

## FACT SHEET **IN THIS TOGETHER**

# FAMILIES AND CARERS CAN ASK. SUPPORTING TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

FOR FAMILY AND CARERS SUPPORTING TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE

### ➔ AT A GLANCE

This resource aims to provide help to carers to navigate the youth mental health system and support themselves while doing so. However, when using the resources please be mindful that not all carers are going to be in the same place on their journey. This resource is not designed for carers with major concerns, those who are currently experiencing significant distress or are displaying rejecting or hurtful behaviours. If a carer has serious internal barriers to affirming the young person's gender identity, they should be offered more intensive support, including access to therapeutic support where they can understand their own beliefs and reactions, and process change.

This fact sheet has been divided into general topic sections for easy navigation. A list of extra services and resources has been included at the end of this fact sheet.



#### You can make this resource your own by:

- adding your own questions;
- bringing this fact sheet with you when meeting with a professional or visiting a service;
- highlighting any questions that are particularly important to you, or you feel haven't been covered in sessions so far; and
- translating this resource – for more information, see Health Victoria's information on language services for mental health.(1)

### INTRODUCTION FOR FAMILIES AND CARERS

\* Gender diversity is not a mental illness, but rather a healthy expression of the diversity that exists within our society and has existed across societies and cultures. Often trans and gender diverse people need help coping in an unaccepting society where their authenticity is challenged or even rejected or attacked.

However, trans and gender diverse young people may be at heightened risk of mental health difficulties due to violence, bullying, discrimination and pathologisation, rigid gender norms and stereotypes, family violence, barriers to and/or a lack of autonomy in regards to gender affirmation, and intersecting experiences of marginalisation. (2,3)

Young people who do experience mental health difficulties might interact with a range of professionals and services. These contacts can take place at a time of heightened distress for young people and family members. For this reason, preparing questions before sessions with a mental health professional or before engaging



with a particular service can be helpful. This simple fact sheet is intended to help families and services work together to benefit the young person, their family and any other supports.

This guide is based on what family members report they wish they had known when looking for ways to support a trans and gender diverse young person experiencing mental health difficulties. It offers a list of possible questions that young people and families can ask professionals and services at different stages of care.

**These questions are not exhaustive**, but serve as examples of a range of questions families may wish to ask professionals.

## ➔ A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

You might have heard or seen the word ‘transgender’ in the media or used by people you know. Although some people use this word to describe themselves, most young people prefer using trans or gender diverse as an umbrella term to encompass the range of experiences people can have when identifying with a gender that is different to the gender presumed for them at birth. Following consultation with young people, Orygen resources use the terminology of trans and gender diverse. Language is constantly evolving, so it’s important to adopt the language that the young person uses to describe themselves, their identity and their experiences.

For more information on how this resource was developed see: fact sheet [Collaborative development of gender diversity and youth mental health resources: an example of community-academic-health partnership](#).

For a glossary of key terms related to gender diversity and youth mental health see: fact sheet:

[Gender diversity and language](#).

## SUPPORTING A YOUNG PERSON

You might wonder how best to support the young person to engage with the mental health service and improve their mental health and well-being. You might be focused on supporting the young person to attend their first appointment. We know that many young people find it hard to talk to professionals about their mental health, or they may not even be aware that they are struggling. It is important to first understand the young person's wishes around accessing help, and any concerns they might have about this.

You can ask health professionals:

- How can I best support the young person?
- How can I best support the young person to engage with this service right now?
- How can I best approach the young person to talk about their mental health?
- How could our wider family and contacts help?
- How can we all work together to support the young person?
- How do I best support the young person in terms of their gender affirmation? How can I show the young person that I'm a trans and gender diverse ally?
- How can I challenge transphobia and discrimination?
- Where can I access information about the young person's legal rights and access support to challenge discrimination?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## UNDERSTANDING THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE SYSTEM

It is important the service lets you know what you can expect from your involvement with them. To gain a better understanding, you can ask:

- How does this service consider the specific needs of trans and gender diverse young people and their families?
- What will usually happen during our sessions together?
- Where can we get support in-between sessions? How might that work?
- Who is likely to be involved in my young person's care?
- How will you support my young person's recovery at this time of mental health challenge?
- What does this service do to ensure it takes a gender-affirming and non-pathologising approach?
- Who can I talk to if I have feedback or a complaint about the service?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## THIS SERVICE

Each mental health service has its own way of operating, which can cause confusion for young people and families. To get a better understanding of the specifics of the service you are engaging with, you can ask:

- How does this particular service work? Who is this service for? For example, what is the age range of eligible clients, does it include family members in care or not?
- Is there a time limit for our involvement with the service?
- Who funds it? Do I need to pay for this service?
- Do you ask for and listen to feedback from service users, such as the young person and myself?
- What training do the staff have? Have professionals at the service undertaken training in gender-affirming care?
- How does the service engage with the broader gender diverse community of health and social care?
- Is it mandatory for staff to be culturally safe?
- Is this service gender-affirming? What signs will tell me this is the case?
- What experience do the staff have working with gender diversity?
- Will the staff understand my perspective as well as my young person's? How will you make sure you hear all of our perspectives?
- What if we disagree with the therapeutic care plan you suggest?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## WORKING TOGETHER: THE YOUNG PERSON, MYSELF AND SERVICES

To gain a better understanding of how various members in a mental health service who play a role in caring for the young person will work together throughout the young person's care, you can ask questions such as:

- How will I be included in the young person's care?
- How will this service support other people in our family during this time?
- How will you make sure that everyone communicates well as a team (i.e., the young person, myself, other supports, the service)?
- What if myself or my partner or other supports disagree with aspects of the young person's care?
- Who can I talk to if I have any questions about how the service works?
- How does confidentiality work? And why is it important?
- Will you work with the young person's school and if so, how? How much will school be involved in the young person's care plan?
- Can you help us to educate the school about gender affirmation and/or mental health?
- What information will you share with other health professionals (e.g. the young person's GP), and how will this information be shared?
- Why is autonomy and choice important for young people in affirming their gender?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSITY

Family members may have a range of questions about trans and gender diversity. Asking your questions can help with supporting the young person and with sharing evidence-based information with others if that's needed. You can ask the service, professional or peer expert:

- What is trans and gender diversity?
- Please explain the diverse ways a person might experience gender.
- What is intersectionality?
- What kinds of feelings and thoughts do young people have about their gender and sexuality?
- Is gender the same or different to sexuality?
- I've only just learned about gender diversity. Is this a new thing?
- What is gender-affirming care?
- What is meant by the term cisgender?
- How do I find reliable resources about gender diversity?
- How can I contact people who share some of our experiences?
- What barriers do trans and/or gender diverse people experience in affirming their gender identity?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## SELF-CARE AND SUPPORT

Often, families naturally focus on the needs of the young person who they are supporting. As a parent, carer or other support person, it can be easy to forget your own self-care and support needs. Stress is also tough for families and can make it more difficult to support the young person and each other. You can ask questions related to self-care and support for family members, such as:

- How do you support families, carers and friends?
- What other services would it be helpful for us to know about in the local community or online?
- How can I practice good self-care myself and support others in the family/network?
- I'm struggling. What will help me to cope? How do others cope?
- What kinds of feelings and thoughts do other families with trans and gender diverse young people have?
- Do I need to explain the young person's needs to our family/friends/the school/work colleagues? If so, how?
- How do I help to prevent my worries and fears for the young person's future from negatively impacting them?
- What can I do if another family member is unsupportive, controlling or violent?
- What does LGBTQIA+ family violence look like, and how do I get support if I think this might be happening to me or my child?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## FROM YOUTH TO ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Transitioning between youth focussed and adult services can be a challenging time for all young people who access mental health services, and particularly when multiple services are involved. You can ask:

- How long will the young person be able to access this service or support? What happens when that is no longer available to them?
- What happens if and when the young person is to be referred on to adult mental health services from a youth mental health service? What does this mean? What will happen?
- Will youth mental health services help me in the transition of the young person into an adult mental health service?

You might have other questions on this topic. You can add them here:

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## OTHER SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Families may need additional support and resources, or to hear from other families who are experiencing similar changes. The options below are not intended to replace the support of a mental health service, but may be able to offer additional and complementary support. Peer supports are an important and empowering way of connecting with others with a shared experience, outside of services. We encourage families to discuss their needs with services and build a shared plan for how they will access wider support networks.



## RELATED SERVICES

You might find some of these services helpful:

- **Transcend**  
a parent-led peer support network for the families of transgender children in Australia.  
[transcendaus.org/](https://transcendaus.org/)
- **Parents of gender diverse children**  
provides peer support to parents and those parenting trans and gender diverse children.  
[pgdc.org.au/](https://pgdc.org.au/)
- **Qlife**  
provides anonymous peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues, including sexuality and gender.  
[qlife.org.au/get-help](https://qlife.org.au/get-help)
- **Rainbow door**  
a helpline providing information, support and referrals to all LGBTIQ+ Victorians, as well as their friends and family, during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.  
[switchboard.org.au/rainbow-door](https://switchboard.org.au/rainbow-door)
- **Raising Children**  
a resource for family members related to adjustment after a child shares their trans or gender diverse identity.  
[raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/pre-teens-gender-diversity-and-gender-dysphoria/when-your-child-is-gender-diverse-family-feelings](https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/pre-teens-gender-diversity-and-gender-dysphoria/when-your-child-is-gender-diverse-family-feelings)
- **Parentline**  
offers confidential and anonymous counselling and support for parents and carers of children from birth to 18 years old. This service is for parents and carers located in Victoria.  
[services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/parentline](https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/parentline)
- **TransFamily**  
support group for the family of the gender diverse person. Family members meet monthly to share in a supportive and welcoming environment.  
[transfamily.org.au/](https://transfamily.org.au/)

## RELATED RESOURCES

You might find some of these resources helpful:

- **Victorian Government's Safe Schools Program**  
a program to help schools foster a safe environment that is supportive and inclusive of LGBTI students  
[education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/safeschools.aspx?Redirect=2](https://education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/safeschools.aspx?Redirect=2)
- **Miller L and Elin L. Families in TRANSition**  
A resource guide for families of transgender youth. 2nd ed. Toronto, Canada: Central Toronto Youth Services; 2016.  
[ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/Families-in-TRANSition.pdf](https://ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/Families-in-TRANSition.pdf)
- **Minus18.**  
How to be a trans ally: A beginner's guide. Melbourne, Victoria: Minus18.  
[res.cloudinary.com/minus18/image/upload/v1585693866/au\\_a6\\_ally-booklet-digital-mmub0m.pdf](https://res.cloudinary.com/minus18/image/upload/v1585693866/au_a6_ally-booklet-digital-mmub0m.pdf)
- **Minus18.**  
Love: How to support and celebrate your LGBTQIA+ child. Melbourne, Victoria: Minus18.  
[www.minus18.org.au/articles/love-how-to-support-and-celebrate-your-lgbtqia+-child](https://www.minus18.org.au/articles/love-how-to-support-and-celebrate-your-lgbtqia+-child)

## LINKS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE YOUNG PERSON

The following resources could be shared with a young person directly for additional support and knowledge.

- **Minus18**  
creates resources to reduce stigma surrounding LGBTIQ+ identities, runs events to promote social support and create a community for LGBTIQ+ young people and provides training to schools and workplaces  
[minus18.org.au](https://minus18.org.au)
- **Some headspace centres run LGBTIQ+ groups.**  
Find your local centre:  
[headspace.org.au/headspace-centres](https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres)
- **Royal Children's Hospital**  
Victorian-based support for trans and gender diverse children and adolescents for whom medical support is needed  
[rch.org.au/adolescent-medicine/gender-service/](https://rch.org.au/adolescent-medicine/gender-service/)
- **Ygender**  
produces resources to increase awareness of trans and gender diverse issues, runs social events and discussion groups, and runs workshops about inclusive practices for professionals who work with trans and gender diverse young people  
[ygender.org.au](https://ygender.org.au)



## REFERENCES

1. Language services - when to use them Victoria, Australia: Victoria State Government; 2020 [Available from: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/mental-health-services/language-services-when-to-use-them>].
2. Strauss P, Cook A, Winter S, Watson V, Toussaint DW, Lin A. Associations between negative life experiences and the mental health of trans and gender diverse young people in Australia: Findings from Trans Pathways. *Psychological Medicine*. 2020;50(5):808-17.
3. Katz-Wise SL, Ehrensaft D, Vettters R, Forcier M, Austin SB. Family functioning and mental health of transgender and gendernonconforming youth in the trans teen and family narratives project. *The Journal of Sex Research*. 2018;55(4-5):582-90.
4. Nexus. Carers can ask: A collaborative engagement tool for families, carers and clinicians Fitzroy, Victoria: St Vincent's Hospital.

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This factsheet is designed as a prompt to assist with good communication. It is not an exhaustive list of questions that families may want to ask or a full guide to the way services may assist. We encourage families and carers to discuss their needs with services and together build a plan if additional help is needed.

**Orygen acknowledges** the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.

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