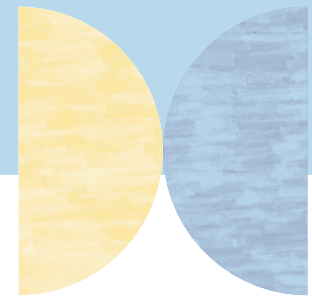


Understanding the aspects of identity that a person values is important to providing person-centered, culturally responsive and inclusive support.

Identity can encompass many facets, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, cultural background, disability and lived experiences, and intersections of these.

We use the singular word identity, but we recognize that people may have many identities, and that identity can shift across situations and time.



Reflect first

Ask yourself the following questions to reflect on the value, context and potential impact of discussing a caller's or texter's identity. This will help you decide whether this discussion is appropriate during an interaction.

- ? Does information about their identity help me to further understand the caller or texter, their experiences or their reasons for reaching out?
- ? Am I aware of the reasons why I am asking about identity?
- ? Is it the right time to discuss identity? Is the person in too much distress at this time? Have I built enough rapport? Does identity relate to the conversation in this moment?
- ? Would failure to talk about identity have a negative impact on the interaction or caller or texter, such as making them feel misunderstood or invalidated?
- ? Am I overlooking aspects of the caller's or texter's identity or experience that might help me identify potential support systems or culturally relevant practices that could enhance support?



Learn more

First Nations Information Governance Centre – Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP®)
fnigc.ca/ocap-training/

YouthREX – Asking About Gender
bit.ly/3XJDWh1

The Trevor Project – Black & LGBTQ+: Approaching Intersectional Conversations
bit.ly/43hTjAC

Egale Canada – Pronoun Usage Guide
bit.ly/41k7nHf



Suicide Crisis Helpline



You deserve to be heard. We're here to listen.

If you're thinking about suicide, or you're worried about someone else, we want to help. A safe space to talk, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

If your immediate safety is at risk, call 9-1-1 right away.



Call or Text 9-8-8

Funded by Canada

9-8-8

Suicide Crisis Helpline

988.ca

[988canada](https://988canada.org)

EQUITY COLLABORATIVE:
COMMUNITY of PRACTICE

Asking callers and texters about their identities

Asking about identities



Provide context for asking

Share your intention behind asking a caller or texter about their identity. Tell them you want to understand the full breadth of their experiences.

For example:

Some programs are gender-specific. Are you comfortable sharing your gender with me so I can find useful options for you?



Describe how the information will be used

Explain how you will use information about their identity to provide a more informed and supportive approach.

For example:

You mentioned experiencing discrimination at work. Are there any aspects of your identity or background that would help me understand what you are experiencing and how to support you?

Review your organization's policies on data collection, and answer any questions about confidentiality and privacy.



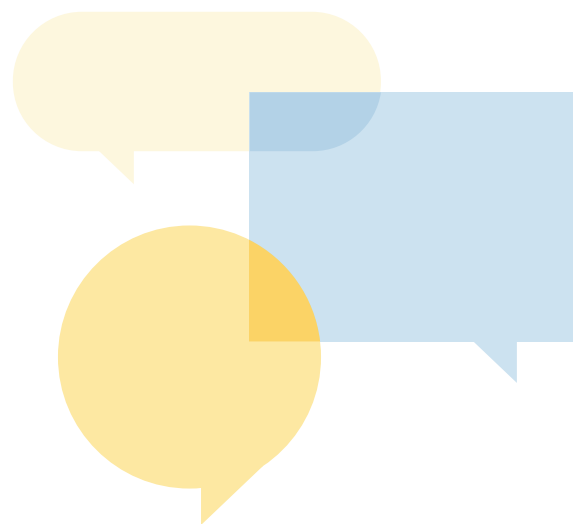
Provide choice

Allow the caller or texter to decide how much information they would like to share with you. Make it clear that they are not required to answer any questions, it is their choice to share and what they share will not alter the support they receive.



Acknowledge and validate

Regardless of whether a caller or texter chooses to share aspects of their experiences or identity, assure them that their decision will be respected and validate their disclosure.



Consider the possible emotional impact of asking

Asking questions about sensitive aspects of a caller's or texter's identity could be overwhelming, or touch upon a sensitive topic. Consider the potential impact of this and be prepared to receive their reactions and to offer support. If there is an impact, take time to build the connection by being curious and exploring what just happened. For example:

I just noticed your tone changed when I asked that question. Can you help me understand why?

I really appreciate your honesty about how that felt. I never want to push a conversation in a direction that doesn't feel helpful to you. We can move forward however you'd like.

Being open to feedback and taking responsibility for the impact of a question—not just the intent behind it—builds trust and safety.



Provide clarity around identity

Some callers or texters may not understand “identity” in this context, especially if the term feels broad or unfamiliar. They may struggle to recognize which aspects of their background or lived experience are relevant to share.

If a caller or texter is uncertain about what you mean, gentle clarification and examples can help them feel more comfortable in deciding what, if anything, they'd like to share.

When I ask about identity, I mean anything about who you are—like your culture, gender, disability or beliefs—that might be important to how I support you. For instance, some people share that they're Indigenous, part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community or are neurodivergent because it shapes their experiences and needs.



Questions to ask callers and texters

Use open-ended questions that encourage them to share however much they want. Be thoughtful about the language you use when asking these questions and ensure that your approach is respectful and inclusive. Some examples include:

What do I need to know about who you are to support you better?

If you're comfortable sharing, I'd like to know more about you, your identity and your background to better understand your experience and perspective. You're welcome to share only what you feel is important.

Is there anything more about yourself that you'd like to share with me? You don't need to share anything you're not comfortable with.

Can you share a bit more about how you see yourself and your identity? I understand if you'd prefer not to share that with me. I'm here to support you in whatever way feels right.

How do you think these aspects of your identity are contributing to your current experiences of . . . [stress, distress, depression, thoughts of wanting to die, etc.]?



Answering questions from callers and texters

If a caller or texter asks why you need to know about their identity, **take a moment to explain your intention in a way that reassures them and emphasizes their autonomy.**

For example:

That's a great question. I ask because understanding a bit more about you can help me offer support that feels more relevant and meaningful. But you are always in control of what you choose to share.

My goal is to support you in the best way possible. Sometimes knowing more about your background helps me do that, but I completely respect your comfort level and what feels right for you.

Every caller or texter may respond differently when asked about their identity. If they react negatively, acknowledge their feelings and let them know their response is valid.

If the conversation causes distress, refocus on their immediate needs. Reassure them that your priority is to support them and address their current concerns. For example:

I can hear that this question is upsetting right now. Let's focus on how you're feeling in this moment and how I can support you. We can continue our conversation in any direction that feels right for you.