# HOW MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS CAN CREATE A GENDER-AFFIRMING ENVIRONMENT FOR BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES

# WHAT IS GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE?

<u>One in 250 adult</u> **Americans identifies as transgender. The diversity of gender expression continues to evolve as we create safer places for people who are LGBTQIA+.**

**Gender-affirming care is a client-centered approach that respects and validates individuals' gender identities and gender expressions.**

**This includes using chosen names and pronouns, creating inclusive environments, and addressing the specific needs of transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals.**

**For mental health providers, these practices build trust and improve mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ clients.**

## Core Components of Gender-Affirming Care

### Use of Chosen Names and Pronouns

Best Practice: Always use clients' chosen names and pronouns in interactions, documentation and case reviews.

Handling Mistakes: If you make an error, correct yourself promptly without drawing attention. Briefly apologize, use the correct name or pronoun, and move on respectfully.

### Inclusive Intake and Documentation

Best Practice: Intake forms should allow clients to specify gender, pronouns, and chosen names, with options to update as needed.

Why It Matters: Intake forms are often a client's first contact with an agency. Inclusive options help clients feel seen and respected from the beginning while minimizing "othering".

### Affirming Cues in the Office & Online

In the Office: Display symbols of LGBTQ+ support, like pride flags, inclusive signage, or resource pamphlets in waiting and counseling areas.

In Virtual Settings: Include pronouns in email signatures and display them in video meeting names whenever possible.

Why It Matters: Visible signs of inclusivity in both physical and virtual spaces signal safety and support, helping clients feel more comfortable.

## Did you know?

**Transgender and non-binary youth who receive gender-affirming care report significantly lower rates of anxiety and depression. (Source: The Trevor Project)**

# COMMON PRONOUNS

**She** **He** **They** **Him** **Their**
**Hers** **Her** **His** **Theirs**

You can't know someone's pronouns from looking at them or simply by their name. The best and only way to find out someone's pronouns are to ask them – preferably privately and respectfully.

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# USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Gender is a social construct shaped by societal expectations and norms. Using gender-neutral language helps create an inclusive environment for everyone. Here are some examples:

- Spouse or Partner
- Significant other
- Parent /Guardian
- Sibling
- Kid or Child

- Relative
- Folks / team / friends
- Restroom
- Menstrual products
- People who menstruate
- Pregnant person

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Gender-affirming care can also include access to physically supportive treatments, such as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or surgical interventions, for clients seeking to align their physical characteristics with their gender identity.

## Key Terms

**AFAB:** Assigned female at birth

**AMAB**: Assigned male at birth

**Cisgender**: A person whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

**Gender Dysphoria**: Distress experienced when one's assigned sex at birth does not align with their gender identity.

**Gender Expansive / Gender Diverse**: Umbrella terms for identities or expressions beyond male-female binary

**Gender Identity**: An individual's internal sense of being male, female, both, neither, or somewhere along the gender spectrum.

**HRT**: Hormone replacement therapy; this can consist of taking hormones and/or blocking existing hormones in the body.

**Nonbinary**: Someone who does not identify strictly as male or female and may identify as both, neither, or outside conventional categories.

**SGM**: Sexual gender minority; individuals who identify as sexual minorities (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer) or gender minorities (e.g., transgender, gender diverse)

**Transgender**: Refers to someone whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex assigned at birth.

## RHODE ISLAND LGBTQIA+ ORGANIZATIONS (LINKS)

- **Youth Pride RI**
- **Haus of Codec**
- **PFLAG**
- **The Womxn Project**
- **QueerRI**

# RESOURCES & REFERENCES

**What is a nonbinary identity [video]:**
https://www.vyond.com/showcase/video/what-is-non-binary-identity

**Using pronouns in therapy:**
https://lgbtqtherapyspace.com/articles/gender-pronouns/

**Safe use of Gender-Affirming undergarments:**
https://docs.google.com/presentation/

**Transgender population in the US:**
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5227946/

**Trans 101:**
https://www.pflagprovidence.org/

**Transgender menstruation:**
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10305890/