



## Trans and gender questioning pupils

This guidance sets out some of the first steps you can take to support gender variant or questioning pupils, and the resources available to help you.

The term transgender, or now more commonly trans, is used to describe people who may act, feel, think, or look different from the gender they were assigned at birth based on their physical sex.

In the last few years a lot of work has been done to raise awareness of and increase the visibility of transgender issues. The number of young people who now feel confident seeking help with their gender identity issues is rising rapidly.

Referrals to The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, which specialises in care for young gender questioning people, are doubling year on year. Waiting times are increasing, placing pressure on services.

### Transition

The word transition when talking about gender identity refers to people who change from living as the gender assigned to them at birth to one that they feel more comfortable or authentic in.

The numbers of young people transitioning or exploring their gender identity has implications for the education system, but professionals often lack the knowledge, experience or guidance to be able to adequately support trans pupils.

This also applies to agencies such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and local youth services, as well as voluntary organisations.

A number of trans people report that they were aware of their gender identity at a young age, commonly around the age of four to six, and that their feelings of incongruence were noticeable then.

Those who have a good support network, often consisting of family, friends, have a smoother transition than those without.

### Legal duties

Not only is there a moral obligation to support young trans and gender questioning pupils in education but there is a legal one too.

The Equality Act 2010 sets out a number of protected characteristics, such as age and race, making it unlawful to discriminate on those grounds.

Trans people are covered by the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, which applies to anyone who is undergoing, has undergone or is proposing to undergo a process (or part of a process) of reassigning their sex by changing physiological or other aspects of their appearance such as clothing.

This means that a pupil will still be covered by the act even if they are not undergoing a medical transition to change their body to match their gender identity, but are taking steps to socially transition to their identified gender, such as changing their name or their clothing, or proposing to do so.

Schools will also have to have gender reassignment in mind when looking at their responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

### Signs a pupil may be questioning their gender identity

Every trans person is different but signs may include:

- self-harm

- appearing socially isolated or uncomfortable and spending a lot of time on their own
- showing reluctance or unhappiness when taking part in activities associated with their gender as assigned at birth, especially physical activities requiring use of shared changing facilities
- low self-esteem or depression
- being the subject of bullying and in particular transphobic bullying.

## How do I respond if a pupil and/or their family asks for help with gender identity issues?

The first thing to do is have a conversation with the young person and - with their permission - their family in order to assess their needs. Keep in mind when interacting with a young trans person or their family that it is important to listen, keep an open mind and not dismiss their concerns.

It is vital that the young person's gender identity is respected. Let them express how they identify or need to express their gender. Take care to find out what their needs are and how they want to proceed. You also need to ensure that they are not led into a course of action they are not yet ready for, or which may be inappropriate.

Support must be based on the needs of the young person and their family and where those differ the needs of the young person must take priority.

## Things to discuss with the young person and their family

- Ask them simply 'How can we best help you?'
- Have they spoken to anyone else about their feelings or gender identity?
- How do they wish to express their gender identity?
- By which name and which pronouns do they wish to be known/called?
- Have they sought medical help?

If they are looking to find medical help with their

transition, then they should first visit their GP. The GP's knowledge may be limited on the subject but they should at least be able to refer the young person to CAMHS.

Local LGBT+ or specific trans youth groups are an excellent place to find local peer support for the young person and family.

If the pupil intends to transition in school, then it is a good idea to put together an action plan, which must be led by the needs of the pupil and the family and not what is convenient for the school.

## Planning and timing transition

In some cases, the school and young person's family have adopted the approach of sending a letter out to pupils' families or holding an assembly to let them know of the young person's transition and a bit of basic information about trans issues. This should only be done if the young person and family are comfortable with that idea. It is not a preferred option overall because although it increases awareness of trans issues it will immediately out the young person. A separate assembly that does not include direct mention of the child in question, but rather trans issues alone, would be beneficial before any action is taken on behalf of the transitioning child.

Transitioning mid-term may produce certain challenges. It may increase the risk of bullying and cause stress for the young person. If the young person decides to start using a new name there may be challenges with school records.

Transitioning at the beginning of a new term or year is sometimes preferable, as it gives the pupil breathing space in the holiday. Also, if they wish to come out publicly, it allows others to normalise the transition. It also allows staff adequate time for records or admin to be brought in line so there should be no confusion when the pupil starts back with a possible new name.

Changing schools or transitioning when moving from primary to secondary or from secondary to further education can also be a popular choice as it gives the young person more chance of a positive new start in their authentic gender. The only people who may know about the person's previous identity will probably be other young people who may have known them in their previous education environment. If the young person does not want to be out as trans then this is usually a

good option.

## Dealing with information sensitively and confidentially

Supporting a young person's identity when they are going through transition is very important. Correct pronouns and new names must always be used out of respect, support and safety. If incorrect pronouns or an old name are used it can sometimes lead to outing that person as trans within a school, which can then lead to bullying and discrimination.

Even when discussing the pupil between staff the pupil's correct and authentic name (the one they wish to be addressed by) must be used at all times and their gender identity issues should not come into conversation unless it is relevant.

If a conversation needs to take place where the pupil's gender identity issues do need to be discussed, then it should be done so in a location that is safe from people overhearing. It only takes one overheard conversation and a bit of gossip to start a chain of events that that can have a detrimental effect on a young person's transition.

## Toilets and changing rooms

Some of the most commonly asked questions regarding trans people are around toilets, changing rooms and uniforms. However, in terms of things to think about they are quite far down the list. Ask the young person what would make them most comfortable. If what they want is realistic and possible, then go with it.

Not all young trans people will immediately want to use the facilities that correspond with their gender identity. They may wish to use another facility separate from others because of anxiety issues connected with body dysphoria. For this reason, and because some pupils may identify as non-binary, ie neither male or female, there should always be gender neutral changing rooms and toilets available.

The only thing regarding changing rooms that may cause a problem is if they do not have cubicles. In this case, the pupil should be offered alternative changing facilities. The young person should not be told that they must use the changing rooms that correspond with the gender they were assigned at birth. There is nothing within law or safeguarding practice that should prevent a trans child from using the facilities associated with

their gender identity.

## Other resources

Hopefully this short guide will help you respond to the needs of a trans or gender questioning pupil. Many more excellent resources are available, from lesson plans that educate about transgender issues, to complete and very detailed school guidance documents put together by local authorities working in partnership with voluntary LGBT+ organisations. There are also a large number of voluntary organisations that can provide in-school training or simple advice. Listed below are some of the best resources available:

### Gendered Intelligence

Gendered Intelligence is a not-for-profit community interest company, which works predominantly with the trans community and those who impact on them. It specialises in supporting young trans people aged eight to 25, and delivers trans youth programmes, support for parents and carers, professional development and trans awareness training for all sectors and workshops for those working in a range of educational settings.

[www.genderedintelligence.co.uk](http://www.genderedintelligence.co.uk)

### Mermaids

Mermaids is a charity that works to raise awareness about gender issues among professionals and the general public. It campaigns for the recognition of gender dysphoria in young people and lobbies for improvements in professional services.

[www.mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk)

### GIRES - The Gender Identity Research and Education Society

GIRES's purpose is to improve the lives of trans and gender non-conforming people, including those who are non-binary and non-gender.

[www.gires.org.uk](http://www.gires.org.uk)

### Trans Inclusion Schools Toolkit

The Trans Inclusion Schools Toolkit from Brighton and Hove City Council and the Allsorts Youth Project, a charity that works with young LGBT people, is one of the best and most comprehensive guidance documents available in the UK.

[www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Trans-Inclusion-Schools-Toolkit.pdf](http://www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Trans-Inclusion-Schools-Toolkit.pdf)

### **The Genderbread Person**

The great Genderbread Person graphic is perfect for explaining the difference between gender identity, gender expression, biological sex and sexuality.

[www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/assets/media/Genderbread-Person-3.3-HI-RES.pdf](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/assets/media/Genderbread-Person-3.3-HI-RES.pdf)

### **Wipe Out Transphobia**

Wipe Out Transphobia operates the largest gender identity based social media page on promoting awareness of and education on trans issues. It also provides training and policy advice on trans inclusion to public, private and other third sector organisations.

[www.wipeouttransphobia.com](http://www.wipeouttransphobia.com)

[www.facebook.com/wipeouttransphobia](https://www.facebook.com/wipeouttransphobia)



#### **Need advice?**

Your first point of contact is the ATL rep in your school/college. Your local ATL branch is also available to help, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on 020 7930 6441, email [info@atl.org.uk](mailto:info@atl.org.uk). Don't forget there's lots more advice on ATL's website at [www.atl.org.uk](http://www.atl.org.uk).

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