

I'M MUSLIM

AND

MY GENDER

DOESN'T

FIT ME

A Resource for Trans Muslim Youth



a project of  
Advocates for Youth

# **“I’m Muslim And My Gender Doesn’t Fit Me: A Resource For Trans Muslim Youth”**

*“Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful” (1.2-3)*



Image Description:  
A niqabi Muslim holds hands with a  
nonbinary Muslim using a wheelchair

## **I think I Might Be Trans...**

Trying to figure out your gender can be really confusing for young people, especially when you're Muslim. The goal of this resource is to validate, support and guide young Muslims trying to understand their gender identity, as well as answer the questions you might have about gender, religion, sexual health and sexuality. If you are also questioning your sexual orientation, check out our other resource – *I'm Muslim And I Might Not Be Straight*.

## Finding The Right Language...

Words can be powerful and help you find a community. However, sometimes it's difficult to know what to say. Language can be tricky when people get confused about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Hopefully this resource will help shed some light on the difference!

Everyone has a gender identity and a sexual orientation - but they are NOT the same thing. When you are born, you are usually assigned a sex at birth solely based on physical anatomy. Your sex assigned at birth is not the same as your gender! Someone's gender identity is their internal sense of being a man, a woman, neither of these, both, or other gender(s).

Sexual orientation on the other hand is a person's physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others. People's gender identity doesn't say anything about their gender expression, sexual orientation, or how they will act or be perceived in daily life.

For some people who identify as TGNC (transgender & gender non-conforming) their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity are not necessarily the same. Some people identify as both transgender and gender non-conforming. Some identify as agender, having no gender at all. There are other people who exclusively identify as their sex assigned at birth. They are often called cis or cisgender.

Trans people can be straight, bisexual, lesbian, gay, asexual, pansexual, queer, etc. just like anyone else because gender identity is separate from sexual orientation.



Image Description:  
Two hijabi Muslims sit together and hold hands.



## How Do I Know I'm Trans?

"Experimentation, self-reflection, and talking about your reflections with others you trust are good starting points"

-Mathani, 19

Image Description: A young person, with a thoughtful look on their face.

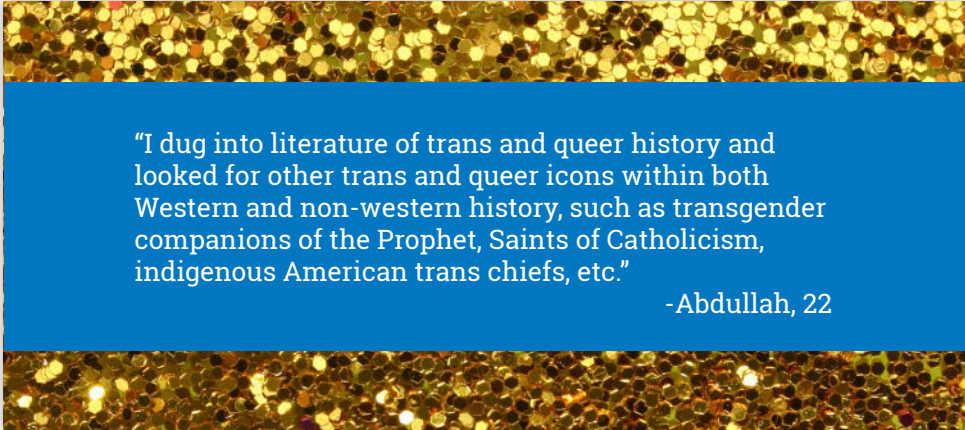
There is no one-way to know if you are TGNC, and many people have different gender journeys and different timelines. The important thing to know is that being gender-expansive is completely normal - trans people and trans Muslims have always existed.

However, figuring out your gender can still be difficult or confusing. Many TGNC people know from a young age that they don't identify with their sex and/or gender assigned at birth. You may feel more comfortable expressing yourself, or being known as a gender and/or sex other than the one you were assigned at birth. You might express your gender in how you dress, cut your hair, your choice to wear hijab or not, or what name and pronouns you use. You may feel uncomfortable with your body. These are just a few feelings that transgender and gender non-conforming people experience.

Everyone's experience is different but if you think you might be TGNC, try asking yourself these questions:

- How do I feel when someone uses pronouns or gendered terms to refer to me, like “sir” or “ma’am”?
- Do I feel like the world doesn’t see my gender or understand how I feel?
- When I was younger, did I like to dress up as a different gender? Did I like to pretend to be a different gender?
- Do I feel like my gender assigned at birth doesn’t fit me?

It's okay if you don't have answers for these questions or if your feelings aren't clear yet. Discovering and understanding your gender can take time, and it's normal for it to develop or change over time. Only you will know how to label, identify, and express yourself correctly.



“I dug into literature of trans and queer history and looked for other trans and queer icons within both Western and non-western history, such as transgender companions of the Prophet, Saints of Catholicism, indigenous American trans chiefs, etc.”

-Abdullah, 22

## Can I Still be Muslim?

**Yes, you can be Muslim and trans - many people are!** TGNC and queer Muslims have always existed, and haven't always been discriminated against. You don't have to choose between your faith and your gender; nor does being trans make you any less of a "real" Muslim (or the other way around).

Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) himself accepted men known as **Mukhannath**, or feminine men, who we might in today's time period view as trans or gay. The Prophet's wife, Umm Salama, had a **Mukhannath** friend named Hit who was welcome in their home. There is a long history of trans and gender diverse people in the Muslim and Islamic tradition. The Qur'an doesn't condemn the **Mukhannath** or other trans people mentioned within, and neither does the Prophet (pbuh).

There are also many Muslim societies today and in recent history that have accepted transgender and third gender individuals, such as the **Hijra** and the **Khawaja sira** of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Through the 16-19th century in South Asia **Hijra** (usually people assigned male at birth who identify and/or present as female) were tasked with protecting royalty. Prior to colonization, the **Khawaja sira** (third gender individuals) were held in high esteem in South Asia.

"Be honest with yourself, get closer to God. The closer I got to Him the more I knew man-made gender did not define me."

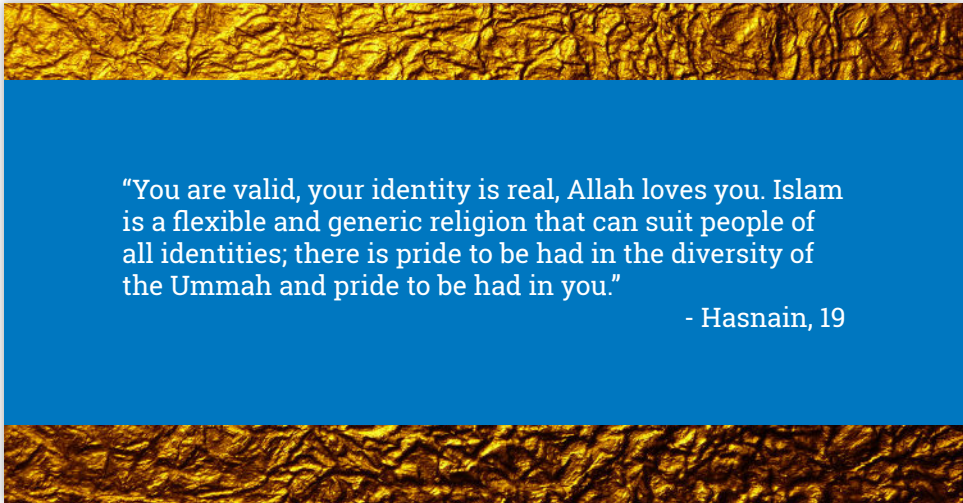
- Rija, 20





There are people who misuse the Qur'an to condemn trans youth. But religious beliefs should never be used to justify discrimination. Allah (**swt**) is without mistake, and Allah made humans. That means you have the right to be who you are. We were created with diverse skin colors, bodies, and personalities. How society and culture interprets these isn't a reflection on what Allah intended. Humans created divisions based on identity - not Allah - so don't let anyone tell you that you are **haraam** or that Allah doesn't approve of people who are TGNC. Only you and Allah know who you truly are and what is in your heart.

Always remember that Allah swt has ninety nine names in the Qur'an including the evolver, the flawless shaper, the most forgiving, the most just. One of them is Al Raheem, the most merciful. Subhanallah.



"You are valid, your identity is real, Allah loves you. Islam is a flexible and generic religion that can suit people of all identities; there is pride to be had in the diversity of the Ummah and pride to be had in you."

- Hasnain, 19

## What's It Like To Be A Trans Muslim?

"Not 'looking' trans or being able to transition doesn't mean you aren't trans. Gender euphoria is just as powerful a force as dysphoria."

-Noor, 23

"Your religion and gender identity do not need to be separate entities. However you identify, Allah loves you, and you don't need to change for anyone."

-Catriona, 31

"Seeing someone with similar interests be so comfortable in their non binary identity made me feel comfortable to explore my gender. Labels aren't necessarily important but they help you feel like you have a language to describe facets of yourself, and that's empowering."

- Hasnain, 23





Image Description: Nonbinary Muslim sits in peaceful position as the words "My queerness is my own, and I may share it with whomever I desire" circulate around their head.

"Your religion and gender identity do not need to be separate entities. However you identify, Allah loves you, and you don't need to change for anyone."

-Catriona, 31

"Sexually diverse and transgender Muslims have been around since the days of the Prophet, through the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, in various cultures both Muslim and non-Muslim, and this has never been an issue for that individual achieving religious or spiritual heights"

- Ameera, 22

## Coming Out & Transitioning

Coming out is the process of accepting your gender, figuring out how open you want to be about it, and telling those you want to know. You don't have to come out if you don't want to or before you're ready to be open about your gender identity.

There is no specific timeline that you need to follow. The safest and healthiest decision is going to depend on a variety of personal factors. For example:

- Do you have people in your life that you want to come out to?
- Do you think those people would react with compassion? Do you think those people would react in a way you could handle?
- Are you dependent on a family member or family members for financial stability? If so, and you're thinking of coming out to them, you may need a backup plan for your safety and financial stability in case they react negatively.
- If family is not an option, would you be interested in coming out to other members of the community, such as in a private trans support group?

Think about what choices would make you happiest and safest. Many Muslim parents, similar to many non-Muslim parents, may not understand the language their children use to talk about their gender. It may take people in your Muslim community some time to accept your identity. At these times, remember that being TGNC is not **haram**; it is natural, it dates back to the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and Allah (swt) loves you no matter what.

If you do choose to come out, it's important to put your safety first. Start by choosing someone you trust, like a close friend, a sibling, parent, or a guidance counselor to confide in. There may be a wide range of reactions, and it's hard to know who will listen and be supportive. Having someone you can trust and talk to can help. Your safety plan might include having a friend on speed dial, having a place to stay for a few nights or longer, or bringing a trusted friend with you for when you actually tell someone.

Transitioning is the process of changing how you are perceived by others so that how you feel, look and are treated all match up. There are a variety of ways to transition because transitioning looks different for everyone. Some transition when they are young, others transition when they're older. Some transition over long periods of time and some transition quicker. Some don't transition at all. Only you can decide what is best for you.

The goal of transitioning is to affirm your gender, and there is no right or wrong way to transition or to be transgender. If you chose to transition, similarly to coming out, your safety is most important. Start by choosing someone to confide in. Decide who you want to tell and what steps you might want to take to transition.

### **Someone socially transitioning may:**

- Come out as transgender, choose to go by a new name,
- change the way they look or dress,
- use different pronouns and ask others to use those pronouns when referring to them.

### **Someone legally transitioning may:**

- Change their legal name and/or gender markers on documents like their birth certificate, ID or driver's license.

### **Someone medically transitioning may:**

- Get surgery to create or remove the vagina, ovaries, uterus, penis, testes or breasts,
- take hormones therapy to create a more 'feminine' or 'masculine' look
- get laser-hair removal

Socially transitioning might not always be safe for everyone while legally transitioning can also be difficult since different states have different requirements for transitioning, especially if you aren't 18 yet. Some states allow people to identify as 'x', or non-binary, instead of male or female, while others don't. It's important to find out what transitioning is like where you live.

Medically transitioning can be very expensive and some people may not be able to afford it. Some people just don't want surgery and that is completely normal too. There are many reasons someone might choose not to medically transition.



Image Description: A young transgender Muslim with glasses in a loving embrace with their parents on either side. A hijabji woman kisses them on the cheek and a bearded man rests his head on theirs.

## Sexuality & Consent

As Muslims, many of us often hear a lot of contradictory and scary things about our sexual desires and bodies. It is very important to approach sex by thinking about your body and self with love and care. Working through and unlearning shame can be a difficult process - communicating with your partner and affirming yourself is an important part of it. The Prophet (pbuh) encouraged Muslims to engage in honest conversations about sex and desire.

Just remember that your body is here to support you and it's important for you to learn how to support it. Be gentle with your body and soul - it's a prophetic tradition. Take time to process your emotions before and after engaging with partners. Focus on being in touch with your desires and boundaries.

Not everyone wants to have sex! Many Muslims wait until marriage to have sex, some Muslims are asexual, and some Muslims don't want to be in relationships. None of these choices should be a source of embarrassment or shame. But many Muslims, regardless of their sexuality and gender identity, are engaging in sex. It's important that if you are having sex, whether it is premarital or not, that you practice safer sex.

Sex is something that is healthy and natural when practiced safely and consensually. Consent means communicating honestly with your partner about what you want and don't want to do. It's also about asking what they do or don't want. Consent is continuous - you have to keep checking in with your partner/s because people have the right to change their minds!

Everyone has the right to be safe and healthy within their relationships, free from physical or emotional coercion. In unhealthy relationships, one or both partners are controlling, demanding, mean, and/or physically or emotionally abusive. Sometimes it's not so easy to decide if a relationship should be maintained the way it is, worked on, or ended before it goes any further. You have a right to leave the relationship if it is not happy and healthy.

Trans and gender non-conforming people have the right to have their gender identity

affirmed by their partner(s). This means having their partner(s) refer to them with their preferred pronouns and language (i.e. partner, girlfriend, boyfriend, etc). This also includes having clear communication around expectations in sex, including what might feel uncomfortable or trigger dysmorphia.

If you are sexually active, it's important to know that oral, anal, and vaginal sex, including sex with toys/dildos, all come with some risk of STIs, including HIV, so it's always a good idea to practice safer sex.

It's also important to know that if someone with a penis and testicles, and someone with a vagina and uterus have vaginal intercourse, they can become pregnant; condoms and/or birth control are effective in preventing unintended pregnancy.

HIV is a virus that you get from sexual fluids, from blood, or from breast milk of a person who has HIV. For oral or anal sex, condoms and dental dams can provide protection against HIV and STIs. If you're having sex, it's a good idea to get tested regularly so you know your HIV and STI status. Knowing your HIV and STI status is crucial to getting the care you need to stay healthy.

Talking about your HIV and STI status with partners is important too. That way you can make a plan that helps both of you stay healthy.

You can also acquire HIV if you share needles for injecting drugs with a person who has HIV. To avoid this way of transmission, don't share needles.

If you think you are likely to be exposed to HIV, for instance by having sex with a partner who is HIV positive, PrEP is a pill your doctor can prescribe that can give additional protection from HIV.





## What are my rights?

Everyone has the basic human right to live as their gender. No one but you has the right to determine who you are, what you look like, or how you live.

- Trans people have the right to express their gender through their appearance.
- Trans people have the right to use bathrooms and public facilities that match their gender.
- Trans people have the right to gender affirming medical services if they wish.

But sometimes, especially for young people, laws, school policies, and authorities don't reflect our basic rights. It's a good idea to look up laws and policies in your state and school. If your school isn't supportive, and you're interested in working to change that, visit [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org) to find a community of youth activists who are working for acceptance and legal rights for trans young people.



Image Description: Young Muslims raise their fists in protest, one with a sign reading "No Muslim Ban!"

# Where can I go if I am feeling unsafe or need support?

There are many places to find queer and transgender Muslims. Chances are some of us live in your community, attend your school or worship at your mosque. Many of us find it helpful to be in community with others who identify as both TGNC and Muslim. Here are some organizations you can contact to find a network of LGBTQ Muslims just like us.

[The Muslim Youth Leadership Council at Advocates for Youth](#) (USA)

[Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity](#) (USA)

[Imaan UK](#) (U.K.)

[Salaam Canada](#) (Canada)

[Safra Project](#) (UK)

[El-Tawhid Juma Circle](#) (Canada)

[Secret Gardens](#) (Netherlands)

[The Inner Circle](#) (South Africa)

[CALEM](#) (Europe)

[H2M](#) (France)

[LGBT Muslim Retreat](#) (USA based but International)

[Desi LGBTQ Helpline for South Asians](#) (USA)

[Queer Muslims of Boston](#) (Boston)

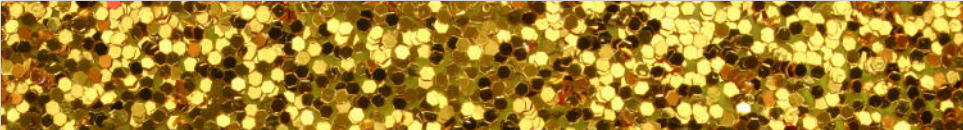
[Masjid Al-Rabia](#) (Chicago)

[OUTMuslim, Haven: The Inclusive Muslim Union of Philadelphia](#) (Pennsylvania)

[Seattle's Queer Muslim Collective](#) (Seattle)

[Queer Crescent Healing](#) (Bay Area)

[Islamic Healing Space of A2 & Ypsi](#) (Michigan)



“What I’ve come to understand is that queer Muslims have existed since the beginning of Islam. We exist. And Allah made us just the way we are.”

- Fatimah, 20





a project of  
Advocates for Youth

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