

6 Ways Cis Folks Can Actually Help on Trans Day of Remembrance

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I've attended Transgender Day of Remembrance vigils for over a decade, and every year I see well-meaning cisgender people at those vigils who I never see a second time. I've had acquaintances come with me to these events to express their sadness, yet find themselves at a loss when challenged to personally contribute to the prevention of harassment, discrimination, and violence against trans people.

I've written this guide to help cisgender people take concrete steps towards creating a world where trans people can live in peace. To make these steps easier to remember throughout the year, I've organized them into six simple words that start with the letter L.

Look. If you don't know any trans people, look for us, because we're everywhere. Go to trans-led community events to meet us. Find us online and befriend us. If you see a trans person being treated badly, ask them if they'd like some help. It might take some persistence since we're often wary of cis people, but it's part of your work to account for the trauma you've collectively inflicted on us, so get to know us on our own terms.

Listen. Once you get to know some of us, listen to us. Hear our own individual stories — don't just categorize us based on your own assumptions or what you've seen from media. There is no universal trans story and every trans person is different. By listening to us, you can understand us as individuals rather than as stereotypes or misconceptions you've received from a cis-centric and transphobic world.

Learn. Once you've listened to our stories, learn lessons from them. Understand that our oppression is not our own fault. It is not our fault that we are constantly subject to harassment and discrimination, or abandoned by our families and friends. The adversity we face fuels struggles with mental health and our ability to maintain sustainable lives. Learn that it is not our fault society ignores us at best, demonizes us more often than not, and portrays us as monsters when all we want is to lead undisturbed lives.

Lend. Your support and your resources become vital when trans people are shut out of so many social and work opportunities. Volunteer for organizations that directly support trans people, or donate your money so that we can access resources to help us lead better lives. Examples of organizations that directly benefit the well-being of trans people are the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund, National Center for Transgender Equality, TransWomen of Color Collective, The Marsha P. Johnson Institute, Trans Lifeline, or your own local trans organization. Often, it is most helpful to donate directly to trans people, so make sure to contribute to personal fundraisers and share online donation links.

Lobby. Make your voice heard on behalf of trans people in public institutions, whether government, education, or employment. Go to protests when the rights of trans people and other marginalized groups are being trampled on. Make it known to your public officials that discrimination against trans people is unacceptable. Tell your schools and your workplaces that trans people should never be harassed, discriminated against, or marginalized. Lobby for the places you patronize to not only accept, but encourage and support trans people.

Love. Finally, remember that trans folks are worthy of your friendship, support, and affection just like any other person. Once you get to know us, you'll find that we not only have the same needs as everyone else, but that we have so much to offer you with our unique perspectives, histories, and lives. You only need to get to know us to know there's no reason for you to fear us. It is when people love us that they are most invested not only in our survival, but in the contentment and happiness we and all human beings deserve.

Meredith Talusan is Senior Editor for them. and an award-winning journalist and author. They have written features, essays, and opinion pieces for many publications, including The Guardian, The Atlantic, VICE, Matter, Backchannel, The Nation, Mic, BuzzFeed News, and The American Prospect. She received 2017 GLAAD Media and Deadline Awards, and has contributed to several books, including Nasty Women: Feminism, Resistance, and Revolution in Trump's America.

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