

# Information Sheet:

## When your child is transgender/gender diverse

### What is transgender/gender diverse?

Transgender/gender diverse is a term used to describe a person who doesn't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth (YGender & Minus 18). Transgender/gender diverse people may identify with being male, female, both, or a gender that doesn't fit into either of those.

### I think my child is transgender/gender diverse, what should I do?

It's important for your child's wellbeing that you love and support them without judgement. You could start by listening calmly to your child, and asking them what will make them feel comfortable and safe. Make your home a safe space where your child can freely express their gender, and support your child and their gender identity around others, both within your family and outside of it. Some good ways to do this include asking your child which pronouns they prefer, and if they want to go by another name that is better matched to their gender identity.

The best way to support your child's mental health is by validating their gender identity. Asking your child to avoid expressing their gender to other family members, or outside of the house can make them feel they need to hide who they are, or that you are ashamed of them.

If you find it confronting, difficult or distressing to have these conversations, you may need to seek support from friends, family or a mental health professional. When learning more about transgender and gender diversity, look for evidence based information and trusted organisations. The Resources section at the end of this information sheet is a good place to start.

### What is Gender Dysphoria?

The term Gender Dysphoria is used to describe the discomfort, distress or conflict a transgender and gender diverse person feels about their body, or about the way they are gendered by others. Not all transgender/gender diverse people have Gender Dysphoria.

Gender Dysphoria often happens at the start of puberty. As a young person's body changes, the difference between their sense of their own gender identity, their gender expression and their body becomes greater. When transgender/gender diverse young people are told that puberty is the time when people "become a man" or "become a woman" this can cause distress.



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For example, a transgender man who was assigned female at birth may feel dysphoric about his breasts, and choose to wear a binder, or other constrictive items of clothing that flatten his chest.

Gender Dysphoria can be felt on a social level, a physical level, an emotional level, or a combination of all three.

People of all ages report feeling Gender Dysphoria and seeking medical assistance in transitioning. It is also possible that social pressure around gender roles, and a lack of information, has led to many transgender/gender diverse people hiding or suppressing their gender identity until later in life.

## What's the connection between transgender/gender diverse young people and autism?

Autistic young people are less sensitive to social cues and expectations, and may express their gender in ways that are different to what their parents were expecting. Some young people may start using a different name, try different clothes, and choose different friends.

## Are many autistic people transgender/gender diverse?

Surveys and research show that while 1% of neurotypical people identify as transgender/gender diverse, the number is higher in autistic people.

The lowest estimate in published research is 7.8% of young people presenting to a Dutch gender clinic who met the diagnostic criteria for autism. This study was by de Vries et al. Other international research by Katiala-Heino et al, Shumer et al, Skagerberg et al and VanderLaan et al puts the estimate at between 23% to 54% of young people presenting to gender clinics also being autistic, or having autistic traits.

The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne (RCH) reports that around 40% of young people at their Gender Service Clinic meet the diagnostic criteria for autism.

## Why is being transgender/gender diverse more common among autistic young people?

The connection between being autistic and being transgender/gender diverse is a very recent area of research, so there haven't been solid findings yet.

One theory is that autistic people are less concerned with social norms, and so are less sensitive to the social pressures that keep other transgender/gender diverse people from exploring their gender and coming out.

Whatever the cause for the link, experts agree that a diagnosis of autism should not prevent a young person from accessing transition-related supports and medical care.

## References

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Kaltiala-Heino, R., Sumia, M., Työläjäarvi, M & Lindberg, N. (2015). Two years of gender identity service for minors: overrepresentation of natal girls with severe problems in adolescent development. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*. 9:9. doi:10.1186/s13034-015-0042-y.

Shumer, D.E., Reisner, S.L., Edwards-Leeper, L. & Tishelman, A. (2016). Evaluation of Asperger Syndrome in Youth Presenting to a Gender Dysphoria Clinic *LGBT Health* 3(5) | Short Reports doi:10.1089/lgbt.2015.0070

Skagerberg, E., Di Ceglie, D. & Carmichael, P. J (2015). Brief Report: Autistic Features in Children and Adolescents with Gender Dysphoria. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 45(8): 2628-2632. doi:10.1007/s10803-015-2413-x.

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VanderLaan, D.P., Leef, J.H., Wood, H. Hughes, S.K. & Zucker, K.J. (2015). Autism Spectrum Disorder Risk Factors and Autistic Traits in Gender Dysphoric Children. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 45(6): 1742-1750. doi:10.1007/s10803-014-2331-3.

YGender & Minus 18 (2017). *Trans 101 Gender Diversity Crash Course*. Retrieved from <https://www.trans101.org.au/pdf/Trans101-PDF-Web.pdf>

## Resources

[Australian Psychological society information sheet on trans and gender diverse children](#)

Barkin, J. (2017). *He's Always Been My Son – A mother's story about raising her transgender son*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London and Philadelphia.

Iantaffi, A. & Barker, M-J. (2018). *How to understand your gender. A practical guide for exploring who you are*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers: London and Philadelphia.

## Trans 101

<https://www.trans101.org.au/index.html>

- A series of videos and a booklet created by transgender and gender diverse youth. Topics include; Neurodivergence in which transgender and gender diverse young people discuss autism and mental health.

You might also be interested in this information sheet:

*Resources about transgender/gender diverse youth for parents of autistic young people*

## Acknowledgements

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