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# EVERYBODY'S GOTTA GO:

## The Importance of Restroom Access

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### Overview & Rationale

Many people take the availability and use of safe restrooms for granted. But for some people, deciding whether, when, and where to use a restroom is a major safety concern. It may affect their ability to work, interact in their community, travel for work or leisure, and generally participate in society. This lesson helps participants explore issues pertaining to bathrooms that may affect transgender people (and sometimes cisgender people whom others perceive might be transgender) differently, and offers suggestions for addressing them. It can help participants gain knowledge, build empathy and reduce anti-transgender prejudice.

### Audience

This activity is designed for people who are new to transgender-related topics or who have not had the opportunity to learn about the importance of bathroom access as a fundamental need. This lesson works best with groups of 10-30 people, and can be used with groups of up to 50 people, if facilitated carefully.

### Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Describe 2 reasons working to insure access to restrooms is essential for equality and health
- Identify 2 groups of people (other than transgender people) who would benefit from the availability of single-user restrooms

### Background Knowledge for Facilitators

It will be useful for facilitators to know about the physical, emotional, logistical, health, and safety risks transgender people face when using restrooms outside of their homes. If needed, review *Bathroom Access: Talking Points for Facilitators* to become familiar with these issues.

### Time

- Preparation: 15 minutes
- Implementation: 30 minutes

### Materials

- Easel paper & markers (or computer, projector & PowerPoint)

### Preparation

- Review *Bathroom Access: Talking Points for Facilitators*. Use other resources in this book, or online, for further information on this topic.
- Write the 3 interview questions from Procedure step 3 on easel paper or insert them in a PowerPoint slide for easy reference, so that participants can keep them in mind during the discussion.

### Procedure

1. Explain: This lesson is designed to help participants better understand the challenges transgender people face when using restrooms outside of their homes—when they are at work, school, out in their communities, etc.
2. Explain that restrooms often cause stress for transgender people because they are sex-segregated. Many people take the availability and use of safe restrooms for granted. But for transgender people, deciding whether, when, and where to use a restroom is a major safety concern. It may affect their ability to work, interact in their community, travel for work or leisure, and generally participate in society. This can also affect anyone who expresses their gender differently from what

others expect. Sometimes gender non-conforming cisgender people are also affected by the lack of restrooms that are safe for transgender people.

3. Ask participants to turn to a neighboring participant and “interview” them using 3 questions (below). Explain that each pair will have about 3 minutes for one to ask the other the questions. When the facilitator calls time, the pairs will switch roles. Explain that after each person has had a chance to interview their neighbor, the facilitator will call the large group back to order and invite participants to share their experiences. While the pairs are interviewing each other, circulate among the pairs and offer support to each pair as needed.

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Can you think of a time when you (or a loved one) needed to access a safe restroom and were unable to do so? What happened in that situation?
  - What is the importance of consistent access to restrooms for all people (cisgender and transgender) where they are confident they will be safe?
  - What are some possible concerns people may have about transgender people and restrooms? Are any of these concerns potentially stereotyped or based on false information? If not, what information have we used to determine that these concerns are legitimate risks (as opposed to expressions of discomfort)?
4. Once each pair has completed their interview and time has been called, bring the pairs back into the large group. Ask for someone who is willing to start, and invite several participants to share some of the themes that arose for each question.
  5. Lead a short discussion using the following questions, and use *Bathroom Access: Talking Points for Facilitators* to guide the discussion.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what ways might access to restrooms affect transgender people’s job and school performance?

- How does access to restrooms affect transgender people outside of work and school?
  - Would people who are non-binary (or cisgender people who are gender non-conforming) be affected similarly, or differently?
  - How might some cisgender people be affected by anti-transgender prejudice regarding restrooms?
  - What are the impacts of the availability of individual, single-person unisex or gender-neutral restrooms on people who are transgender?
  - What are the potential impacts of the availability of individual, single-person unisex or gender-neutral restrooms on people who are not transgender?
6. If using this as a standalone lesson, conclude the activity by giving participants about 5 minutes to return to their pairs, brainstorm slogans for gender-neutral restroom campaigns and report back to their peers. For example, Single Stall Restrooms: The Best Cure for Pee Shyness, or Private Restrooms: So You Don’t Have to Hear Anyone Fart, or [A picture of a toilet] Everyone Deserves Access to a Safe Restroom.

#### Evaluation Questions

- ✓ What are 2 reasons working to insure access to restrooms is essential for equality and health?
- ✓ What are 2 groups of people (other than transgender people) who would benefit from the availability of single-user restrooms?

Note from the authors:  
This lesson is intended for implementation with adult audiences and is not designed for use with youth audiences.

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Some participants may resist the idea of allowing transgender people to use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity. Often this resistance is based on a fear that transgender people are predators, or that people who are not transgender will pretend to be transgender to access bathrooms for sexual or nefarious purposes. It is important to stress that when violence or sexual assault occurs in bathrooms, transgender and gender non-conforming people are much more likely than cisgender people to be victims and are very, very rarely perpetrators. It can be helpful to refocus the discussion on why access to restrooms is important for all people, how laws are already in place to prevent harassment in restrooms, or how policing restrooms is

unnecessary, unrealistic and an invasion of privacy for everyone.

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Participants may have detailed questions about the legalities of bathroom use; they may, for example, ask specific questions about local or state regulations in their area. Be sure to include the discussion points on these topics listed under Background Knowledge for Facilitators under the discussion section of the lesson, and *Bathroom Access: Talking Points for Facilitators* as a guide.

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Participants may be surprised to learn about proposed bathroom bills, or simply not understand why some people have so much focus on how, whether, where, and when others should be allowed to use the restroom.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

Or, they may have a difficult time believing that this could happen. Refer to the discussion points and Background Knowledge for Facilitators, and encourage participants to seek out additional information about this issue. Remind participants that because this issue is rooted largely in anti-transgender prejudice, myth, and misinformation, it's important to know the facts and work toward providing safe restrooms for everyone.

# Bathroom Access: Talking Points for **FACILITATORS**



## Impacts

- Transgender people frequently experience discrimination, such as being questioned or challenged about whether they are in the “correct” bathroom, being verbally or physically harassed or threatened, or fearing for their physical safety. So do people who are not transgender, but whom others believe don’t look masculine or feminine enough for the bathroom they’re in.
- Many transgender people report avoiding using public bathrooms. Or they may restrict their fluid intake. This can have a significant negative impact on physical health, (including extensive dehydration or urinary tract infections) and mental health (including anxiety, depression and isolation).
- Some transgender people avoid situations in which they will be away from safe or private bathrooms for extended periods of time, try to create a “buddy system” to ensure their safety, or go out of their way to find restrooms that are gender-neutral or private.
- Many transgender people, people with non-binary genders, and people who are perceived as gender non-conforming must think every day about whether they have access to a safe restroom at work, in school, in restaurants and coffee shops, at bus and train terminals, at airports, when they are out the community or traveling elsewhere, and generally wherever they are outside of their homes.
- Transgender people may use a lot of time and energy trying to structure their work or school day to avoid having to use the bathroom. This may also affect their work or school performance, if they need to leave early, arrive late, or try to take breaks to travel back home or to another safe location in order to use the restroom.

## Risk, Harassment, and Discrimination

- Transgender people are at risk when using restrooms outside the home. It is common for transgender people to be harassed by cisgender people in restrooms. In one survey, fifty percent of transgender respondents reported having experienced harassment or assault in a public restroom (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2002). When this happens, the person may be verbally or physically harassed, asked to leave the restroom, removed by the establishment in which the restroom is located, or arrested by the authorities.
- There are no recorded instances of cisgender people being harassed by transgender people in restrooms. And, a recent report found no instances of harassment or inappropriate behavior in 17 of the largest school districts in the country in which transgender students are allowed to use the restrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity (Media Matters, 2015).
- Most people, whether transgender, cisgender, or another gender, simply wish to use the restroom in peace, and leave.
- Sometimes cisgender people find themselves affected by anti-transgender prejudice in restrooms when someone else perceives them as transgender. If this happens, the cisgender person might suffer the same difficulty as a transgender person. They may be verbally or physically harassed, asked to leave the restroom, removed by the establishment in which the restroom is located, or arrested by the authorities.

## Myth, Misinformation, and More Discrimination

- There is a great deal of myth and misinformation about transgender people and restroom use. Because of this, some people are fearful or angry when they think about transgender people's access to restrooms, or if they believe a transgender person may have access to a restroom they might use—or to any restroom at all.
- In 2015, several states introduced laws that would jail people whose chromosomes or birth sex do not match the restrooms they are using. Some of these bills also proposed a “bounty” of up to \$4,000 be paid to anyone who turns in someone they believe is using the “wrong” restroom to the authorities. Other laws have proposed fines or criminal charges for schools or business owners if they allow a transgender person to use the restroom.
- There are already laws in place that make harassment in restrooms (or anywhere) illegal, which makes additional legislation unnecessary and shows that the abovementioned laws exist solely to penalize transgender people.
- Multiple-person restrooms don't prevent people from entering who seek to harass others. Bathrooms with multiple stalls don't have a “force field” or other magical powers to keep such individuals out.
- Requiring transgender people to use only a specific restroom (for instance, requiring a person to use only a single-person, gender-neutral restroom, or requiring a person to use a restroom that is not open to all other members of the public/employees/students) is disrespectful, an invasion of privacy, and could reveal someone's transgender status to others and thereby place them at risk for violence. In some places it is against the law.

## Strategies and Solutions

- There are strategies that can assist transgender people in finding access to safe restrooms. These include websites and apps that provide listings of single-person, gender-neutral restrooms in some communities, making plans in advance to visit the restroom accompanied by a trusted friend, seeking out only single-user restrooms (those with “unisex” or gender-neutral signage that have facilities inside for one person, and a locking door).
- At its root, much of the fear and anger others harbor about transgender people and restrooms is a reflection of anti-transgender prejudice, and assumptions that people with penises (cisgender or transgender) will use them to harm women, if given the opportunity.
- Reducing anti-transgender prejudice so that transgender people could simply use any restroom that corresponds to their gender identity would eliminate the need for many of these strategies.
- Providing some single-user restrooms is one way to provide more options not only for transgender people and people whose gender expression differs from what others might expect, but for many other people as well. Single-user restrooms may also meet the needs of people in a variety of situations, including:
  - o parents assisting a small child or a person of another gender,
  - o people accompanying an elderly relative of another gender who requires assistance,
  - o people who have personal care attendants of another gender than themselves
  - o people who are very shy and find it difficult to use a public restroom if others are present
  - o anyone seeking additional privacy or security while using a restroom.

GREEN, E.R. & MAURER, L.M. (2015). THE TEACHING TRANSGENDER TOOLKIT: A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO INCREASING KNOWLEDGE, DECREASING PREJUDICE & BUILDING SKILLS. ITHACA, NY: PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF THE SOUTHERN FINGER LAKES: OUT FOR HEALTH. ISBN: 978-0-9966783-0-8 Available at: [www.teachingtransgender.com](http://www.teachingtransgender.com)