

No 11 Supporting Transgender Children

What is gender identity?

For some people, it is not appropriate to think of gender identity as being totally female or totally male. They may consider their gender identity to be fluid, partially male and partially female or they may consider themselves to be ungendered. When the person experiences a discomfort or distress at the mismatch between their gender identity and physical sex it is referred to as gender dysphoria. The important thing is to validate the young person's identity as it is now and support any changes that may arise as they come to explore their gender identity further.

Transgender/Trans/trans

These are umbrella terms used to describe people who identify as:

- Transgender
- Transsexual
- Transvestite (a person who wears the clothes of the opposite sex. Not always a transgender person)
- Intersex (reproductive anatomy doesn't fit the typical definitions for male or female)
- Both male and female
- Non-Binary (Neither male nor female)
- Gender fluid (gender changes between male and female repeatedly)
- Androgynous (partly male and female in appearance)
- A third gender
- Or who have a gender identity which we do not yet have words to describe

Transgender Person: A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people will choose to transition socially and some will also take medical steps to physically transition (with the help of hormone therapy and/or surgery) to live in the gender role of their choice.

Transsexual Person: A person with a consistent and overwhelming desire to transition and fulfil their life as the opposite gender. Most transsexual people actively desire and complete gender re-assignment surgery.

Why is this important?

Trans children and young people are a particularly vulnerable group. Someone whose gender presentation appears different from their biological sex could be vulnerable to transphobic bullying but could also suffer from homophobic or sexist and sexual bullying.

Useful resources: <http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/>



TransgenderGuidanc
e.pdf

What can schools do?

Seating plans

Students often report that boy-girl seating is the most frequent cause of stress. For non-binary students (those who identify as neither male nor female), such arrangements erase their gender entirely; therefore avoid this method of seating pupils

Recognise and challenge transphobia

Many schools are now appropriately challenging homophobic language, but we are less skilled at challenging – or even identifying – transphobia. Most common is students misgendering one another as “banter. The key is in educating students as to why this is harmful. Once explained, adopt a zero-tolerance policy on future transphobia.

Names

It’s important to honour students’ choices of name – for trans students, this sends the important message that you accept their identities unfailingly.

Ensure safe spaces for Trans students

Toilet and changing room access for Trans students can be difficult. In the short term schools can turn disabled toilets into gender neutral bathrooms to create a safe space. Long term a toilet specifically designated as a gender neutral toilet is generally best and something to be considered.

Curriculum

Hearing about transgender people in lessons can provide trans and cisgender students alike with role models.

Assembly/Form Time

Use assembly and form time to raise awareness of key dates for the trans community.

Consider language in policies and also the uniform policy

Do school policies and information contain gender specific rather than gender neutral pronouns? If so, then review these policies; consider changing reference to boys or girls to ‘pupils.’ Consider changing the uniform policy to be gender neutral, again removing the reference to girls’ or boys’ uniform and keeping it just as ‘uniform.’

What should I do if a pupil tells me they are questioning their gender?

If a pupil confides in you that they are, or think they might be trans, the first thing you should do is reassure them that it is okay, and that you will keep this information confidential until they want it to go any further. You should ask questions about what support they would like from the school, and you could let them know about LGBT youth groups and support services. Being transgender should not be treated as a child protection issue in itself, and therefore you should not pass this information on to anyone else without the young person's consent, unless there are additional concerns about their well-being or mental health.

Practical considerations: Some of the things you might want to consider include:

- Should the class register be changed to a different name?
- Which toilets/ changing room would the pupil prefer to use?
- Does the pupil want to change the uniform they wear?
- Who does the young person want to be told about this, and how should that happen?