



Bringing a Gender-Inclusive Lens to Supporting Survivors

Healthy & Affirmative Communication

Engaging another person to gain assent to sexual activity can often feel awkward. However we actually engage in communication that creates agreement and approval in other interactions every day with friends, coworkers, and family members. We should apply similar practices with our intimate or sexual partners to achieve healthy communication that builds respect and trust.

As one example, asking about and using a person's pronouns affirms the dignity and right to self-determination of that individual. Communication between and among partners that creates shared agreements is about actively seeking to understand each other's interests and desires, along with affirming one another's perspectives, all while respecting individual choices.

Another way to build trust and show respect is to ask a sexual partner how they wish for parts of their body to be referenced and sharing your preferences. This form of affirmative communication is both respectful and can help form a stronger emotional and/or erotic connection. Because most people's sexual or intimate desires, feelings about, or experiences in their bodies can change over time, this and other conversations about sex are important to have with new partners and to revisit with long-term sexual partners.

When we bring a gender inclusive lens to our communication prior to sexual activity, we illuminate affirmative ways that better include the interests or desires of nonbinary and transgender individuals. This can bring into focus other important opportunities for individuals to agree to intimate and sexual activity.

Supporting Trans-Identified & Nonbinary Survivors

Our institution is committed to providing informed, compassionate, and respectful care to everyone in our community who experience sexual or gender-based harm through our CARE offices, our centers for LGBTQIA+ support and community-known as "LGBT Centers" on many UC campuses- and our Title IX Office.

We also recognize that many trans identified or nonbinary survivors will turn first to a friend or loved one when seeking help. While you're not expected to serve as a counselor or therapist, there are some actions that you can take that will support their healing and help connect them to additional resources for ongoing support.

- **Listen** to the survivor: let them choose what they share with you and avoid asking intrusive questions
- **Affirm** their experience: let them know that you don't see them differently and they are not to blame for what happened to them
- **Support** the survivor in ways they choose: you may ask if they need help in focusing their breathing, if they wish for physical comfort like a hug or hand-holding; if they would like to know about resources available to them
- **Connect to resources if desired:** this can mean helping the person call a crisis line, walking them to the CARE office, or sharing online resources
- **Learn more about supporting survivors:** [Here's one resource](#) to get started.