

# 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.



# When your child is transgender/gender diverse

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 1% of neurotypical people identify as transgender/gender diverse and the number may be higher in autistic people. Studies have shown that the rate of autism among people who are transgender/gender diverse is higher than the rate of autism in the general population.

For example, a study by de Vries et al found that 7.8% of young people presenting to a Dutch gender clinic met the diagnostic criteria for autism. The Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne (RCH) has found that around 15% of young people attending their Gender Service Clinic have an autism diagnosis. This compares to a rate of 1 to 2% in the general population.

## 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 (Strang et al 2018).

## References

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.

de Vries, A.L.C., Noens, I.L.J., Cohen-Kettenis, P.T. et al. (2010). Autism spectrum Disorders in Gender Dysphoric children and adolescents. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 40(8):9306. doi: 10.1007/s10803-010-0935-9.

# When your child is transgender/gender diverse

Strang, J.F., Meagher, H., Kenworthy, L., de Vries, A.L.C., Menvielle, E., Leibowitz, S., Janssen, A., Cohen-Kettenis, P., Shumer, D.E., Edwards-Leeper, L., Pleak, R.R., Spack, N., Karasic, D.H., Schreier, H., Balleur, A., Tishelman, A., Ehrensaft, D., Rodnan, L., Kushner, E.S., Mandel, F., Caretto, A., Lewis, H.C. & Anthony, L.G. (2018) Initial Clinical Guidelines for Co-Occurring Autism Spectrum Disorder and Gender Dysphoria or Incongruence in Adolescents, *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 47:1, 105-115, DOI: 10.1080/15374416.2016.1228462

Professor Michelle Telfer, Gender Service, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. Interview February 2018.

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

This information sheet was developed in consultation with autistic transgender/gender diverse people and their families. We thank Spectrum Intersections for their contribution.

©2019 Amaze

Permission is granted for the content of this information sheet to be reproduced in its entirety, provided Amaze is acknowledged as the source. Content is provided for educational and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional.