

Transitioning in the Workplace: A Guide for Trans Employees

Produced by the **HRC Foundation**

This guide is intended to help transgender people to navigate aspects of their transition related to the workplace. If you are an employer who wishes to support your transgender employees, you may also consult HRC's Trans Toolkit for Employers.

Transitioning in the workplace can be a big step in living openly as your full, authentic self. It can offer many benefits such as freedom to express your gender, support from your colleagues and increased confidence. Many transgender and non-binary people wish to transition while maintaining safety, comfort, and healthy professional development. We hope you use this guide to learn about transitioning in the workplace and how to successfully navigate workplace transitions.

Applying to Jobs While Transitioning

Whether applying for jobs or transitioning at your current workplace, it's important to remember that you are in control of your transition. Only you can decide who, if anyone, to disclose your gender identity to. Information related to your gender identity (such as sex assigned at birth) may be confidential medical information that does not need to be shared with those who do not need to know. Furthermore, you may choose to begin your transition at one workplace while continuing it at another. You may also choose when to begin certain aspects of your transition based on whether your organization has an inclusive environment or healthcare policy.

Applying to jobs while transgender or non-binary can sometimes feel like a confusing process. If your name or pronouns are different from what's listed on government identification documents, you may find it helpful to apply using the name and pronouns by which you wish to be referred. Unfortunately, your legal name will likely be required for payroll and retirement accounts. For this reason, you may be forced to disclose your transgender or non-binary identity while being onboarded. However, this information should otherwise remain confidential, and there is no reason for your other colleagues to know you as anything other than how you wish to be identified.

If you choose to disclose your trans identity during interviews or onboarding, you may also discuss necessary time off for transition related purposes. This can include time off for surgery, doctor's appointments or personal time off to manage your transition. You may wish to ask for an onboarding form to see if there is any relevant information related to sexual orientation and gender identity of employees. No matter your position, even if you are an intern or part-time employee, you deserve a comfortable workplace environment. As long as it is safe and you are ready, publicly transitioning can allow you to grow your career as your authentic self.

Creating an Action Plan

In 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, Georgia that makes it clear that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited under the federal employment non-discrimination law known as Title VII. However, you may still wish to work with colleagues and supervisors to develop a smooth plan for transitioning in the workplace.

If there is someone in your workplace that you trust, such as a close work partner or friend, you may wish to tell them about your transition first in order to gain an ally. Next, you may come out to your organization's management or human resources representatives in order to create an action plan for transitioning at your workplace. If your organization has a coming out guide or non-discrimination policy, consult it for advice specific to your workplace.

Many organizations are committed to creating diverse workforces and retaining talented people from all backgrounds. When you decide to transition at work, some of the things you may wish to discuss are updating personal information such as your name, pronouns or employee photograph in internal systems. You may wish to decide on the use of gendered facilities such as bathrooms or changing rooms. If you plan to make a formal announcement of your transition, relevant information such as your email address and company photos should be ready in advance with your proper gender identity and expression.

If you plan to change your gender expression as part of your transition, you can discuss a timeline for when you plan to make this change. If you plan to medically transition, it is important to discuss time off for visits to medical providers. If your organization has an insurance policy, you can consult it for information on transition-related care. Even if you do not plan to medically transition, you may want time off to adjust to your new gender expression. Consider talking to your supervisors about the possibility of temporarily working from home so that you may be comfortable while transitioning.

Coming Out to Your Coworkers

After creating an action plan, one of the first steps you may want to take is coming out to your coworkers. There are many ways you may wish to do this. You can choose to come out to your coworkers individually, or first to a small team. You may wish to come out to your coworkers in person, or through an organization-wide email. Timing may also factor into your decision on when to come out. You could choose to come out once you are comfortable expressing your gender identity at work, or once a certain projection is completed and you may have more of your team's attention. Upper management can play a key support role such as being alongside you in meetings or forwarding a coming out email from you. The presence of upper management may signal to your organization that you are accepted and welcome as yourself.

After coming out, your coworkers may be curious about your transition. If you do not wish to answer questions yourself, you may wish to ask an HR representative to answer questions on your behalf. Unfortunately, some of your coworkers may even have a negative reaction to your coming out. This may be due to ignorance or a deeper feeling of transphobia. It is important to work with your supervisors and HR representatives to outline what is and is not acceptable behavior, and how to handle negative reactions to your transition.

One common issue many transgender people experience is misgendering. Your colleagues may, from time to time, mistakenly use the wrong name or pronouns. Although this is often accidental, repeated instances of misgendering can escalate into a serious issue. It is also inappropriate for supervisors or coworkers to ask a transgender employee their name assigned at birth. It is inappropriate to ask any employee, whether or not they are transgender, about medical details. Nor is it appropriate to assign them transgender-related advocacy work that you would not assign a non-transgender person in the same role. You may wish to ask your supervisors or HR personnel for a plan - either disciplinary or educational - to deal with these situations.

Once you come out, there is no need to use anything but your chosen name and pronouns with your colleagues. However, it is important to remember that this information has the possibility of spreading. If you see your coworkers in person or on social media, they may accidentally use your chosen name and pronouns around friends and family you may not be out to. Ultimately, coming out to your coworkers is best handled on a case by case basis. Explore what feels comfortable to you and speak with your organization's management about creating a plan.

Ongoing Support

How you decide to transition is ultimately up to you. You may wish to make some changes immediately, while making others more gradually. However you decide to transition, it is important to know your rights and find allies who can support you. Ask if your organization has an LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group, or perhaps consider starting one with fellow LGBTQ+ colleagues. Remember that for many, transitioning may seem like a difficult or lengthy process, but it becomes easier as time goes on, and it can feel liberating to live as your full, authentic self.