

Gender diversity

Childhood is a time when we all start to work out who we are. An important part of our identity is our gender. While most people's gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth, this is not the case for everyone. For gender diverse children and young people, a supportive family environment helps them feel loved and valued for who they are.

Gender

Many children and young people experience and express their gender in different ways. While society often teaches us from birth that there are only two genders and certain ways boys and girls should behave, not everyone fits these expectations. Understanding that gender can be diverse helps us create a supportive environment for children and young people.

Health and wellbeing

Gender diverse young people may experience discrimination, bullying, rejection and harassment. These experiences, rather than their identity itself, can contribute to anxiety, depression, self-harm and social isolation. With family acceptance and support, gender diverse young people can live healthy and fulfilling lives.



Gender identity and development

Children often explore gender from a young age, which can commence as early as the age of 3. Some may:

- prefer activities, clothing or roles not traditionally associated with their assigned gender
- feel their gender differs from expectations
- identify with another gender, multiple genders or no gender.

Parents may learn about their child's gender identity in different ways and respond with support, curiosity, concern, disappointment or shock. To tell a parent you are gender diverse takes courage. They know it could change how you feel about them. They might worry they will lose your love.

Parents can be supportive by:

- listening carefully and trying to understand their experience
- using respectful and inclusive language
- challenging and avoiding gender stereotypes

- including non-binary identities in discussions
- not reacting if you have strong negative feelings
- taking steps to keep them safe when necessary.

Gender dysphoria and affirmation

Some young people experience gender dysphoria, where a mismatch between their gender identity and body causes distress. Professional support can help explore options.

Gender affirmation or transition may involve:

- using a chosen name and pronouns
- different clothing or appearance
- social recognition of gender
- puberty blockers or hormones under specialist care
- surgery from age 18.

Supporting your child

When a young person shares their gender identity:

- keep communication open
- avoid assumptions about future identity or sexuality
- learn from reliable and respected sources
- be their advocate
- ask how you can best support them
- avoid giving a lecture
- respect their privacy and confidentiality.

Let your child know they can talk to you at any time. If they prefer not to talk to you, ensure they have accurate information and trusted people they can communicate with.



Looking after yourself

Families may experience uncertainty, grief or worry while adjusting. These feelings do not mean you love or support your child any less. Be patient with yourself. Support from professionals or other parents can be helpful. You and your family may benefit from having your own support as you navigate this journey together.

You might not have all the answers and may make mistakes along the way. That's OK. Any efforts to understand what your child is going through will let them know you care and that home is a place where they can be themselves and belong.



Want more information?

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