

## **Navigating Sex-Segregated Spaces: Bathrooms/Locker Room Issues**

Using bathrooms, locker rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities is an integral part of life for everyone. Everyone needs to pee.

Allowing people to access restrooms, locker rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities that are congruent with their gender identity is more than just a matter of respect, it is also a matter of safety. Confrontations that arise when people are perceived to be in the wrong bathroom obviously involve intense emotions and fears, and there are many documented cases where it has escalated to violence or become a traumatic experience. Allowing transpeople to choose which bathroom they use can reduce this risk.

Because many transgender people have an indeterminate appearance, confrontations may occur regardless of which bathroom the transgender person chooses to use. However, everyone knows their own situation and is best able to make decisions about their own safety. Well-informed, respectful policies allow people make their own decisions about what is the most comfortable and safe bathroom for them. What is an appropriate and safe option for one transperson may be unreasonable or dangerous for another.

These are some examples of problems that have arisen in situations where employers have not established a clear precedent of respect:

- A confrontation may occur when someone, whether they are trans or not, is accused of being in the wrong bathroom. This confrontation alone can be painful and humiliating.
- A confrontation can escalate and someone may threaten or even attack the transgender person.
- A confrontation can also escalate if security or police are called. A lack of awareness or training of the security or police can lead to misunderstandings and possible abusive behavior by security or police officers.
- Some employers have tried to address the situation by demanding that transgender people use a bathroom or locker room that is not congruent with their gender identity. This can be a degrading and humiliating experience as well as potentially unsafe.
- Some employers have also required transgender people to walk long distances to use unisex facilities. While some people may choose to do this for themselves, forcing them to do so puts an extreme burden on the trans employee as well as singles them out for potential harassment by coworkers. Depending on your jurisdiction and any bargaining contracts, this could also be an unfair labor practice.
- With policies where trans people have little options in bathrooms that best provides them both safety and basic human dignity, some transgender people have chosen to avoid using public restrooms at work or at school which can lead to significant health problems.

- In any of these scenarios, a hostile environment is created which makes working and/or living in it stressful, painful.

Institutions and businesses everywhere are finding how valuable it can be to have policies to address the myriad of issues surrounding gender identity and gender expression. Solutions for the problems described above are numerous, and depend in part on the resources of the institution and the nature of the facilities where conflict has or might occur. In all situations the concerns of gender variant people should be considered.

Solutions other institutions have utilized:

- Education and Trainings: Quite often hostilities arise around restrooms due to misunderstanding about trans people's lives. Diversity trainings and educational events and programs that include topics of gender variance help shed light on these issues and facilitate a safer and more respectful environment for everyone.
- Unisex bathrooms: Many places have single stall bathrooms. Unisex bathrooms can be helpful if an employee or student feels uncomfortable sharing facilities with transgender people, or if a transgender person feels uncomfortable using available sex-segregated facilities. Making the locations of these restrooms known can help alleviate tension. Often single stall bathrooms are marked men's or women's. A quick change of signs would make it known that any gender could utilize these facilities comfortably.
- Designated bathrooms: While it isn't an ideal situation, when unisex bathrooms aren't readily available, but other bathrooms are, designating a single bathroom for employees unwilling to share a bathroom with trans coworkers can be an option.
- Modification of locker rooms: More often than not it is easy to modify locker rooms to provide privacy for anyone who feels they need it (for instance, a privacy curtain around one or two shower heads in shower facilities).
- Access to faculty, staff facilities: These can be made available in situations in which safe or private locker room facilities would be difficult to provide, but faculty or staff facilities are available.
- Locker-room schedules: In some cases where resources are limited a special time can be established in shower rooms where either those uncomfortable sharing facilities with trans folks, or trans folks feeling unsafe in facilities can negotiate a schedule so they will not utilize the facilities at the same time.

It is worth noting that student, employees, or customers have many reasons to want privacy when utilizing facilities aside from issues that arise around gender variance. People with children, who are disabled, or who are care takers, are just a few of the people who report that having single-stall facilities, or special privacy options in locker or dressing rooms have made them feel much more at ease.