the Act which closed on 19 October. You can read about Stonewall's [response](#) and how to stand up for trans rights if you want to know more. Stonewall has campaigned for changes to the law to allow trans people to declare their own gender without going through medical tests, recognise non-binary people and lower the age that someone can declare their own gender to 16. The consultation in Scotland has already closed and we are awaiting the Scottish Government's response to it.

If this change to the law happens, what will it mean for me and my family?

If you're a cis person, it will barely affect you. All that will happen is that trans people in the UK will have a slightly easier life. However, it will mean you and your family are living in a fairer society, one where people – maybe including some people you love and care for personally - are free to lead the lives they want to live, without the abuse and discrimination that's an everyday part of life for many trans people at the moment.

If you're a trans person, it will mean you can get your gender recognised by the state without being subject to a demeaning, discriminatory and unnecessary process.

Does teachers and doctors talking about trans issues more make children and young people think they are trans when they aren't?

No. The fact that teachers, doctors, families and care givers are talking about gender issues more is a good thing. It means that children are more empowered and more able

to explore their identity as they grow up, as well as helping them understand and accept difference.

All children and young people deserve the right to be happy and be themselves. We all explore different elements of our identity as we develop – it's a part of growing up.

When young people access support, they're looking for exactly that: support. They want someone to talk things through with, someone who can understand their thoughts and feelings, and help them to have those conversations. Of those young people, a very small number may go on to identify as trans, but many more won't. This is a success and demonstrates the importance of listening and talking to young people.

For those who find it impossible to reconcile who they are with the sex they've been given at birth, ongoing age-appropriate care and support is vital.

But what about public toilets?

Trans people can and have been using the toilets that match their gender for years without issue. This is another media-generated 'debate', and it's actually having a negative effect on many cis people too; people whose appearance doesn't fit the stereotypes of male or female are increasingly being challenged for simply going into a public loo.

Having facilities that everyone can use – toilets and changing rooms with private space – is really sensible and many businesses and institutions have been taking that approach without incident for a long time now.

Should trans women be allowed in women's refuges?

Refuges exist to support vulnerable women leaving unsafe situations. 41 per cent of trans people have experienced a hate crime in the past year, and more than a quarter of trans people in a relationship have faced domestic abuse from a partner. It's heartbreaking to imagine being the victim of violence and then being turned away from help when you desperately need it.

There are many refuges that already support trans women escaping abuse and it works fine – in fact the majority of domestic violence services in Scotland have been for nearly 10 years (you can read a statement from Scottish women's organisations [here](#)). We have to trust that the people running these services know what they're doing. They're the experts at supporting women in these services, after all.

There's a chronic lack of funding and support for refuges, which means victims of domestic violence who desperately need help are being turned away in ever increasing numbers. That's something we all need to work together to tackle. Read the report Stonewall produced with nfpSynergy '[Supporting trans women in domestic and sexual violence services](#)'.

Should trans women be able to sit on women-only panels or be on women-only shortlists?

Yes, of course. Trans women are women, and because of that it makes sense that they should have the same opportunity to be involved in debates as any other woman. Women-only panels and shortlists exist to try and redress the gender inequality that all women – trans women included - face every day.

Panels and shortlists are stronger when they recognise and represent a wide range of women's experiences and backgrounds, including trans women, who have very little visible representation in positions of power.

What do deadnaming and misgendering mean?

Deadnaming is when people refer to a trans person using the name they had before they transitioned. Misgendering is when someone refers to a trans person using the gender they were assigned at birth instead of their real gender.

When done deliberately, they're both deeply hurtful to trans people. If you hear people do this, stand up as an ally and challenge the person saying it, if it's safe for you to do so. You can get tips on challenging transphobic bullying [here](#).

Why are people who support trans equality refusing to go on panel shows to discuss gender? Aren't you silencing debate?

Trans people and trans allies are keen to have robust and honest debates about how to make trans equality a reality in the UK. But what they're not prepared to do is debate whether or not they have the right to be themselves, or have rights as citizens under the law. Stonewall is working with people in the media to help them understand this, and move the conversation on to how they can work together to tackle transphobia and fight for acceptance without exception for trans people.

What can I do to be an ally to trans people?

More and more people and organisations are recognising the importance of stepping up and being a vocal ally to trans people. Prominent individuals in politics and in the media are already doing it, as are organisations ranging from Lloyds Banking Group, to Tesco, to top-ranked law firms.

But there are also lots of small steps you can take to be a trans ally. Whether it's online or in real life, simply listening to - and supporting - trans voices can make a huge difference.



For more information on what else you can do, go to Stonewall's [Come Out For Trans Equality campaign page](#). You can also sign up to keep up to date with Stonewall, read its five-year plan *A Vision for Change* , and get stuck in!