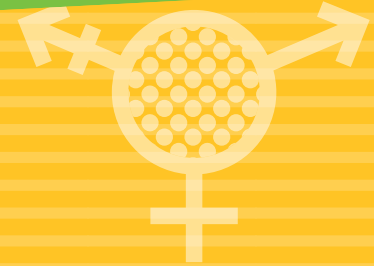


Gender identity and mental health



About gender identity

Gender identity is an individual's internal experience of their gender and is not necessarily defined by their biological sex as assigned at birth. Gender is a personal identity influenced by culture and personal experiences, while sex is wholly determined by physical attributes, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs.

The gender spectrum includes numerous identities including male, female, a mixture of both, no gender, a fluid gender, or another gender. Gender diversity covers a range of identities in the gender spectrum, including, but not limited to:

Transgender:

identifying with a gender other than the one assigned at birth due to their biological sex

Genderqueer:

a term that may be used by those who identify as neither male nor female, as both male and female, or a combination of the two. This term may also be used by people with other gender diverse experiences

Trans and gender diverse:

An umbrella term to include those who identify as transgender and/or gender diverse.

By contrast, cisgender covers those that identify with the gender that conforms with the gender assigned at birth.



If a young person has confided in you about their gender identity they may be looking for your support and guidance. Take the time to ask them how you can support them and reassure them that you will respect their privacy. They may not be comfortable in letting other people know about their gender identity and it is very important that the young person remains in control of their personal information.

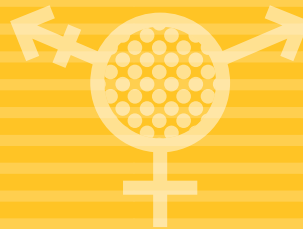
Risk factors experienced by trans and gender diverse young people

Most trans and gender diverse young people experience the same range of mental health concerns as their gender conforming peers. Gender diversity in itself does not cause mental health problems. Trans and gender diverse young people may however experience a range of stressful occurrences that can increase their risk of depression, anxiety, self harm and suicide. It is important to be aware of these risk factors when working with trans and gender diverse young people to ensure an accurate assessment of their risk is made.

Transphobia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transphobia is the perceived or intended hatred, aversion, fear, or prejudice against people who identify as trans and gender diverse. 87% of gender diverse people have experienced transphobia in Australia¹. Young people who experience transphobia are at high risk of anxiety, depression, self harm, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse.
Living in a rural or regional community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those living in a rural or regional community may be more likely to be subject to feelings of isolation, discrimination, and lack of accessibility to services. Self harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts are reported to be higher for gender diverse young people in rural areas².
Social isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trans and gender diverse people may feel they don't belong as they are likely to have a majority of cisgender friends and family.
Family rejection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender diverse young people are at higher risk of homelessness, dropping out of school, and economic instability³. Family rejection significantly increases a gender diverse young person's risk of depression, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and suicide attempts⁴.



Gender identity and mental health



What are the early signs suggesting a possible mental health problem?

Things to look out for in the young person include:

- **Changes in mood** – feeling sadder, more anxious, or more irritable than usual
- **Changes in behaviour** – being less talkative, becoming withdrawn or being more aggressive
- **Changes in relationships** – falling out with friends or their partner, or conflict with family
- **Changes in appetite** – eating more or less than usual, or losing or gaining weight rapidly
- **Changes in sleep patterns** – not sleeping enough, or sleeping too much
- **Changes in coping** – feeling overwhelmed or tired of life
- **Changes in thinking** – more negative thoughts, or thoughts of self harm or suicide



It's normal to experience some of these changes from time to time. When these changes last longer than expected and begin to interfere with a young person's life, their study, work and friendships, talk to them about seeking help.

Young people may not know where to turn to for support or they may feel reluctant to get help. Providing support and guidance for the young person will allow them to get the help they need when they need it.



How to support a trans and gender diverse young person

Discuss how the young person identifies their gender; do not assume anything about a young person's gender identity based on their appearance.

Talk in an open, non-judgmental way about their gender identity.

Be informed about gender diversity and be open and accepting when a young person discusses their gender identity with you.

Address their gender identity only when it is related to their concerns and your relationship with them.

Try not to misgender. Be careful to use the appropriate gendered pronouns and name when referring to the young person. There are a range of pronouns that trans and gender diverse young people may identify with, so it is always important to ask a young person what pronoun they prefer.

Work to reduce the effects of transphobic abuse or bullying by attempting to tackle the problem and telling them that transphobia is a problem with society, not them.

Reaffirm the importance of supportive friends and family, as well as others in the trans and gender community, to encourage the young person to experience a positive sense of their identity.

Ask how the young person's family has reacted to their identity. Family support can have a big impact on the young person's health and mental health.

Identify community and online resources for trans and gender diverse young people and their families. This can help give

access to positive role models for both the young person and their families.

Connect them with trans and gender diverse role models to help reduce their risk of social isolation.

Encourage them to get further advice and support at headspace or eheadspace if they are going through a tough time.



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

This information was produced in conjunction with **Transgender Victoria** (www.transgendervictoria.com).

References: ¹M. A. Couch, M. K. Pitts, S. Patel, A. E. Mitchell, H. Mulcare, S. L. Croy, and H. and S. La Trobe University. Australian Research Centre in Sex, "TranzNation : A report on the health and wellbeing of transgender people in Australia and New Zealand," 2007. ²L. Hillier, T. Jones, M. Monagle, N. Overton, L. Gahan, J. Blackman, and A. Mitchell, "Writing themselves in 3: the third national study on the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and gender questioning young people," 2010. ³Robinson, K. H., Bansel, P., Denson, N., O'venden, G. & Davies, C. (2014). Growing Up Queer: Issues Facing Young Australians Who Are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, Melbourne. ⁴Ryan, C., Russell, S.T., Huebner, D., Diaz, R & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing, 23(4): 205-213.

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