

Gender Neutral Bathrooms

Frequently Asked Questions

What are “gender neutral” bathrooms?

“Gender-neutral” bathrooms (sometimes called All-Gender) are bathrooms that are accessible to any person regardless of their sex, gender identity, or gender expression. Gender neutral bathrooms are typically a single-stall, lockable bathroom. In some facilities, these bathrooms may include multiple single stalls with a shared sink or could be the same as sex segregated bathrooms with multiple stalls in one room.

Why are gender neutral bathrooms important?

Many people face difficulty using sex-segregated bathrooms. Transgender and gender non-conforming people are regularly subject to harassment, intimidation, legal charges, and violence just for using the bathroom. People with disabilities who need assistance from a differently gendered attendant and parents with differently gendered children (such as mothers with sons, fathers with daughters) all report difficulty using sex-segregated bathrooms.¹ Even in areas that are generally considered “liberal” places, many people are still harassed in both women’s and men’s rooms.² Making an effort to create more gender-neutral bathrooms means an increase in private, safe spaces that are accessible to all people.

Aren’t sex-segregated bathrooms safer than gender neutral bathrooms?

No. Maintaining sex-segregated bathrooms does not prevent violence, but rather provides an illusion of safety. There are countless gender neutral bathrooms around the globe and there has never been a recorded instance of harassment or violence because a bathroom is gender neutral.³ Single person gender neutral bathrooms are arguably the safest as they are accessible to only one person at a time. Multiple person gender neutral bathrooms increase community accountability as they experience more traffic and there is a higher level of accountability to others. In fact, you have used countless gender neutral bathrooms over the course of your life!

Are gender neutral bathrooms less private?

Gender-neutral bathrooms are just as private as sex-segregated bathrooms. Frequently they are more private. It is very common for businesses, restaurants, and offices to have single-stall bathrooms used by all identities, not to mention the bathrooms in your home.

¹ University of Chicago QueerAction, “Gender-Neutral Bathrooms Campaign: A QueerSafeCampus Initiative” Developed by Brett Genny Beemyn, Director, The Stonewall Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, brettgenny@stuaf.umass.edu
<http://queeraction.uchicago.edu/statement.html>

² Transgender Law Center, “Peeing in Peace: A Resource Guide for Transgender Activists and Allies”
<http://www.transgenderlawcenter.org/pdf/PIP%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>

³ Transgender Law Center Publications: Additional Hesitations. <http://transgenderlawcenter.org/trans/pdfs/SBAC%20Fact%20Sheet-ons%20handout.pdf>

Why do gender neutral bathrooms make people uncomfortable?

Most Americans are accustomed to sex-segregated bathrooms so gender neutral bathrooms can feel strange or uncomfortable. Any change requires a period of adjustment for all people, including those who will have increased access to bathrooms as a result. Globally, gender neutral bathrooms are common and considered normal so we can expect the same. Everyone has a biological need to use a bathroom and while it can be challenging to share a bathroom with different identities, the alternative is that many people are unable to use the bathroom at all. The most important thing to remember is that feeling uncomfortable cannot be compared to feeling safe. Personal preference cannot override health and safety.

Will there still be sex-segregated bathrooms?

Yes. There are people who want or need to use sex-segregated bathrooms. The important thing is that there are equally accessible options for everyone.

Does using a gender neutral bathroom mean men and women will have to use the bathroom or shower together?

No. Gender neutral bathrooms create a third option for people who are comfortable with sharing spaces with people who may not be the same sex and gender identity as themselves. That said, just like other bathrooms, gender neutral bathrooms maintain privacy.

If I use a gender neutral bathroom will people think/know I am transgender?

In general, people pay very little attention to what other people are doing. If someone does notice a person enter a gender neutral bathroom, what they are most likely to assume that person is using the bathroom!

Don't men make bathrooms messy?

Everyone has the ability to be clean or messy regardless of their identity. The general trend is that gender neutral bathrooms are cleaner than gender specific bathrooms, perhaps because people are more conscious of cleanliness in shared spaces.

Is converting gender neutral bathrooms expensive?

Converting gender neutral bathroom takes little to no funding. Building public single-occupancy bathrooms is ideal, but converting an existing multi-stall bathroom to gender neutral is an easy intermediate step.

How can I help create gender neutral bathrooms at my workplace, business, or school?

Creating gender neutral bathrooms can be as easy as changing the sign on the door to as involved as creating architectural changes for old or new buildings. Often, schools and larger businesses require a proposal for why gender neutral bathrooms are needed. It can sometimes take months to years before larger institutions are willing to make changes. Some people create campaigns encouraging others to get involved or enlist the help of local or national organizations. Even if it takes a lot of time to see change, starting the conversation is one of the most important things a person can do.