

GUIDE TO ALL-GENDER SPACES

All-Gender Spaces (sometimes referred to as “gender-neutral”) are locations where any person of any identity or presentation may enter. Unlike **gendered spaces**, all-gender spaces do not require a specific identity or appearance for use. Examples of a **gendered space** include women’s and men’s bathrooms and locker rooms or sex-segregated dormitories and shelters. Although gendered spaces are typically the norm in American culture, they are not spaces that everyone can safely or practically use.

Who benefits from all-gender spaces, and why?

Everyone can benefit from all-gender spaces. Groups who may find particular benefit are certain transgender and gender non-conforming people, parents with children, and certain people with disabilities. The most significant problems that arise in gendered spaces are intimidation, legal charges, and violence. When a gendered space is one like a bathroom, a place that everyone requires access, addressing this problem becomes increasingly significant. All-gender spaces make it so that everyone can access needed facilities without fear of violence or conflict.

Are all-gender spaces safe?

Yes. All-gender spaces are equally safe, or in the case of single stall rooms, safer than gendered spaces. Multiple person, all-gender bathrooms and changing rooms can promote safer environments since they receive more foot traffic and, generally, are more open and visible making them less attractive to predators. Studies show that multiple person all-gender bathrooms report no complaints, no harassment, and no violence.¹

What does an all-gender space look like?

Typically, all-gender bathrooms and changing rooms are single-stall, lockable rooms available to people of all genders and sexes. They may have a sign with figures representing both a man and a woman, or simply be labeled “restroom” or “changing area.” All-gender bathrooms more easily meet the accessibility regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)² and have shown to better promote communal cleanliness.

If we create all-gender spaces, will there still be gender specific ones?

Yes. There are people who want or need to use gender specific spaces. All-gender spaces give a third option to people who are not able to use gendered facilities. The important thing is that there are equally accessible options for everyone.

Is converting gendered bathroom into an all-gender one expensive?

Building an all-gender bathroom is comparable, or less expensive than building multiple gendered bathrooms. Converting gendered spaces like bathrooms or dormitories can take little to no funding, or require a remodel depending on the design and the policies developed for them.

Do all-gender spaces make people uncomfortable?

For some, using all-gender spaces may feel strange at first however, examples in Europe and Canada have demonstrated that all-gender spaces quickly become normalized. Minor discomfort or modesty, when compared with the inability to engage in necessary biological functions, cannot be prioritized. We must all commit to adjusting to changes that will increase access and reduce discrimination.

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¹ Transgender Law Center Publications: Additional Hesitations. <http://transgenderlawcenter.org/trans/pdfs/SBAC%20Fact%20Sheet-ons%20handout.pdf>

² University of Chicago QueerAction, “Gender-Neutral Bathrooms Campaign: A QueerSafeCampus Initiative” Brett Genny Beemyn <http://queeraction.uchicago.edu/statement.html>

