



## Collecting and Documenting Information Related to Gender and Sexuality.

Documentation is an important tool for communication and improving outcomes for individuals we serve. Understanding an individual's identity is important for being able to provide culturally responsive services. This tip sheet provides guidance for how to collect and document information relative to gender identity and sexual orientation.

### Talking about Gender Identity

Every individual has a gender identity, as well as experience related to that identity. This experience is often a core component of someone's identity and influences their wellbeing.


It is important to start by understanding how someone identifies, and to then go a step further and understand what that experience has been like for them. (refer to SOGIE Disclosure script)

### Talking About Relationship and Sexuality

Depending on the nature of your role with your client, it may or may not be appropriate to discuss sexuality explicitly. However, assumptions about sexuality are often embedded in the language that we use to ask people about their relationships. Samples for how to begin a conversation about relationship, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior in an inclusive manner are listed below:

- *Who are the important people in your life?  
Are you in any significant relationships?*
- *Do you have a partner or spouse (rather than boyfriend/girlfriend/wife/husband)*
- *Are you sexually active? With boys/girls, men/women, or both?*
- *How do you identify? (sexual identity/orientation)*
- *Do you think of yourself as straight, bisexual, gay, lesbian or something else?*
- *Have you ever felt unsafe because of how you identify?*

#### Checklist for Effective Planning and Communication

- ✓ Talk to all people about gender and sexuality, not just those who you think might be LGBTQ.
  - ✓ Share your preferred name and pronouns when you meet someone. Ask them to share theirs.
  - ✓ Don't assume. Ask each individual how they identify with respect to their gender and sexual orientation.
  - ✓ Be prepared to know how you will respond if someone questions why you are asking.
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## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q- If I ask someone about their identity or their gender pronouns and they get offended, how do I respond?**

A: Individuals may respond defensively if they feel you are targeting them for some reason. If you ask all people these questions, responding to this becomes easier because you can share that you ask this of everyone. You could respond by saying: I am sorry if I upset you with this question. I want to make sure you, and the other individuals I interact with, feel respected and supported, so it's important to ask everyone these questions rather than just making assumptions. I want to learn more about you from you.

**Q- How do I respond if someone asks me what it means to be transgender?**

A: You can respond by saying: For some people, their sense of themselves as male, female or another gender doesn't match the gender people decided they were when they were born based on their body. When that happens, some people use the term "transgender" for themselves. There are also some people who are born with variations of hormones, chromosomes and reproductive sexual anatomy which are often called intersex conditions. For us, it is important that everyone is safe and supported, so we ask about this to make sure we are meeting everyone's need. Do you have any questions about this?

**Q- If someone tells me they want me to start using a different name or pronoun than what they originally told me, when do I switch, or how do I know if I should change how I refer to them?**

A: You should begin to use the name someone is currently asking you to use as soon as they ask, even if you do not understand the change or trust that the change in their identity is real. If an individual asks you to call them something that would be inappropriate for someone of any gender (e.g. derogatory terms), it is appropriate to talk to them about your concerns with the use of that language.

### Concepts Defined

**Gender Identity** is an individual's internal sense of their gender

**Gender Pronouns** are the words people use to refer to someone instead of their name. Commonly used pronouns include he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, e/em/eirs and ze/hir/hirs

**Legal Sex** is the gender listed on an individual's birth certificate or drivers license/state ID

**Sex Assigned at Birth** is the gender designation assigned to a child at birth, often based strictly on anatomy

**Q- What do I do if an individual's parent or other relative wants me to call their family member by their legal name, against the individual's wishes?**

A: When there is conflict, ask the person you are working with how they would like you to refer to them around their family, etc. if they would like you to use preferred name and pronouns, then it is appropriate to continue to do so. If someone challenges you on it, one appropriate way to respond is by sharing that we know from the research that individuals do best when they are affirmed and supported. Therefore, it is the practice of DCFS staff to use the name and pronouns an individual states they prefer.

**Q- What do I document if someone comes out to me, but they aren't out to other people?**

A: In general, decisions to document should be informed by the individual's wishes, an understanding of who they are out to, who they feel is unsafe to share this with, who will see the information if documented, and how relevant the information is to case planning. Individuals should also be informed in advance about who will have access to documented information (refer to Information Flow Chart and to SOGIE disclosure form)

