

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safe sexual pleasure!

What's the "T"? Understanding Transgender

Q. I often hear LGBT or GLBT. I understand LGB – lesbian, gay bisexual— but what about the T?

Transgender is a label used to describe people whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth don't match as expected. For example, at birth, someone may have been assigned female sex, based on their having a vulva and vagina; however, as that person matures, they may realize that the sex they were assigned doesn't accurately reflect their internal sense of their true gender. Some transgender people pursue medical interventions so their bodies align more closely with their identity.

Q. I never hear about transgender elders. Why is that?

Some transgender people, particularly those who have medically transitioned via surgery and/or hormones, choose not to focus on having been assigned a different sex at birth. It is not something they focus on once they are living in accordance with their gender identity. Others do not feel safe or comfortable being "out" about their transgender identity for fear of discrimination or harassment – particularly in medical care or housing situations. This is a huge concern in assisted living and long-term care settings.

Q. What sexual orientations do transgender people have?

Transgender people can identify as any sexual orientation, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer the most common labels. Everyone's experience of sexual orientation is unique, and each person should be able to label their orientations in a way that feels best for them. Generally speaking, orientation labels align with the person's gender identity. Someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to women is likely to identify as a lesbian; someone who identifies as a man and is attracted to men is likely to identify as gay. Someone who is attracted to people of the opposite gender is likely to identify as heterosexual. And someone may use the label bisexual if they are attracted to people of their own and other genders.

Q. How do transgender people navigate safer sex?

Transgender people navigate safer sex in the same way cisgender (non-transgender) people do! Parts that are used for penetration or oral contact should be covered with a barrier. If pregnancy is a concern, a contraceptive should be used as well. As with all penetration, ample lubrication and a slow pace can help partners create an enjoyable sexual experience.

Q. I hear that transgender people experience discrimination and prejudice. How can I be an ally?

If you have a local LGBT community center, volunteer. Or, host a screening of a documentary about transgender people's lives, or host a small fundraiser for a non-profit group that advocates for and supports transgender people. Another important step is to speak up when jokes or derogatory remarks are made about transgender people. Let people know that you support transgender people and will not listen to prejudicial remarks. You can also become friends with transgender people and their partners.