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## With These Things In Mind



With these things in mind, policies of mutual respect and tolerance should ensure that a workplace is relatively unaffected by a person's transition, and after an initial adjustment period, things do return relatively to normal. It is important to put aside the myths that exist regarding transsexuals, and chances are, one will find getting to know the "new" person a worthwhile investment.

## Links for more information:

**AlbertaTrans.org:**  
<http://www.albertatrans.org/>

**EgaleCanada:**  
<http://www.egale.ca/>

**Resources by the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE):**  
<http://transequality.org/Resources/resources.html>

**Resources for employers by the Human Rights Campaign:**  
<http://www.hrc.org/issues/workplace/8055.htm>



This brochure prepared for:  
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## Trans People in the Workplace: An Introduction for Employers and Co-Workers



## When Someone Transitions in the Workplace

For most people, the idea of transsexuals conjures a wide number of confusing images, and a lot of emotions.

But for the trans person that you know and work with, this is something that is very serious, and very real -- and takes a little effort to understand what this is all about. So it's best to take a deep breath, and put aside those images and emotions for at least a few moments.

When someone changes gender in the workplace, things may seem awkward, strange, even funny at times, particularly in the beginning. But when you remember that the person risks their friendships, family, homes, careers and reputation to do so, one realizes that it is not a decision that they would have made unless they felt that they absolutely had to.

The experience of being transsexed involves one's entire identity. Transsexuals attempt to hide who they are, living a lie that feels unnatural in order to live up to others' expectations, until it becomes an experience many liken to suffocating. Transsexuals sometimes spend years attempting to "pass" as the gender that society expects them to be, until a crisis point is reached.

### What Is It That's Changing?

When a person changes gender, it's often said that only the outside appearance changes. This is only partly true. Voice may change, body language may seem different, but there is more. People who are "gender dysphoric" have usually spent years hiding much about themselves and trying to act a certain way to fit a stereotype of who they're supposed to be. Often, this means that after an initial nervous and awkward point during their gender change, the person eventually becomes more open and able to relate who they really are.

The dynamic between people also changes somewhat, especially when treating someone in a "buddy" manner no longer seems appropriate. But usually, a person who is making a transition from male-to-female or female-to-male will realize this, and understand. Most trans people tend to not be offended by honest questions, and to understand if a person who is making a sincere attempt to accept their change slips up and says the wrong pronoun or use the old name by accident on occasion. Some dynamics do change, but the mutual respect does not have to.

### Other Myths

There is sometimes an assumption that transsexuals have a sexual fetish that drives them to transition. This sometimes brings to the imagination all manner of "icky" situations. Despite the term "transsexual," it is in fact not about sex, sex practices, orientation (transsexuality is about who one is, rather than who one loves) or lifestyle -- and in some cases, hormone therapy would actually be self-defeating, if this were the case.


### All in Their Heads?

It is still not understood completely why a person is transsexual, although there have been several recent studies that show a likelihood of a biological connection at least partly involved. All that is certain is that the transsexed person has often spent considerable effort (and sometimes years) unsuccessfully trying to make their mind conform to the body, only to come to the inescapable realization that the only way to deal with their turmoil is to change their physical body to reflect the essence of who they are.

### When Beliefs Vary

There are sometimes people who have objections to transgender people based on their personal beliefs. They are perfectly entitled to these beliefs, but in a workplace setting, lecturing, teasing, humiliation, sarcasm, disrespect, refusal to accept new names and pronouns and other forms of harassment are not appropriate. If it is felt that a transsexual's transition is somehow an affront to God or Nature, this conflict should be left between the trans person and God or Nature.

### Why is This Necessary?

The American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association and Canadian medical authorities support transition as a medically necessary part of overcoming the anxieties and distresses of living out of sync. As much as mainstream society would like to believe that electroshock therapy, anti-psychotic drugs or conversion therapy would help transsexuals "just get over it," modern medicine has realized that this approach simply does not work. Aversion therapies usually result in suppression, suicide or extreme anti-social behaviour. Aligning body to mind, however, enables transsexuals to become valued and successful people in society. This change is not instant, but it does enable the transsexed person to gradually address the root of their anxieties so that they can let go of some of the other personal issues previously brought on when trying to cope. 

## Washroom Issues

By the standards set by medical professionals, it is appropriate and even required for transsexuals to use facilities matching their gender identities. Transsexuals who go through the screening to transition are simply interested in their own privacy in a washroom, and not a threat. Since laws were first introduced in 1975, over 120 jurisdictions in North America have allowed transsexuals to use appropriate public facilities. There is no statistical evidence to support the belief of predatory behaviour in womens' spaces by transsexual women. Additionally, predatory behaviour remains inappropriate no matter who the perpetrator is and regardless of washroom policy.

Gender-neutral single-stall locking washrooms are sometimes a reasonable option, but not always workable (i.e. public change rooms, which can be occupied for long stretches). Male facilities can be extremely unsafe for a transsexual woman to use, as this can expose her to negative reactions or violence.

It is reasonable for employers to request documentation that will show a person is serious and has begun living their real-life test as recommended by medical standards of care. Suggested documentation can include but not be limited to: a carry letter from a therapist or physician, a legal change of name certificate, or business mail addressed to a name reflective of their identified gender.