the incredibly detailed honest forthright fully comprehensive completely blunt wonderfully helpful and witty exposition on a topic that makes some people stress because they doubt they understand it or know enough about it but they'll soon be ready to talk because this compelling and transformative (no pun intended) little publication will answer lots of questions and start to demystify the not-at-all secret world of people who are transgender and become your tried and trusted

guide to being a trans ally*

CONTENTS

introduction

> *Allies have been indispensable in the journey of transgender people. Without them, this would be a very lonely road.*
>
> **Alyssa**

If there's one thing that we can say about being an ally, it's this: It is all about the journey.

When PFLAG National launched the Straight for Equality program in 2007, the mission was—if you'll excuse our nearly inexcusable pun—pretty straightforward. We wanted to create a resource and community for people who are not lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) to understand why their voices are critical to achieving equality for all, and provide them with the information and tools to effectively raise their voices.

To lead people on the path from "Soooo not my issue…" to one of support (or even Super Ally status), we'd have to start at the very beginning. It would entail creating a set of resources that would take people through different aspects of the journey: learning what allies are, developing competency around understanding what "LGBTQ+" means, finding out about the experiences of LGBTQ+ people, and genuinely knowing what ally behaviors to deploy in every situation.

So far, the trip has been pretty awesome.

We started with the basics—what does it mean to be a straight ally to people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and why is self-identification so important? (If you want the answer, check out

the guide to being a straight ally.) We went into some very specific topics—things like being an ally as a person of faith (**be not afraid—help is on the way!**), or a an ally working in healthcare (**read this before you put your metatarsals between your maxillae and mandible**).* And we got some important conversations and learning opportunities going about what being an ally looks like in different settings, like the workplace or with our friends.

At every point on the journey, we were doing what anyone on a road trip does: we were looking down the road at what comes next. Which, of course, brings us to our next stop.

Welcome to learning how to be a trans ally.

We kind of know what you might be thinking. Why wait? And how does this fit into your whole ally thing?

Glad that you asked.

From the start, the goal of the Straight for Equality program was to engage all of those people out there who never really saw "LGBTQ+ stuff" as their issue. And to do this, it means a lot of focused education. Learning about what every part of "LGBTQ+" actually means, for example, and how things like sexual orientation and gender identity—while often thrown into the same sentence—are very different things. And to demonstrate respect for people who embrace these identities, we'd need to create specific spaces where people can learn about each element.

So here you are, holding this book. A book focused on transgender inclusion, and the role that allies play in making it a reality.

There is that other question, about how the whole "straight ally" thing fits in here. Now that we're talking about gender identity and expression, this might mean that more than straight-identified people can be part of the ally group, and…your head is near exploding, right?

We've got you covered on that one, too.

You'll find a lot more conversation about the word "ally", why it is important to use, why modifiers matter, and how to pull it all off later on in chapter two. But for now, let's just say this: the name

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* *If you're interested in any of these books, you can download them for free at straightforequality.org.*

of the program—Straight for Equality—always worked as a very nice nod to people who identify as non-LGB allies because of the lovely double entendre. (Yes, we remember high school English classes all too well.)

But the title of the program always carried a primary message: this is about how we're all working to achieve equality together, not taking detours around issues that stress us out, or avoiding conversations with people we didn't think would agree. It was always about heading straight to that end goal of equality, and bringing as many people along with us on this very direct journey.

And here we are, together again. So whether you come to this new part of our journey as a straight ally, or you come to it as a member of the LGB community looking to be part of the force for trans inclusion, welcome. As always, we're honored and thrilled you're here.

Let's go.

Equality guideposts

Here are some nifty icons to help quickly identify things you might face on your journey to becoming a trans ally.

Stumbling Blocks

Caution with a twist. Read real-life stories from people about how they struggled to understand a situation, confront a fear, or try something new. These narratives are good reminders that you're never alone in your journey to becoming a more active ally.

Phone-a-Friend

Get quick access to great resources that can help you get past your stumbling blocks and on the path, straight to equality.

Your Invitation

Learning more about how to be a powerful trans ally opens up a whole new set of opportunities for you to change the world. Take advantages of these invitations to try something new and help move equality forward.

Equality Literacy

While you're reading this book, it is possible that you'll encounter terms with which you're not familiar. We've made an effort to provide explanations along the way, but if there's a word that is unclear, check out our Equality Literacy section starting on page 63.

I didn't know much about transgender people or what a lot of the words around the term meant. And I had never considered what it felt like on a day-to-day basis as to what it would mean to be trans. But when I found myself closely working on an event with a transgender person, it allowed me to see into her world, and see the obstacles that she faced every day. It was a shock to think outside of my little box, but talking and interacting with an out and proud transgender woman helped me become a better ally in general, and a much better ally for people who are transgender.

Jane

chapter one:

Words. A lot of words.

There's been a lot written about why people sometimes struggle with understanding the T in the LGBTQ+ acronym, and one of the key indicators that seems to be consistent in any discussion is this: many of us are just kind of hazy on what everything means in the first place.

If we call becoming an ally a journey (and we do), it would seem that the best place to start the trip is by doing some preparation to start our adventure. So let's begin by talking about a few words.

Ok, more than a few. But we promise to be brief. Or brief-ish.

One quick and very important note from the outset: the conversation about gender identity, expression, and identification is constantly evolving, and there are lots of ways to understand some of the terminology associated with the transgender community and being a trans ally. The explanations and definitions in this publication are just one of many ways to understand the landscape. It is likely that you will meet people who interpret some of these terms differently, or that some of these terms will change—even in the time between when this book is published and when you read it.

That's ok. In fact, it's great.

Why? It demonstrates the tremendous diversity in this conversation, and reminds us that there is no one definitive way to understand who we are. We're offering some starting points to help get the trip going.

Assigned Sex

Hooray! We have everyone's attention!

Simply put, sex refers to the biological, genetic, or physical characteristics that define males and females. These can include genitalia, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics (the things we often "read" as male or female, like body hair or body shape).

Nearly everyone is assigned a sex at birth, and it tends to be one of two choices: Male or female.*

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Did you catch the word "assigned"? That was a pretty big one. When we think about the sex of an individual, it typically corresponds with what the doctor said the moment that individual was born—"It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!". Keep that in mind, because we're coming back to it soon.

Here's the big takeaway: Everyone has an assigned sex.

Gender

If we're going by the book, gender most often refers to a set of social, psychological, and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as "feminine" or "masculine".

We hear about gender all the time—traditional stereotypes about gender (e.g., women are nurturing while men are protective) and how they've traditionally influenced life choices (the nurturing woman goes into teaching, while the protective man garners a high-powered job to care for his family).

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* *Some individuals may be assigned the term "intersex" which refers to a variety of biological conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy or hormone levels that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female. It is important to know that intersex and transgender are* not *interchangeable terms. For more information on this term, please see the Equality Literacy section starting on page 63.*

Often, when someone steps outside the way that gender is understood by their group, it causes some people to get a little rattled. For example, the girl who didn't want to play with dolls, grew up playing rough sports like football, and, as a woman, chose to become a firefighter will have a number of conclusions drawn about her—and perhaps her sexual orientation, or even gender identity—because she's stepped out of the typical space for girls and women.

When things like this happen, it is a reminder to all of us about the power that our society confers about how gender "ought to be"…and the possible consequences that happen when an individual (whether as a child or adult) steps outside those boundaries.

And the takeaway for this one? Everyone has a gender, too.

Sexual Orientation

This term tends to be a pretty familiar one for most people because of the growing familiarity with people who have a sexual orientation that is not straight.

In talking about sexual orientation, we're getting into an individual's emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay and lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who are bisexual experience feelings for people of both sexes. And people who are asexual experience no or very little attraction to either sex.

Just like sex and gender, everyone has a sexual orientation.

Gender Identity

This tends to be a bit of a newer term for a lot of people—but the fact that we're hearing it more often is a good sign that this conversation is receiving greater attention.

Gender identity is the term that is used to describe a person's deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or maybe even neither.

Here's the important part: A person's gender identity does not always correspond to their assigned sex.

So remember where we talked about assigned sex typically being male or female? This is where gender identity comes in. While an individual, at birth, may be assigned the term "male" based on biological characteristics, that person might not necessarily feel as though they are male, or were intended to be male. For them, there's a disconnect that happens between what they may see on the outside (a male body, leading to the assumption that the person will identify as male) and how the individual sees themselves (a person who identifies as female but who is living inside a body that was assigned male).

We're learning more about where gender identity comes from. A lot of experts in the field believe that awareness of gender identity is experienced in infancy, solidifies around age three, and then gets reinforced in adolescence through how we teach youth about who boys and girls are expected to be. But no matter where our understanding of our gender identity comes from, or when we become aware of it, it's an incredibly strong force in determining how we understand ourselves.

The takeaway for this term? Everyone has a gender identity.

This of course brings us to terms that help describe various gender identities.

Cisgender

As a refresher to those of us who struggled through Latin in school, and a quick tutorial for those of us who (one might argue, luckily) averted the struggle, the prefix "cis" is Latin for "on the same side of." When we add the word "gender" to the prefix, we end up with a word that roughly translated, means "on the same side of gender."

Still fuzzy?

Try looking at the term this way. Cisgender people identify with (or are on the same side of) the gender assigned to them at birth. So when we mention a cisgender man, the focus is on an individual who was assigned male at birth, and whose internal sense of his gender has been the same as that identification: male. Similarly, a cisgender woman is an individual who was assigned female at birth, and also identifies as female.

Yep. It's true: When you break it down like that, the term is pretty useful. And cisgender sounds a whole lot better than "non-transgender" or—even worse—the dreaded, "I'm not transgender, not that there's anything wrong with that."

Transgender

Here's the most basic explanation: transgender is a term often used to describe an individual whose gender identity does not necessarily match the sex assigned to them at birth.

So we have transgender women (individuals who were assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female) and we have transgender men (individuals who were assigned female at birth, but whose internal sense of their gender identity is male). And there are many people who were assigned one or the other, but identify as neither, making them nonbinary-identified.

But we did mention that this is the basic explanation. As in any group, there is tremendous diversity within the transgender (or just trans) community. Transgender people are just part of the incredible spectrum of identities in this space, and the space is constantly evolving and changing.

Your Invitation… Everything under the umbrella

"I thought I had this down, and then there were more words. Now I'm really worried that I'm not getting this whole thing as much as I thought I was. Gender-creative? Help."

Michael

Genderqueer. Gender nonconforming. Trans. Transsexual. Bigender. Third sex. Female-to-male (FTM). Male-to-female (MTF). Gender-creative. Gender-colorful. Gender-expansive.

The diverse collection of ways that people who identify under what is sometimes called "the transgender umbrella" is vast, and is always evolving. Some terms that you may hear are alternate ways of talking about being trans, while others might refer to specific identities that expand our understanding of what gender nonconformity (in other words,

(continued on page 13)

SIDENOTE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRANSITION?

"My journey as an ally began when my fraternal twin started his gender transition. Being a twin means you always have a witness to your life, someone to help you see yourself more clearly. During my twin's transition, many people asked if I was upset or sad to lose my sister. I always told them that I did not lose anything. My twin is still my twin, I just see him more clearly now. Our transgender friends and family give us the gift of being their best selves. My wish is that one day people like my twin receive only gratitude, not pain and discrimination, in exchange for their courage." —Katherine

When talking about people who are trans-identified, one of the most commonly used terms is "transitioning." Simply put, it refers to the process one goes through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. The process not an overnight event, but a long-term journey that may take years.

There tend to be two aspects to transitioning for many people:

- **Social and legal transition: Change of name, pronoun selection, modifications to appearance, dress, changes to an individual's vocal tone, etc.** For many people, this will also entail legal changes to their name and gender marker on identification documents like driver's licenses and passports.
- **Medical transition: The introduction of hormones (testosterone for trans men, estrogen and testosterone blockers for trans women) into the body.** For some people, it will also involve surgical procedures that align the physical body with one's gender identification. These may include "top" surgery, "bottom" surgery, and, for trans women, facial feminization.

For many teens and adults who are transgender, their transition experience will be guided by the Standards of Care (SOC) developed by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). The SOC serves as clinical guidance for health professionals to assist trans-identified people with safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort in order to maximize their overall health, psychological well-being, and self-fulfillment. This assistance may include primary care, gynecologic and urologic care, reproductive options, voice and communication therapy, mental health services (e.g., assessment, counseling, psychotherapy), and hormonal and surgical treatments.

SIDENOTE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRANSITION? (CONTINUED)

For children who identify differently from their assigned sex, and are "persistent, consistent and insistent" in that identification, parents might decide to support their child's social transition. They may call the child by their preferred name and pronoun, allow the child to grow or cut their hair, and dress in the clothing and colors of the gender the child feels most comfortable. These changes are completely reversible should the child want to. Often, parents find these changes bring their child great comfort and alleviate the child's anxiety and depression. What is most important for success in these cases (as in all cases) is the parents' unconditional love and support of the child for who they are, whether trans or cis, lesbian, gay, bi, or straight.

However, not all trans people will follow the Standards of Care, nor will they go through medical procedures or treatments as part of their transition. Some individuals' experiences—whether dictated by personal selection, where they live, access to healthcare services, or by limited resources—necessitate a slightly different path. However, this does not mean that an individual is "less" transgender than someone who has received extensive medical and surgical procedures any more than someone is "less" gay because they haven't yet been in a relationship. It is just one more way of being trans-identified.

Phone-a-Friend

Looking for more information on the transitioning process?

Check out the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) by visiting **wpath.org.** And if you'd like to learn even more about the many aspects of trans-related health, pick up a copy of **Trans Bodies, Trans Selves** (available at **transbodies.com**).

For more details on transition processes among children and youth, check out **Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Gender-Nonconforming Children** by Diane Ehrensaft or **The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals** by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper.

viewing one's gender as something beyond the understanding that people must be male or female) means.

Not sure what to use?

In general, *trans*, or *transgender* tend to be safe places to start, but the best way to find out what to use is simply to ask a person. (More on how to do this in chapter 3.) If you're looking for additional definitions for words associated with gender identity, check out the Equality Literacy section on page 63.

Gender Expression

So far we've talked a lot about terms that are assigned to people, and terms that people may use to identify themselves, so much of the conversation has been internal. But gender expression is where everything goes public.

Gender expression is something you can see. It includes the way in which a person communicates their gender identity to others through external means such as clothing, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are traditionally linked to how we read masculinity or femininity.

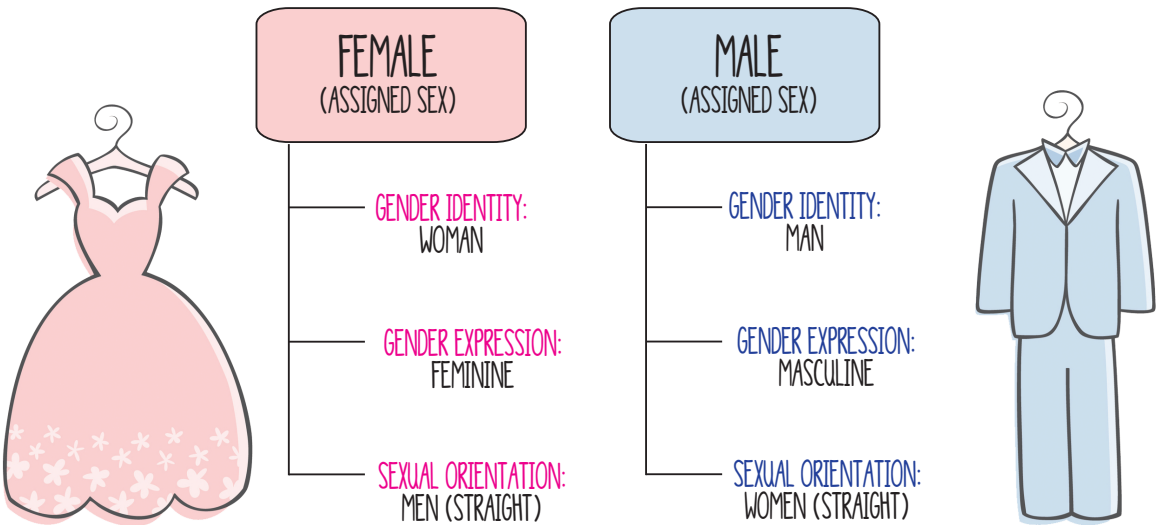
We say "traditionally" for a very specific reason: some individuals may embrace a gender expression that is outside of these two opposite points, or *binaries*. Many individuals may have a more androgynous—or gender-neutral—expression. Some individuals may embrace a more fluid expression, at times presenting as female, at others presenting as male. When we talk about countless expressions, we're being completely literal. You may hear people refer to being non-binary, which generally means that they do not see themselves on any of the more traditional understandings of gender as rigid and inflexible.

And just like all of those terms that we've mentioned already, remember this: Everyone has a gender expression.

That really was a lot of words.

Yes it was. And we're just starting the conversation. But just like any vocabulary list, this isn't just about memorizing what things mean. The real goal is to understand how it all fits together. Occasionally, there's no better way to do that than to just draw some pictures.

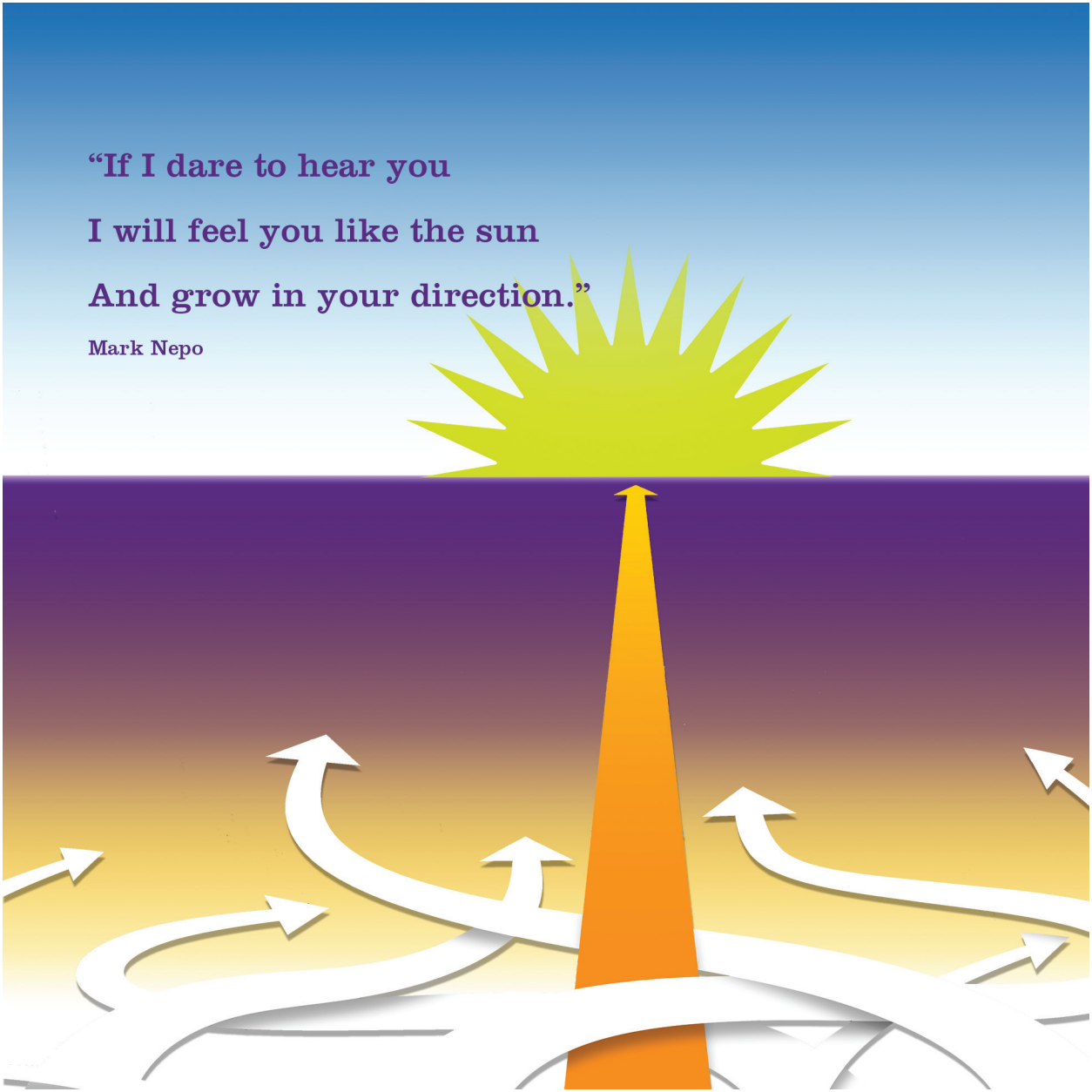
For some people who may say that they've never met someone who is transgender, or even lesbian, gay, or bisexual, this is often what the world may look like:



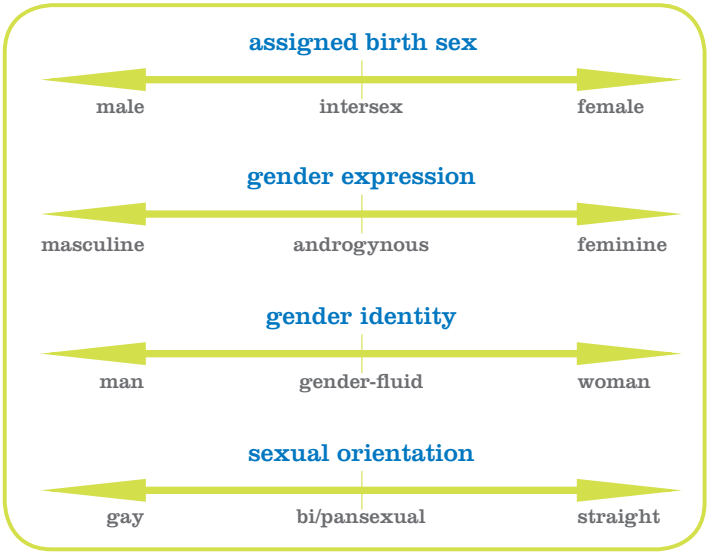
This perspective isn't a good or bad thing—it is just about the experience that they have had so far. And while it may seem kind of rigid or inaccurate for many, acknowledging that this remains the place from which some people approach this topic is important to being an effective trans ally who can talk about the issue.

Even for people who may understand sexual orientation and acknowledge that they are one of the 8 in 10 people in the U.S. who say that they personally know someone who is not straight, adding in the element of gender identity and expression might be outside of their experience.

So how can we help communicate a more accurate version of how people identify? Think of it this way—every person has a path in life. Sometimes it's just recognizing that we each get to the same destination a little differently. But we can always learn from each other on that journey.


“If I dare to hear you
I will feel you like the sun
And grow in your direction.”
Mark Nepo

So let's look at things differently:



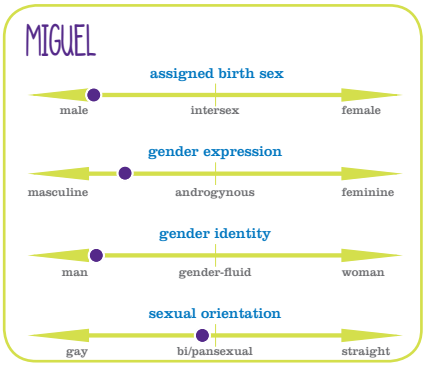
Admittedly, this version lacks cute pictures, but here's why we think it is the way to go: it is a whole lot closer to reality in reflecting the diversity of who we are, regardless of where we identify. In other words, anyone can "map" themselves on this model if they wanted to.

Remember how we kept reminding you that, "Everyone has a…" and then added terms like sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression? That's because it is true. We all have these elements, and we all fall on different places of the spectrum within these elements.

So let's look at a couple of examples to see how this works...

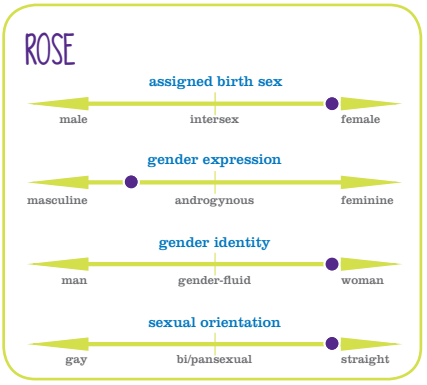
Miguel

When Miguel thought about where he was in terms of these spectrums, we were able to get an idea of how he identifies. His assigned sex is male, and he's always identified as male. His gender expression has been pretty typically masculine, and his sexual orientation is towards both sexes, although slightly leaning towards other men. So when we're talking about Miguel, he's a cisgender bisexual man.



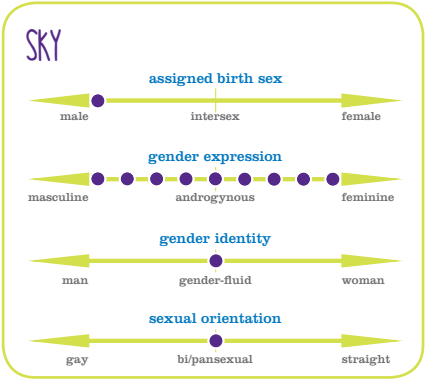
Rose

Rose gives us another chance to look at how someone might identify. She mapped herself out as being assigned female, and said that her sexual orientation is towards men. Yet when it came to her gender expression, she picked something that was leaning towards masculine. So while some elements of who Rose is and how she presents to people may be expected, her expression—she doesn't do dresses, prefers work boots to heels, and doesn't use much makeup—is a little less traditional. She identifies as a cisgender straight woman.



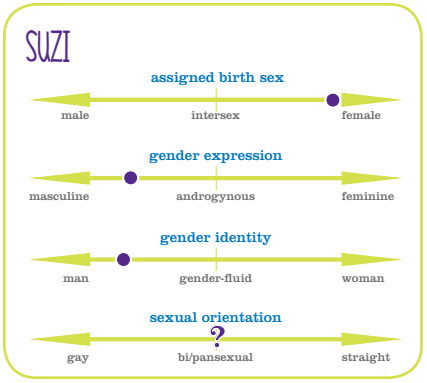
Sky

And Sky provides us with one more possible example of how someone might see themselves. Sky was assigned male at birth, although Sky's never truly identified as "completely" male. Sky's gender expression has reflected that. Some days, Sky will show up for classes in feminine clothes, other days it is all about donning a bow tie and a suit, and on others, Sky's clothes will be pretty gender-neutral, like jeans and a sweater. When it comes to attraction, Sky identifies as bisexual, because Sky is attracted to both women and men. If you asked Sky for a term of self-identification, it would be queer.



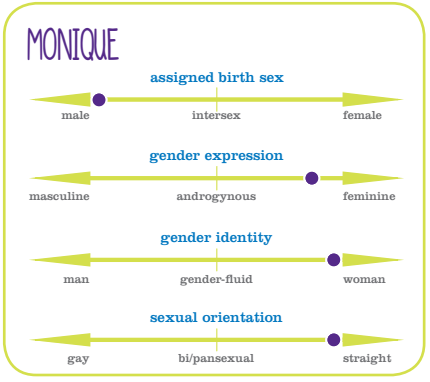
Suzi

Suzi is now three years old and was assigned female at birth. Yet when Suzi was a toddler, her parents noticed she only played with boy's toys and, in pretend play, she was always the daddy. Suzi's parents allowed Suzi to continue to express herself, even in traditionally masculine ways, without criticism or censure. While Suzi probably wouldn't be identified as transgender at this point, she gives us a perfect example of how youth begin to express their gender identity—which may be seen as nonconforming—and claim their gender expression at very young ages.



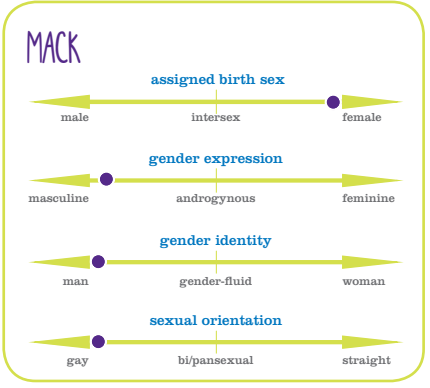
Monique

Monique gives us yet another example of how a person might identify when we put all of these elements together. Monique's assigned sex at birth was male, but she never identified as such. For as long as she can remember, she identified as female. Her gender expression is very feminine and when most people see her, they identify her as a woman. Finally, Monique identifies as heterosexual and says that her attraction is exclusively towards men. So Monique's self-identification is as a straight, transgender woman.



Mack

Finally, Mack offers yet another way to understand how people identify. Mack's assigned sex at birth was female, but when he was a child, Mack started identifying as a boy. As a teen, Mack presented himself as a male, and when he was in his 20s, he officially transitioned to male. But in a contrast to Monique, Mack has always been attracted to other men, so he identifies as gay. Mack's identification is as a transgender man who is gay.



And these are just a few examples of how people might identify when asked to think about the various elements around sex, gender, identification, expression and orientation that makes people…well, who they are. The possible combinations are infinite when we move away from the belief that everyone muse be on the traditional binaries.

An important take-away is this: One element is not necessarily a predictor of another.

As most people are beginning to know, being born female doesn't necessarily mean that an individual's attraction will be towards men. In the same way, identifying as transgender does not dictate anything about an individual's sexual orientation. Some trans people will identify as straight, some as bisexual, others as gay or lesbian, and there are still others that identify as someone more fluid. Sexual orientation doesn't depend on how someone understands their gender or who they are—it just depends on who they are attracted to.

Your Invitation…

Ever spent any time thinking about how you identify?

Many people never really will, because they never see a need to. But why not give it a whirl? You can download a copy of the chart that we've used in this section at **straightforequality.org/trans**.

Go through the exercise and think about where your identifications might be completely expected, and where you might embrace aspects that are less traditional.

One more thing: This chart just shows a few of the possible identities that an individual might embrace. Is the word for how you identify not included here? Does it not fit into this model? Use that as an opportunity to talk to others about the diversity of our experiences and identities.

I'm still not completely out as trans, but one thing I did do was change my name on my personal Gmail account from Jessica to Jay. My sister-in-law noticed, and she sent me a wonderfully supportive e-mail where she asked what pronouns I prefer and whether I'd like to be addressed by my niece as Uncle Jay instead of Auntie Jess. Being offered that kind of support by a trans ally, without even asking, really made me feel more comfortable about being out around my family.

Jay

chapter two:

Who are allies, anyway?

Let's acknowledge what we're all thinking about chapter one: that was a lot to learn and wrap your brain around.

There's no arguing with that. But stick with us, because now is the time when we add one more very important word to the conversation:

Ally.

Simple to understand, right? Perhaps. But by this time you've probably figured out that we think that more is better when it comes to understanding who we are and the roles that we can play in achieving equality for all, so let's talk about what "ally" really means.

In the beginning, there were lists

As PFLAG National developed the Straight for Equality program in the time leading up to the 2007 launch, we actually started by researching how the word "ally" was being used within the LGBTQ+ equality movement. Certainly allies have always been here and doing important work, but we needed to explain who an ally is and the expectations we have for allies to be effective. After all, what is the chance that someone would say they'd like to be an ally if they don't know what it is, or what it entails?

We went to work. We searched high and low for definitions of what allies are within the LGBTQ+ movement and what we found were lists.

There was the list of five things you must believe to be a good ally. The list of 25 things you must be doing to be a good ally. Even the list of 150 things that you need to believe and do before you earn the right to call yourself an ally. And even the explanations that were not list-based had some pretty big requirements for people who wanted to adopt the term: allies had to challenge homophobia and transphobia every single time they encountered it. Allies had to vote in a very specific way. Allies need to acknowledge and work to subvert their heterosexual

and cisgender privilege. Allies had to give money to LGBTQ+ organizations. Allies needed to only belong to faith communities that are openly supportive of people who are LGBTQ+.

Don't get us wrong: these are some pretty lofty goals, and are good options for some allies. But in the end, the same question kept coming up: aren't people worth so much more than being reduced to a list or a set of rigid demands—some of which would probably exclude a lot of people from the effort?

We think so.

So we went back to the drawing board and thought about what the path to being an ally really looks like, and how we might be able to expand it to bring more people on the journey. In the end, we found ourselves looking at the whole project differently. Our first step was to do a definition purge, and the second entailed drawing a picture.

Rather than developing a stiff set of requirements or beliefs for someone to be an ally, we created a list of some of the qualities people—regardless of where they are on their ally journey—possess:

- **Allies want to learn.** Allies are people who don't necessarily know all that can be known on LGBTQ+ issues or about people who are LGBTQ+, but want to learn more.
- **Allies address their barriers.** Allies are people who might have to grapple with some barriers to being openly and actively supportive of people who are LGBTQ+, and they're willing to take on the challenge.
- **Allies are people who know that "support" comes in many forms.** It can mean something super-public (think covering yourself in rainbow glitter and heading to a Pride celebration with a sign reading, "PROUD ALLY"*). But it can also mean expressing support in more personal ways through the language we use, conversations we choose to have, and signals that we send. And true allies know that all aspects of ally expression are important, effective, and should be valued equally.
- **Allies are diverse.** Allies are people who know that there's no one way to be an ally, and that everyone gets to adopt the term in a different way…and that's ok.

**An interesting and bold choice, but especially challenging in hot or windy weather. Probably not for everyone.*

As we started to think about the qualities of allies, the terms "journey" and "spectrum" kept coming up. The process of going from "not my issue" to "someone take me to my legislator to fix some laws!" rarely happens overnight. It usually entails a process of learning more, becoming comfortable to talk about the issue openly, knowing how to take on pushback, and being able to help others in their ally journeys, too.

And that ally journey, as we looked at it, felt like its own coming out process of sorts. So we grabbed our sketchpads and went to work.

Behold, the Straight for Equality Ally Spectrum®:

Why is the ally spectrum useful?

First, it acknowledges that allies can be found across the spectrum of support, from the people who say, "Not my issue…but I'll listen to you," to those who feel comfortable finally saying "LGBTQ+" and talking about issues out loud, to those who get the LGB part, but want to understand the T and the Q (and that plus, too), right through our super allies, who are off and taking care of things on their own.

Second, it is a reminder that no matter where people are on the spectrum, they are allies. No need to become an advanced ally before you claim the title. There are things to learn and things to do at every single point.

Finally, it gets rid of that icky feeling that we all get when we're forced to ignore all of the characteristics, background, and experiences that make people who they are and try to squeeze them into a box to fit our own ideas about who they ought to be. Shake free the chains of being just a list or one definition, people! Now is your time to embrace your ally diversity.

So why is this term so important? Why the "label"?

Even super-brainy people have taken on this issue. Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (ally status unknown) once wrote that, "Once you label me, you negate me," suggesting that labeling any individual compromises their individuality.

We actually agree. Labels really aren't for people at all.

But to us, identifying as an ally isn't a label—it is a term of empowerment. It is a state of being, an explanation of who someone is, and where their values lie. It communicates key things that matter to them—LGBTQ equality, care for their LGBTQ+ friends, family, and colleagues—in a powerful way. It is a vocal and positive stand that clarifies an important point: **while I may not be LGBTQ+, LGBTQ+ issues are my issues, too**.

And yet, you're messing with my head. Straight allies, and cis allies, and allies with no specifics…why?

There's a lot of conversation about this, and it tends to sound something like this: if the point is that your sexual orientation and gender identity shouldn't matter, then why make such a point of mentioning it when we talk about being allies?

Short answer: Because it does matter.

Don't get us wrong—the goal is that one day none of this will be relevant. (At PFLAG, we joke that our job is to do such a good job at achieving equality and inclusion that we'll be able to put ourselves out of business.) But for now, it is relevant.

Consider this: As of this writing, roughly 50% of people who are LGBTQ+ are not out in their workplaces. There is still no federal law explicitly banning discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the workplace. In a national survey released in 2015, it was revealed that 40% of trans-identified respondents had attempted suicide at some point in their life, compared to 4.6% in the U.S. population.

In order to change these jarring statistics, we need to have a broad spectrum of diverse voices expressing their support for equality and inclusion—and that includes people who are not members of the LGBTQ+ community. They have a unique power to send the message that inclusion and equality aren't just things that people in the group affected want (in other words, LGBTQs), but something that everyone wants. And in order to make that unique, "It's not about me, but it really is about me" statement, talking about our background as someone who isn't LGBTQ+, but owns this issue is often necessary.

Putting your specifics in front of the word ally also creates unique educational opportunities. For example, within the LGBTQ+ community, there are still challenges for some to being inclusive of people who are trans. So when an LGB individual states that they are a trans ally (or if you want to go super-brainy, cis ally) they are making a statement within the community that they are striving to be more inclusive…and will be a resource and a person who is willing to talk and educate. Without that adjective, that's not likely to happen.

Where do we go from here?

By now, you've hopefully started taking a bit of an ally journey of your own. Maybe you're rethinking how you personally understand the term "ally." There's a chance that you considered where you might be on your ally spectrum right now and what it will take to move forward. Maybe you've even started thinking about what some of your barriers might be to becoming an out and proud trans ally.

If you've thought about these things—or you're thinking about them now—we're on the right track.

SIDENOTE

THE POWER OF TRANS ALLIES

Here are just a few examples of trans allies making a big difference in someone's life.

I was having a medical issue that had nothing to do with my transition and had to go to the emergency room. I was in extreme pain and had visible, deep wounds. The doctor came in took one look at me and asked, "What are you?" My ID doesn't match my gender appearance. He was noticeably uncomfortable. I heard him call me "it" and make fun of me with a nurse outside the curtain. I was not treated for over an hour and the doctor kept walking in and out asking questions about transition rather than looking at my wounds. Eventually the friend that drove me to the hospital calmly put her things down and went to get help from the patient advocate on site. She also spoke to the doctors and nurses explaining calmly and lovingly what it means to be a trans man. After she did this, I finally got treated. The doctor and nurse later apologized. —Oscar

I am a male-to-female trans person, and the congregation of my home church is comprised of a great many trans allies in the clergy and laity. When my marriage was falling apart and I was feeling unworthy of love, my congregation lifted me up and supported me as my transition progressed. —Connie

As an undergraduate, I experienced extreme anxiety and challenges navigating campus and society as a gender variant/trans individual. There was one ally on campus who had a Safe Zone placard [a sign indicating that the individual is LGBT-inclusive] in their workspace who I reached out to. This trans ally listened to me, helped build my confidence, and assisted me with strategizing on how to deal with these everyday situations. This person is still my mentor and role model to this day, as a trans ally, they literally changed my life. —Dana

Being transgender is hard enough, and not having support from your parents makes coping with daily life substantially more difficult and nearly unbearable. I can imagine that this feeling is similar to that which a parent experiences when hearing their child is transgender. The hopes and expectations they once had for them are now gone. Only by going through the challenging and emotional storm (appropriately named the Stages of Grief) can a parent arrive at the calm waters of acceptance of their child. My mother achieved this feat, and I am so very blessed to be supported by her, and proud to be her son. —Allen

I'm gay and have been out since I was 18 (I'm 51 now). While I never excluded people who are trans, I wasn't actively supportive. I didn't understand how trans fit into the whole gay community, and when it came to legislation, being trans-inclusive wasn't a priority for me at all. Then I met a trans woman who shared her coming out and transition story with me, and I immediately got it. I suddenly understood that her experiences were a lot like mine, and I needed to use my cis privilege to support her just like I want straight people to include me. I'm not perfect, and I still have a lot of learning to do, but I'm proud to be an ally to people who are trans. It was all about hearing that story.

Gary

chapter three:

Working through the barriers

Some of the hardest work that trans allies need to do is coming to terms with The Great Unknown. In other words, how does a person figure out where some of their barriers to being openly supportive are? How can they commit to working through them so they can move from feeling good about being supportive to doing something outwardly supportive?

We have some great news for you: Your answers are here.

Just a quick reminder: encountering barriers does not make anyone a bad person, or a subpar ally. It makes them human. In fact, any ally (even the Super Allies) sometimes struggle with getting past their own fears to speaking up. Becoming supportive—and, for that matter, evolving yourself so your support can get bigger—is a process. Mistakes will be made. Tripping is likely to happen. Feeling a little lost is par for the course. But that's ok. The ally journey is a pretty interesting experience.

Barrier One:
I'm feeling awkward, but don't judge me!

> *"This is all just very, very new for me. I've got gay friends, so I feel like this should just be easy to understand—you know, LGBTQ+ and all. But it feels different, and I'm just a little uncomfortable. But I'm not a hater!"*

So there are a few truths going on here: this *is* different than the LGB stuff that people often know. And being uncomfortable is normal when people are learning something new. Finally, being a little uncomfortable with new ideas doesn't mean the person is a hater—they're trying to understand, and when it doesn't happen immediately, things can get frustrating.

How about we start here: Accept that gender is a really complex thing.

This is the case for everyone, whether you're someone who identifies as trans or someone who doesn't. Our ideas about what gender is and what it means for who we are have been practically hardwired into many of our social structures. If the doctor says, "It's a girl!" there are a lot of assumptions about what that individual's sex will mean for their lives. As children, it dictates how parents will dress the child, what toys they'll be given (or even permitted) to play with. And while society has, to some extent, evolved past such rigid expectations, they still play a significant role over many our immediate and even unconscious judgments about the people we meet. Think about when some people meet someone and can't immediately tell if they're male or female. It causes stress and for some, is a very uncomfortable feeling since we're raised seeing things in terms of one or the other.

Yet wrapped up in all of this is an idea that is much harder for people to rethink—the very concept that a person's gender can be something else than they expected. Most people are not raised thinking outside of the structure of something like "Born a man, always a man." (To be clear, there are some exceptions to this. See concepts like *Two Spirit* in the Equality Literacy section for examples.)

Even when people try to understand why some people are transgender, they often find themselves more confused than ever, since the very experience of, "I'm not in the right body" is so completely different from their own experiences. That's why when some people encounter someone who has transitioned, it flies in the face of much that most have been socialized to believe. And that can be a new or even rattling experience.

So this brings us back to where we started: Gender is a complex thing. But what can an ally do about it?

Here's what to do: think differently about what gender is, and how it can be defined. Begin moving away from the idea that people are one or the other (or part of the gender binary), and move toward the idea that what the doctor said on the day a person was born is not necessarily their destiny.

You don't actually need to know a transperson to change how you think about gender in the same way that you don't need to know a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person to rethink sexual

orientation. Start paying attention to how the rigidity around how we understand gender is changing in front of our very eyes. Gone are the days of baby dolls for girls and trucks for boys—Barbie® is an entrepreneur, and boys are learning culinary skills. Look at how these messages and expectations are evolving and use them as reminders that we're moving in a direction where the toys we play with, the clothes we wear, and the careers we pursue aren't dictated by biology. In other words, biology is no longer (or ever truly was) destiny.

Most importantly, start thinking about this: People should have the right to define their own gender—and allies should be the ones to accept and respect that identification.

There's a whole lot to be said about the power of setting a great example through our words and our actions. When you meet someone who is trans, accept their identification whether it seems to make sense to you or not. A good ally knows that there are countless ways for us to express who we are, and everyone's expression should be validated.

Finally, remember that while the acronym "LGBTQ+" gets used all the time, that there are, in fact, differences in what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer/questioning and what it means to be transgender. The LGB part refers to people's sexual orientation, while the T part refers to gender identity or expression. So while the different groups tend to be seen in the same community —often because of common experiences, shared history, and the overlap that can exist (for example a trans man who also identifies as gay)—they involve different learning and understanding. And the familiarity that a person might have with all of their LGB friends does not necessarily translate into the same familiarity with people who are trans. So be patient with yourself and be listen to people who are trans for their individual perspectives.

You don't need to shake your discomfort off right away, because becoming accepting generally entails a lot of inward thinking about how we see the world and who is in it. This is pretty profound meaning of life type stuff—the kind of stuff that doesn't get resolved in a day. Because it is evolving, allies need to evolve over time, too. Sometimes there are snags, but knowing what they are is the key to moving it forward.

P.S.: We still don't think you're a hater.

Your Invitation…

Put yourself in check

Change begins with you. A great way to start expanding your ability to conceptualize and accept different understandings of gender identity and expression is to begin by being conscious of our own assumptions and expectations. Start questioning yourself. Think about where you have challenged gender stereotypes and what the response may have been—were you a boy with long hair? Girl who hated dresses? And when you find that you might be making assumptions about someone based on their gender, put yourself in check. Are you judging someone because they aren't meeting your expectations of who they should be and how they should behave based on what was assigned to them at birth? Are you repeating gender-policing behaviors that you might have been hurt by in the past? Now's the time to own it, and start working to end it.

Want an example of how powerful changing this aspect of yourself can be, and what it means for a person who is trans? Someone shared the following story:

> *"The support of allies has been crucial to my family. Just last week my son was repeatedly teased about being a girl (he hates this). Several girls in his class stood up for him and his right to wear what he wants. They know that boys can wear dresses and like pink. These children—and their vocal ideas about gender—are vital to making my son safe."*

SIDENOTE

THE BATHROOM BLUES

As many start to become aware of people who are trans, they often begin to wonder what they'd do in certain situations. And before long, the perennial question is raised: "What about the bathroom???"

(We inserted three question marks to add a wave of profound drama to this question.)

To be a little more specific, many people want to know what bathroom a person who is trans should use, and what they're supposed to do when that person walks into the facility.

On the first point, people who are trans should be allowed to use the facility that corresponds to their gender identity and expression. Trans women and girls in the ladies' room, trans men and boys in the gents'. There is also a growing trend towards gender-neutral facilities, and even mixed gender facilities, which provide a few other options. But remember that part about being an ally by accepting a person's gender as they define it? This is a great example of what it means when put into action.

Here's the most important step while you are ensconced in the loo: just keep doing your business. If someone is in the restroom, they're there for a specific purpose, regardless of their gender identity, and it is probably the same purpose that you have. (Please don't make us say it.) For all intents and purposes, the person in the next stall or at the next sink is in just the place where they belong.

Barrier Two:
Stop me before I make a mistake!

"I am officially stressed out. What if I mess up? There are so many new words and ideas here. Am I just going to make a situation worse? Will I offend someone? I want to be a good trans ally! Help!"

Accept this: messing up is probably going to happen.

> *Be open to the idea of being wrong. The process of discovering what the role that being transgender plays in our lives isn't always a linear process. It is sometimes fraught with dead ends and second guesses, but that's ok.*
>
> **Loren**

The good news is that it means that you're actually doing something to try to start the conversation. So there are a few ways to handle it when a mistake happens.

Breathe, apologize, and ask for guidance.

Did you just mean to talk about people who are trans and found yourself mentioning the word "intersex"? Having a conversation about someone who is trans, and unintentionally used the wrong pronoun? It happens. And when it does, the first thing that you should do is breathe. Let the moment of panic pass. When you're back to being grounded, apologize for your trip-up: "Wow. That was not the word I meant to use. I'm really trying hard to be a better ally and learn the right terminology, but I'm still working on it. If you hear me misuse something, I'd really appreciate if you could let me know."

Seriously, it is as easy as that. But make the commitment to catch yourself when something goes awry and own it.

Similarly, if someone who is trans objects to or challenges how you've used a term or talked about an issue, be open to truly hearing what they have to say. As we might have mentioned a few times already, this is an ever-changing and evolving conversation with countless perspectives. What you learn in this book might be understood very differently by someone else. Don't suggest that you know the one definitive answer, but listen to the different perspective. Follow people's guidance and respect the language they use. And always thank people for taking the time to talk to you and share their stories.

Phone-a-Friend

"What if I just don't even know where to start a conversation when I meet someone and I'm not sure about how they identify?"

Hopefully by now, we've established that you can't necessarily know anything about someone's gender identity by just looking at them. (If you haven't gotten that message...Absorb. It. Now.) So for some allies, there is a question about how to approach people and have a conversation when they're not sure what pronouns or words they should use.

Here's the big solution: ask them. Model an easy way for people to share both their name as well as their pronoun. As in, "My name is *[fill in your name]* and my pronouns are *[fill in your prnouns]*. What about you?" This is good manners and a great way to signal your support by just asking the question. When someone gives you the response, thank them and follow their guidance.

The Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee offers additional guidance. Visit them at **uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns** for some great information.

Gender-Neutral Pronouns

"I mastered the LGBTQ+ acronym, started using inclusive terms like 'partner' and 'spouse' and then someone mentioned that I should use the pronoun 'ze.' And now I'm just completely lost." —Renee

When we get into pronouns, be aware that it is possible that you might meet someone who asks you to use gender-neutral pronouns (like "ze", "hir", or even "they") or to use no pronouns at all, for example, rather than saying "his office space" you'd say "Drew's office space." If you encounter this, don't panic. It is just another way of identifying. There are some definitions in the Equality Literacy section that might help, but don't forget about the power of a Google search to give you more background.

Your Invitation…

Respectful pronouns for all!

Want to start setting the tone for respecting people's identifications? If you're conducting an event, holding a meeting, or teaching a class in which people are wearing name tags, consider creating a space on the tag where people can fill in their pronouns on the badge. If there is someone who is transgender or gender nonconforming, this could be a great way to help them communicate their pronouns as well as a chance for you to subtly signal your support. And if there isn't, it may give you the chance to talk about why, as an ally, you are doing this.

SIDENOTE

THE "T" WORD

There's been a lot of controversy about the word "tranny" in the LGBTQ+ community. If you haven't followed any of the debates, the very brief version is this: Some people find the term to be a deeply offensive word that has historically been used as a slur to describe people who are trans. Others embrace the term as one of empowerment, in the same way "queer" has moved from epithet to positive identity for some. Meanwhile, there are people who claim that everyone just needs to lighten up and accept that the word is just a word and that we need to move on.

We'd like to tell you that we've figured out the definitive solution to this one, but we haven't. Still, we're happy to offer our perspective.

Since the term "tranny" has long been perceived as deeply offensive, proceed with caution. At this time, the term packs a significant emotional punch for some people which should, at the minimum, warrant some discretion on how, when, or if it is used.

In other words, for most allies, it is best not to presume that this word should be used to describe an individual or a group of individuals. Under no circumstance should it be used as an umbrella term. Instead, it should be treated on a case-by-case basis, finding out by listening or asking if someone uses the term themselves and if it is the term that they want you to use in describing them. In other words, practice the Platinum Rule: treat people as *they'd* like to be treated.

Here's a somewhat parallel example that might help you understand what we're getting at: the term "dyke" is seen by people in many different ways—from an identity to a deep insult. Most allies would not use "dyke" to describe a lesbian when they first meet her. They'd find out what that woman's comfort zone and preferences are first, and then work from there.

Same rule applies here. Given the nature and history of the word, err on the side of caution and respect. Listen to hear if people use it themselves. Ask what term they'd like for you to use. Apply what you've learned to that individual only. And repeat.

Barrier Three:
The well-intentioned but TMI ally.

> *"I have a lot of questions. This is fascinating. I didn't know people could even change like this and I want to know everything about what their experiences are like so I can really wrap my head around it."*

Makes sense, right? Kind of that great ally can-do attitude? Well...yes. *And no.*

For many allies, the need to know as much as possible is part of their DNA. Get the terminology down. Memorize some statistics. Read narratives. Watch films. Get to know people. Initiate conversations. This is all good stuff. But when it comes to being a trans ally, the desire to know as much as possible needs to get tempered a little by recognizing what questions are good to ask, and which are off-limits.

So first, how do you appropriately ask a question to someone who is trans (or, in the case of trans or gender nonconforming children, their parents or guardians) about their experiences or perspectives? The magic trick here is that you should do it the same way that you would ask any other person about their experiences or perspectives.

1. **Understand that your desire to know something does not mean that a person is required to give you an answer.** Different people have different comfort zones, and accept when an individual says, "I really would prefer not to talk about that."
2. **Ask in a way that allows the person to decide if they want to answer the question, and allow them the right to set the time and the space for the conversation.** One of our favorite strategies goes a little like this, "Would it be ok if I asked you about _____ sometime?" Simple, right? But it puts the power to decide where the conversation is going to go in the hands of the person who will respond.
3. **Listen.** And we mean really listen. Just like LGB people, there are countless experiences of what it means to be trans, and the chance that you'll hear two that are identical will happen at the probability of 246,010,509,452,038,449,043, 297,534,759,342 to one. So be present when you're getting the response that you asked to hear.
4. **Say thank you.** Probably an obvious one, but mom was right: "Please" and "thank you" go a long way.

So what's off-limits?

The truth is that there is no definitive list of things that you should or should not ask a person who is transgender. However, there are a few points that by and large seem to be accepted.

- **Do not ask about a person's surgical status or body parts.** The reasoning is this: some things—like the condition of our bodies—are private and should only be discussed if someone proactively brings up the subject. Remember that not every trans person has the means or the desire to go through surgical changes, and this does not make them any "less" trans. When you ask this question of someone, it could touch on other issues which are not generally for public discussion.

  So what's the alternative? Accept people for who they are, as they are. You don't need to know what happens "down there" to understand a person's gender or who they are.

- **Do not ask to see pre-transition photos or ask what a person's name "used to be."** If we start from the place of accepting people for who they tell us they are (probably one of the biggest trademarks of a trans ally) then knowing who they were once seen as is irrelevant. Sure, you might be very, very interested in who the person once appeared as, but it is in the past, and for many trans people, a piece that should be left in the past (not unlike one's middle school photos).

- **Do not ask when a person "became" transgender.** Just like the LGB coming out process, the trans coming out process is often long and challenging and involves a lifetime of self-understanding and awareness. No one suddenly "becomes" trans any more than they "turn" gay or lesbian. Science-y types are constantly learning more about the points at which humans start to understand their own gender, and evidence is pointing to it happening as young as three years old. So the experience of realizing that someone's assigned sex does not match their internal sense of their gender cam be a long-term experience, while for others it may be clear as a bell from a very young age. Implying anything else suggests that there is some element of choice in gender identity.

- **Do not ask how people have sex.** It does seem a little unusual to have to call such a question out, but many people wonder what being trans means for sexual activity. And while an interest might be there, it is no more appropriate to ask this of a transperson than it would be to ask anyone else. Just…don't.

> *Educate yourself and remember that nobody owes you an explanation or an answer to a question. One trans or gender nonconforming person can't be a representative for all of us. Don't treat us like encyclopedias. That said, sometimes there's only so much Google can do. If you feel you need to ask someone about something you don't understand, respectfully acknowledge that you are not entitled to an answer, but you wish to educate yourself and are hoping for advice.*
>
> **Dylan**

Barrier Four:
The conflict-averse ally.

> *"I don't do conflict, period. So if being an ally means getting into arguments and debates, I'm probably not going to be a very good ally. I'm just not confrontational."*

Oddly enough, this ally is actually in a really great space. We don't do confrontation either.

Why? Simply put, confrontation rarely works in actually transforming how people think or behave. Few people have ever had truly heartfelt changes in the way that they act because someone has aggressively called them out and pointed to what's wrong with them.

This isn't to say that we're suggesting that you should let anti-trans comments, jokes, and remarks slide. The truth is that when people let things go, bad behavior is seen as acceptable. But instead of confronting someone who has made your Trans Ally Sense (which is kind of like Spidey Sense, but with more heroism) go wild, why not commit to a conversation instead? It is much less scary, doesn't involve making a scene, and tends to deliver better results.

Your Invitation…

Make your conversations transformational

Not sure where to start in standing up to someone who has said something that wasn't trans-inclusive, or even just plain mean? Try this strategy:

- **Take a deep breath: Or maybe a few deep breaths.** If you're extremely upset, the way that you approach the conversation will reflect it. Step back and let your temperature come down.
- **Assume nothing: You don't always know why someone made a comment.** Sure, it may be really gross transphobia. But it also might be because they didn't think it was hurtful, or because they thought people would see it as a joke. Give people room to explain.

- **Pick the right time and place.** While (we admit it) there may be a momentary rush of self-satisfaction in making a scene as you point your finger, the approach is probably going to put the person at the other end of the conversation in an even more confrontational place and shut down the opportunity for meaningful conversation forever. Instead, approach the person and ask if you can have a quick private conversation.
- **Address the behavior.** It is important to let someone know specifically what was said that has brought you to this conversation, so be sure to explain what you're referring to—*and then keep the conversation about that specific behavior*. In other words, "I felt like the joke you made about trans people was really messed up," works because it makes the topic of conversation the joke. Whereas, "I am here to tell you that I think that you're a great big transphobic jerk" is pretty broad and doesn't address the behavior, but attacks the person's character. One gives you room for an important conversation, the other will probably make the person you're speaking with feel confronted and they'll start shutting down, because really, who responds well to being called a jerk (or worse)? And who's listening after they feel like they've been attacked?
- **Explain why it bothered you, and use your trans ally angle.** Be sure to let people know why you felt that something is wrong and the impact that it had. Also let them know why you're bringing up the topic. Try something like this: "As someone who is an ally to people who are trans, I feel it is my obligation to talk to people when they say something that feels wrong. And I feel like the joke you made is insulting to people who are trans."
- **Listen and offer support.** After you've made your statement, listen to the other person to hear what they've got to say. Maybe they'll apologize immediately. Maybe they'll tell you they didn't think it would hurt anyone, but now they'll be more careful. Maybe they'll say something that will suggest that you can help them understand things differently. You won't know unless you're listening. Let them know that you're a resource if they ever want to talk.
- **Say thank you.** This is important. You've just done something big, and engaged someone else in the process. No matter how it goes, thank people for their time.

SIDENOTE

BEING OUT AND DISCLOSURE

"I was talking to a friend of mine who is trans, and I mentioned something to her about being an out trans woman at work. She paused, looked at me, and said, 'I'm just a woman. I was always meant to be a woman. I'm not ashamed of being transgender, but it is not my identity. Female is.' When she said this, I was embarrassed. I didn't even think about that perspective. I thought, 'LGBTQ+ means out.' But for her, it just means presenting as who she's always been. Now I know." —Siobhan

"Coming out" is a process for many people, whether they're lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or an ally. This process should be driven out of a personal decision to reveal more about themselves to people and should never be forced (sometimes called "outing").

And while most people can say that they personally know someone who is LGB and out, the familiarity tends to be lower when it comes to trans people. A key aspect of being a great trans ally is to remember that the concept of being out looks very different for some trans-identified people than what many know from LGB friends.

If you're in the market to become a powerful ally, keep this in mind. Some trans people will openly identify as such, while others just want to be seen as their gender-affirmed selves (sometimes referred to as being *stealth* or *private*). For some people, this choice may be simply how they'd like to live, not a desire to be "in the closet." For others, the lack of protections for people who are trans and threats of discrimination and violence may drive the decision not to *disclose*—or share information with others in specific circumstances. This isn't about being in the closet, but rather about addressing different situations in a way that best meets the individual's needs.

As you get to know people, find out what their perspectives are, and respect them. And remember, it is never the role of an ally to out someone who is trans. Remember that there are obvious ways that someone may be outed (e.g. "Jack is transgender"). But there are also more subtle ways that are still outing (e.g., "I remember Jack when he used to be Samantha"). Be conscious of your words and how they might reveal sensitive information.

Barrier Five:
The over-ambitious ally.

"I'm so totally into talking about the complexities of gender. In fact, I'm so attuned to it that I consider myself gender-blind when I look at people in the same way that I'm completely color-blind about race. I've experienced gender discrimination, so I really can identify with trans people."

Well…congratulations?

This is a barrier for people who might be a little further along in their ally journey. But it is still a barrier. Making comments like this sends a message that gender doesn't matter, when, in fact, it does. People see gender, people experience what gender entails, people are subject to what it means in their culture, and grapple with what role it plays in their own lives. So while your perception of gender may be that it does not matter, making comments like this often minimizes or even shuts down people whose experience is not the same, or who might feel differently.

And while someone who is not trans can certainly *empathize* with some of the experiences that trans people have had, being a victim of gender discrimination doesn't mean that you really *identify* with the transgender experience. That experience is many things, and not limited to what gender discrimination feels like.

Your Invitation…
Share your journey to where you are today.

Allies who have worked through the more traditional challenges of understanding what transgender is and their roles as allies can be great companions on a new ally's journey. Be willing to admit when you weren't totally there, acknowledge some of the mistakes you made and, share what experiences led you to start thinking outside of the traditional understanding of gender. Tell people about what brought you to be a trans ally. Explain to others what they can be doing to become one, and position yourself as a resource. These activities will give you space to talk about the issues without, from the outset, dominating with your lone worldview.

5 POSITIVE WAYS TO BE A TRANS ALLY

1. **Accept** that people have the right to define their gender, regardless of assigned sex.

2. **Respect** people's gender identifications, pronouns, and names.

3. **Challenge** anti-trans and sexist remarks, jokes, and comments through personal conversations.

4. **Listen** to the stories of people who are trans to better understand their experiences.

5. **Say** that you're a trans ally and tell people why.

My first in-person encounter with a transgender person was when I taught a university course, Psychology of Women. One focus of our course was to develop a better understanding of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender development, and the ways that we define gender in our culture. It was fortunate that, at the time, our department secretary was in a relationship with a male-to-female (MTF) person in transition, who was in the process of coming to terms with the gender identity that was most authentic for her. She agreed to come to our class to make a brief presentation and answer students' questions.

It was a great experience in opening awareness for students, as well as an exercise in experiencing non-judgmental acceptance for the person presenting. This experience, and my own improved understanding of the issues transgender folks encounter, made me an ally for life.

Marie

chapter four:

Going Further on the Journey

This may have come up a few times already, but let's reiterate it one more time:

This is a lot of information.

Perhaps if you've come to this guide as someone who already identifies as a trans ally, some of the content has been a refresher, or helped build on what you already knew. And if you started this as a trans ally at the beginning of your ally journey, there have been lots of new ideas to absorb and explore. But no matter where you started, you'll get to a point where understanding terminology and etiquette will only get you so far.

That means it's time to apply that knowledge and open up new paths to learn more about people who are trans, the challenges that they sometimes face, and—importantly—understand the role that you as an ally play in getting more people to engage in the journey.

A note of disclaimer before we pontificate any further: there are countless topics associated with people who are transgender. In this chapter, we've selected just a few of those topics as possible places where you can start learning more and connecting some ally actions to your learning.

If you look at the resource pages in this publication or (even better) the resources that we've posted on the Straight for Equality website at **straightforequality.org/trans**, you'll find even more suggestions.

1. Get to understand the challenges in depth faced by people who are transgender.

The bad news? You'll learn that rates of discrimination, rejection, hostility, and violence are disturbingly prevalent no matter where you look. The good news? There are great resources that will help you understand these challenges in-depth and you can access them right now.

The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS) is the largest survey examining the experiences of transgender people in the United States, with more than 27,000 respondents. It serves as a follow-up to the groundbreaking 2008-09 National Transgender Discrimination Survey. The USTS provides a detailed look at the experiences of transgender people across a wide range of categories, revealing disturbing patterns of mistreatment and discrimination and startling disparities between transgender people in the survey and the U.S. population when it comes to the most basic elements of life, such as finding a job, having a place to live, accessing medical care, and enjoying the support of family and community. Survey respondents also experienced harassment and violence at alarmingly high rates.

On the issue of transgender and gender nonconforming youth, there are two excellent reports that you can access for free that will help you understand the unique challenges they face. GLSEN released **Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools**, a report detailing the challenges of trans and gender nonconforming youth in schools and documenting their experiences of bullying, harassment, and rejection. The Human Rights Campaign, in partnership with Gender Spectrum, published the **Supporting and Caring for Our Gender Expansive Youth** report, examining the experiences youth whose gender identities or expressions expands the conventional understanding of gender and how best to support them.

Your Invitation…

Download the reports and use them to fuel your conversations!

All of the reports mentioned here are available as free downloads from these great organizations:

- **The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey**: Download the report by visiting ustranssurvey.org.
- **Harsh Realities:** Download from GLSEN (glsen.org).
- **Gender Expansive:** Download from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC.org) or Gender Spectrum (genderspectrum.org).

Spend some time reading the findings. Chances are that they will provide you with some great data and perspectives that will make the conversations you have about people who are trans—and why you're a trans ally—even more effective. And if you encounter someone who seems to have misinformation about people who are trans, be ready to share it with them so that you're creating powerful teaching moments.

2. Understand more of the legal and legislative challenges that people who are trans face each day.

> *I truly became an ally to the trans community after I attended a program where several trans people shared their stories. Common threads in their stories were the difficulties in finding the most basic things like medical care and safe toilet facilities. It truly broke my heart and motivated me to do more as a trans ally.*
>
> **Al**

Did you know that people who are transgender or gender nonconforming can be fired from their jobs under state law in more than half of the states in the U.S. simply for being transgender—and that it is perfectly legal because there's no federal law that explicitly bans this kind of discrimination? Have any idea about the challenges that people who are trans face in accessing basic legal documents, like driver's licenses because some states require proof of sex reassignment or gender affirmation surgery before granting the request? Ever hear that while federal hate crime legislation passed in 2009, the number of hate crimes against transgender people continues to rise and increase in severity?

There are a lot of challenges that still exist, and even more solutions that are constantly being proposed. However, any progress in creating policies or laws to fix a problem require knowledgeable and vocal supporters. Supporters (in the form of trans allies) can make the case as to why these changes aren't just an issue being advocated for by people who are trans, but also by those who are not and who value equality.

A small note here: You may be thinking, "Wait…they promised no politics!" We sure did. But there's a lot of ways to approach this. If you're a newer ally—or even a politics-averse one—this doesn't have to be about political activism, but rather an opportunity to learn about some of the ways current laws create challenges for people who are trans. And if you're further along and waving your Super Ally banner, here's your chance to consider a little advocacy work.

Here is some even more good news: There are many organizations that are completely dedicated to educating and advocating trans issues, and others that do it as part of their LGBTQ+ equality missions. The project for a trans ally, of course is to make the choice to take advantage of the information and action opportunities that they offer.

Phone-a-Friend

Looking to connect with organizations that can keep you informed? Want to find out about possible advocacy opportunities for trans allies? Here just are a few of our go-to transgender-focused organizations who fit the bill:

- **National Center for Transgender Equality: transequality.org**
- **Sylvia Rivera Law Project: srlp.org**
- **Transgender Law Center: transgenderlawcenter.org**
- **Transgender Law and Policy Institute: transgenderlaw.org**

Meanwhile, several national LGBTQ+ and civil rights organizations focus significant effort on LGBTQ+ legislation and policy issues. Just a few include:

- **PFLAG National: pflag.org**
- **American Civil Liberties Union: aclu.org**
- **Center for American Progress: americanprogress.org**
- **Lambda Legal: lambdalegal.com**
- **The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights: civilrights.org**
- **National Center for Lesbian Rights: nclrights.org**
- **National LGBTQ Task Force: thetaskforce.org**

Once again, these lists can—and should—go on. Check out the Straight for Equality website (**straightforequality.org/trans**) for additional suggestions.

3. Understand the journeys, experiences, and challenges that transgender and gender nonconforming youth face—and know your role in supporting them.

> *Our daughter [who was assigned male at birth] was only three years old when she informed us he is a she. We showed up at a family's home who wouldn't allow her to come in unless she was dressed like a boy. When I saw the utter destruction of her soul that day, I made the decision then and there, that I will always advocate for her right to express how she feels.*
>
> **Carmel**

The stories of youth who identify as trans and gender nonconforming have become the content of news reports, documentaries, TV shows, and films. This visibility has led to increased awareness when it comes to understanding the point at which youth understand their gender and the challenges they face once they start to self-identify. One of the other benefits of increased visibility is the vast expansion of resources and networks to support these young people and their families.

Organizations like Gender Spectrum (**genderspectrum.org**) have created a national network of shared resources and support services for both youth and their families. From understanding how youth express their identities, to learning about what a transition entails for young people, to understanding the policies that parents may encounter in the school system, these organizations are breaking the silence on the topic and reminding families that they are not alone. Meanwhile, groups like PFLAG National *(disclosure: Straight for Equality is a program of PFLAG National)* have used their national platform to create resources (check out the book **Our Trans Loved Ones**, which is available in English and Spanish editions) as well as foster support services through their grassroots chapter network.

Your Invitation…

Create safe spaces for trans and gender nonconforming youth in schools

Do you know if your school district has a nondiscrimination policy that specifically includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/gender nonconforming, and queer/questioning youth?

Ask.

That's it: ask. Are you a parent or caregiver to a child? Next time you're at Back to School Night, or a parent-teacher meeting, ask the question. Bullying and harassment of kids is rampant, and one of the core causes for being harassed is because of the way youth present themselves. Is a boy harassed for being "too girly" for choosing to join cheerleading instead of football? Is a girl attacked for wearing boy's clothes? These are examples of harassment based on gender expression that can happen to any child—not just ones who identify as trans or gender nonconforming.

When we create environments in which this kind of harassment isn't tolerated, we create spaces in which all youth feel safer expressing who they are, whether transgender or not. It also helps send the message to youth that gender and how they express it never needs to be "traditional" for them to be accepted.

Finding out if your school has a policy in place to address this topic is a powerful first step in creating these safe spaces. If they have inclusive policies, be sure to thank your contact and tell them why this matters to you ("As an ally for trans and gender nonconforming youth, I'm happy that we're working to ensure all kids are accepted.") If there isn't a policy, find out what role you might be able to play in getting that conversation started.

> *I began to identify as an ally when a fellow student shared their disgust and hurt about being called by their birth name and not the preferred name the student chose as part of their gender affirmation because our school does not have a policy on name changes. This motivated me to see what I can do for other students.*
>
> *No one should be calling people by a name that isn't the one that they want to be called.*
>
> **Fred**

Feeling kind of intimidated about speaking up? Get the sense that this might push you out of your comfort zone?

"I can't lie—this is still very new, and sometimes even kind of weird for me. I can't imagine what being trans must be like, and the experience of learning about trans people has challenged a lot of my beliefs. I feel bad that I'm not yet ready to start announcing my ally status…but I'm on the way. I just need some time."

Remember the ally journey. Any individual's ability to express themselves as an ally is something that develops over time. So while this may not be something you're ready to try immediately, keep it in mind as a possible goal for when you're feeling more comfortable to speak up.

Also keep in mind that you never need to go at any effort alone. In the case of schools and with youth, you'll find great resources to help you have this conversation and get help on the GLSEN website (**glsen.org**) and Gender Spectrum site (**genderspectrum.org**). Check it out when you're ready to plan your conversation.

4. Become aware of stories of people who are transgender on the news, in the media, and even in history—and share what you learn.

Sylvia Rivera. Brandon Teena. Laverne Cox. Billy Tipton. Marsha P. Johnson. Chaz Bono. Jazz Jennings. Janet Mock.

Know any of those names?

Chances are that you might because of the increase in coverage that is happening in mainstream media about people who are transgender. But much of the coverage that's happening is focused on the present, and the incredible stories of the people who forged visibility for the trans community tend to get lost.

This isn't so much about taking a history class as it is about taking the time to connect the dots between the accomplishments of people who are trans and the influence that they have had on their own community, the LGBTQ+ movement, our understanding of gender, and the story of social change. These stories can help you understand the intersections of multiple identities and what the intersections of identities mean for people—what does it mean to be both a person of color and trans? What's the role that a person's generation has played in how they are seen? What role does faith play in the experiences of people who are trans?

These stories also help us understand why people who are trans are often grouped with people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the LGBTQ+ acronym, since the stories demonstrate how the sources of discrimination against these communities are similar and rooted in rejection of anyone who does not conform to the gender binaries. (Remember that word? If you need a refresher, look on page 63.)

So where do you get started?

First start paying attention to the stories around you. In 2014, Laverne Cox, an actress who is transgender, appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and shortly afterwards made front-page news again as the first person who is transgender to ever get nominated for an Emmy®. That's history in the making. You just need to be looking for it, so keep your ally radar on and sharp at all times. When you see history in the making, talk about it.

And when you're ready, go a little deeper. Like most topics here, there are countless publications and websites that can help you learn more, and we've got a more extensive list on the Straight for Equality website. But a few of our starting points include:

- **Transgender History** *by Susan Stryker*
- **Transgender Warriors: The Making of History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman** *by Leslie Feinberg*
- **The Transgender Visibility Timeline** *from GLAAD, available at glaad.org/blog/timeline-look-back-history-transgender-visibility*

Your Invitation…

Start using what you're learning to come out as a trans ally

Social media is a kind of amazing thing. Not only does it allow us to share countless kitten and puppy videos in one quick click, but it also creates a great way to share news, information, and even engage people in conversations.

So why not use it to educate others about trans issues and why you're an ally?

To get started, pick a few of the resources that we've mentioned here—or any others in which you have interest—and either follow or like them online. Then, as they start to post stories that can be used to engage people in learning about or discussing trans issues, share them. Personalize with a line about why you're posting the information. This helps you "come out" as an ally online as well as offer people ways to learn more and engage in conversation.

> *"Hearing Jennifer Finney Boylan's interview on* Oprah *10 years ago and reading her memoir was the start of my ally journey. It changed the way I empathized with transgender people and all people. It taught me that you never know what another person is going through or struggling with and that looks can be deceiving."*
>
> **Lisa**

I am amazed at how my family has found trans allies in people we never would have thought of including former classmates, co-workers, neighbors, community members, and Facebook friends. Even though our child is the first trans person they have ever known, they openly support us by sending positive messages, asking questions, demonstrating an interest in our lives, respecting our wishes for privacy, and honoring our child for who she is. Many have told us that learning about our situation has expanded their interest in learning about gender differences. That knowledge has helped them be more supportive of other trans and gender nonconforming people they have met. The more they have learned through our situation, in the better position they are in to be visible trans allies to someone else. That is powerful.

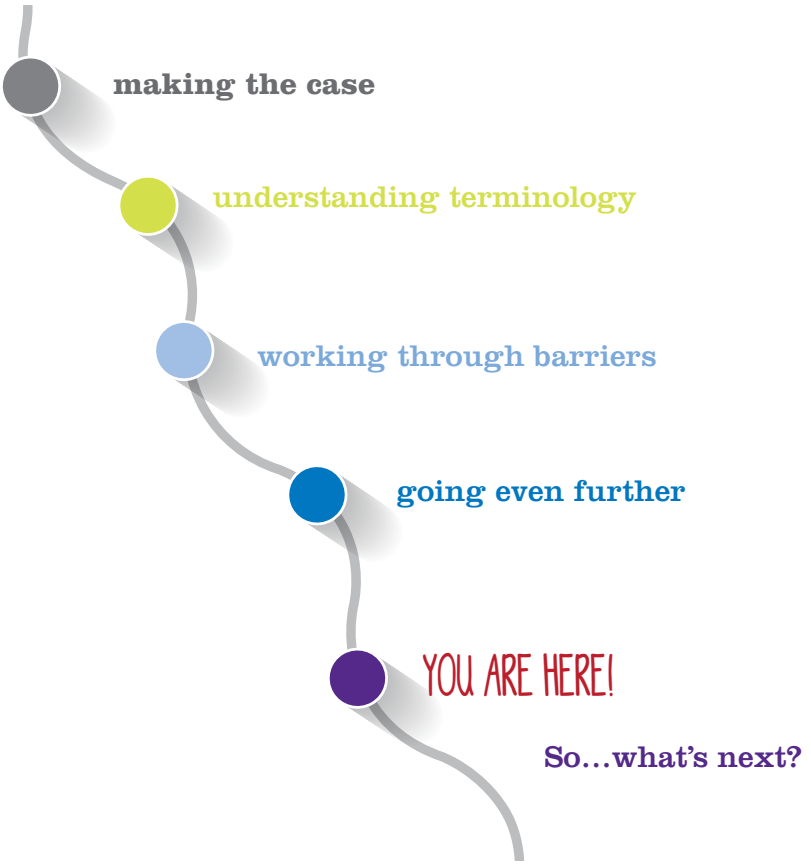
Ali

chapter five:

Come out, come out, wherever you are…

By now it is probably a well-established fact that we are really attached to drawing pictures. And now that we're finally here in the final chapter, it would be strange to not add at least one more.

When we take a look at where we've been so far, this is where the journey has taken us:



Where does that leave us?

Interestingly enough, we're back where we started: talking about the importance of visible allies. During the journey there have been plenty of suggestions on how to learn more and address challenges. But now that we're here at our endpoint we'd like to offer you one more way to come out and start talking.

Honestly, we think you're ready for this one.

Start visibly signaling how you're going to be a trans ally.

And we've got one tool to help you do it right now:

Here's how it works:

5. DOWNLOAD the Straight for Equality trans ally card from **straightforequality.org/trans** and print it. (No need to cut up this lovely little book.)

6. FILL OUT one of the ways you're committing to actively being a trans ally.

7. POST the card somewhere that others will see it. Maybe it will be in your cubicle at work. Perhaps you'll put it on your refrigerator. You might even consider taking a photo of yourself holding it and posting it to your social media feeds.*

8. TALK with people when they ask you what it means, why you're a trans ally, and be ready to do some educating!

Yep. It really is that simple.

So why does this work? First, it gives people a way to see that you have chosen to openly talk about the fact that you are a trans ally. Second, it does better than just saying that you're an ally. It tells people one way you are being an ally…and how they might be one too. Finally, it can position you as someone who wants to engage in a conversation about people who are trans and how allies can support them. You may become the first person with whom a friend ever has this conversation! And it all happened because you initiated the effort.

As we often say here at Straight for Equality, each time we start a new conversation, we're starting another opportunity to change the world in which we live.

You can do this.

See page 70 for more info on how you can share a photo with the Straight for Equality community online.

And this is where we say goodbye. (Sniff.)

> *Over the past 13 years, I have experienced more positive support than I ever imagined when I came out about having a transgender son. I am fortunate to have an accepting family, friends, past co-workers, and church members. We often discuss LGBTQ+ issues that would never have been in my vocabulary prior to my son's coming out. There still are those family members and friends who do not understand; my advice to them is to simply befriend a transgender person to cultivate compassion and become more aware of the existing barriers to acceptance. Do not give up on unconditional love.*
>
> **Joe**

To quote the wise words of Bugs Bunny, "That's all folks!"

But really, this isn't the end. This is just the beginning.

As you've read through this book, there may have been a few places where you struggled a little, or realized that you'll need some time to explore things on your own. There have hopefully been a couple of "ah-ha!" moments, too. And we'd like to think of the dozens of suggestions that have been put out there about the ways you can become an active, out, and proud trans ally, you've found a few in which you thought, "That's the one for me."

But this is just goodbye from one part of what we know is going to be an amazing and long-term journey for you as a trans ally. Today was just the start for you.

Begin trying out a couple of the suggestions in here and see where it takes you.

Connect with us online, and let us know how things are going, or where we might be able to provide more help (contact information is at the end of this publication).

Share this book with someone, too. You can start the trans ally journey for someone else **right now.**

The important thing is this: Keep walking. Keep listening. Keep talking. And make sure that you're seen.

We hope to see you again on your ally journey.

equality literacy:

Ready to have your trans ally conversations?

Here's a list of terms that will help make your efforts even more effective. Please remember that terminology is a constantly evolving topic, so be aware that some people may have differences in how they understand certain words, and preferences for how they describe themselves. Remember to listen to each individual and respect their identifications. And keep in mind that terminology may change over time, so if you're unsure about a word, check online by visiting one of the many resource sites we list in this book and on our website.

AFAB: Acronym meaning *Assigned Female at Birth*. AFAB people may or may not identify as female some or all of the time.

Affirmed Gender: An individual's true gender, as opposed to their gender assigned at birth. This term should replace terms like *new gender* or *chosen gender*, which imply that an individual's gender was chosen.

Agender: Refers to a person who does not identify with any gender.

Ally: A term used to describe someone who is supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Allies include both heterosexual and cisgender people who adovocate for equality in partnership with LGBTQ+ people, as well as those who are LGBTQ+ who are supportive of other identities within the community.

AMAB: Acronym meaning *Assigned Male at Birth.* AMAB people may or may not identify as male some or all of the time (see *Gender*).

Androgynous: Having elements of both femininity and masculinity. An androgynous individual, whether expressed through sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, is known as an androgyne.

Asexual: Refers to an individual who does not experience sexual attraction. Each asexual person experiences relationships, attraction, and arousal differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviors, in that asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviors. Sometimes abbreviated as *ace*.

Assigned Sex: The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.

Assumed Gender: The gender others assume an individual to be based on the sex they are assigned at birth, as well as apparent gender markers and expectations (e.g., physical attributes and characteristics).

Binding: The process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts, often by using a binder.

Biological Sex: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that determine if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include primary and secondary sex characteristics, including genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, chromosomes, and genes. Often referred to as *sex*, *physical sex*, *anatomical sex*, or specifically as *sex assigned at birth*. Sex is often conflated or interchanged with gender, which is more social than biological, and involves personal identity factors as well.

Bisexual: Commonly referred to as *bi* or *bi+*. According to bi+ educator Robyn Ochs, bisexual refers to a person who acknowledges in themselves the potential to be attracted—romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually—to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree. The "bi" in bisexual can refer to attraction to genders similar to and different from one's own. People who identify as bisexual need not have had equal sexual or romantic experience—or equal levels of attraction with people across genders, nor any experience at all; attractions and self-identification determines orientation.

Cisgender: Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming Out: For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, the process of self-identifying and self-acceptance that continues throughout one's life, and the sharing of their identity with others. Sometimes referred to as *disclosing* (see *Disclosure*). Individuals often recognize a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/gender-expansive, or queer identity within themselves first, and then might choose to reveal it to others. There are many different degrees of being out: Some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It's important to remember that coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

Disclosure: A word that some people use to describe the act or process of revealing one's transgender or gender-expansive identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, and prefer to use the term *coming out*, whereas others find coming out offensive, and prefer to use *disclosure*.

FTM/F2M: A trans male/masculine person who was assigned female at birth. Originally translated as "female to male".

FTX/F2X: A genderqueer or gender expansive person who was assigned female at birth.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man). In contemporary contexts, *lesbian* is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

Gender: A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual along a spectrum of man, woman, both, or neither.

Gender-Affirming Surgery (GAS): Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their innate gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older term sex change. Also sometimes referred to as *sexual reassignment surgery* (or SRS), *genital reconstruction surgery*, or *medical transition*.

Gender Binary: The disproven concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies that gender is biologically determined.

Gender Dysphoria: The distress caused when a person's assigned sex at birth and assumed gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSMV), the term "...is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

Gender Expansive: An umbrella term sometimes used to describe people that expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for their society or context. Some gender-expansive individuals identify as a man or a women, some identify as neither, and others identify as a mix of both. Gender-expansive people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the man/woman binary paradigm, and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns (see *personal gender pronouns*). They may or may not be comfortable with their bodies as they are, regardless of how they express their gender.

Gender Expression: The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. An individual's gender expression does not always imply one's gender identity.

Genderfluid: Describes a person who does not consistently identify with one fixed gender, and who may move between gender identities.

Gender Identity: One's deeply held core sense of being a woman, man, some of both, or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.

Gender Neutral: Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns and salutations/titles—see *gender-neutral salutations or titles*), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

Gender-Neutral Salutations or Titles: A salutation or title that doesn't identify the gender of the person being addressed in a formal communication or introduction. Also used for persons who do not identify as a binary gender, addressing someone where the gender is unknown, or if the correspondence-sender is unsure of the gender of the person to whom the correspondence is being sent. *Mx.* is the most commonly used gender-neutral salutation (e.g., "Dear Mx. Smith…").

Gender Nonconforming: An outdated term used to describe those who view their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly man or woman. More current terms include *gender expansive*, *differently gendered*, *gender creative*, *gender variant*, *genderqueer*, *nonbinary*, *agender*, *gender fluid*, *gender neutral*, *bigender*, *androgynous*, or *gender diverse*. PFLAG National uses the term *gender expansive*.

Genderqueer: Refers to individuals who identify as a combination of man and woman, neither man or woman, or both man and woman, or someone who rejects commonly held ideas of static gender identities and, occasionally, sexual orientations. Is sometimes used as an umbrella term in much the same way that the term *queer* is used, but only referring to gender, and thus should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as genderqueer.

Gender Socialization: The process by which an individual is taught and influenced on how they should behave as a man or a woman. Parents, teachers, peers, media, and books are some of the many agents of gender socialization.

Gender Spectrum: The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

Gender Variant: A term, often used by the medical community, to describe individuals who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not conform to dominant gender norms. (See gender expansive.) People outside the medical community tend to avoid this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal, preferring terms such as *gender expansive* and *gender creative*.

Heteronormativity: The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

Heterosexual: Refers to a person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to a person of the opposite gender.

Homophobia: An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Similarly, *biphobia* is an aversion people who are bisexual, and *transphobia* is an aversion to people who are transgender. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as *anti-LGBTQ+ bias*.

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms *gay*, *lesbian*, or *queer*.

Intersex/Differences of Sexual Development (DSD): Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceed to perform surgeries to 'align' their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. (This practice of genital mutilation is opposed by interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth.) Formerly, the medical terms *hermaphrodite* and *pseudo-hermaphrodite* were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

Lesbian: Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; attraction that helps determine orientation.

LGBTQ+: An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. It is sometimes stated as *LGBT* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) or *GLBT* (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). The addition of the Q for queer is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition, which recognizes more fluid identities; and as a move towards greater inclusivity for gender-expansive people (see Queer below). The *Q* can also stand for *questioning*, referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. The "+" represents those who are part of the community, but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity.

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ+. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ+ is a choice.

Misgender: To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a word, pronoun, or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

MTF: A trans female/trans feminine person who was assigned male at birth. Often considered an over medicalized and somewhat outdated term.

MTX: A genderqueer or gender expansive person who was assigned male at birth.

Nonbinary: Refers to individuals who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man or woman. It is an identity term which some use exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like *genderqueer*, *gender creative*, *gender nonconforming*, *gender diverse*, or *gender expansive*. Individuals who identify as nonbinary may understand the identity as falling under the transgender umbrella, and may identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as *NB* or *enby*.

Out: Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ+ in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term *disclose*.

Outing: The deliberate or accidental sharing of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression without their explicit consent. Outing is considered disrespectful and a potentially dangerous act for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Pansexual: Refers to a person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people inclusive of all genders and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determines the orientation.

Personal Gender Pronouns: A personal gender pronoun, or PGP—sometimes called *proper gender pronoun*—is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, individual use they and their as gender-neutral singular pronouns. Others use *ze* (sometimes spelled zie) and *hir/zir* or the pronouns *xe* and *xer*. Replaces the term *preferred gender pronoun*, which incorrectly implies that their use is optional.

Queer: A term used by some people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, queer is still sometimes disliked within the LGBTQ+ community. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (e.g., "My cousin identifies as queer").

Questioning: Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. For many reasons this may

happen later in life and does not imply that someone is choosing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.

Sexual Orientation: Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition, one's sexual activity does not define one's sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Stealth: A term used to describe transgender or gender-expansive individuals who do not disclose their transgender or gender-expansive status in their public or private lives (or certain aspects of their public and private lives). The term is increasingly considered offensive by some as it implies an element of deception. The phrase maintaining privacy is often used instead, though some individuals use both terms interchangeably.

Transgender: Often shortened to trans. A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression—such groups include, but are not limited to, people who identify as *transsexual*, *genderqueer*, *gender variant*, *gender diverse*, and *androgynous*.

Transition: A term sometimes used to refer to the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control. The validity of an individual's gender identity does not depend on any social, legal, and/or medical transition; the self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

Transsexual: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called *sex reassignment surgery (SRS)* (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

Two-Spirit: A term used within some American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) communities to refer to a person who identifies as having both a male and a female essence or spirit. The term—which was created in 1990 by a group of AI/AN activists at an annual Native LGBTQ conference—encompasses sexual, cultural, gender, and spiritual identities, and provides unifying, positive, and encouraging language that emphasizes reconnecting to tribal traditions. *(With thanks to Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board [NPAIHB].)*

one last thing…

This publication—like all of our Straight for Equality materials—could not have been written without the help of countless individuals from both the PFLAG family and its supporters who shared their personal stories about being a trans ally or being trans-identified themselves. Some dedicated their time to reviewing this book, too. We're deeply grateful for all of these contributions.

Each of the stories in this publication has been taken from narratives submitted to the Straight for Equality team via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and during in-person learning sessions. The stories have been edited for length and content, and names have been changed, but each one is real and represents one of the millions of critically-important voices in this conversation.

You can be one of those voices too. In fact, please consider this your invitation to be an important part of the dialogue. Connect with us online (our info is on page 72) and let us know what you think, what you need, and how your journey as a trans ally is going.

ok, maybe not…

This really, really is the last thing:

Want to share your trans ally photo with us so we can post on the Straight for Equality social media feeds? After you download the card at **straightforequality.org/trans** and fill it out, take your picture (be sure it is close enough so we can read the card). Then submit it to the straight for equality team at **info@straightforequality.org** to participate in our effort on Facebook.

About PFLAG National:

Straight for Equality is a program of PFLAG National.

Founded in 1973 after the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation's largest family and ally organization.

Uniting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) with families, friends, and allies, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has 400 chapters and 200,000 supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and serviced by PFLAG National, located in Washington, D.C., the National Board of Directors and 13 volunteer Regional Directors.

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the incredibly detailed honest forthright fully comprehensive completely blunt wonderfully helpful and witty exposition on a topic that makes some people stress because they doubt they understand it or know enough about it but they'll soon be ready to talk because this compelling and transformative (no pun intended) little publication will answer lots of questions and start to demystify the not-at-all secret world of people who are transgender and become your tried and trusted ***guide to being a trans ally***

Author: Jean-Marie Navetta | Editorial review: Jamie Henkel

This and other publications from PFLAG National's Straight for Equality program, including:

- *guide to being a straight ally*
- *read this before you put your metatarsals between your mandible and maxillae: straight for equality in healthcare*
- *be not afraid—help is on the way! straight for equality in faith communities*

are available for download or purchase at **straightforequality.org**. We've got other ally-friendly goodies there, along with details on how you can bring a Straight for Equality in the Workplace learning session to where you work. Seriously, we're smart and funny in person.

Come visit us online (we love company):


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E-mail us: **info@straightforequality.org**

*made you look

the guide to being a trans ally

Learn more about PFLAG National by visiting pflag.org.

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Straight for Equality is a program of PFLAG National

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‡Another footnote, you say? Where will it end? Honest, it's just this last one. We wanted to wave goodbye one more time. Couldn't help it. We're really going to miss you.