



**WHEREVER YOU  
& YOUR GENDER SIT  
THERE IS A PLACE WHERE  
YOU CAN BE YOU**

---

**A Guide to Supporting  
Gender Diverse, Transgender, Trans\*  
Genderqueer and Gender Questioning  
Young People at School**

[www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)

**twenty10**  
A PLACE TO BE YOU

Twenty10 incorporating the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service of NSW (GLCSNSW) is an organisation that works within NSW to support young people, their families and communities around gender identity, sexual orientation and intersex status. We have created this resource for school and education communities with the underpinning belief that for any young person to reach their full potential, a network of consistent support is pivotal. Many education professionals that we have spoken to have voiced their concerns around working with young people who identify as Gender Diverse, Gender Questioning, Gender Queer, and Trans\* simply because they do not have enough knowledge in the area; this resource aims to address that concern.

There are many amazing resources on supporting gender diverse students available on the internet. We have combined the best of those; with our own practical and day to day experiences and have created some suggestions on how to be best support and include young Gender Diverse people and their families within your school community.

In this resource, we have used the terms Gender Diverse, Gender Questioning, Gender Queer, and Trans\* to encompass the multitudes of gender identity and expression among folks and young people.

**If you require training, support, resources or information, you can contact us at:**

## **Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW**

**Street: Level 1, 45 Chippen St, Chippendale NSW 2008**

**Mail: Po Box 78 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012**

**Email: [info@twenty10.org.au](mailto:info@twenty10.org.au)**

**Metro Support: 02 8594 9555**

**Rural Support: 1800 65 2010**

**Web: [www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)**

Created April 2012, Updated May 2014

## Why is gender diversity an issue for schools?

---

This resource recommends better practice principles for schools to ensure that all your students are safe, included and respected, irrespective of their gender expression or identity, including students who are Gender Questioning, Transgender, Trans\*, GenderQueer, and Gender Diverse.

Without even meaning to, schools can often exclude Gender Diverse and questioning students. Schools are gendered spaces, with toilets, change rooms, sport teams, and uniforms that are usually separated into two distinct categories: male and female. But what if a student does not identify as male nor female, or as a boy or girl? What if they are transitioning or changing their gender? What toilet should they use, what uniform should they wear, what sports team can they play on, and what change room do they use?

These are important questions, among others, to ask, to take action against exclusionary practices that may be found within school policies, procedures and culture so that all students are safe and included whilst attending your school.

## What is gender diversity?

---

Gender Diversity can mean different things to different people, but is generally considered an umbrella term for a person whose **gender identity** does not match the sex they were assigned to at birth in the socially expected way, or who sits outside the gender binary of man/woman. Gender diversity can include (but is not limited to) people who identify as Transgender, Trans\*, Gender Questioning, Gender Queer or another label.

## What is gender identity?

---

Many people use the words “gender” and “sex” interchangeably but they actually mean different things. “Sex” refers to the physical sex which is assigned to a baby at birth by a doctor and recorded on their birth certificate (this is usually male or female). “Gender” or “gender identity” refers to a person’s sense of who they are: a girl, a woman, a boy, a man, both a man and a woman, neither, or another gender. In our society we have a different set of appearances and behaviours (gender expressions) that are thought to be appropriate or typical of girls and boys. People often incorrectly assume that if someone’s assigned female at birth that they will automatically look like, behave and identify as a girl, or that someone assigned male will automatically look like, behave and identify as a boy, but this is not the case. **Gender expression and identity are not predetermined**, instead we learn and develop our gender expression and identity throughout childhood and beyond.

## Aren't children too young to know their gender identity?

---

Considerable research and lived experience show a person's gender identity is usually "fixed" by puberty, if not before, although many people do not feel safe or able to "live" as their affirmed gender due to social pressure, harassment and discrimination. Some Gender Diverse people report feeling "different" from as young as three years old, but may not be able to express exactly why and how they are different. Others may have a very strong awareness of their gender identity, which may be different from the sex they were assigned at birth. They may prefer toys, clothing, friends, and activities thought to be typical of the opposite sex. Of course, not every child who has toys or clothing not typical of their sex grows up to identify as gender diverse, and not all Gender Diverse people have a childhood that reflects their current gender identity or expression.

## How does a young person transition?

---

Transitioning refers to the process of a person recognising, accepting and expressing their affirmed gender. For some Gender Diverse people, their body does not match in a socially acceptable way to their gender identity, and so they may take steps to express their gender differently. This might start with changes to their clothing and appearance. They may change their name to suit their affirmed gender identity (e.g. someone assigned male at birth, but identifies as a girl may change their name from "Andrew" to "Amy" to reflect their affirmed gender). They may ask people to use a different pronoun (e.g. "she" instead of "he"). Some young people will prefer a gender neutral pronoun such as "they" instead of "he" or "she".

Some young people may use hormone blockers to put a "pause" on puberty and minimise the impact of their body's hormones until they reach an age where they can make legal medical choices about their body. Understandably, some people have concerns about young people being prescribed blockers, but blockers help alleviate and avoid the trauma experienced during puberty. They are also considered a fully reversible should the need arise to stop them. Blockers can also remove the need for painful surgeries (e.g. breast removal) when they young person is older by stopping effects of hormones before they have lasting impact on the body.

Some young people may use hormones, administered by their doctor, as part of their transition. Hormones help the young person express their affirmed gender, as using hormones over time will effect the young person's body in a similar way to if they had produced the hormones themselves. Hormones are carefully monitored by the young person's doctor to ensure the best health outcomes.

Gender Affirmation Surgery is another intervention used to assist transition, but this is not available to those under 18.

Transitioning is never an easy process for people to go through, but it is most commonly a liberating and positive experience for them overall.

## Is gender diversity a mental illness?

---

**No, Gender Diversity is no longer considered a mental health issue.** It is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM V) used by psychiatrists and other practitioners as **Gender Dysphoria**. Gender Dysphoria (formerly “gender identity disorder”) is **not in itself a mental disorder** but draws attention to **the presence of clinically significant distress** that gender diverse people often experience caused by constant social rejection and marginalisation.

The DSM V recognises the emotional, psychological, and physical effects that social expectations and assumptions about gender have on gender diverse people. For example, trauma and distress occur when family members, teachers, and students do not respect the affirmed (chosen) gender identity, pronoun and name of the Gender Diverse person.

## Do schools have a legal obligation to include Gender Diverse students?

---

Schools in Australia have the legal responsibility of creating safe physical and emotional environments for all their students, regardless of the students’ gender, sex, or sexual orientation.

Since August 2013, it has been “**unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status under federal law**” through *the Sex Discrimination Amendment*. “These new protections will particularly apply to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, gender diverse and intersex people” (Australian Human Rights Commission). *The Sex Discrimination Amendment* highlights the protection of all individuals, no matter what sex the person was assigned to at birth, or whether the person has gone through any kind of transition including medical interventions, hormone treatments, or surgeries.

Direct discrimination, such as acts of treating someone less than because they are Gender Diverse, and indirect discrimination, where an institution, for example, have policies and procedures that do not reflect Gender Diverse people, and therefore exclude them by omission, are no longer tolerated. Direct discrimination, for example, is found when teachers, staff, and students do not recognise the young person’s gender identity. This can be seen when schools continually refer to Gender Diverse students by their birth name and birth assigned sex, rather than recognising and accepting their affirmed name and gender. Moreover, direct discrimination is found when schools dismiss the vast possibilities of



gender identities, and therefore prevent Gender Diverse students from wearing uniforms that best match their affirmed gender. When schools ask Gender Diverse students “what” they are (their bodies, their genitals, and/or how they have sex), instead of “who” they are (name, age, gender), it is a breach of confidentiality and is a discriminatory practice.

Indirect discrimination is less obvious, and is often found in policies, procedures, rules and cultures within a school. That is, indirect discrimination occurs when a minority group, such as Gender Diverse students, are not represented or omitted from the school curriculum, policies and procedures, and in turn contribute to transphobia.

Examples of indirect discrimination can be found in *Growing Up Queer: Issues Facing Young Australians Who Are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse* stating: “In the schooling context, the continual exclusion of the experiences and needs of young people who are gender variant and sexuality diverse from sexuality education curricula, not only has serious implications for the sexual health of these young people, but also contributes to reinforcing heteronormative values that perpetuate homophobia and transphobia in schools and the broader community” (39).

## What name and pronoun should we use for a trans\* or transitioning student?

---

**All staff and students should use the student’s preferred name and gender** (as opposed to the name and sex assigned to them at birth). All school documents, including the student’s ID, should use the student’s preferred name and gender. Young People are not legally able to change the sex or name on their birth certificate until they are over 18 and have met a range of additional criteria, however changing school documents and the Student’s ID are small steps a school can make to support the student. If the details on a student’s birth certificate need to be referenced or sighted, this should be kept as confidential as possible.

Respectfully check with the student about their preferred name and pronoun, then consistently use those terms, (regardless of the details on their birth certificate). Referring to them by any other name or pronoun (such as their birth assigned name and the related pronoun) is highly traumatic and detrimental to them and can seriously impact their well-being, mental health and sense of safety.

When we use pronouns to identify a person, we may be making assumptions about their gender. Some Gender Diverse people may prefer **gender neutral pronouns** (see below) instead of gender specific pronouns like “she” and “he”. Some may prefer “they” while others may use their own gender/neutral pronouns such as “Ze” and “Hir”, although these are less widely used.

If you are not sure which pronoun a student prefers, use “they” until you ask their preferred pronoun, then consistently use their preferred pronoun when referring to the student.

	Subject	Object	Possessive Determiner	Possessive Pronoun
<b>Girl / Woman</b>	<i>She</i> smiled	I saw <i>her</i>	<i>Her</i> name is	That’s <i>hers</i>
<b>Boy / Man</b>	<i>He</i> smiled	I saw <i>him</i>	<i>His</i> name is	That’s <i>his</i>
<b>Neutral 1</b>	<i>They</i> smiled	I saw <i>them</i>	<i>Their</i> name is	That’s <i>theirs</i>
<b>Neutral 2</b>	<i>Ze</i> smiled	I saw <i>hir</i>	<i>Hir</i> name is	That’s <i>hirs</i>

If students or staff use the incorrect name or pronoun (e.g. the student’s birth assigned name and pronoun instead of their preferred name and pronoun), they should be respectfully corrected, whether or not the student is present. This helps to avoid future mistakes and corrects the assumptions of anyone who heard the mistake. Allowing the mistake to go uncorrected can mean the student will have uncomfortable interactions in the future and could potentially expose their Trans\* identity without their consent.

## Who needs to know that a Gender Diverse student is enrolled at the school?

---

It is never appropriate for a school to disclose a Gender Diverse student’s gender identity or history to other students or their families, except with the student’s express permission. In most instances only the school executive, school counsellor and the student’s teachers need to be aware of the student’s gender history (e.g. that they have transitioned) particularly if the student is newly enrolled. This can help the relevant staff address any issues privately and sensitively. In some situations it may be appropriate for more staff to know that a student is Gender Diverse, but any such decisions should always recognise the student’s right to privacy.

## Should Gender Diverse students “come out”/tell other students they are Gender Diverse?

---

Gender Diverse students should decide if and when they want to share their gender identity and history with other students. Some Gender Diverse students may wish to be completely transparent about their transition with other students and staff, while others may simply want to blend in and be treated no differently from any other student of their gender (For example, a Trans\* girl, assigned male at birth and living and/or identifying as a girl, will often want to be treated as other girl students). But some Gender Diverse students, such as those who identify as being Gender Queer or Gender Questioning, may not prefer to “blend in” as their gender identity challenges or falls outside the male/female binary.

If the student has been previously enrolled at the school, it may be useful to use the beginning of a new term as a starting point for their transition. It would also be useful to have support and resources for students who are transitioning. School support can be seen through school councillors, and Positive Space Clubs, while at the same time, having leaflets on transitioning, Gender Diversity, and “Coming out”/ “Inviting In”. Referrals, and connections with service providers, who work alongside Gender Diverse young people, will also give the young person further support, and connections with the broader Gender Diverse community. Moreover, including gender expression and transphobia in anti-harassment, anti-bullying policies and procedures, in addition creating positive space guidelines for the entire school, as this will foster a supportive environment for Gender Diverse students.

## What uniform or dress code applies to Gender Diverse students?

---

Strict gender specific uniforms and dress codes can be distressing and harmful for Gender Diverse students. Allowing students to have options in their uniforms and dress code is crucial for creating an inclusive school environment, as the uniform being worn affects how they are perceived by other students, teachers and administration, while at the same time, allows the student to explore and express their gender identity.

Some Gender Diverse students may feel the most comfortable wearing a uniform that matches their affirmed gender identity. Gender-neutral uniform options, if available, may be preferred by some Gender Diverse students. Additionally the school could allow the possibility of allowing students to choose the uniforms they feel most comfortable in rather than designating shorts only to boys and skirts only to girls. This can help to create a positive space for Gender Questioning and Gender Queer students to express a more fluid gender (if they wish) by potentially wearing a skirt one day, and pants and a tie another, or they may



want to wear a mixture of both gender uniforms in order to perform their gender expression.

## What about sports uniforms or swimming costumes?

---

Like school uniforms, sports uniforms and swimming costumes are often gendered, so Gender Diverse students should be provided with options they can choose from.

Many Trans\* students use clothes and binders underneath their uniforms to help their body better match their affirmed gender identity (binders are a tight elastic bandage, worn under a shirt to visibly reduce the size of breasts). These are hard to conceal if they are required to wear a close fitting sports uniform or swimming costume. Loose-fitting gender inclusive options are a better alternative, or they may prefer the option of wearing a bikini-top underneath a shirt.

Gender Diverse students, like many other students, can be uncomfortable with their bodies and may be distressed by having to wear tight, revealing swimming costumes. Longer swimming shorts, rash suits or shirts may help. In some cases, the possibility of being excused from swimming could be discussed with the student and the student's parents/guardian.

## What toilets should Gender Diverse students use?

---

Gender Diverse students are often assaulted or harassed for entering the "wrong" toilet, as other students may judge them on their appearance and mistake them for a different gender. For example, a trans boy (assigned female at birth) may be harassed for using the "boys" toilets because other boys don't consider him to be a "real" boy, yet ironically the same student may also be rejected in the "girls" toilet for not being a "girl" either. Some students may also identify outside of the gender binary of boy/girl and therefore find having to "gender" themselves to use a toilet traumatic.

Sadly it is common for many Gender Diverse students to avoid using toilets at school entirely in an attempt to avoid potential harassment.

All students, including Gender Diverse students, should be offered options when it comes to accessing toilets, including having the choice to use the toilet that reflects their affirmed (preferred) Gender Identity and/or access to non-gendered toilets. Some schools re-sign their disabled toilet or designate a particular staff toilet for the use of any student wishing to have a non-gendered toilet facility. If re-purposing a toilet, it must be appropriately signed, leaving it as "disabled" can be further stigmatising for students. Non-Gendered toilets can be useful for any student who feels uncomfortable or unsafe using male or female toilets, not just those who identify as Gender Diverse. Some Gender Diverse

students may still prefer to use boys or girls toilets rather than the non-gendered toilets, so providing options is always better practice.

## What changing area should Gender Diverse students use?

---

Like many students, Gender Diverse students may feel vulnerable changing clothes in front of other students. Offer students options can help minimise or avoid that discomfort. They may wish to use the change room that best matches their affirmed gender identity. The use of curtains or individual cubicles may provide additional privacy and safety. Non-gendered and private change rooms may be a suitable alternative, or using the non-gendered toilets may be a compromise if the student prefers that option.

## What about sex-segregated activities at school?

---

If students are separated by gender for classes or activities, Gender Diverse students should be able to participate in the group that best matches their affirmed Gender Identity and/or allowed to participate in the group they feel most comfortable in. Holding mixed-gendered sessions open to any student is a more preferable option, especially for students who do not identify as (or present as) a boy or a girl.

## If Gender Diverse students want to play sport which team should they play for?

---

Gender Diverse students should have equal opportunity to participate in sports and given the choice to play in the team that best matches their Gender Identity and wear the appropriate uniform, or if preferred, a gender neutral option. Another recommendation is to create co-ed sport teams and groups; whether competitive or recreationally, in order to include all students regardless of their gender identity.

## How should the school respond to harassment of Gender Diverse students?

---

Schools have an obligation to create safer spaces for *all* students. The best results have been achieved when schools take a zero tolerance approach for homophobic and transphobic behaviour and comments.

School staff, families and students should easily be able to refer and understand the school's policy on gender-based bias including transphobia. It should be clear that harassment and bullying on the basis of gender and sexuality will not be tolerated in your school.

School staff should easily be able to identify and deal with transphobic and homophobic language or behaviour. This can include overt bullying and social rejection, students or staff misgendering the student by using their birth name or birth assigned sex (instead of their affirmed name, pronoun, or gender) or phrases such as “they’re not a real boy/girl” or “they’re a freak” etc.

Developing policies and procedures work best when all staff and students understand them and know how to report incidents, and also when schools encourage exploring and celebrating diversity in the curriculum. This includes including gender diverse people and communities across a range of curriculum areas.

## How can schools support the parents of Gender Diverse students?

---

Transitioning can be a challenging time for parents, families and caregivers. Often they may be fearful about how their child will be treated at school by other students and staff. Reassure them that the school respects diversity and every student’s right to a safe school environment. It may help them to know what strategies the school uses to support Gender Diverse students. This includes acknowledging the student’s gender identity, their preferred pronouns and their chosen name. Strategies also include student confidentiality, anti-discrimination policies, anti-harassment policies, and safe space policies. Being transparent with the parents about linking in with specialised support services and providing professional development for staff around gender diversity and transphobia can be reassuring for them.

If the parents are unsupportive of their child’s transition, or need assistance in better understanding gender diversity, schools can play a helpful role in connecting them in to specialised support.

## What can teachers, counsellors and school staff do to be more inclusive of gender diverse students?

---

- Using a Gender Diverse student’s preferred pronoun and name is essential when speaking with staff and students.
- If someone makes a pronoun mistake, correct them, whether or not the person whose pronoun was misused is actually present.
- Have all school staff take part in professional development offered by Twenty10 or other local not-for-profits that specialise in best practice for diverse genders and sexualities.
- Interrupt homophobic and transphobic language or behaviours being used by students and staff. Moreover, if you witness harassment (name calling, hazing, rumours, graffiti, unwanted attention, abuse, etc.) respond accordingly.

- Saying someone was “born a girl” or “used to be a girl” is disrespectful to Gender Diverse student’s identity. If you need to refer to their history, say they were “assigned female at birth,” which recognises how sex and gender are assigned at birth, but is not always the way the individual experiences their gender.
- Be an ally to Gender Diverse students. Lead by example.
- Display materials and posters relevant to gender diverse people in your spaces. ([www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au) is a good starting point)
- Include diverse genders and sexualities in anti-harassment, anti-discrimination school policies.
- Create visibility! Include materials about gender diversity within the school curriculum to help foster a supportive environment for Gender Diverse students, while at the same time, educating students on the complexities of gender, sexuality, and sex.
- Create a “Positive Space Club”, “Ally Group” or a “Gay-Straight Alliance” to support students of diverse genders and sexualities.
- Encourage all school groups and clubs to be inclusive of Gender Diverse students.
- Participate in events that raise awareness of gender diversity, sexuality, homophobia and transphobia, such as “Wear It Purple”, the “International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia” on May 17<sup>th</sup>, “International Day of Silence”, “International Trans Day of Remembrance”. Participating in events similar to these will foster community and alliance with Gender Diverse students.
- Do your own homework and research rather than asking a Gender Diverse young person to educate you.
- Do not assume all Trans\* people want hormones and/or surgery, or to transition at all. For some, hormones and/or surgery are unnecessary, as they are conformable with their bodies. For others, hormones and/or surgery are inaccessible because they are too expensive and/or require parental consent.
- Do not assume that Gender Diverse students are actually gay. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Each Gender Diverse person is different, and therefore, can have any sexual orientation.

## Do your staff require professional development?

---

For over a decade, *Twenty10 incorporating GLCS NSW* has provided specialist training and support to the education, community and health sectors in better practice for working with LGBTIQ young people.

**At *Twenty10*, we offer evidence-based, interactive workshops for school staff and executives. Our experienced and highly-skilled staff can tailor training packages to suit the specific needs of your school, service or community.**

**Sessions can support your staff to:**

[www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)



- Understand the differences between gender identity, intersex status and sexual orientation and use appropriate language.
- Identify common issues for LGBTIQ young people in schools or services.
- Utilise best practice around transgender students including preferred names and pronouns, uniforms, change rooms and toilets.
- Recognise homophobic and transphobic behaviours and develop practical strategies to create change.
- Evaluate how inclusive your school and staff are with LGBTIQ students and rainbow families, and create a plan of action to increase inclusivity and cultural awareness.
- Access appropriate resources, referrals and services.

**For more information**, please contact **Terence Humphreys**:  
terence@twenty10.org.au / (02) 8594 9562



# Glossary of Useful Terms

---

**Gender Diverse:** Gender Diverse is used as an umbrella term to encompass all the different ways gender can be perceived and experienced. It can include people questioning their gender, those who identify as Trans\* or transgender, gender queer, gender questioning, non-gender specific, and many more labels.

**Gender Questioning:** Someone who feels the gender expectations for their assigned sex do not fit their body nor identity. This includes people who see the binary categories of male and female or masculine and feminine as unhelpful or too restrictive. Similarly, Gender Questioning folks may feel that their gender does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth. Gender Questioning may also be used to refer to the “process” of questioning, exploring, acknowledging and accepting their (assigned) gender identity. Gender Questioning can also be used as an identity or a label that acknowledges the exploration of genders and gender identities. Some may go on to identify as Trans\* or Gender Queer.

**Gender Queer:** Gender Queer people challenge the gender binary of male/masculine and female/feminine. They may identify as being both man and woman, neither, being all genders, or having no gender at all. Gender Queer often refers to a person’s gender identity, while the word “Androgyny” usually refers specifically to someone’s appearance.

**Trans\*:** An inclusive umbrella term that can include but is not limited to transgender, transsexual, trans man, trans woman, gender queer, gender fluid, non-binary, genderless, androgynous, questioning, or any other identity labels which are meaningful for that person.

**Our thanks for the amazing and inspirational work of the following agencies and projects which have helped us develop our thinking:**

*Growing Up Queer: Issues Facing Young Australians Who Are Gender Variant and Sexuality Diverse*

<http://www.twenty10.org.au/resources/research>

The Gender Centre <http://www.gendercentre.org.au/>

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/new-protection>

<http://lgbtcenter.ucdavis.edu/lgbt-education>

[http://www.hrc.co.nz/human-rights-environment/action-on-the-Trans\\*-inquiry/resources/Trans\\*-people-facts-information/](http://www.hrc.co.nz/human-rights-environment/action-on-the-Trans*-inquiry/resources/Trans*-people-facts-information/)