



*gender*QUESTIONING



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gQ

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“Whenever I go into a women’s bathroom, people look at me weird, like I’m not supposed to be there. I know they think I’m a guy. Actually I’d rather go to the men’s, because I feel like I’m a boy inside. But in the men’s toilets they think I’m a girl.”

“When I was little, I thought I would grow up to look just like my Dad. I didn’t: everyone says I look just like my Mum.”

trans\* can be used as an umbrella term to include many experiences of sex and gender: trans, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer etc.

# introduction

The first question often asked after we’re born is “Is it a boy or a girl?” The assumption is that a child will fulfil one of those two distinct categories. But we are not all born ‘standard male’ or ‘standard female’. The reality is that gender is more complex. There are many genders beyond just ‘male’ and ‘female’; gender can be fluid and limitless.

This booklet is for people aged 16 to 25 who are questioning their gender – for people who feel like the sex and/or gender assigned to them at birth doesn’t fit. We all call ourselves many different things... transgendered, transsexual, trans\*, genderqueer and that’s just a start. Just to make things easier throughout this booklet we are going to use trans\* to refer to people with a range of sex and/or gender experiences and identities. We called this booklet **GQ: Gender Questioning**. We hope that reading this booklet will be a big help towards figuring out some stuff that can be very confusing.

# sex gender & transgender

“I think I’m questioning my gender”

The word ‘sex’ is usually used to describe our biology - whether we are born with a penis or vagina, and what kind of chromosomes we have: XX for girls and XY for boys.

The word ‘gender’ describes how we are expected to act as a male or a female. While there have been a lot of changes around women’s and men’s roles, at least in Australia, it’s still a very strongly held conviction that males should have one set of characteristics and females another. For example, we all know what it means if someone tells us to ‘act like a boy’ or ‘act like a girl’. We also know that you can face ridicule, intimidation and even violence simply for not fitting someone else’s ideal of a real man or a real woman.

The reality is that many people do not neatly fit into one of those categories. The sex we are assigned at birth is not the only factor to determine the kind of person we are. While sex may be a label assigned to you at birth based on our genitalia, how we feel about it is not nearly as simple. Different families /countries/religions have different expectations of how girls and boys should be. These expectations or rules of how to be a man or woman limit how everyone, regardless of gender identity, live their lives. There are also biological facts disproving that everyone is simply either male or female.

Some people are born intersex which includes people born with genitalia that cannot be easily classified as a penis or a vagina. Other people might not respond to, or produce different hormones. This condition, called Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS), means that some people with XY chromosomes (traditionally “male”) might appear more female than male. Some people born intersex might not have a chromosomal make-up that’s XX (female) or XY (male) but a mix of chromosomes, e.g. XXXO or XXY. Being intersexed is a normal variation of nature which should not carry any social stigmatization or medical intervention without consent from individuals themselves.

‘Transgender’ is a word that covers a large range of people whose common experience is that their inner sense of gender is different to the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgendered doesn’t necessarily mean feeling trapped in the wrong body, but it can sometimes include it. Not all, but some trans\* people feel the need to use diet, exercise, hormones and/or surgery to physically change their bodies. There is no right or wrong on this, it’s about figuring out what feels right for you.

“Sometimes at home I dress up in high heels and a dress I found at an op shop. I put on make-up and pretend I’m a princess. I’ve liked doing this for as long as I can remember, but I don’t know why.”

## Being transgender is different to being gay

A person’s gender identity refers to their sense of being male, female, something other or in between. Being gay, lesbian or bisexual means you have some sexual or romantic attraction towards people of the same gender. This does not mean that a gay man is questioning whether he is a man or that being a lesbian means that a woman has questions about her gender identity.

Trans\* people have the same range of sexual orientations as the rest of the population – and so could be lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, straight or something else. Some people identify as queer as a way of recognising that gender is often more than simply male or female, and sexuality is often more than simply gay or straight.

While sexual orientation and gender identity are different, we live in a world that is often prejudiced against us. Unfortunately trans\* people, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and intersex people face similar forms of discrimination. Regardless of gender or sexual identity, everyone would benefit from less restrictive understandings of gender.

“I’m not sure that I really want to ‘become’ a man, but I do know that it doesn’t feel right being a woman... so where does that leave me?”

*Some of these questions might get you thinking about gender but it's important to remember that there is no right or wrong answer:*

What is gender?

- What is gender?
- What makes a man a man or a woman a woman?
- How many genders are there?
- What would the world look like without gender?
- Do you think that gender restricts the way you live or the things that you do?
- What about the clothes you wear?
- Was the gender assigned to you the one you feel most comfortable with?
- What can you do more easily or less easily because of the gender you've been assigned?
- Do you feel forced to act in certain ways because of gender?
- What happens when you don't act in these ways?
- Can we unlearn gender?
- Where did gender come from in the first place?

## Glossary/Useful Terms

The following are some commonly used terms here in Australia. There is no world-wide agreement on definitions, many words have different meanings according to who you talk to, depending on context, politics, place, or culture, and are continually contested. We respect that some people may not agree with the definitions below and respect everyone's right to identify in any way they choose. This isn't supposed to be an exhaustive list, there are many more but hopefully it's a useful start.

**Cross dresser:** a person who has the need to express an alternative gender identity through the way they dress, and be accepted in that role on a less permanent basis.

**Drag:** refers to theatrical/stage performances of gender. Includes drag kings and drag queens.

**Gender:** can refer to biological sex, social roles or gender identity. There are many genders, however the most commonly recognised are male and female.

**Gender affirmation (often known as gender reassignment):** the physical, legal and social process of transitioning gender. May include surgery/hormone treatment, changing name, using a different pronoun, and changing your birth certificate gender.

**Gender binary:** is the classification of sex and gender into two separate categories of masculine and feminine. Most societies divide people into these two distinct categories which excludes many people who don't fit neatly into either category.

**Gender expression:** is how someone presents their gender to the world. This can mean through the way a person physically presents as well as the way they act. This can be through appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions.

**Gender identity:** refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, something other, or in between. Everyone has a gender identity regardless of whether they are trans\* or not.

**Gender neutral pronouns:** any pronoun other than he/his/him or she/her such as ze/hir/zir, it/its, they/their/them, robot/robots, one, heart/hearts or anything else that someone may choose to use.

**Gender neutral toilets:** any toilet that doesn't specify male or female use, such as unisex. These are sometime also known as 'pan' toilets.

**Genderqueer:** refers to people who do not identify as, or who do not express themselves as, completely male or female. Genderqueer people may or may not identify as trans\*. Those who identify as Genderqueer may or may not feel the need to utilise hormone therapy and/or surgery options.

**Heteronormativity:** a view implying that all people fall into only one of two genders (i.e. male or female), that there are particular roles that men and women should follow, and that heterosexuality (i.e. attraction to the opposite gender) is the only 'normal' sexuality.

**Intersex:** a general term used for a variety of people born with anatomy or physiology which differs from current ideas of male and female. This is sometimes known as indeterminate gender.

trans\* can be used as an umbrella term to include many experiences of sex and gender: trans, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer etc.

# Glossary/Useful Terms

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**Pronouns:** are the words we use as substitutes for peoples names. There are gendered pronouns such as he/his/him and she/her as well as gender neutral pronouns (*see above*).

**Sexuality/Sexual orientation:** the nature of a person's basic sexual attraction to other people. i.e. straight/lesbian/bi/queer/pansexual/homosexual/heterosexual.

**Trans\*:** can be used as an umbrella term to include many experiences of sex and gender: trans, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer etc.

**Transgender:** an umbrella term and identity used to describe all kinds of people who sit outside the gender binary or whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. May or may not feel the need to access hormone therapy and/or surgery.

**Transition:** transitioning often consists of a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the correct pronoun. This may or may not include medical care like hormone therapy, counselling, and/or surgery. This can also be called 'affirmation'. Not all trans\* people choose to use the word 'transition' to describe their experiences.

**Transphobia:** prejudice against, and/or fear of trans\* people, or anyone thought to be trans\*. Transphobia can include violence, harassment and discrimination as well as the general idea that says everyone must fit into male or female. Transphobia can be built into the way things work, for example being forced to use either a male or female bathroom or having to continually tick male or female when filling in forms. Homophobia works in the same way but is aimed at anyone seen as outside heterosexuality.

**Transsexuality:** the medical or psychiatric term for a person who transitions from one gender to the other. People can also use 'transsexual' to describe themselves. Some people think that transsexuality is biological, this issue is constantly debated and often divides the trans\* community rather than unites it.

**Transvestite:** someone who dresses in the clothes usually worn by the opposite sex for fetish or arousal purposes. Transvestites, like anyone else, may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, queer, or something else.

**The following list includes terms that trans\* people might use to describe themselves. This is not a definitive list, there are probably many more:**

**MTF, M2F** (male-to-female),  
**FTM, F2M** (female-to-male),  
**Transwoman, Transman, Transguy,**  
**Trannyboy, boi, Trannygirl, Trans**  
**masculine, Trans feminine, Tranz,**  
**bi-gendered, third sex, polygendered,**  
**MTM** (male to male), **FTF** (female to female), **pangendered, transbutch,**  
**transfag, trannydyke, androgyne.**

trans\* can be used as an umbrella term to include many experiences of sex and gender: trans, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer etc.

Genders outside today's ideas of 'male' and 'female' have been around as long as human life has existed. Gender has taken different forms and involves different practices in various cultures and historical periods.

<sup>1</sup> **Homosexuality** was defined as a medical disorder up until 1974 when it was removed by the American Psychiatric Association from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

## trans\*history

**Genders outside today's ideas of 'male' and 'female' have been around as long as human life has existed. Gender has taken different forms and involves different practices in various cultures and historical periods. This is a quick look at the different ways people have talked about gender in western history in particular. Unfortunately we haven't got enough space here to do justice to non-Western cultural experiences, but you may also choose to investigate the two-spirited people in North America, Hijras of India and Pakistan, Fa'afafine of Polynesia, kathoeyes (or "ladyboys") of Thailand, Travestis of Latin America, and the Guevedoche of the Dominican republic. And that is just the tip of the iceberg.**

The popular western terms for talking about gender variance, like transsexuality, transgender, transvestite, genderqueer and cross-dresser are all relatively new. In the 19th century, people who didn't conform to either gender were sometimes known as hermaphrodites. Many European sexologists confused homosexuality with what they considered 'abnormal' gender identity: both homosexuality and transsexuality were called 'sexual inversion'.

The English writer Havelock Ellis called gender variant people 'Eonists', after a French noble, the Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont, who lived as both a woman and a man in the 18th century. Although gender roles in Western countries in the 19th century were much more constrained than now, it seems that trans\* people found spaces to love, work and play: perhaps in the bohemian pockets of large cities, perhaps elsewhere. In Australia, Marion "Bill" Edwards lived as a man through the early 1900's, working in bars, at racetracks and on farms around Melbourne, New South Wales and Queensland until he died in 1956.

The term "transsexual" was coined by an American doctor in 1949. Doctors had been performing gender reassignment operations since 1902, but people weren't named "transsexuals" until the early 50's. Subsequently, transsexuality also became a classifiable 'mental disorder' during the 1950s<sup>1</sup>. Christine Jorgenson, an ex-soldier from New York City, became the first famous transwoman. She obtained

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gender reassignment surgery in Denmark and became a media sensation on arriving home in the USA. Jorgenson starred in her own show at a New York nightclub, and later wrote an autobiography. Meanwhile, terms like 'drag queen', 'cross-dresser' and 'transvestite' were becoming popular although most people still assumed, as some people still do, that a feminine man must be gay, and that a masculine woman must be a lesbian.

At first, doctors thought trans\* people could be divided into categories, depending on how long they'd experienced cross-gender feelings, their feelings about their genitalia, and how well doctors thought they might pass after surgery. (For example, an MTF who had known she was a woman since early childhood, who had a feminine facial structure and struck the medical profession as a potentially attractive woman would be classified a 'primary' or 'true' transsexual.) Doctors began to develop stringent standards about who could, and could not, medically or legally access hormones and/or surgery. Some of these standards still exist today.

Sadly, not enough has changed in the last 50 years, though it can be said that at least in some areas we are making progress! New Zealand's Georgina Beyer became the world's first openly transsexual Member of Parliament in 1999 and in the USA, Amanda Simpson, another openly transsexual woman, was appointed as the Senior Technical Adviser to the Department of Commerce by the Obama administration in 2010.

In Victoria, since 2005 transsexual people who have had "sex affirmation surgery" are now able to get a new birth certificate with their affirmed gender. In 2009 the Australian Human Rights Commission produced the 'Sex Files' report giving recommendations for legal recognition of sex in documents in government records.

Adverts tell us that we can all choose to live the way we want to, that the choices are endless, but we don't always have a choice about gender. Nevertheless, we can, and often do, choose to fight the rules and find ways to be happy no matter what gender we are. We hope that by reading this booklet you feel as though you can have control over your body and your gender and find a place that works for you.

"Sometimes I feel like all I do is explain myself but I'm sure one day people will understand me and the way that I feel"

trans\* can be used as an umbrella term to include many experiences of sex and gender: trans, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer etc.

gQ

## What should I do if I'm questioning my gender?

### Figuring out your options

At some point you may want to **take action** about your gender identity issues. This is different for everyone, so there is no 'how to' guide for figuring this out. However, other people have gone through this before you, and are always going to be going through this so it is a good idea to try and find some support. It also depends on where you are at, what you need, what you're comfortable with, and what you think you're ready for. Where to go from here can also depend on things like where you live or who you live with, your financial situation, where you work, what services you've got access to, and your age.

There are lots of different forms of useful support out there, some people prefer finding local support groups, other's make friends with other trans\* people online, some people like to use email lists and others prefer finding local trans\* friendly counsellors, psychologists or psychiatrists or even telephone counselling. Rather than trying to include everything in this little book we thought it would be easier to have a list of really informative and regularly updated websites with resource lists for you to go to for more information. You will find this at the back.

Take your time, don't feel pressured but when you are ready you might decide it's time to talk to others about your gender, make steps towards changing your name, or experiment with changing your appearance to better fit your identity. For some people these can be scary things to think about, for others it is so completely normal that you won't think twice about it. Just remember, that we are all different and that's a good thing. There are no limitations on what your gender and identity can be. This is exciting stuff to be thinking about so enjoy the ride (at least sometimes!) if you can!

## Accepting who you are

**Be careful not to make big decisions about your life until you're ready. There are no rules about who you can be: all you need to do is be yourself.** Accepting who you are is an important step for everyone regardless of whether they are trans\* or not. You may worry that you aren't 'normal'. But really what is 'normal' anyway?! It takes courage to acknowledge a part of you that possibly goes against other people's expectations. It's not that being trans\* isn't 'normal', it's just that it's not always all that common.

Even when you are comfortable with your gender identity, life sometimes presents problems and challenges. Try and remember that you are a special, unique and valuable person. You might want to rush in and start taking steps towards making the body you see in the mirror reflect how you actually feel, but sorting out your head is just as important. It takes time to know who you are. It's ok to question your gender, it's ok to be unsure, and it's ok to take your time. Lots of people experience feelings like this, so don't forget to check out the back of this booklet for some ideas on where to find them!

## Getting Support

Even though it might be for some, we're not going to lie and say it's easy being gender-questioning or trans\*. Some people might have to deal with feeling alone, scared or depressed, especially if you haven't talked to anyone about how you feel. These are really painful feelings, but they are normal responses to stress. Dealing with these feelings can often be easier when you take care of yourself and your body – support networks, eating well and staying active can sometimes go a long way in dealing with stress and in the long run is probably going to be more helpful than trying to escape or numb your feelings in other ways.

**A good thing to try and do is to learn how to deal with or challenge other people's prejudice, rather than thinking that you have a problem with your gender identity. Remember, if you need to talk to someone right now, you can call:**

**Lifeline: 13 11 14**  
(24hrs cost of a local call)

**Victorian Gay and Lesbian Switchboard:**  
**(03) 9827 8544**  
(Mon-Thurs 6-10pm,  
Weds 2-10pm, Fri-Sun 6-9pm)

If you are feeling like you might harm yourself or feel suicidal it's important that you keep yourself safe and try and get support. Many trans\* people have struggled with accepting themselves but have got through the tough times. **Remember if you are having terrible thoughts now, they are only thoughts. Work out a plan for these times when you are feeling hopeless – it can be good to do this with a trusted friend or family member or a counsellor. You don't need to work through all of this alone.** Find someone you trust enough to talk to or ring a helpline. The Reachout website also has good information on coping with life challenges and finding the support you might need in the process. [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

## Telling people

**If you decide that you want to start dealing and/or experimenting with your gender identity, you might want to talk to some trustworthy people in your life. Even if you are at the early stages of questioning your gender, you still might find it helpful to talk to someone but remember that there is no 'right' way to go about things. The main thing is that you feel ready and do what feels right for you.**

If you think your friends and family won't be supportive then try to gather enough support around you to handle what happens next. Support can be from all kinds of areas in your life: friends, counsellors, teachers, doctors, siblings, neighbours, relatives, other trans\* people, a support group or counselling service. Remember to check out the websites at the back of this book for some useful starting points for both medical and social supports.

Who you tell, what you tell them, when, why and how is all up to you. Some people drop the news into ordinary conversation; others make time to talk about it alone with a friend, parent, colleague or teacher. A written letter (even to someone you see regularly) is a good way to give the person time to take in the information as well as a good way to make sure you get a chance to say what you want to say.

Think through what you want from people before you tell them. Do you want the people around you to think or refer to you as 'she rather than he' or would you prefer gender neutral pronouns or no pronouns at all? Do you want to be called a different name? Do you just want to tell someone, without any changes to how they treat you? If you tell your boss, do you want them to tell other people or to deal with administrative changes? It doesn't have to necessarily be difficult; this can also be a time for celebration. You could throw a party or invite a group of close friends to celebrate your decision. It's natural to want people to respond positively when you tell them and some people will be happy for you, but it's also a good idea to remember that some people may express fear, anger or disbelief. Some people may have already suspected, while others will be surprised and may need a little time to adjust.

**If you encounter conflict: Remind the person that you are still you, and that being trans\* doesn't change who you are – you are not hurting anyone. Stress that you are telling someone about your decision to be more honest with them about how you feel, in the hope that this strengthens your relationship.**

## Your family

**You've probably spent a lot of time thinking about telling your family.** Having their love and acceptance can make a big difference. It's an important decision. More so if you're under 18 or relying on their financial support. At first the people closest to you may have the most difficulty reconciling your new gender identity with the person they know and love. They may have trouble making sense of what they perceive as a difficult 'choice' in life.

Being transgender is normal, but it's not common. So they probably don't know much about it. Having some information that they can read could be a good idea. We've included a few sources of information at the back of this booklet. Your patience is very helpful here. Given time, most families of trans/GQ people come around.

You have a right to be the person you are, no matter who says otherwise. You are sharing an important part of yourself. If people ignore this, they are missing out on knowing who you are.

**Hold on to the fact that you are special. You deserve to be loved and respected the way you are.**

## What's in a name?

**Sometimes trans\* people decide to go by a different name that fits better than their birth name.** In Australia, you can change your name legally for any reason, as long as you only do it once a year and the name is not obscene. We recommend contacting the Births, Deaths and Marriages Office in your State or Territory for further information. You might have known the name you'd prefer for a long time. Or you could try out lots of different names and combinations to see what you like. Alternatively, you might want to keep the name you were given. Just like pronouns, hormone therapy or surgery options, there is no right or wrong with names either, so just have a think about what feels right for you.

You might tell others that you want to start using a new name as your nickname, to see how you like it. You might also want to think about when to use what name: for instance you might only want to be called 'Sam' around friends or school and not around your family. It may take a while for others to adjust to using your new name. Even if people mess up, they might not mean to. Sometimes a new name takes a while to stick.

## What about pronouns?

You may feel as if neither male nor female pronouns (she/he/his/her) fit you properly. You might want to use gender neutral pronouns such as 'hir' and 'ze' or any others that you may prefer, or you may prefer to ask people to use no pronouns at all and instead use only your name. **It's up to you to figure out what feels best for you and to remember that there is no right or wrong with this stuff.**

It can really hurt when people use incorrect pronouns. Most people don't think twice

before using a pronoun, so even if you've asked people to change pronouns for you, it may take a while for people to stop slipping up but eventually most people will get the hang of it.

## Physical transition

For some trans\* people it is important that they change their body to make it look more like how they feel on the inside. Choosing to change your body is a big decision and one that shouldn't be made quickly or for the wrong reasons so make sure you talk it through with those who are supportive of you. Generally people who want hormonal therapy or some form of surgery will in the first instance visit their GP, who would then refer them on to a psychiatrist or surgeon if needed. This changes from state to state so it could be worthwhile getting more specific information from some of the websites at the back of this booklet.

**Questioning your gender or being trans\* is not an illness or a psychiatric disorder but if you want safe medical treatment you need to deal with the medical system.**

The thought of raising this issue can be intimidating, so it can help to go to a GP you already know and trust or find a GP who is experienced in working with trans\* people (such as from a resource list on one of the websites at the back of this booklet). It may be helpful, if you're feeling stressed at this point, to have a counsellor/social worker/case worker to talk things through a bit more and get the support to help you through the hard times.

In Australia, an informed consent model is not often available so instead you may need a psychiatric assessment in order to access hormones and surgery. In Victoria, most gender affirmation surgeries are handled by the Gender Dysphoria Clinic at Southern Health, but there are other options. **To find out more, speak to a trans\* friendly GP, counsellor, therapist or contact one of the trans\* groups listed in the back of this booklet.**

## Getting hassled about your gender?

People who don't exhibit typical genders often get targeted for bullying or harassment at school, on the street, and at home. Lots of people get flak for wearing the wrong clothing or presenting themselves in a way that doesn't reflect society's rules about gender. Girls who are androgynous, have short haircuts, work in 'men's' jobs like mechanics or other trades, play sport, wear masculine clothing or get mistaken for boys are often labelled dykes or butch. Similarly, boys who don't present a stereotypical masculine appearance or who like doing things that women are supposed to do – like cooking, crafts, art, theatre, etc – are often labelled sissy-boys or faggots. What we are trying to say here is that lots of different people get hassled about their gender not just trans\* people, this is the way narrow and restrictive gender roles get reinforced.

It might be as serious as a stranger attacking you because 'you look like a fag' or as trivial as your Dad asking you over and over when you're going to grow your hair. You might be ostracised at school because you aren't 'girly' enough, or prefer making art to playing footy. All of this is unacceptable.

To stop harassment, violence or bullying – whichever way it comes at you, it can help to tell someone. It might be family, friends, teachers or lecturers. If the harassment is happening at school or uni or at work, each of these places has a duty to make sure you are safe and not harassed. Teachers and counsellors may be specially trained and it's their job to help. In the workplace this could be a Human Resource manager or union representative.

If someone is violent to you and you have been hurt, you can call your local police, or ooo, or if you prefer Victoria Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers, who have been trained in the issues relating to transgender people. You can call them on 03 9247 6944.

## Knowing your rights

In Australia some parts of the law are changing. Discrimination on the basis of perceived or actual gender identity is now illegal. **Under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (1995), it is prohibited to treat someone unfairly or harass them because of their actual or assumed gender identity. This covers transgender people, transsexual people, and intersex people.** As of 1st December 2009 the Sentencing Act in Victoria now gives recognition to hate crimes. Laws may change from state to state, so check the Equal Opportunity Act relevant to your state, contact your local community legal service or an organisation such as the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby in Victoria.

You can behave according to the gender with which you identify. Employers and schools must allow you to dress in the gendered style that you choose. You have the right to be referred to using the right name and pronouns. You also have the right to use the facilities that fit with your preferred gender i.e. if you identify as a male, you should be permitted to use male toilets or changing rooms.

Because anti-discrimination law around gender identity has not been tested in court, and because community attitudes can lag behind the legislation, you may find that employers, parents, teachers are unaware of the legislation. The enforcement of gendered school uniforms or work dress codes is a big source of discrimination. If you have trouble with people in power acknowledging your gender identity, contact an organisation that may be able to help, such as TransGender Victoria.

## What should I do if someone I'm close to is questioning their gender?

**If you're reading this, someone you love may have recently told you something like, "I think I'm questioning my gender," "I may be transgendered," or maybe "I'm really a boy/girl".**

If you have always known a person as a male or female, and he or she questions the 'rightness' of this gender, it can be confusing and scary. Watching someone close to you struggle with their gender identity may make you feel like you don't know them as well as you thought or you might find it hard to watch someone you care about going through a sometimes difficult time. It is important to remember that they are being honest with you in the hope of strengthening your relationship. They are putting a lot of trust in you and if possible try your best to be supportive and understanding. You too might need someone to talk to about it if you are having a hard time making sense of things. There are some support groups as well as numerous books that are aimed at families and friends who are coming to terms with someone else's gender identity so if it is hard at first, remember you are not alone.

You can show your support in a concrete way by respecting the choices someone makes about clothing, name, and pronouns.

Gender is usually one of the most basic, often 'assumed' parts of anyone's identity: for example, you don't have to figure out that your friend is a boy every time you see him, he just is. If that basic information shifts, it might seem as if all the other things you know or trust about a person might have disappeared. But your friend is still the same person. Even if she begins to wear radically different clothes, takes on new mannerisms, asks you to say 'he' rather than 'she' or asks for you to use gender neutral pronouns, or asks to be called a new name, they are still the same person. A good way to look at it is that if someone is coming to terms with their gender identity, they are becoming more themselves.

On the other hand, you may have guessed at what was coming. Perhaps you always 'sensed' that your friend didn't feel comfortable in the gender assigned to them at birth. You may already feel like you understand and support what's happening. If this is the case, you are doing great! But if you aren't that's ok too, if needed get some support to assist you through the hard times such as from a trans\* aware counsellor or friend (you could try contacting a local trans\* support group or the local gender centre and ask them for suggestions on trans\* aware counsellors, books to read or even if there are any support groups that they know of).

You can show your support in a concrete way by respecting the choices someone makes about clothing, name, and pronouns. It's important to make an effort with these things even if you don't understand or feel comfortable with it, and even if you don't see the person as the gender they have chosen.

Try to maintain a normal relationship and do the same things that you would of before you knew your friend was trans\*. Call as often as you would before your friend told you about their gender identity. Take the initiative in organising social events, like coffee or a bike ride, or whatever you may have enjoyed together in the past.

The other important thing you will need to ask a gender-questioning or trans person is how to negotiate this with the other people in your own life. For example, they may prefer that you not talk about their decision to other people; on the other hand, they may encourage you to tell other people. Some trans\* people only use their 'preferred' (or new to you) pronouns or name around particular people or social groups. Respect their decision. This is especially important if the trans\* person you know is financially dependent on someone else, for example parents or relatives.

It is really important to remember that if you are aware that someone's gender is different to the one that they were assigned at birth it is never ok to disclose their gender history to others without their consent to do so. Trans\* people do not need to disclose their gender history to anyone if they do not want to so respect each individual's position on this as all trans\* people are different.

It's a good idea to ask what things are and are not appropriate to talk about. Be discreet about the changes your trans\* friend is making in their life. Don't ask about gender affirmation surgery or whether they are on hormones. Definitely never ask what genitals a person has or if they have 'had the operation'. Try and think about a situation such as you getting a drastically different haircut, and everyone you knew offered their opinion on how great or crap it looked, you'd get sick of it pretty quickly. Trans\* people are the same. In short, do your best to be supportive but try not to offer your opinion unless it's invited.

If you have lots of questions, sometimes the best thing to do is get online, or go to a library, make a few calls and do your own research. It could be really helpful for you to go and see your own counsellor to assist you with working through your own difficulties if you need to. Remember that you are not the only person who has had someone close to you who is dealing with their gender.

Perhaps the worst thing you could do as a supporter of a trans\* person is to feel sorry for them. Not conforming to the laws of gender may mean going through a lot of hardship but it isn't all bad. Don't make any assumptions as to how someone else may feel about being trans\*. Figuring out who you are is also cause for celebration, for many trans\* people this is a very exciting time that they have been looking forward to for a very long time!

**Lastly: when someone is questioning their gender identity your own ideas about the world may get shaken up a great deal. You may need to adjust your own sense of what gender is and how it works in the world. So don't be afraid to get support for yourself if you need it to.**

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trans\* can be used as an umbrella term to include many experiences of sex and gender: trans, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer etc.

# Resources

It would be impossible for us to provide you with a comprehensive list of resources and support services in this little booklet. Instead, we have suggested a few groups and websites that have more definitive and continually updated resource lists on them. Hopefully you'll find it a useful starting point.

## A Gender Agenda

This website, based in Canberra, is intended to be a community hub, and informational resource for transgender, intersex, genderqueer and other gender variant people and their supporters. The organisation intends to provide information and support for individuals, families, government bodies and other institutions.  
[www.genderrights.org.au](http://www.genderrights.org.au)

## Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV)

This organisation provides news and information of particular interest to the health and wellbeing of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Victoria.  
[www.glhv.org.au](http://www.glhv.org.au)  
(03) 9285 5382

## Gay and Lesbian Switchboard Victoria

Trained counsellors who are volunteers from the GLBTI community are available to answer calls to explore any issues, including for friends and families.  
Mon-Thurs 6-10pm,  
Weds 2-10pm,  
Fri-Sun 6-9pm  
(03) 9827 8544 (Metropolitan area)  
1800 184 527 (Country Victoria)  
[www.switchboard.org.au](http://www.switchboard.org.au)

## Gender Identity Support Group (GISG)

Gender Identity Support Group is a non-profit organisation for people who have issues with their gender identity, their families and supporters. Meetings and social events are regularly held at locations around Melbourne and Victoria so as to be accessible to not just city people but those living in more remote locations.  
[www.gisg.org.au](http://www.gisg.org.au)  
0403 974 366  
[G.I.S.G@bigpond.com](mailto:G.I.S.G@bigpond.com)

## Intersex Society of Australia

An organisation that seeks to improve the standards of living of people with intersex conditions through education, public acceptance, peer support, advocacy, campaigns and working with various groups to achieve mutual gains.  
[home.vicnet.net.au/~intersex/](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~intersex/)  
(03) 9315 8809

## Minus 18

Minus18 is the largest Melbourne hangout for same sex attracted and transgender young people who want to have a sweet time and meet others just like them. They run dance parties, social events, workshops and tons more.  
[www.minus18.org.au](http://www.minus18.org.au)  
0400964687  
[info@minus18.org.au](mailto:info@minus18.org.au)

# Resources

## Our True Colors

Is an organisation based in the USA that works with other social service agencies, schools, organisations, and within communities to ensure that the needs of sexual and gender minority young people are both recognized and competently met. The website contains useful information for parents, especially those of younger children.  
[www.ourtruecolors.org](http://www.ourtruecolors.org)

## Rainbow Network Victoria

This is the state-wide network for anyone who works with transgender and/or same sex attracted young people. Their website also contains a list of support groups for SSATT young people.  
[www.rainbownetwork.net.au](http://www.rainbownetwork.net.au)  
(03) 9285 5131

## The Gender Centre

The Gender Centre in Sydney offers a wide range of services and information to people with gender issues, their partners, families and friends. Website contains good information on all aspects of transition.  
[www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au)  
(02) 9569 2366

## The Seahorse Club Victoria

A support and social group for the transgender community. Seahorse Victoria aims to create a safe and supportive space in which those who identify as transgendered can meet and communicate with each other. They also produce a monthly newsletter and have an active email list.  
[www.seahorsevic.com](http://www.seahorsevic.com)  
(03) 9513 8222 (voicemail service)

## TransGender Victoria

Founded in the late 1990s to address discrimination faced by transgender people in Victoria, TransGender Victoria is a fearless advocate in legislative reform and works with government and community groups in all aspects of human rights for transsexuals and cross-dressers alike.  
[www.transgendervictoria.com](http://www.transgendervictoria.com)  
(03) 9517 6613 (voicemail service)  
[transgendervictoria@yahoo.com](mailto:transgendervictoria@yahoo.com)

## Trans Melbourne Gender Project (TMGP)

A coalition of people in Melbourne who want to be able to freely embody their own personal gender. This might be men, women, transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, mtf, ftm, queer, or none of the above. TMGP meets once a month and has a lively email list.  
[www.genderproject.net.au](http://www.genderproject.net.au)  
[info@genderproject.net.au](mailto:info@genderproject.net.au)

## Vic Gender

Offers social and practical support for people going through a permanent change from male to female or female to male. They have a helpline, arrange social gatherings and help with such issues as getting medical information and referrals and finding where to live.  
[www.vicgender.com.au](http://www.vicgender.com.au)  
(03) 9001 0250  
[vicgender@netexperts.com.au](mailto:vicgender@netexperts.com.au)

## WA Gender Project

Is a lobby, education and advocacy group for transgender, transsexual and intersex people which is based in Perth, Western Australia.  
[www.wagenderproject.org](http://www.wagenderproject.org)  
[info@wagenderproject.org](mailto:info@wagenderproject.org)

## Zoe Belle Gender Centre (ZBGC)

This new centre in Melbourne aims to;

- Provide support, information & referrals
- Run events, workshops and campaigns to inform, enliven and strengthen our communities
- Host groups and services that are complementary to our Mission
- Improve the healthcare of trans\* and gender variant people
- Advocate and educate about issues of gender diversity

[www.gendercentre.com](http://www.gendercentre.com)  
(03) 9660 3990  
[contact@gendercentre.com](mailto:contact@gendercentre.com)

# Resources

## MEDICAL

### Centre Clinic

The Centre Clinic is a community health service for HIV positive people and the GLBTI community, but open to all.

Rear 77 Fitzroy Street,  
St Kilda VIC 3182  
(03) 9525 5866

### Drummond Street Relationship Centre

Provides counselling services to trans\* clients of any age (under 18 welcome). Counselling is free for those with a healthcare card, or charged on a sliding scale according to your income.

195 Drummond St,  
Carlton VIC 3053  
(03) 9663 6733  
enquiries@dsrc.org.au

### Gender Dysphoria Clinic

Provides services for people who are seeking advice, opinion and assessment for gender dysphoria. Referrals must be made in writing by a GP, psychiatrist or other mental health professional.

Southern Community Mental Health Service, 352 South Rd,  
Moorabbin VIC 3179  
(03) 9556 5216  
genderclinic@southernhealth.org.au

### Northside Clinic

This clinic is open to all, but has a particular focus on providing quality medical care for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans\* communities in Melbourne's north.

370 St. Georges Road,  
Fitzroy North VIC 3068  
www.northsideclinic.net.au  
(03) 9485 7700

### Prahran Market Clinic

Has a number of doctors with experience in dealing with trans\* patients.

Pran Central, Mezzanine Level,  
Corner Commercial Road & Chapel Street, Prahran 3181  
www.prahranmarketclinic.com  
(03) 9826 4500



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