



A GUIDE TO SUPPORTING TRANS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



CONTENTS.

Foreword	2
What does it mean to be trans?	2
The challenges faced by trans children and young people	3
Key terms	4
Signs of gender variance	6
How to create inclusive environments for gender-variant young people	8
When a child discloses feelings of gender variance	9
Good practice	10
Legal obligations	11
Notes	12

FOREWORD.

Action for Children is committed to the inclusion of staff, volunteers, children, young people and parents who identify as trans. This guide has been produced to support Action for Children staff and volunteers to work confidently with children and young people who identify as trans, so that all children and young people feel safe and supported within our services.

To ensure that we are supporting trans children and young people and addressing their individual needs, our practitioners need to be fully briefed on the distinct challenges trans children and young people face on a day-to-day basis.

This guide provides clear information and guidance on how to support trans and gender-questioning children and young people and to help challenge transphobia. It will enable staff and volunteers to develop their approach to trans inclusion and empower trans children and young people to be themselves and achieve their full potential.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRANS?

There is no universal experience of being trans and everyone has a distinctive experience. People often regard trans people as being individuals who wish to transition from one gender to another, but in reality the wide spectrum of gender identity is more complicated. Many people feel comfortable openly expressing and identifying themselves in ways other than simply male or female.

Wherever possible, children and young people should be given opportunities to self-identify or describe themselves, rather than labels being ascribed to them.

For the purpose of this guide, trans is used as an umbrella term for individuals whose identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the trans umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including transgender.

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY TRANS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

The culture in which we are raised is overwhelmingly binary. You are either a girl or a boy. Quite simply, when a baby is born, doctors look at the physical attributes of the baby, make a decision about the sex of the baby and a birth certificate is created.

Our binary culture in the UK creates pressure on children and young people whose gender expression does not conform to the expectations of their families, teachers and wider society. Some children and young people will be aware that their gender feelings and expressions do not match the expectations of society, whilst others will not have worked it out. This can cause a depressed feeling without the understanding of the root cause.

Some children and young people will know without doubt that they identify in a certain way and their feelings never change, whilst others will have a fluid gender identity and sometimes will evolve as lesbian, gay or bisexual at puberty. Other children and young people will evolve as trans.

If a child or young person feels an unbearable mismatch between their body and the way they feel inside then this can lead to distress, whilst some children and young people won't experience any particular distress or make any major life changes.

“

**I BRING MY FAVOURITE
STUFF TO SCHOOL,
BUT OTHER KIDS CAN
BE SO CRUEL**

**THEY LAUGH AND POINT
AND SAY 'OOOH'
AND I JUST DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO DO**

**I BRING BARBIE TO
SCHOOL BUT THEY LIE
AND WHEN I GO
THEY DON'T SAY 'BYE'.**

Alex (7)

”

KEY TERMS.

Terminology in this field is complex, sensitive and constantly shifting. For example, the term 'transsexual' is rarely used now. Labels are necessary but also unsatisfactory when children and young people are just wanting to be themselves. It is always best to allow an individual to self-identify rather than using a wrong term that could cause offence.

AGENDER

Having no gender identity or a neutral gender identity.



BI-GENDER

Having two gender identities, either at the same time or in different situations.

The two genders could be male and female but can also include non-binary identities.

BINARY TRANSGENDER

Some children and young people fit into a binary stereotype which is at odds with their sex assigned at birth.

FTM

An abbreviation for female-to-male sometimes used by trans men.

COMING OUT

Acknowledging to yourself and others that you are trans. It is also used in relation to sexual orientation.

GENDER DYSPHORIA

A person who experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn't feel comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth.



CIS / CISGENDER

A term used to describe a person whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth (ie someone who is not trans).

GENDER BINARY

The concept that there are two genders (male and female).



GENDER EXPRESSION

The external presentation of gender identity, for example, someone's clothes, hair, voice and mannerisms.

GENDER FLUID

Moving between gender identities or expressions.

TRANS (GENDER)

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

LGBT

An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

GENDER STEREOTYPING

Generalisations about the characteristics, behaviour and interests of an entire group based on gender.

**MISGENDERING**

Referring to someone using a word (often a pronoun, such as 'he' or 'she') which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

MTF

An abbreviation for male-to-female, sometimes used by trans women.

NON-GENDER

Any gender identity which does not fit within the binary of male and female.

SEX

The two main categories (male and female) assigned to a person at birth on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions.

NON-BINARY

Some children and young people do not fit into the binary divide and identify as neither man nor woman, but somewhere in between. Some may also identify as a mix of man and woman.

GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal, deeply held sense of their own gender.

TRANSITION

A term used to describe changing gender presentation so it aligns with a person's gender identity. There are two main forms of transitioning – social transition and medical transition.

INTERSEX

A term used to describe people born with variations of internal or external sex anatomy, resulting in bodies that cannot be classified as typically male or female.

GENDER PRESENTATION

Is one's outwards appearance, body language, and general behaviour as categorised under the gender binary by society.

GENDER ROLE

A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviours are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person, based on their actual or perceived sex.

**GENDER VARIANCE**

Behaviour or gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine and feminine gender norms.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Used to describe a person based on who they are physically and emotionally attracted to.

SIGNS OF GENDER VARIANCE.

Many children are interested in expressing themselves in ways that contradict societal norms. This does not necessarily mean that the behaviour will continue into adulthood or that the children are gender variant. It is best to consider a prognosis when the young person reaches puberty. How children and young people are affected by gender variance or gender non-conformity can differ greatly. Some will experience significant emotional distress whilst others will not. When an individual experiences extreme discomfort, they will likely wish to change their gender role to permanently reflect who they really are.

Low self-esteem and self-harm can be symptomatic of a child or young person who is experiencing gender variance but they may not know the cause, or have been told not to behave in the way they feel most comfortable, and consequently suppress how they truly feel.

There is also a higher incidence of suicide attempts amongst gender-variant individuals than in the general population, so early intervention is key to long-term positive outcomes. It is also important to support young people who are gender variant but do not wish to change their gender role permanently.

A TEENAGER WHO WAS ASSIGNED AS FEMALE AT BIRTH BECOMES VERY DISTRESSED BY BODILY CHANGES AT PUBERTY, FEELS VERY UNHAPPY AND DOESN'T LIKE LEAVING THE HOUSE. THE YOUNG PERSON WANTS TO BE KNOWN AS JACK AND LIVE FULL TIME AS JACK.

IS JACK LIKELY TO BE GENDER VARIANT?

The answer is yes, because of the combination of the signs and because Jack has reached puberty, which means his feelings will be unlikely to change.

A YOUNG CHILD ASSIGNED FEMALE AT BIRTH REPEATEDLY SAYS 'I AM A BOY' AND PLAYS OBSESSIVELY WITH 'BOYS TOYS' AND HATES WEARING SKIRTS AND DRESSES.

WILL THE CHILD CONTINUE TO IDENTIFY AS MALE WHEN OLDER?

The child may continue to identify as male; however, you can't be certain until puberty starts.

AT THE AGE OF TWO, ALASTAIR REPEATEDLY SAID HE WAS A GIRL. AS A YOUNG CHILD HE ENJOYED DRESSING IN SKIRTS AND PLAYING WITH 'GIRLS' TOYS. AT THE AGE OF SEVEN, ALASTAIR DOES NOT DISPLAY THE SAME BEHAVIOUR BUT HE HATES GOING TO SCHOOL AND DOES NOT HAVE ANY FRIENDS.

IS ALASTAIR LIKELY TO BE GENDER VARIANT?

Alastair may have outgrown the behaviour or he may be hiding it. He might not be gender-variant; however, he may have learnt to hide his gender feelings, especially if he was repeatedly told his expressions were wrong. Gender variant children can hate going to school and have difficulty with relationships although, of course, these issues may also stem from other causes.

A YOUNG BOY HAS CHOSEN TO DRESS UP IN HIS SISTER'S SKIRT FOR FUN. HE HAS NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE AND HE LIKES HIS NORMAL CLOTHES.

WILL THIS CHILD IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER IN THE FUTURE?

It is likely that this child is just playing and this is unrelated to being gender variant. This type of behaviour may be demonstrated by many children.

A SIX YEAR OLD GIRL REFUSES TO WEAR STEREOTYPICALLY FEMALE CLOTHING. SHE HAS ADOPTED THE GENERAL-NEUTRAL NAME ASHLEY AND DOESN'T LIKE BEING CALLED BY HER GIVEN NAME, AMY. THIS HAS BEEN HER CHOICE SINCE ABOUT THE AGE OF THREE.

IS ASHLEY LIKELY TO BE GENDER VARIANT?

Ashley may be gender variant; however, she may also just like the nickname and dress. Gender-variant children and young people sometimes use names that reflect their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. They will also prefer clothes that reflect their own sense of identity.

However, some children and young people who are not gender-variant may also display this behaviour. The key difference is that these children and young people are not expressing their gender identity, just a preference for names and clothing.

HOW TO CREATE INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR GENDER-VARIANT YOUNG PEOPLE.

Environments that are inclusive and based upon the principle of acceptance will offer practical support for young people and their families and will contribute to achieving positive outcomes.

A family can face great emotional stress if their child is questioning their gender. Parents may mourn the loss of their 'daughter' or 'son' and the strain may even result in parents splitting up. Siblings can also find it difficult and may be scared of being bullied by their peers.

It is critical that families are supported to identify the positive outcomes that can be achieved through enabling their child to be themselves. Holistic support for the family can be an encouraging approach and will empower family members to advocate on behalf of their child in social situations. A united and compassionate family will assure that their child feels respected and loved for who they are.

If adults attempt to stop or criticise a child's behaviour, it will not stop the child's gender identity. Curbing a child's expression of identity can result in:

- The child feeling that they are bad or wrong.
- Feelings of depression and low self-esteem.
- Children and young people not having the confidence to seek the support that they may need.

Adults should make every effort to address the child in the way they have requested. Using the wrong name and wrong pronouns can hurt the individual and result in them feeling more isolated. Whilst it can be very difficult for adults to adjust to a different gender role, it is disrespectful to refer to an individual's previous gender role (even when they are not present to hear this). The more you refer to a person in their new gender, the easier it will become.

A CHILD WHO WAS BORN AS A MALE DRESSES IN GIRL'S CLOTHES AND ASKS TO BE ADDRESSED AS A GIRL USING THE PRONOUNS 'SHE' AND 'HER'. WHILST THIS IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE CHILD'S PARENTS, THEY SHOULD TRY TO GET USED TO USING THE PRONOUNS ALTHOUGH THEY MAY SOMETIMES SLIP UP IN ERROR.

It is essential that adults learn to pay less attention to the differences between their child and their siblings and peers, and more attention to making them feel included. Children and young people who are accepted and valued for who they are less likely to feel excluded and have improved outcomes.

WHEN A CHILD DISCLOSES FEELINGS OF GENDER VARIANCE.

Children who have tried to ignore their gender identity can often become distressed when they reach puberty and their body begins to change. How adult family members and practitioners react to a child saying they do not feel that they are their ascribed sex can be remembered for years to come by the individual.

What you can do:

- Explain the issue of confidentiality regarding the disclosure.
- Ask the child or young person how you can help.
- Be positive and somewhat 'matter of fact'.
- Ask the individual if they have chosen a name.
- Reassure the individual that their gender feelings are valid.
- Advise the individual that you will have to share their disclosure if there are signs of self-harm or if the child is in particular distress.
- Don't make a big deal of the disclosure and don't act surprised.
- Reassure the individual that you are pleased that they are able to talk to you about their feelings.
- Ask questions in a sensitive and gentle manner.
- Ask if the young person has told anyone else about the disclosure.
- Ensure that you are taking the comments seriously.

GOOD PRACTICE.

- Do not inform anyone about a child's gender variance without the child's consent.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers who work with children and young people understand gender variance.
- Treat the child with dignity and respect. Understand the risk of bullying to a gender-variant child and adopt a zero tolerance approach.
- Be prepared to deal with individuals who have less accommodating views about gender identity.
- Adhere to the principles of confidentiality and avoid rumours.
- Recognise that each child is unique, with their own set of circumstances.
- Ensure the environment in your service is inclusive and that no child or young person feels isolated.
- Educate children and young people on the protected characteristics (which include sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment), maybe by displaying a poster or code of conduct for the service.
- Talk about wider diversity as much as possible.
- Avoid binary stereotyping.
- Use gender-neutral terms such as 'students' and 'children'.
- Provide a network of emotional support within your service that may include siblings or the child's family members.



LEGAL OBLIGATIONS.

The Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998 and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provide legal protection to children and young people who are gender variant.

The UNCRC protects the rights of young people up to the ages of 18 and it has 54 articles. The articles relevant to supporting trans children and young people are:

Article 12: Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decision that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

Article 13: Children have the right to freely express their thoughts and opinions, and to get and share information (as long as the information is not damaging to them or to others).

Article 16: Children have the right to privacy.

Article 24: Children have the right to health and good quality health care.

Articles

28 and 29: Children have the right to an education that will develop their personality, talents and abilities to the full.

Under the Equality Act 2010, people are not allowed to discriminate, harass or victimise another person who has (or is perceived to have) a protected characteristic (age, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, maternity and pregnancy, race and ethnicity, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, religion).

Gender reassignment is defined in the Equality Act 2010 as applying to anyone who is undergoing, has undergone or is proposing to undergo a process (or part of a process) of reassigning their sex. The Equality Act 2010 covers social and medical transition.

NOTES.



Action for Children

3 The Boulevard
Ascot Road
Watford, WD18 8AG

Telephone: **01923 361 500**

Action for Children supports and protects the young and vulnerable as they grow up. We make their lives better: now, tomorrow and every day.

All children shown have been helped by Action for Children.

actionforchildren.org.uk

 **actnforchildren**

 **actionforchildren**

 **actionforchildrenUK**