



**3.**

**MENTAL  
HEALTH CARE**

## GETTING SUPPORT IS GOOD!

Psychotherapy can be an important part of gender-affirming medical care. It can also serve as treatment for conditions like depression, anxiety or bipolar, and it can help us learn new skills for coping with feelings, problem-solving or changing behaviors. Trans or non-binary individuals may choose to work with a therapist for many reasons, including that some medical providers and insurance carriers, as discussed in the section Health Care in Wisconsin, may require an assessment of readiness for hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or gender-affirming surgical procedures. Others may not require the assistance of a therapist for gender-affirming purposes, but instead choose to work with a therapist for reasons related to diagnosed mental health conditions or simply to learn new skills for managing feelings and experiences.

Talk therapy with a therapist may be time-limited or to help us with a specific issue. For others, talk therapy may be an ongoing part of their lives for years. Regardless of why we might seek or need to work with a therapist, it's important to know that caring for our mental health is just as critical to our well-being as caring for our physical health. Working with a therapist can be beneficial for so many reasons – simply hearing ourselves process our feelings by talking out loud is sometimes an enlightening experience. Ideally, therapy is more than just talking (or complaining) about problems. Talk therapy should be solution-oriented, with the goal dependent on our needs.

Though society's recognition of the need for and benefit of psychotherapy has eliminated a great deal of stigma that may have existed in the past, some individuals are deterred from seeking professional assistance because of their bias. Additionally, trans and non-binary individuals may hesitate to seek out talk therapy because of concerns about how an individual therapist might respond to or work with issues about gender identity, or because of negative experiences with therapists in the past.

While the reasons that transgender and non-binary individuals may be hesitant to engage mental health providers are valid, it is to our benefit to consider whether therapy is right for us, whether for gender-affirming purposes or not.

Finding and choosing a therapist can seem a daunting task, and particularly so for trans and non-binary individuals, for individuals who are survivors of sexual or other violence, and for people of color or others whose identities are multiply marginalized.

Below you will find guidance and options for identifying and evaluating trans-knowledgeable therapists. It's important to recognize that, like all parts of our lives, we may seek therapy for reasons related to gender or for other reasons. Similarly, we need not feel compelled to work with a professional who specializes in gender issues. Many trans or non-binary people work with therapists who are not specially experienced to assist with issues related to gender identity, and that's okay. What's important is that you feel safe and respected with the therapist and believe that your goals can be satisfied by working with that individual.

## HOW TO FIND A THERAPIST

While many transgender or non-binary people work successfully with therapists, identifying trans-knowledgeable therapists, and choosing and working with a therapist, can be more complex than for the general population. For transgender people who are also sexual assault or other trauma survivors, finding a knowledgeable therapist can seem even more daunting. However, there are several resources to use as starting points for finding a trans-knowledgeable therapist.

FORGE maintains an online directory of trans-knowledgeable mental health providers in Wisconsin who have been vetted by trans or non-binary individuals who have used their services. Consider using the directory as a starting point for your search. FORGE's mental health provider directory is found at: <https://forge-wi.org/providers/mental-health-providers/>. (See "Additional Resources" at the end of this section for specialty providers and clinics serving trans and non-binary individuals in Wisconsin.)

**Other online resources for finding a therapist include:**

### Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)

<http://glma.org/>

*Offers referral section for physicians, including psychiatrists.*

### American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT)

<http://www.aasect.org/referral-directory>

*Professional organization of providers who focus on sexuality issues (not everyone may be trans-knowledgeable or trauma-informed).*

### National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

<http://www.nami.org>

NAMI offers support groups in every state in the country, usually with support structures for family members, friends, and allies, in addition to people living with mental health conditions.

Check out local resources in your area. Service providers or resources like LGBTQ+ community centers or college and university LGBTQ+ resource centers often maintain directories or referral lists of providers. If you work with other types of professionals who are trans-knowledgeable, like a doctor or social worker, ask them to recommend a knowledgeable therapist.

FORGE also offers a guide to help you through the process of finding and working with a therapist. For trans and non-binary survivors of violence, in particular, FORGE's "Let's Talk About It! A Transgender Survivor's Guide to Accessing Therapy," addresses many specific questions that trans and non-binary survivors may ask, like how to decide if therapy is right and, if it is, how to choose the best type of therapy, find referrals and choose a therapist. The guide also discusses trans-specific survivor issues such as dealing with Standards of Care issues, addressing any shame, body image, or gender dysphoria issues, and navigating sex-segregated services. The guide is available on FORGE's website at: <https://forge-forward.org/2015/05/07/lets-talk-about-it-a-transgender-survivors-guide-to-accessing-therapy/>.

## Questions You May Want to Ask When Screening Therapists....

### About Type of Therapy Offered...

- How long have you been in practice?
- What is your theoretical approach to therapy (in general)? Psychodynamic, behavioral, cognitive, systemic, family systems, supportive, humanistic, existential, transpersonal, somatic? [Ask them to explain the differences. A combination can sometimes be best.]
- What experience have you had in treating traumatic stress conditions?
- What specific trauma treatment modalities are you trained in (and use)? [Ask them to describe any modality you aren't familiar with.]
- Are you willing to work with my physician, pastor or other support/healing team?
- If I were in crisis, would I be able to reach you? How do you handle crises?
- How do you decide which approach is best for your clients? [Note: Listen for if the therapist involves you in the decision-making process.]
- How do you involve key family members, partner(s) or friends? Can I bring my partner or family members into therapy with me?
- Do you work with your clients to design therapeutic goals and treatment plans?
- How and when will progress be assessed?

### About Trans-Related Services...

- What is your experience working with [transgender/gender nonconforming/ \_\_\_\_\_ ] clients?
- What percentage of your client-base is transgender or lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer?
- Are you connected to the transgender or LGBT community?
- Do you know of transgender or LGBT resources and services (not necessarily mental health focused)?
- Do you have good working relationships with psychiatrists and other mental health providers who are transgender or LGBT-savvy?
- What training do you have in working with [transgender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, leather, polyamorous... [fill in your identity(ies) here...]] individuals?

### About General Policies...

- Questions about fees.
- How do you protect my confidentiality? Who (besides you) will have access to my files?
- Do you have a grievance policy?

See also the screening interview checklist provided at the end of this section.

(FORGE. (April 2015). Let's Talk About It! A Transgender Survivor's Guide to Accessing Therapy, 58-60. Retrieved on January 29, 2019, from <https://forge-forward.org/2015/05/07/lets-talk-about-it-a-transgender-survivors-guide-to-accessing-therapy/>.)

## HEALING FROM VIOLENCE

As a community, LGBTQ+ people regularly confront a mix of circumstances that place us at greater risk for sexual assault, from societal bias and marginalization to lower socioeconomic status. LGBTQ+ communities also experience higher rates of hate-motivated violence, which can also take the form of sexual assault. Societal views of LGBTQ+ people and stigma around our intimate relationships can sometimes lead to intimate partner violence stemming from shame. Trans and non-binary individuals have particularly unique needs when it comes to preventing violence and supporting and caring for survivors who are healing from violence.

Many people believe that incidents of violence occur most often between strangers. The reality is that most types of violence are perpetrated by someone we know, including many hate crimes.

Below you'll find information and resources about reducing risks for experiencing violence and where to get help if violence does occur.

### Intimate Partner Violence (and Domestic Violence)

When intimate partner violence occurs, it is not your fault.

Resources are available in Wisconsin to support transgender and non-binary individuals who are leaving a home environment that is abusive or are healing from experiencing violence.

#### What actions can you take if you think you might be experiencing abuse in a relationship?

1. **Safety Planning.** Read through FORGE's "Safety Planning: A Guide for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals who are experiencing intimate partner violence." Consider what steps you might take to help increase your own safety. Also consider working through this safety planning tool with a friend, therapist, or someone you like and trust. <http://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/safety-planning-tool.pdf>
2. **Safe Place.** Identify at least one person or one place where you can go if you are in immediate danger.
3. **Seek Assistance.** Locate a trans-friendly anti-violence agency in your area. LGBTQ+ anti-violence agencies work to prevent and respond to incidents of violence, and they can provide or refer you to sources of advocacy, support and services. The National Coalition

Did you know that between 31% and 50% of trans people experience intimate partner violence in their lifetimes?

(Brown, T.N.T., & Herman, J.L. (2015) "Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People: A review of existing research." Retrieved January 28, 2019 from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Intimate-Partner-Violence-and-Sexual-Abuse-among-LGBT-People.pdf>.)

of Anti-Violence Programs maintains a directory of LGBTQ+ anti-violence programs across the country at: <https://avp.org/ncavp-members/>. Note local agencies and keep their contact information available so that you have it if you decide to seek help.

## What actions can you take if you know or suspect that someone you know is experiencing abuse in a relationship?

---

1. **Transgender Power & Control Dynamics.** Familiarize yourself with common “power and control” tactics that are used against transgender and non-binary individuals in relationships where abuse is happening: <http://forge-forward.org/2013/04/power-and-control-tactics/>.
2. **Help With Safety Planning.** Offer to work through the Safety Planning Tool with the person. <http://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/safety-planning-tool.pdf>
3. **Alternatives to Law Enforcement.** It is critical to recognize that engaging law enforcement can be especially dangerous for transgender or non-binary people, especially those who are people of color, who might be undocumented, or whose identities fall into multiple categories of marginalization. Find ways to support the individual experiencing violence and to help facilitate their safety without summoning law enforcement.

## Sexual Assault

---

Sexual assault and other sexual violence affects every community the U.S., including LGBTQ and transgender and non-binary communities. A 2015 national survey revealed that 50% to 65% of transgender or non-binary individuals experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetimes, with people of color, people who are underhoused, people who are incarcerated and sex workers experiencing the highest rates of assault. (James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality. Retrieved May 27, 2019 from <http://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports>)

Trans and non-binary individuals who have experienced sexual assault may be hesitant to report such incidents to law enforcement, and survivors who experience discrimination because of their gender identity are often deterred from seeking help from medical or mental health providers, or shelters, rape crisis centers or other service providers.

If you have experienced sexual violence, locate a trans-friendly anti-violence agency in your area. Many LGBTQ+ agencies have anti-violence programs that work to prevent and respond to incidents of violence, and they can provide or refer you to sources of advocacy, support and services. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs maintains a directory of LGBTQ+ anti-violence programs across the country at: <https://avp.org/ncavp-members/>. Make note of local agencies and keep their contact information available so that you have it if you decide to seek help.

## SAMPLE LETTERS

Therapists who work with transgender individuals often write letters of support. The most common letters of support are letters referring individuals for hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or gender-affirming surgical procedures.

Some trans and non-binary individuals also request a “carry letter” (or “travel letter” or “safe passage letter”), which is intended to inform others about their gender, and, sometimes, the status of their treatment while medically transitioning. Such letters may be particularly useful when traveling to assist with airport security screening encounters.

Below is a sample referral letter for HRT as well as a sample carry letter that you may share with your therapist.

### Sample: Referral Letter for HRT

Date:  
Re:  
DOB:

Dear Dr. :

This letter is to serve as documentation that (name) has been assessed for readiness for hormone replacement therapy (HRT) as per the WPATH Standards of Care, Version 7. (Client name) has been a client of (organization) from (date) to (date). He has been taking hormone blockers for the past [timeframe] (or delete this phrase) and is eager to begin HRT [estrogen/testosterone] as the next step in their medical transition.

(Name) is a (age) year old (gender), who was assigned (male/female) at birth. He notes he first knew his assigned sex differed from his gender identity at (age). He has been living consistently and successfully in the gender role that is congruent with his identity since at least (date). I met with Mr. (name) for an independent mental health evaluation on (date). It is my clinical opinion that he fits the criteria for Gender Dysphoria (of Adulthood/Adolescence) (ICD-9-302.85). He reports symptoms of anxiety, which he feels are exacerbated by the Dysphoria. He relates much of his Gender Dysphoria to the (presence/absence of male/female secondary sex characteristics; provide example). Mr. (name) has expressed a persistent desire for hormone therapy since (date/establishing care with us). (Name) has demonstrated adequate knowledge of the benefits and potential risks of HRT, including the length of time it will take for the full benefits to take effect, heightened risk of cancer and other risks associated with reproductive and sexual health. His friends and family are supportive of his decision to move forward with his transition. He is stably housed in (city).

Additionally, Mr. (name) is psychologically stable for hormone therapy. There is no evidence of any symptoms of psychosis or disturbances in personality. He does not smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, and he has no history of drug abuse. I believe (name) would benefit greatly

both medically and psychologically from hormone therapy. It is recommended that (name) continue in therapy as they begin hormone therapy in order to address any issues that may surface (or delete this line).

Mr. (name) has met the WPATH SOCv7 criteria for hormone therapy. I have discussed risks, benefits, limitations and alternatives of HRT with him. I feel he has an excellent understanding, given his persistent desire for a hormone therapy. I have assessed his readiness, and have decided to fully support his decision to move forward. Given that his insight and judgment are sound, it seems likely that any prescribed medication will be taken in a responsible manner. I hereby recommend and refer Mr. (name) for hormone therapy. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns at (phone #).

Sincerely,

(Name and credentials)

(Gender Health Center. Sample Clearance Letter for HRT (lightly edited by FORGE). Retrieved January 29, 2019, from [https://www.thegenderhealthcenter.org/resources/providers/SAMPLE-Clearance\\_Letter\\_HRT.pdf](https://www.thegenderhealthcenter.org/resources/providers/SAMPLE-Clearance_Letter_HRT.pdf).)

## Sample: Carry/Travel/Safe Passage Letter

[Letter on therapist's or physician's letterhead]

To Whom It May Concern:

Please be advised that [(female) birth name] a.k.a. [(male) chosen name] is undergoing a gender change and is under my direct care (or part of \_\_\_\_ gender program). S/he is participating in a structured program of gender reassignment.

As a part of this complex process, [(male) chosen name] is expected to live and work as a male on a twenty-four hour basis. In addition, a change of name and gender status on all identifying documents is an integral aspect of the identity transformation procedures.

Therefore, I request that you provide the bearer of this letter with your understanding assistance with the reassignment tasks s/he is carrying out.

Thank you for your cooperation. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact program staff.

Sincerely

[Therapist's/physicians's/other provider's signature]



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### **FORGE Mental Health Providers Directory**

<https://forge-wi.org/providers/mental-health-providers/>

*Directory of trans-knowledgeable mental health providers in Wisconsin.*

### **AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin**

<https://www.arcw.org/about-us/locations/>

*Wisconsin's largest HIV health care provider with 10 locations in the state; offers medical, dental and mental health clinics, pharmacy, dedicated social services, including food pantries, legal representation and case management.*

### **American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT)**

<http://www.aasect.org/referral-directory>

*Professional organization of providers who focus on sexuality issues (not everyone may be trans-knowledgeable or trauma-informed).*

### **Children's Hospital of Wisconsin Gender Health Clinic**

<https://www.chw.org/medical-care/endocrine/gender-health-clinic>

*Provides medical care, behavioral health care, education and support to gender-expansive youth under age 17 and their families.*

### **Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin Inclusion Clinic**

<https://www.froedtert.com/locations/clinic/inclusion-clinic-sargeant-health-center>

*Medical care specifically designed to comprehensively meet the health care needs of the LGBTQ+ community, including primary and specialty care, behavioral health and gender-affirming care.*

### **Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)**

<http://glma.org/>

*Offers referral section for physicians, including psychiatrists.*

### **Howard-Brown Health (Chicago), Trans and Gender Nonconforming Health**

<https://howardbrown.org/programs-services/transgender-health/>

*Offers primary care, specialty care, behavioral health care, pharmacy and case management staff who are sensitive to transgender and non-binary patient needs.*

### **Madison Police Department – MPD Pride**

<https://www.cityofmadison.com/police/community/pride/>

*MPD Pride is a LGBT resource group comprised of LGBT officers and allies within the Madison Police Department. Officers in the group serve as the points-of-contact for Madison's LGBTQ+ community at large, offering support to LGBTQ+ individuals in need of police services. Contact MPD Pride at [mpdpride@cityofmadison.com](mailto:mpdpride@cityofmadison.com).*

### **Milwaukee Police Department – LGBT Community Liaisons**

<https://city.milwaukee.gov/Directory/ERC/Shares/Quick-Links/LGBTQ-Liaisons.htm#.XPQrEYhKhaQ>

*The Milwaukee Police Department designates one or more liaisons to the LGBTQ+ community-at-large in Milwaukee. Liaisons are available as points-of-contact for individual community members. LGBTQ+ Police Liaison: **Captain Heather Wurth**, District 4, [hwurth@milwaukee.gov](mailto:hwurth@milwaukee.gov), (414) 935-7222.*

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

<http://www.nami.org>

NAMI offers support groups in every state in the country, usually with support structures for family members, friends, and allies, in addition to people living with mental health conditions.

**VA Health Care Services for Veterans with LGBT and Related Identities**

<https://www.patientcare.va.gov/LGBT/index.asp>

*Medical care for all Veterans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity; offers gender-affirming care, including hormone replacement therapy; does not perform gender-affirming surgeries, but offers pre- and post-surgical care; social supports for LGBTQ+ Veterans; LGBT Veteran care coordinator at all facilities.*

**University of California, San Francisco, Center of Excellence for Transgender Health**

<http://transhealth.ucsf.edu/>

*Transgender Health Learning Center offers a wide range of information and resources for individuals and service providers specific to primary and gender-affirming care; publishes the Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Nonbinary People.*

**UW Health Gender Services**

<https://www.uwhealth.org/gender-transgender-services/gender-services/51499>

*Provides trans-knowledgeable primary, behavioral health and gender-affirming care.*

**UW Health Pediatric and Adolescent Transgender Health (PATH) Clinic**

<https://www.uwhealthkids.org/pediatric-diabetes/pediatric-and-adolescent-transgender-health-path-clinic/41750>

*Provides medical care, education and resources to gender-expansive and transgender children and families about medically supporting gender affirmation or transition in youth.*

**University of Wisconsin System**

<https://www.wisconsin.edu/lgbtq-resources/lgbtq-directors/>

*Statewide directory of campus LGBTQ+ resource centers.*

**Wisconsin Transgender Health Coalition**

[witranshealth.org](http://witranshealth.org)

*Working for equitable access to health and health care for transgender, intersex, non-binary, and gender nonconforming (TING) people. Directory of trans-knowledgeable medical providers and therapists in Wisconsin.*