



the facts:
navigating life



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

understanding gender identity

Gender identity is how you think and feel about your gender, how you show this to others, and how you want others to treat you.



About gender identity

The physical features you were born with (sex assigned at birth) don't necessarily define your gender. Although gender has traditionally been divided into 'male' and 'female', there are a diverse range of gender identities.

For example, you could identify with a gender that's different from the sex you were assigned at birth, such as:

- being assigned female at birth, but identifying as a male
- being assigned male at birth, but identifying as a female
- being born with both male and female sex characteristics and identifying as male, female, or another identity
- identifying somewhere between male and female
- recognising yourself as another gender identity.

Some people may not have a label for what they're experiencing and some might be exploring their gender identity, and that's OK too.

Young people who are gender diverse or don't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth can live exciting and fulfilling lives. However, a lack of understanding, acceptance, discrimination and transphobia can contribute to an increased risk of depression, anxiety, self harm and suicide.

Why might this be difficult to experience?

Some common experiences that can affect your wellbeing and increase your vulnerability to developing mental health difficulties are:

- feeling different from other people around you
- experiencing bullying about your gender identity, whether verbal, physical or online
- experiencing discrimination – being treated differently or excluded – because of your gender identity (this is against the law in Australia)
- feeling pressure to define or deny your feelings regarding your gender identity
- feeling unsupported or worried that your gender identity will not be accepted by family and friends, along with the possibility of being rejected or isolated
- feeling stressed and anxious in relation to the pressure to conform with your sex assigned at birth.



Feeling these pressures can be stressful, especially with any other stresses you might be experiencing in your life such as managing studies or work, job hunting, forming relationships or making sense of who you are and your place in the world.

Noticing the impact on your mental health

It can be hard to know if you're experiencing early signs of a mental health problem. Things to look out for include:

- changes in mood – feeling sadder, more anxious or more irritable
- changes in behaviour – being less talkative, becoming withdrawn or being more aggressive
- changes in relationships – falling out with friends or your partner, or conflict with family
- changes in appetite – eating more or less than usual, or losing or gaining weight without trying to
- changes in sleep patterns – sleeping more or less than usual
- changes in coping – feeling overwhelmed or tired of life
- changes in thinking – more negative thoughts, or thoughts of self harm or suicide.

If you have been experiencing any of these things for a long time, you might not see them as changes.



Getting the right support

While it's normal to occasionally experience some of these things, if you're finding it hard to cope and your social life, work or studies are being affected, then it's time to get support.

Getting support when problems develop can reduce the effects of mental health challenges and can help prevent more serious issues developing in the future.

Some transgender or gender diverse young people find it very hard to ask for help. This might be because of discrimination by health professionals in the past, worries about privacy, or difficulty talking to strangers about gender identity.

It's important to find someone you can trust to support you throughout your journey. This might be your general practitioner (GP) and/or other health professionals experienced in working with gender diverse young people. headspace can also help connect you with specialists for specific needs around gender transition if you decide to go down that path.

It can take time to find the health professional who is right for you, so don't give up if you don't find the

right person straight away. Remember that you don't have to discuss your gender identity if you don't feel comfortable or safe.

A trusted friend, teacher, Elder or family member might also be able to recommend someone to talk to.



You can find tips for a healthy headspace on the headspace website if you're feeling stressed or having a hard time.

Remember that you're not alone and there are many young people exploring and questioning their gender identity. If you want to talk through any questions or concerns about your gender identity, or if you're having a hard time, there are people who can help and support you.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of intense emotions, or if you have thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately. Navigating your gender identity can be challenging at times, but it's important to remember that there are lots of people who can celebrate and support you as you learn more about yourself.

Getting support

Youth support services

qheadspace

Chat anonymously with other young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and ask questions of our headspace queer peers.

headspace.org.au/qheadspace

Qlife

Chat to a peer support volunteer over the phone or through web-chat every day from 3pm to midnight (all ages).

qlife.org.au

Minus18

Have lots of resources about gender diversity for young people and their families. minus18.org.au

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800 (5-25 years)

kidshelpline.com.au

SANE Australia

1800 187 263 (18+ years)

sane.org



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government.

 **headspace**
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information. 03 Novemehr 2022