



PATIENT FACTSHEET

What is it?

When your child was born, they were given a gender based on their physical appearance. This gender was listed on their birth certificate as their legal sex classification.

Some children grow up feeling that their given gender doesn't match their gender identity - who they truly are on the inside.

Other children will accept their gender but will act in a way that may not fit with the behaviours, attitudes and personality traits expected by their society. Your child's gender expression may vary over time.

Some children are sure about their gender identity from a young age. Others continue to explore how they feel during childhood and early adolescence. After your child has entered puberty, their gender identity usually becomes established and remains stable into adulthood.

If your child has told you that they were assigned a gender that isn't true to who they are, don't panic. There are many families raising gender diverse children. And, there are resources to help you explore what it means to raise your child. You can start with the 'supports' section of this handout.

Why does my child feel different?

Feeling different is not easy, but there is nothing 'wrong' with your child. About 1 in 150 people are gender diverse (or transgender). Your child may feel like the 'opposite' gender, between genders or experience their gender in a way that is unique to them.

What matters is that you continue to love and support your child and ask for help - especially if your child is feeling uncomfortable or distressed.

This distress or unease could be gender dysphoria and can be experienced from being treated as belonging to a gender that doesn't match the way they feel. Many gender diverse children do not have gender dysphoria, or if they do it may stop when they are able to express their gender identity. The gender diverse (and transgender) experience is not a mental illness.

What will my GP do now?

Your GP is your first point of call for your child's healthcare. Your GP will talk to you about your child's health, how you and your child are feeling.

Your GP will give you a referral for a paediatrician who has experience caring for young people who don't believe the gender they were given is right for them.

Children with good health and wellbeing who are supported by their family and community may only need support from their GP and school.

If you or your child are feeling anxious or depressed, or are having difficulties at home or at school, your GP may suggest a referral to a counsellor or other mental health professional. Seeing a professional will allow you to explore your feelings and provide extra help and advice.

Your GP should talk to you about your child's gender issues openly and honestly. If you feel like your GP doesn't understand what you're going through, it's okay to change GPs. Contact the support groups to find a trans-friendly GP.

Does my child need any procedures or medications now?

For gender diverse children, medications and interventions are not necessary. At this stage, supportive care is the best approach.

Allow your child time and space to explore their feelings in a safe environment. For example, give your child the freedom to choose their preferred name, clothes and hairstyle. This type of care improves your child's wellbeing.

Talk to your GP or paediatrician about early social transition, as this can be the best option for some children. Remember that every child is unique and must be treated as an individual.

Will my child need any procedures or medications in future?

As your child grows up, they may want to change aspects of their physical appearance. There are different ways your child can do this.

Puberty blockers

Puberty usually begins anywhere from age 8 to 14 years. It's common for gender diverse young people to feel anxious about the changes puberty brings.

Puberty blockers are reversible medications that can temporarily stop these changes. Some gender diverse teenagers take puberty blockers in the early teenage years to avoid continuing to develop the irreversible changes of puberty.

As a parent, you need to agree to any treatment your child takes until they are able to make their own decisions. Speak to your GP or a paediatrician to learn more about puberty blockers.

Hormones

Hormones are a type of medication that can help people to develop features that may be typically associated with the gender they identify with. Some gender diverse people choose to take hormones and some decide not to take hormones.

People who take estrogen will start to develop breasts. People who take testosterone will start to grow facial hair and their voice will get deeper.

Some changes take a few months, while others can take several years. Some of the effects are permanent and do not go away if a person stops taking hormones. Hormones can be started if your child is mature enough to make this decision, and you and your doctors agree they should start treatment. Speak to your GP or a paediatrician to learn more about hormone therapy.

Other options

As your child becomes an adult, there are various options they can choose if they have been through puberty and would like to change their appearance.

Some of the options include tucking, binding, voice changes, removing excess facial hair and surgery. Later on, your child may choose to change their name and gender with Medicare, RMS and on their passport.

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What should I do?

Being gender diverse is a natural part of human diversity. However, it's normal to question whether your child will continue to feel differently about their gender as they grow up. While it's not possible to predict what will happen in the future, what's most important now is to listen to your child and provide support.

Gender diverse young people who are supported by their families have better mental health and perform better at school. Without support, your child is at risk of developing anxiety and depression.

If you feel supported you can better support your child. You may want to contact the support groups and access some of the available resources as a place to start. You can also ask your GP for a referral to a counsellor or other mental health professional.

How do I talk to family and friends?

Talking to your friends and family about what your child is going through may not be easy.

Speaking to a counsellor can give you ideas and strategies for starting a discussion. You can also see the 'supports' section of this leaflet for more help.

If people are bullying your child, tell your GP or counsellor.

You can contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), headspace (1800 650 890 or eheadspace.org.au) or QLife (1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au) for help and advice. Ask for help before the situation gets worse.

Where can I get help in an emergency?

Phone triple 0 (000) if you or someone you know is at immediate risk of self-harm.

If you are worried about your child's safety at school, speak to your child's teacher and the school principal. You, or your child, can also contact Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), headspace (1800 650 890 or eheadspace.org.au) or QLife (1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au) for help and advice. Lifeline (13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au) provides 24 hour crisis support.

What questions should I ask my GP?

Here's a list of questions you may wish to ask:



- How can I best support my child?
- Who can I call if my child is being bullied?
- Which specialists does my child need to be referred to, if any?
- How can I find other families to connect with?
- Where can I go for support groups?
- What can I do if I am worried about my child at school?
- Could you check the information and resources on HNE Healthpathways?

What supports are available?

Support groups

- Newcastle Headspace LGBTQI and social support groups 12+ years: phone (02) 4929 4201
- Maitland Headspace LGBTQI and social support groups 12+ years: phone (02) 4931 1000
- Lake Haven Headspace LGBTQI and social support groups 12+ years: phone (02) 4394 9100
- ACON: phone (02) 4962 7700
- Gender Help for Parents Support group for parents and caregivers: visit genderhelpforparents.com.au or facebook.com/genderhelpforparents

Public specialists

Ask your GP for a referral if you would like to see a public specialist with experience in transgender health.

Private specialists

Ask your GP for a referral if you would like to see a private specialist with experience in transgender health. Counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists that see young people mainly work in the private sector.

Telehealth

Ask your GP if you can access care using Telehealth.

Mental health services

Contact the Mental Health Contact Centre: phone 1800 011 511

Legal matters

- Hunter Community Legal Centre: phone (02) 4040 9120 or 1800 650 073 (toll free)
- Julie Hughes, solicitor/clinical teacher, University of Newcastle Legal Centre: phone (02) 4921 8666
- Inner City Legal Centre in Sydney: phone 1800 244 481