Supporting Trans* Teens in the Public Library

A BRIEF HOW-TO CHAPTER FROM Gender Issues and the Library: Case Studies of Innovative Programs and Resources available in December 2017 from McFarland
Who?

Trans* in this context is being used to indicate all the variations of gender identity that exist outside of binary conceptions of male and female. This includes teens who identify as:

- Transsexual (the gender opposite to the one they were assigned at birth and intend to alter or have altered their bodies to match)
- Transgender (those who identify as the gender opposite to the one they were assigned but may not wish to alter their physiology)
- Gender non-conforming teens (there are a range of gender expressions that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and a variety of words that convey this such as genderqueer, genderfluid, and androgynous)
Why?

- LGBTQ teens are significantly more likely than their peers to experience victimization, depression, and PTSD.
- More than half of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey respondents who reported harassment had attempted suicide.
- Up to 1.6 million young people experience homelessness in the United States every year. 40% of them identify as LGBT; 46% of homeless LGBT youths ran away because of family rejection of their sexual orientation or gender identity; 43% were forced out by parents, and 32% faced physical, emotional or sexual abuse at home. (Williams Institute, 2012)
- The suggestions made in Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens (Martin and Murdock) are excellent but trans* teens need some different and more specific forms of support than the rest of this population.
Scope:

- Physical space
- Social space
- Programming
Physical Space


- Are there informational posters that make it easy to understand the differences between sex, gender, and sexuality? A good example can be found here: [https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Teaching-Tolerance-Know-the-Difference-Poster-Summer-2015.pdf](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/Teaching-Tolerance-Know-the-Difference-Poster-Summer-2015.pdf)

- Is there signage that makes it clear what a ‘safer space’ entails?

- Are there trans* related resources included in the general community information area? GLAAD’s website offers a broad range: [https://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources](https://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources)

- Are books with trans* characters included in displays (even when it’s not a GLBTQ-related display)?
Social Space

- Keeping an eye and ear out for gender policing—tricky business, a variety of tactics can be useful depending on the situation.
- Building relationships with trans* teens—lots of listening (just like with any teen), as few assumptions as possible.
- Practice! You might not be familiar with how to use every pronoun in conversation, so try it out using something like this chart and mad lib: [https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/](https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/)
Helpful questions:

- So you’re saying ___? (Repeat back their concerns, questions, and context to make sure you’ve understood correctly.)
- What pronoun do you prefer when we are speaking to one another?
- Are you changing your name?
- What pronoun and name are you comfortable having me use around your peers?
- If your parent/guardian calls, what name and pronoun should I use?
- If I visit your school, what name and pronoun should I use?
- Is there anyone else I should know that you do not want to be outed to?
Wider questions for further interactions:

- Do you want to have individual conversations with my coworkers, do you want me to, or do you not care right now?
- What level of assistance, if any, do you want when you tell your peers your new pronoun and/or name?
- Do you want my help explaining what being transgender means, or do you want to take it on yourself and ask for help if you need to?
- Do you want me to correct your peers when they use an incorrect pronoun or do all the correcting yourself—or to have no correcting at all?
Example questions for a longer-term interaction:

- Is it still okay for me to use your old pronoun when I’m talking to your mom?
- How did it feel when I stepped in to help you explain to the ten year old at the program that just because you look like a girl doesn’t mean you have to be one? Do you want me to do that any differently next time?
- Do you want me to keep correcting your boyfriend when he calls you ‘she’?
Programming

- Include pronoun preference in the opening questions any time there’s a go-around, or make the information explicitly welcome ("What do you need us to know to be able to be comfortable/present here, for example, pronoun preference, if you need to leave early, if you had a terrible day, if you have a headache, etc."

- Include trans* presenters in teen programming (not necessarily on the topic of gender)
Further Considerations

- Does your library have a gender neutral bathroom? Resources from ALA that provide support for this can be found here:
  [https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2015/10/30/libraries-gender-neutral-bathrooms/](https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2015/10/30/libraries-gender-neutral-bathrooms/)
  [http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org.rt/files/content/professionaltools/bathrooms%20brochure%20for%20printing.pdf](http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org.rt/files/content/professionaltools/bathrooms%20brochure%20for%20printing.pdf)

- Do your library’s card applications require gender as a category? ALA offers this resource as to how this could be addressed sensitively:
  [http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org.rt/files/content/professionaltools/trans_inclusive_libcard_forms_for_printing.pdf](http://www.ala.org/rt/sites/ala.org.rt/files/content/professionaltools/trans_inclusive_libcard_forms_for_printing.pdf)

- Do your local LGBTQ or trans*-specific teen groups know that your library is a safer space?

- Do your local LGBTQ or trans*-specific organizations know that you are interested in including hand-outs in your info area?
Bibliography


If you have any questions, please get in touch!
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