



# Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



## Transgender: Where to Find and How to Give Support

Navigating and making gender-related changes is a journey that takes courage. In support of transgender persons or individuals considering gender transition, this edition of Vitality will serve as a resource for managers at all levels, identifying sources of information as well as how to best support transgender employees.

For an individual who is transitioning, it can be exciting, worrying, liberating, and a challenging process all at once. It can trigger a wide range of feelings and reactions within themselves and others. Every person's journey is unique. Taking steps to understand the impacts a trans person faces is important in understanding how you can support them.

### Where to find support for transgender people?

There are many support options available for transgender people. Educating yourself on the available services in your community can help you provide support to your employees. As a manager, look to your EFAP for tools and resources to assist you and your employee. Additionally, reviewing and understanding the Government of Canada Rights of LGBTI persons' [website](#), provides resources relating to the legal protection within each province or territory.

Before deciding how to give support to a transgender employee, here are some steps you should take:

- 1. Consultation.** In the initial meeting with the employee (and union representative, if desired/applicable), the following protocols are recommended:
  - Ask what name and pronoun you should use when referring to the employee – affirm your commitment to doing so in your interactions.
  - Affirm that you will protect the worker's privacy and confidentiality about their trans status.
  - If the employee show signs of stress or unease in talking about this subject, acknowledge that it can be difficult to talk about gender identity with an employer and that you respect their courage in coming forward.



- Let the employee know that you are here to support them, and that you will look to them for suggestions on what type of support would be helpful.
  - Do not ask intimate or non-relevant personal questions about surgeries, hormones, or sexual orientation, etc.
  - If you need additional support, consider reaching out to your EFAP provider or looking to professional LGBTQ organizations for more information.
- 2. Support and Communication Planning.** According to the Canadian Labour Congress (2010), components of a support and transition plan could include discussion around the following topics:
- Transition timelines regarding changes of name, pronoun, and gender.
  - If time off will be required for medical treatment, be prepared to discuss the company's benefit plan with the employee.
  - Whether or not the employee wants to inform their supervisors, co-workers, and third parties such as clients, patients, and customers about their transition. If so, you will want to determine if that is appropriate and if the employee wishes to inform others themselves, or have this done by the union/management.
  - If pronoun or naming amendments need to be made to records and systems; and the appropriate timing for these changes to be made.
  - Whether training for co-workers/clients/patients will be required, and if so, how training would be conducted and by whom.
  - How the organization intends to handle harassment, hostile reactions, or unwanted questions/interest in regards to staff transition.
- 3. Putting the Plan into Action.** Once a Support and Communication Plan has been developed and is in place, it is recommended to appoint a primary contact person (e.g. Manager or HR representative) for the employee. If applicable, the union may also wish to appoint a primary contact person. Suggestions:
- Be prepared to answer questions from other staff, customers, clients and/or patients, while respecting the employee's right to privacy. Do not share any information about the employee without their explicit permission.
  - Consider a Code of Conduct; be prepared to respond quickly to any harassment and bullying concerns.
  - It is advisable to check in with the employee regularly to gather feedback on how the communication process is unfolding.

### How to give support to transgender people?

As a leader, it is important to educate yourself about issues that are of concern to transgender people and to listen to trans employees' requests for support. Homewood Health is available to support you and your team(s) in the development of skills to support trans and gender diverse employees in the workplace.

Withholding part of one's self requires a great deal of energy. People who feel supported and are empowered to be themselves are often more productive, engaged and creative in their roles.

As a person in a position of leadership, it is important to model the behaviours and demonstrate the respect for diversity that you expect your staff to emulate. Here is how you can give transgender employees support:

- Transphobic jokes and behaviours should not be tolerated and should be covered under HR policies. Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, it is prohibited to discriminate against gender identity or gender expression. If your employee's rights aren't protected, legal action could be taken against your organization.
- While many trans people appreciate support, advocacy and having allies, it is best to create a forum for trans people to speak for themselves. If that is not possible, it may be necessary to provide explicit support.
- Set an inclusive tone at meetings – use gender neutral and inclusive language to address groups of people. Instead of saying "Ok, guys", or "Ladies, let's get started" – try "Good morning folks" or "Have a great weekend everyone."
- Review your current organizational policies, practices, and forms. Do they include trans people? Do they use gender neutral language? Do they collect unnecessary information about sex and gender?

Everyone has the right to work in a safe and respectful environment. When taken, these initial steps and the development of policies and guidelines to support transgender individuals can foster a more collaborative and supportive workplace.

## Resources

If you need additional resources, the organizations listed below are helpful places to start when gathering information on transgender issues and how you can support someone who is in transition.

**Trans Lifeline** is a non-profit dedicated to the well-being of transgender people. The organization provides a hotline staffed by transgender people for transgender people. Trans Lifeline volunteers are available to support the needs of your community.

Canada: 1-877-330-6366

**Welcome Friend Association** provides seminars, training and outreach for other organizations and the community at large to broaden the understanding of LGBTQ communities. The organization provides a place where everyone regardless of their gender or sexual orientation can find respect and understanding.

Canada: 1-888-909-2234

 Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions — [vitality@homewoodhealth.com](mailto:vitality@homewoodhealth.com)

For more information, please contact our Client Services Representatives available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

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