

# Non-Binary Identities

*Tips by non-binary people, for other non-binary people, their friends and families.*



# What does non-binary mean?

In the UK, there is a gender binary. This is the social norm that people are either men or they are women. Binary means 'made up of two parts'.

People who live outside of the gender binary exist all over the world. They have always and will always exist. The umbrella term for these people is **non-binary**.

The four authors of this booklet are non-binary. We have tried our best to explain what being non-binary means. However, be aware that there are no rules for being non-binary, things as complicated as gender are hard to describe, and terms used to describe gender change over time.



*Isn't your gender defined by your sex?*

No. Our sex is assigned at birth based on our biology. It is a way of distinguishing whether we have mostly female biological sex traits or mostly male biological sex traits.

Our gender is an internal feeling. It can shape how we experience the world and relate to others. It can influence how we want other people to see us, to talk to and about us, or how we feel about our bodies.

Even though our sense of gender develops throughout our lives, we are usually assigned a gender at birth. Typically, females are assigned as girls and males are assigned as boys. If you grow up and your sex and gender do align this way, you are **cisgender**. If your gender doesn't fully align this way, you are **transgender**.

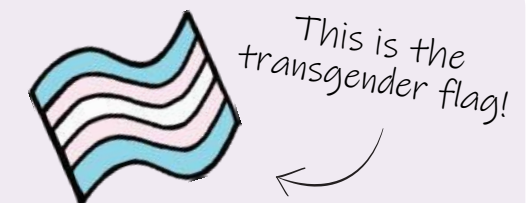
Some transgender people go on to alter their biological sex traits later in life and may change their legal sex to reflect this. Others may not.

# Is non-binary the same as...

## ...transgender?

Transgender people are people whose gender doesn't fully agree with their gender assigned at birth. Trans people can have binary genders - be trans men or trans women - or be non-binary.

In this way, non-binary is commonly thought of as being under the transgender umbrella. However, there are also non-binary people who don't use the word transgender to define themselves.

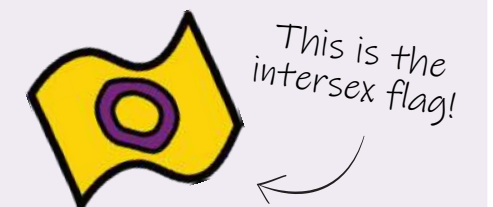


## ...intersex?

No. Intersex is an umbrella term for people who were born with normal variations in their biological sex traits (hormones, genitals, ovaries/testes, chromosomes), which do not fit the typical patterns associated with the male and female sexes.

Intersex people are still assigned a gender at birth. Therefore they can be cisgender or transgender, binary or non-binary, just like everyone else.

Intersex infants may have surgery to make their biological sex traits fit typical male or female patterns. These are often medically unnecessary. This is described as Intersex Genital Mutilation and is being campaigned against by human rights groups.



## ...androgynous?

No. Our **gender expression** is how we show our gender to the world, in the way we dress, talk, act, etc. **Androgynous** describes a gender expression that is neither typically masculine or feminine.

Some non-binary people present androgynously, but not all. You can never tell a person's gender (internal feeling) just from looking at their gender expression (how they look externally).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I know if I am non-binary?

You may wonder if you're non-binary yourself. If you feel like the word "man" or "woman" doesn't fully describe your experience of gender, you very well might be!

There are no rules for being non-binary. You may want any kind of body, look however you want, and use whichever pronouns you want. It doesn't matter which gender you were assigned at birth, or which gender others perceive you as. Also, you **don't have to be sure** in order to identify, express yourself and live as non-binary. You can change your mind if it doesn't work out.

- **Explore the diversity of non-binary identities.** You don't have to use specific labels for yourself, but they can be useful to find people whose experiences you can relate to.
- **Experience the non-binary community.** We live in a society that tries to force us into binary gender roles, so it's important to find places where we are accepted, understood and supported as who we are. You can talk to non-binary people, but there are also essays, books, comics, podcasts, videos and so on, made by people in the community.
- **Try things out.** Play with gender (or reject it outright!) and see how that makes you feel. Focus on what feels the most authentic and joyful. But it may also be very uncomfortable at first, especially if you have strong ideas about who you are and aren't allowed to be.

### Who are non-binary people attracted to?

Being non-binary is about your relationship to gender, not about your sexual or romantic orientation. Non-binary people can be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, aromantic, or any other sexual or romantic orientation. Increasingly, non-binary people are using the word 'queer' to describe themselves. Queer is a reclaimed slur, and it just means that in some way your relationship with gender and/or sexuality goes against what is seen as 'normal'.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Do non-binary people medically transition?

Some non-binary people feel discomfort with their bodies, and seek to use things like hormones or surgeries to make them feel more comfortable. However, not all do.

Even if they do, they might not do so in the way that binary transgender people might. For example, a non-binary person assigned female at birth might want chest masculinising surgery, but not want to take testosterone or have bottom surgery. Or a non-binary person assigned male at birth might want to take low-dose oestrogen to slowly feminise their features, but never take a 'full' dose.



### Can I ask a non-binary person their assigned gender at birth?

It is considered rude to ask a non-binary person their assigned gender at birth. Think to yourself, why do I want to know? Do you want to know so that you can put them in a box in your head labelled male or female? If so, try to remember that a non-binary person probably wouldn't want you to do that.

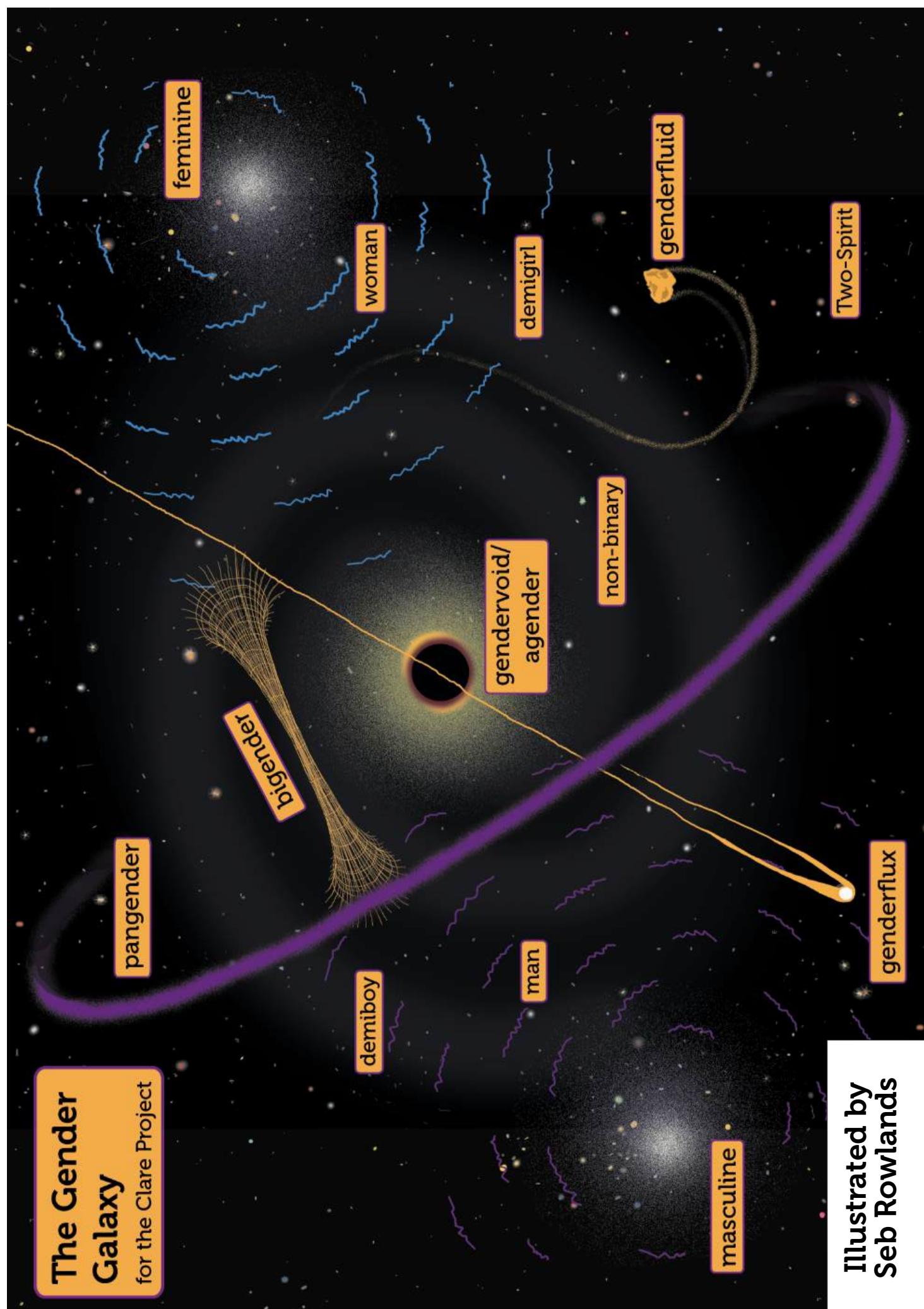


Only you get to decide who to tell about what is in your pants!

Do you want to know because you want to know what genitals they have? If you don't have a reason for wanting to know this... don't ask! They wouldn't randomly ask you about the size or shape of your junk!

If you want to have sex with them, ask them what type of sex they like having, and tell them what you are attracted to about them. Then you can figure out if you are compatible.





## What types of non-binary identities exist?

Non-binary people may simply label themselves as non-binary (or nonbinary or enby) or they may use more specific words to describe their identity. These more specific terms are always evolving. It is important to ask someone what terms they feel comfortable with and respect that.

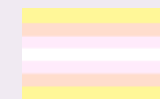
We have chosen to illustrate the variety of non-binary genders with this illustration of a gender galaxy. However, gender is hard to capture in an image, so this is just one interpretation. We have also written a short gender glossary with some common genders, but there are also tens, if not hundreds, of possible words that people can use to describe their gender that aren't listed here.

### Gender Glossary

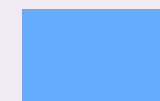
Masculine: genders traditionally associated with men



Pangender: I contain many genders. Similar terms: multigender, polygender.



Man: my gender is fully masculine. I may be cisgender or transgender.



Bigender: I have two genders



Demiboy: my gender is partly but not fully masculine



Agender: I do not have a gender. Similar terms: genderless, gendervoid.



Feminine: genders traditionally associated with women



Genderflux: my sense of gender changes in intensity



Woman: my gender is fully feminine. I may be cisgender or transgender.



Genderfluid: my gender changes over time



Demigirl: my gender is partly but not fully feminine.



Genderqueer: my gender is beyond 'normal' ideas of gender



Non-binary: I simply use non-binary to describe my gender.



Two-Spirit: I am Native North American and my gender is outside the European binary.



# kiilas's story:

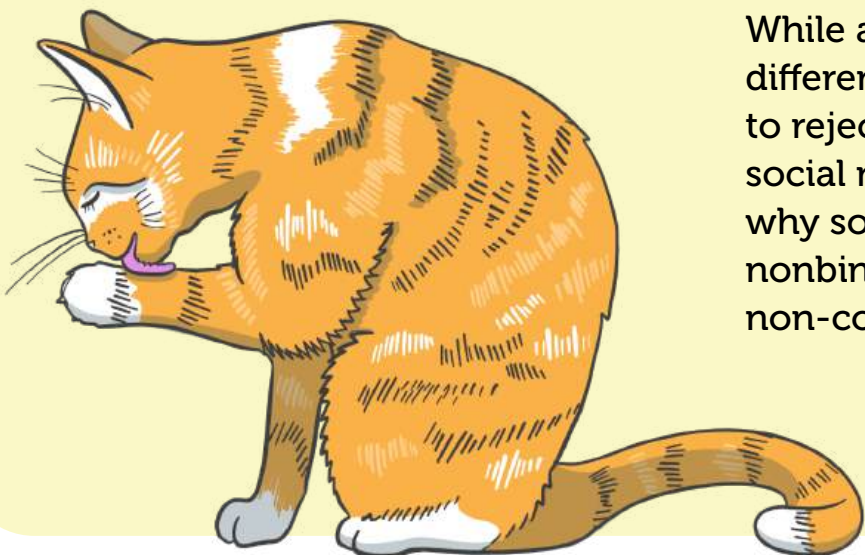
My name is kiilas, and I use it/its and they/them pronouns. I'm non-binary, specifically agender, and even more specifically gendervoid. Although non-binary identities exist under the trans umbrella, I do not identify as trans.

"Non-binary" is an umbrella term for an infinite diversity of gender identities and ways of relating to gender. I don't have a gender, but I'm still non-binary.

I define "agender" as being genderless (having no gender). Because society expects everyone to have a gender, it took me a very long time to accept that I don't have one and that it's okay to stop looking.

While "agender" describes my relationship to gender pretty well, the term that I like the most is "gendervoid". "Agender" feels quite clinical to me, like maybe I'm missing a gender. "Gendervoid" asserts that I have no need or space for a gender, that it's a non-concept as far as my identity is concerned. Of course, that's my personal understanding and relationship with these terms, and not the universal feelings of everyone who identifies with them.

Finally, being autistic informs how I view and relate to gender. Gender plays a major role in how society categorises people, objects and activities. Gender norms are based on tradition and often involve complex rules that have been made up by people whose brains work differently to mine. I find these rules confusing and unrelateable.



While autistic people are all different, we're much more likely to reject prescribed identities and social norms. That's a big part of why so many of us are trans, nonbinary, agender or gender non-conforming.

# Gendered language

One of the key issues that non-binary people often face is that of gendered language. This page is about how to use language that includes and affirms non-binary people.



Our pronouns are how we would like people to refer to us. The most commonly used pronouns are 'he' and 'she' - these are obviously gendered.

Non-binary people may choose to use 'he' or 'she', but also commonly use other pronouns, like the singular 'they' or neopronouns. Here are some of the most commonly used non-binary pronouns:

| She (she is nice) | Her (I called her) | Her (her name is) | Hers (that is hers) | Herself    |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------|
| He                | Him                | His               | His                 | Himself    |
| They              | Them               | Their             | Theirs              | Themselves |
| Ze                | Zir                | Zir               | Zirs                | Zirself    |
| Xe                | Xem                | Xir               | Xirs                | Xirself    |
| Sie               | Hir                | Hir               | Hirs                | Hirself    |
| E/ey              | Em                 | Eir               | Eirs                | Eirself    |
| It                | It                 | Its               | Its                 | Itself     |

Words to describe our family members are often gendered - for example, mum and dad. Here are some alternative words non-binary people may use to describe their familial relationships:

|                      |  |                   |                      |
|----------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------|
| Sister/brother       | Sibling  | Wife/husband      | Partner/spouse       |
| Mother/father        | Parent   | Niece/nephew      | Nibling              |
| Mummy/daddy          | Baba/mapa/zaza                                       | Aunt/uncle        | Bibi/nibi/unt/y/zizi |
| Son/daughter         | Child/kid/offspring                                  | Grandma/grandpa   | Grandparent/grandy   |
| Boyfriend/girlfriend | Partner/enbyfriend/joyfriend/lover/significant other | Grandson/daughter | Grandchild           |

Job names are commonly gendered - for example, waiter and waitress. Here are some alternative non-gendered words you can use:

|                 |                |             |                    |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Waiter/waitress | Waiting staff  | Businessman | Businessperson     |
| Fireman         | Firefighter    | Salesman    | Salesperson        |
| Policeman       | Police officer | Handyman    | Maintenance person |
| Chairman        | Chair          | Weatherman  | Meteorologist      |
| Craftsman       | Artisan        | Clergyman   | Minister, pastor   |



## Alé's story

My name is Alé, and I'm an autistic and disabled Indigenous person of color who is Two-Spirit. As a friend put it, I live in a complex intersection, and there's no one part of me disconnected from the rest.

My personal journey is one of a colonized person, from a family that was unfortunately greatly restrained and traumatized due to ableism, colonialism, internalized white supremacy, and religion.

I was trans, autistic, and an atheist being raised amongst people who had a lot of trauma that they had no way to deal with in a society that was and is purpose-built to hurt them. These relationships were with people that I both could rely on and caused me trauma, and my autistic and nonbinary self fit in very poorly.

I knew for sure I was not a girl and not a boy from a very young age. I didn't feel like I had any way to describe myself and it was difficult to connect with most people.

*One distressing time was when my school was giving out free books, which as a dyslexic and poor book lover I was really excited about until I found out that there was two books and they were given out by gender. I hated the idea of getting the princess book and cried for the rest of the day. It took me decades to deal with my internalized femme phobia, but gendering books is also incredibly ridiculous.*

*A really affirming story from high school is when a friend told me they liked me because I wasn't like a boy or a girl. I loved that but I still didn't really understand how to explain myself. It wasn't until I was about 20 years old that I first read the term genderqueer, which really clicked for me. I still rather like the term, and identify with it slightly. I consider myself to be completely devoid of gender, and it's neither an emptiness nor something on a binary or spectrum.*

As I've had to explain my gender, and lack of gender, over time to cis het white people in the U.S., I've settled with explaining myself as agender, or sometimes settling for the simpler trans nonbinary if I feel like they'll be too confused by agender.

I'm Two-Spirit, but I don't usually use it around white folks because it tends to make them say something ignorant and colonialist such as appropriating the term or misunderstanding it to just mean gay.

## What is Two-Spirit?

*To be clear, Indigenous peoples of many former and current colonized lands do indeed continue to exist. You may be uncomfortable with the following but I hope that you will open your heart and mind.*

Pan-Native is a term Indigenous folks use to describe the identities and issues facing the Native communities of North America. Two-Spirit is a pan-Native word used by Indigenous queer, trans, and intersex folks to describe ourselves.

Using this word distances ourselves from the European gender binary and European LGBTQ+ community, and connects ourselves to our Indigenous history and cultures.

There are many more terms that are nation-specific, so some people use those words instead. Not all queer, trans or intersex Native Americans use the term Two-Spirit.

Indigenous people from all over the world have always had different labels for different genders and sexualities. European invaders, for 500 years, not only murdered individuals, burned our books, and destroyed entire cities, but have and continue to go to great lengths attempting to destroy our cultures and identities.

Prior to invasion, in some nations, Two-Spirit people were regular members of their communities. In others, Two-Spirit people held important societal and spiritual roles. Our different view point was unique and valued.

Since European invasion, we have become marginalized, sometimes even from within our own communities, as European cultures and religions put pressures on our people.

*Support Indigenous youth and our Two-Spirit communities. Support our movements. Support our creatives. Support our works. Reading the paper "Decolonization is not a metaphor", and the book "An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States" are great places to start. Please consider donating to our communities such as through The Chúush Fund: Water for Warm Springs: <https://mrgfoundation.org/the-chuush-fund-water-for-warm-springs/>*

# What issues do non-binary people face?

## LACK OF ACCESS TO AFFIRMING HEALTHCARE

Non-binary people may wish to use hormones or surgery, to ease any body dysphoria they might experience. However, even when accessing trans related healthcare, non-binary people can be forced to present more 'male' or 'female' in order to access these interventions.

## LACK OF LEGAL RECOGNITION:

In the UK, non-binary is not a legally recognised gender identity. You cannot have a non-binary sex or gender marker on NHS records, marriage certificates, passports or many other legal documents.

However, this is not the case globally. Malta, Denmark, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, several states in the United States and several provinces in Canada and Uruguay, allow non-binary gender identities to be legally recognised in some way.

Even in those places where non-binary options are legally recognised, many non-binary people will choose not to have paperwork with their gender on it, for fear of discrimination and violence.

## BARRIERS TO GENERAL HEALTH CARE

## HOMELESSNESS

Trans and non-binary people are at greater risk of homelessness than cisgender people, and may be excluded from single-sex housing options.

## LACK OF POSITIVE MEDIA REPRESENTATION

## BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

## DISCRIMINATION

Alongside misgendering and erasure, people will sometimes discriminate directly against non-binary people. This might mean that it is harder for non-binary people to get a job, or make us more at risk of harassment in public or on social media. It is illegal to discriminate against non-binary people under the Equality Act 2010.

## HAVING TO CONSTANTLY COME OUT

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Non-binary people are more at risk of common mental illness than cisgender or binary trans people, due to facing more inequality.

## IDENTITY ERASURE

Non-binary people often face erasure – meaning that our needs and identities are made invisible in society.

The lack of legal recognition is just one example of erasure. But erasure also happens every time we have to fill out a form that forces us to select 'male' or 'female'. It's present every time we have to use a public toilet.

We constantly have to pick from two genders, which can feel wrong and invalidating, or even be dangerous.

## MISGENDERING

People assume other people's genders all the time. Think of the last time someone in a coffee shop or hospital clinic referred to you as 'sir' or 'madam'. Non-binary people are constantly being gendered incorrectly (misgendered).

Non-binary people may not mind this, or it may have serious consequences on their mental health and wellbeing.

We may ask you to use gender neutral pronouns like they/them, and gender neutral terms like person, partner, folks, pals, or human, to make us feel safer and more comfortable.

## BEING EXCLUDED FROM TRANS SERVICES

## VIOLENCE

Non-binary people, especially transfeminine non-binary people, are at greater risk of violence than cisgender people are. This is both from strangers and from acquaintances and family members. There is also the risk of violence from the state - in many countries, non-binary people may be at risk of direct violence from the police. This is particularly the case for non-binary people who are Black, Indigenous and/or People of Colour.

## EXCLUDED FROM RESEARCH

It is hard to know what support non-binary people might need, as they are often left out of research.

## MORE LIKELY TO BE SEX WORKERS (and the risks this carries)

## LANGUAGE ISSUES

Some languages are so heavily gendered (like Italian, for example), that it is very difficult to refer to yourself or others as non-binary in those languages.



## Being a good ally

### What does being an ally mean?

Being an ally means supporting someone who needs your help. They might be from a marginalised or under-represented community. You might be in a position of greater privilege compared to them, and you may have the ability to stand up for them. Allyship is also standing with marginalised people. Being an ally means taking positive ongoing action to challenge the barriers and discrimination they are facing.

### How you can be an ally to non-binary people

Sometimes, when your loved one, friend or colleague comes out to you as non-binary, you might find that you need to stick up for them (be their 'advocate'). There are some key things you can do.

- Pronouns – ask us what our pronouns are (e.g. they/she/he). There is no one way to look non-binary, so it is safe to assume you cannot know someone's pronouns based on their gender expression or name, until they confirm what they are. You can also help us by using our pronouns correctly with others, and correcting people to use the right pronouns for us.
  - Create space for and normalise the existence of non binary people. Reading about, and talking to people with, different non-binary gender identities can help.
  - Make it part of your everyday way of speaking to use more gender neutral language. For example, 'sibling' instead of 'sister/brother', 'hey folks' instead of 'hey guys'.
- This helps to create space for non-binary people by categorising everyday interactions in a less binary way.
- Create and call for provision of non-gendered spaces such as toilets, support spaces and services. The majority of these spaces are binary, which can prevent non-binary people from accessing them, or pressure them into conforming to a gender they are not.



## Breaking down gender

Another way you can support non-binary people is by breaking gender stereotypes in your day-to-day life.

### In the way you present

People are constantly breaking down gender stereotypes in the way they present. For example, are you a woman that wears trousers? Then you are already advocating for clothing to be less gendered. If you don't want to play with gender presentation yourself, support others that do. Like men who wear make up and colourful clothing.

### In the roles you play

In a similar way to gender presentation, people break down gender roles all the time. For example, are you a man who does housework? If you look after young people, it is especially important that you teach them that they don't need to fill specific gendered roles in society. Support little girls who want to play football. Support little boys who want to be nurses.



### In the language you use

We have talked about language already in this booklet, but we will talk about it again because it is so so important. Make it normal to start speeches with 'dear guests' rather than 'ladies and gentlemen'. Make it normal to use singular they pronouns for people before they tell you their preferred pronouns.



### In the causes you support

When joining a political party or signing up to support a charity, ask, what are they doing to support non-binary people's rights? When you notice that the newspaper you read continuously publishes articles by transphobic 'gender critical' people, stop paying for that newspaper. Actively support causes that improve the lives of non-binary folks. Employ non-binary folks. Pay them for their time and skills.



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*Supporting Trans, Non-binary and  
Intersex communities  
Campaigning for inclusion.*