



Here are six tips on how a mental health provider can better support the transgender community and run a trans-inclusive practice.

1. **Refer to clients that are transgender by the pronouns they use.** Ask politely for clarification if you are unsure about a client's gender identity or how they wish to be addressed. For instance, you can ask, "What pronouns do you use?" It is essential to clarify a client's designated pronouns at the start of the first session. Also, share the pronouns you use, demonstrating to the client that you are aware of the salience of gender identities.
2. **Address your client by their chosen name.** Be aware if your client goes by a name different from the name they were assigned at birth. If the client's name has not yet been legally changed, some of their medical paperwork or insurance cards may still be in their assigned name. It is important to clarify and then address your client by their chosen name in every interaction moving forward.
3. **Use gender-inclusive intake paperwork.** In the intake paperwork, have a section that asks for a client's name and what pronouns they use. Provide an option to fill in the blank when asking for gender identity, so clients can use their own language versus offering a binary or multiple choice. During the assessment, clarify their chosen name and the gender identity they use so you can be respectful to your client's needs moving forward.
4. **Do not assume that the reason your client is seeking therapy is due to being trans.** A client may be seeking your services because they are struggling with obsessive compulsive disorder or they are having difficulties with a sibling. Too often, clinicians assume that the conflict in a client's life must be related to the client being trans. It is important not to assume that gender is always associated with the presenting challenges or that it needs to be a focus of treatment at all. Allow the client to be the guide as to what they wish to address in therapy.
5. **Keep the focus on the client's care rather than asking questions out of curiosity.** Asking questions about one's transgender status, if the motivation behind asking is simply due to your own curiosity, is inappropriate. For instance, it is never appropriate to ask your client about their life before transitioning or request to see pictures from that period simply out of curiosity. It will quickly lead to an uncomfortable therapeutic alliance, and it will negatively impact your client.
6. **Be aware of using microaggressions.** Microaggressions are subtle statements or comments that can be hurtful to the trans community. These statements may not be intentional; however, your client may still find them harmful. Common microaggressions include statements such as, "I did not realize you were trans, I thought you were a woman," or "You look great! You can pass for someone who was born a boy!" These microaggressions may lead to your client feeling shame or distress.

In addition to these guidelines, there are many more ways you as a provider can support your clients who are transgender. GLAAD (glaad.org) is a great organization that offers resources and education on the LGBTQ+ community. Remember, your clients who are transgender want to be treated with respect and receive quality mental health care. These six steps can help you start the process of running a more trans-inclusive practice!

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