



One minute guide

Working with transgender young people

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What is transgender and how does it relate to our services?

A person who is transgender is someone whose gender identity, i.e. their inner conception of themselves as male or female, does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people undergo gender reassignment to match their physical characteristics to their gender identity.

Transgender is sometimes shortened to 'trans'. However, it is important to note that terminology in this field is complex, sensitive and constantly shifting; for example, the word 'transsexual' is rarely used now. Transgender people are sometimes included in the umbrella term LGBT, which includes people with the sexual orientations of lesbian, gay and bisexual. There is a guide on working with LGB young people ([guide](#)); we have produced two separate guides because gender identity and sexual orientation are different concepts and can result in different experiences for young people.

It is difficult to estimate how many transgender people there are in the UK as there are no official surveys or census questions that allow transgender people to identify themselves, but research by the Gender Identity Research and Education Society ([GIRES](#)) puts the figure between 300,000 and 500,000.

Many transgender young people are aware of their gender identity from a young age, though they may not have shared this with anybody. Any of the young people you are working with may identify as transgender, and you should not make assumptions about any young person's gender identity.

All young people want places to go and things to do, in an environment where they feel valued, accepted and included, and we in children's services have a moral and legal duty to provide these environments for transgender young people. The Equality Act 2010 made gender identity a [protected characteristic](#), which means that any service provided to young people, whether publicly funded or not, cannot lawfully discriminate against transgender young people. In addition, the Act introduced the public sector Equality Duty, which means that services have to consider how they can address inequalities experienced by transgender young people.

What is 'coming out'?

The process of transgender people telling others about their gender identity is often referred to as 'coming out'. Coming out to somebody for the first time can be very stressful, as young people may fear rejection or discrimination. For this reason, young people will often tell someone they trust and have confidence in. If a young person comes out to you, they may simply want somebody to talk to about what can be a confusing and scary time for them, or they may want support in accessing further information - the links in this one minute guide may be helpful.

There is further information about how to talk to young people about their gender identity in this useful [online training resource](#) produced by GIRES. The key thing to remember is not to share this confidential and personal information with anybody, particularly the young person's family, without the young person's permission or unless you have **additional** information that gives you reason to believe that they may be at risk of significant harm.

Respect for transgender young people

A group of young people worked with the NHS and Department of Health in 2007 to produce a [guidance booklet](#) for transgender young people and those working with them. They provided tips for creating a respectful and inclusive environment, with suggestions such as:

Use the name and pronoun (he, she, her, him etc.) that the person asks you to. If you aren't sure what the right pronoun is...ask. If you make a mistake with pronouns, correct yourself and move on, don't make a big deal out of it.

Respect people's privacy. Don't ask what their 'real' or 'birth' name is. Trans people are often sensitive about revealing information about their past, especially if they think it might colour how they are perceived in the present.

Respect people's boundaries. If you want to ask a personal question, first ask if it's okay to do so. Personal questions include anything to do with one's sex life, anatomy (not just genitalia), medical treatment and relationship status – past, present or future.

What barriers or difficulties might transgender young people face?

A lot of transgender young people do not experience any difficulties with their gender identity, and are accepted by their family, friends and community. However, some transgender young people may have an increased risk of poor outcomes, which often relate to discrimination similar to that experienced by LGB young people, as outlined in the LGB one minute guide ([LINK](#)). The Government Equalities Office in 2014 published a review of 'what works' in tackling [homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying](#) in schools.

Some of the support services available to LGB young people are specific to issues relating to sexual orientation rather than gender, so may not be inclusive of transgender young people. However, the [Albert Kennedy Trust](#) for homeless young people, [Broken Rainbow](#) for people experiencing domestic violence and the [Yorkshire MESMAC](#) health and wellbeing charity all offer support to transgender people as well as LGB.

There is less research available about the specific barriers and poor outcomes faced by transgender young people than LGB or LGBT groups as a whole. That which is [available](#) suggests a higher prevalence of mental health difficulties higher levels of discrimination against transgender young people than LGB, heterosexual and non-transgender young people.

As the Equality Act considers gender identity as a protected characteristic, transgender young people have the right to use the appropriate toilet and changing facilities to match their gender identity, and to be referred to using their preferred name. It is good practice to record on their file their preferred name and gender, and use these wherever possible. There will be some instances, e.g. those requiring birth certificates, where this is not legally permissible without a [Gender Recognition Certificate](#), which are not issued to under eighteens.

What is available for transgender young people locally and nationally?

Leeds has a youth group for transgender young people aged 13 - 18, 'Transtastic'. The group meets regularly and offers both a safe space for transgender young people to socialise and 1-1 confidential support. Contact samantha.horsfield@leeds.gov.uk for further information.

Some transgender young people may want to access specialist support, which can include counselling, hormone treatments (including delaying the onset of puberty) and gender reassignment surgery. The NHS run a Gender Identity Development Service ([GIDS](#)) which young people can be referred to for support.

There are a wide range of resources available from the Gender Identity Research and Education Society ([GIRES](#)) covering various transgender issues, and a comprehensive [online training course](#) to support practitioners working with transgender young people.

The LGB charity Stonewall have recently expanded to become an [LGBT charity](#), and will be developing specific projects to support transgender people over the coming months.