

Transgender and Nonbinary Inclusion in Leather Communities

Session Scenarios

Bathroom: Someone approaches the bar manager: "There's a person who looks like a man in the women's bathroom. You need to do something about this."

What should the bar manager do?

- A) Ask the patron in question to show ID to verify their gender marker
- B) Tell the person "Everyone uses the bathroom that matches their identity"
- C) Escort the patron in question to a single-stall restroom
- D) Ask the patron in question privately if they're comfortable and if they'd like support

Option A—asking for ID to verify gender marker—that's a hard no. First of all, gender markers on IDs don't always match someone's identity. People in the middle of transition, people who can't afford to update their documents, people in states where it's really hard to change your marker—that ID might say M when they're a woman. So checking ID doesn't actually tell you anything. Plus, it's humiliating and it's not your job to police people's identities.

Option C—escorting them to a single-stall restroom—might seem helpful, but unless they asked for that, you're basically telling them they don't belong in the space they chose. You're treating them like they're the problem. So that's not great either.

Option B is what I'd probably do first: tell the person who complained "Everyone uses the bathroom that matches their identity. That person is exactly where they should be." Clear, direct, done. You're not debating it, you're not entertaining the complaint. You're setting the standard for your space.

Option D could also work—checking in privately with the person who was questioned. "Hey, someone made a comment, I shut it down, but I wanted to make sure you're okay and ask if you need any support." That centers their wellbeing.

The key is: the person using the bathroom isn't the problem. The person complaining is the problem. And your response needs to make that crystal clear. for everyone.

Registration Desk: You're checking people in at a leather event. Someone's registration says "Alex Thompson" and pronouns "they/them," but their ID says "Alexander" with an "M" gender marker.

What do you do?

- A) Ask them which name they'd like you to use
- B) Use "Alexander" since that's what the ID says
- C) Use "Alex" and they/them as listed in registration
- D) Quietly pull them aside to verify their identity matches the registration

Option B—using "Alexander" because that's on the ID—nope. The ID is for verification that they paid or they're on the list, not for deciding what to call them. IDs don't update instantly when someone transitions. Changing your legal name costs money, takes time, and in some states is really difficult. That ID might be months or years out of date.

Option D—pulling them aside to verify their identity—is essentially asking them to prove they're trans enough or that the name Alex is legitimate. That's humiliating. Don't do that.

Option A—asking which name they'd like you to use—could work if you genuinely don't know, but they literally already told you. It's on the registration form. So asking again is kind of like you're questioning whether they really want to be called Alex.

Option C is the move: use Alex, use they/them, exactly as it's written on the registration. That's what they told you to use. That's the information that matters.

Here's the thing: if someone registers under a chosen name and pronouns, that's what you use. Period. The ID is for verifying they're the person who registered. Once you've confirmed it's them, you use their name and pronouns from the registration form.

Treat their chosen name as real—because it is real. It's their actual name. The ID is just paperwork that hasn't caught up yet. **You may bump across this a lot over the next 3 years and some change because of our current administration.**

Policy Decision: Your leather organization is updating its anti-discrimination policy. Three versions are proposed:

Version A: "We don't discriminate based on sexual orientation."

Version B: "We don't discriminate based on sexual orientation or gender identity."

Version C: "We welcome all participants regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, body size, or fetish interests."

Which should you choose?

- A) Version A - Keep it simple
- B) Version B - Adds necessary
- C) Version C - Most comprehensive
- D) Write your own that's even more specific to leather/kink

Version A—just sexual orientation—that's outdated. That doesn't explicitly protect trans people, non-binary people, or people who are gender non-conforming. It also doesn't mention race, disability, any of that. So if someone experiences discrimination, you can't point to your policy and say "This is clearly against our values." It's too narrow.

Version B—adding gender identity—that's better. At minimum, your policy should include gender identity and gender expression. That's baseline. But it's still missing a lot.

Version C is what I'd recommend. It's comprehensive. It explicitly names race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, body size, fetish interests. It's clear that discrimination in any form isn't acceptable in your space.

Option D—writing your own that's even more specific to leather and kink contexts—could work if you want to get really tailored. Like, you might add things about experience level, relationship structure, whether people are out, stuff like that. But Version C is a really solid foundation.

The Leather Solidarity Collective uses language basically like Version C, and they explicitly say: discrimination or bigotry of any kind results in immediate removal and permanent ban. That's the standard. Clear, no wiggle room, enforced. Your policy needs to be specific enough that people know what's protected and what will happen if someone violates it. Vague policies don't protect anybody.

Contest MC Introduction: You're MCing a leather contest. Contestant Alex (they/them pronouns) is up next. You accidentally say: "Next up, we have Alex! Let's give HIM a big round of applause!"

You realize immediately you used the wrong pronoun.

What do you do right then?

- A) Keep going, apologize privately later
- B) Stop and say "I apologize, I meant THEM" and continue
- C) Stop and say "Sorry Alex, I know you use they/them, my mistake" and continue
- D) Keep going but make sure you use they/them for the rest of the night

Option A—keep going, apologize privately later—means everyone in the audience just heard you misgender Alex. And now it's hanging there. If you wait to apologize privately, you've signaled to the whole room that misgendering is no big deal. That's not great.

Option D—keep going but use they/them the rest of the night—same problem. You didn't correct it publicly, so the audience doesn't know you made a mistake. They might start using he/him for Alex too because that's what they heard you say.

Options B and C both involve correcting yourself publicly, which is what you should do. The question is how. Option B—"I apologize, I meant them"—is quick, factual, keeps things moving. That works. Option C—"Sorry Alex, I know you use they/them, my mistake"—is slightly more thorough. You're naming that you know better, you just made a mistake, and you're correcting it.

Either B or C works. The key is: correct yourself immediately, keep it brief, and move on. Don't make it a huge thing—"Oh my god I'm so sorry, I'm terrible at this, I feel awful, can you forgive me?"—because now Alex might feel pressure to comfort you and the audience is watching that instead of watching Alex compete.

Just: "I apologize, I meant them" or "Sorry, my mistake, [correct pronoun]" and continue. Quick correction, move forward. And yes, then you make sure you use they/them correctly for the rest of the night. Practice makes it stick. And no, the answer can't be to only use their name. We can hear it, and we can tell. Even if you have to pause for a few seconds... that's better than using the wrong pronouns.

Contestant Registration: Someone registers for your leather contest. Registration form shows:

Name: Jordan Lee

Gender: Nonbinary

Pronouns: they/them

Contest path preference: International Mr. Leather

A board member says: "They can't compete for Mr. Leather if they're nonbinary. That doesn't make sense."

How do you respond?

- A) "You're right, they should compete for Ms. Leather instead"
- B) "Actually, they get to choose which contest represents them best"
- C) "Let's ask them to clarify their gender identity first"
- D) "We should add a new nonbinary category"

Option A—telling them they should compete for Ms. Leather instead—you're making assumptions about what contest represents them better. Non-binary doesn't mean "secretly a woman." They told you what they want. Listen to them.

Option C—asking them to clarify their gender identity—they already did. They said non-binary. That is clear. You're just uncomfortable with their choice, but that's your problem, not theirs.

Option D—creating a new nonbinary category—sounds inclusive, but now you're creating a separate-but-equal situation. "You can't compete in the real contests, but we made a special one for people like you." That's not inclusion. That's segregation.

Option B is the answer: they get to choose which contest represents them best. Full stop.

Here's why this matters: "Mr." and "Ms." in leather contexts aren't just about gender—they're about leather identity, leadership style, community role. Someone nonbinary might feel their leather identity aligns more with Mr. Leather than Ms. Leather. Or vice versa. Or neither. That's their call to make, not yours. **The board member's discomfort isn't a reason to exclude Jordan. It's a reason to educate the board member.**

Overheard Misgendering: At your leather bar, you overhear someone repeatedly misgendering a regular patron named Sam (he/him). The person says "Yeah, SHE'S over there by the bar. I've known HER for years."

Sam is within earshot and looks uncomfortable.

What do you do?

- A) Pull the person aside privately and correct them
- B) Interrupt immediately: "Sam uses he/him pronouns"
- C) Check in with Sam first to see what he wants
- D) Wait until the person leaves, then apologize to Sam

Option D—waiting until the person leaves and then apologizing to Sam—means Sam had to sit there and listen to someone misgender him repeatedly while you did nothing. Even if you apologize later, you didn't protect him in the moment. That's not great.

Option C—checking in with Sam first—might seem respectful, but now Sam has to decide in real time whether he wants you to intervene while the person is still actively misgendering him. And he might say no just because he doesn't want to make a scene, even though he's uncomfortable. So that puts the burden on Sam.

Options A and B both involve correcting the person, which is what you should do. The question is whether you do it publicly or privately.

Option A—pulling the person aside privately—protects their feelings but doesn't actually stop the misgendering while it's happening. Sam's still sitting there listening to it.

Option B is what I'd do: interrupt immediately and correct. "Sam uses he/him pronouns." Brief, factual, not accusatory. You're not saying "How dare you" or making them feel terrible—you're just providing information. And you're stopping the misgendering right then so Sam doesn't have to keep hearing it.

Here's the thing: when you correct someone publicly, you're also signaling to everyone else in the space that misgendering isn't acceptable here. That this is a space with standards. Other people watching learn from that.

After you correct them, you can pull the person aside if they seem confused or defensive and explain more. But the immediate correction needs to happen at the moment.

And yes, you could also check in with Sam afterward—"Hey, I noticed that happening, I said something, are you okay?"—**but that's in addition to the immediate correction, not instead of it.**

Harassment Report: Someone fills out your online incident report form:

"At last Friday's event, a person I don't know made multiple comments about my body and asked invasive questions about my transition. When I said I wasn't comfortable, they said 'I'm just trying to understand.' I left early because I felt unsafe."

What's your immediate first step?

- A) Email the reporter asking for more details about who did it
- B) Send immediate acknowledgment: "We received your report and will respond within 48 hours"
- C) Post on social media: "We're aware of an incident and taking it seriously"
- D) Review security footage to identify the person

Option C—posting on social media—is premature. You just got the report. You haven't investigated. You haven't talked to anyone. Don't make public statements before you know what happened.

Option D—reviewing security footage—might be part of your investigation, but it's not the first step. And it only works if you have cameras, if they captured the interaction, if you can actually identify people from footage. It's a tool, not a starting point.

Option A—asking for more details about who did it—is part of the process, but it's not the immediate first step. Because if you send that as your first response, it sounds like "Prove to me this happened" or "I need you to do more work before I'll take this seriously."

Option B is the right first move: send immediate acknowledgment. "We received your report. Thank you for telling us. We take this seriously and we'll respond with next steps within 48 hours." That's it.

You're confirming you got it. You're setting a timeline for follow-up. You're showing them you care. And you're buying yourself time to actually investigate without leaving them hanging.

Then, separately, you start your investigation. You might email them with follow-up questions—but frame it as "We want to understand exactly what happened so we can respond appropriately" not "Prove this to us." You review footage if you have it. You talk to staff who were working that night. You try to identify the person who caused harm. But the very first thing—within a few hours if possible—is acknowledgment. **That's how you build trust that your reporting system actually works.**

Pattern Across Venues: Someone fills out your online incident report form:

You run a leather social group. Another organization's leader contacts you:

"We banned someone from our dungeon space last month for repeatedly asking invasive questions about trans people's bodies and refusing to stop when corrected. We heard they're now attending your events."

The person in question hasn't caused problems at your events yet.

What do you do?

- A) Thank them for the info but wait to see if the person causes problems at your place
- B) Pre-emptively ban the person based on the other organization's report
- C) Contact the person, share what you heard, and clarify your expectations
- D) Ask the other organization for more details about what happened

Option A—waiting to see if they cause problems—means you're letting them keep attending until they harm someone in your space. You have information that suggests they're likely to cause harm. Waiting for it to happen puts your members at risk.

Option B—pre-emptively banning them—is tricky. If you have solid documentation from the other organization, if the behavior was egregious, if multiple organizations have reported the same pattern, that might be justified. But banning someone solely based on one report without any investigation could be unfair, especially if you don't know all the details.

Option D—asking for more details—is part of the process, but it's not the first step. You need to decide what you're going to do, and then get the information you need to do it.

Option C is what I'd do: contact the person directly. "Hey, I heard from [organization] that you were banned for [specific behavior]. I want you to know that at our events, we have clear standards about [relevant policy]. If you're interested in attending our events, these are the expectations. Can you commit to these standards?"

You're not assuming guilt, but you're also not ignoring information. You're being transparent about what you know, you're clarifying your standards, and you're giving them a chance to either commit to those standards or self-select out.

If they say "Yeah, I can commit to that," you document that conversation and you watch. If they say "That's not what happened" or "I shouldn't have been banned," you can investigate further. If they say "This is bullshit, I'll do what I want," then you know not to let them in your space.

The key is: you're taking the report seriously, you're protecting your community, but you're also being transparent with the person rather than just making decisions about them behind their back.

Policy Review After Incident: Your organization just handled a serious incident of transphobic harassment. At the debrief meeting, someone says:

"This wouldn't have happened if we just banned all discussion of gender and bodies at our events. Let's make a policy: no one talks about anything related to being trans."

What's the problem with this approach?

- A) It's too restrictive and limits free speech
- B) It puts the burden on trans people to hide their identities
- C) It doesn't address the actual problem (harassment)
- D) All of the above

Option A: yes, it's too restrictive. Leather and kink spaces are places where we talk about bodies and identities more explicitly than mainstream spaces. That's part of what makes these spaces valuable. You can't just ban all discussion of gender.

Option B is the big one: this puts the burden on trans people to hide their identities instead of putting the burden on harassers to stop harassing. Trans people should be able to talk about being trans, share their experiences, discuss their transitions if they want to. Telling them they can't talk about their identities to avoid harassment is backwards. You're punishing the wrong people.

Option C: this doesn't actually address the problem. The problem wasn't that people were talking about gender. The problem was harassment. Someone made invasive comments, refused to stop when asked, and made someone feel unsafe. That's what you need to address—the harassment, not the topic of conversation.

This kind of "solution" happens a lot. Something goes wrong, and people try to prevent it by restricting the behavior of the people who were harmed instead of the people who caused harm. "If trans people just didn't talk about being trans, they wouldn't get harassed" —no. That's victim-blaming.

The actual solution is: make clear policies about what harassment looks like. Train staff to interrupt it when it happens. Create consequences for people who harass others. Center the dignity and safety of trans people, not the comfort of people who might harass them. **You want to prevent harm? Prevent harassment. Don't prevent trans people from existing visibly in your spaces.**

Budget Priorities: Your organization has \$500 to spend on inclusion initiatives this year. Three proposals are on the table:

Option A: Sponsor table at Pride with promotional materials (\$500)

Option B: 4-hour staff training on trans inclusion + updated signage (\$500)

Option C: Donate to trans-led organization and share their work (\$500)

Which creates the most meaningful impact for trans inclusion in leather spaces?

Option A: Sponsor table at Pride with promotional materials (\$500)

Option B: 4-hour staff training on trans inclusion + updated signage (\$500)

Option C: Donate to trans-led organization and share their work (\$500)

Option A—Pride sponsorship table—gives you visibility. You're present at Pride, you're showing up, you're handing out info about your leather organization. That's not nothing. But does it actually make your space safer or more welcoming for trans people? Not really. It's marketing, not structural change.

Option C—donating to a trans-led organization—is good. Supporting trans community infrastructure matters. Sharing their work amplifies trans voices. But this is about your organization building capacity, and this doesn't do that. It's supporting good work elsewhere, not changing your own practices.

Option B is where I'd put the money. Four-hour staff training on trans inclusion means your people actually learn how to create welcoming spaces, how to handle incidents, how to intervene when they see problems. Updated signage—all-gender bathroom signs, anti-discrimination policy posted visibly—signals to trans folks that you've thought about this before they walked in the door.

This is the option that actually changes your space. Training builds capacity that lasts beyond this year. Your staff gets better at this work. Signage is infrastructure that stays up and keeps communicating your values.

Here's the thing: visibility without substance is just marketing. Donation without internal change is outsourcing the work. Training and infrastructure are investments in actually becoming a more inclusive organization.

If you had \$1000, you could do option B and C together. Training plus donation. But with \$500, option B creates the most meaningful impact for trans inclusion in your actual leather space.

Now, that said, different organizations are at different stages. If you've already done extensive training and your staff is really solid on this stuff, maybe option C makes sense as your next step. Context matters. But for most organizations starting this work, training and infrastructure are the foundation.

I'd like to also highlight that training can be costly. \$500 on a 4-hour training is fairly unrealistic, but it's *plausible* you might find an organization or someone newer to training willing to help out. Maybe they're within the leather/kink space and willing to give a discount. **It'd be better to pool your money together with sibling organizations to make sure you're getting someone with the experience and tools necessary to do this work.** Here are examples of corporate rates, which may overlap with nonprofit ones depending on the trainer or organization. You'll also find questions at the bottom to help you better vet your speakers and trainers: <https://hicharlieocean.com/pre-event-planning-guide>