

Transgender experiences – Information and support



**For trans people, their
families and healthcare staff**

About this leaflet

This leaflet has been produced to help trans people and their families understand about the experiences of trans people, their rights and their choices. It also helps healthcare staff to understand about their role when caring for trans people.

We now live in a more equal society, where boys and girls have many interests in common. Nevertheless, we still tend to think in stereotypes: we expect that each group will dress somewhat differently and may often have rather different behaviours and pastimes, and even separate groups of friends.

Defining gender identity

Society divides people into categories – boy or girl – depending on the male or female appearance of an infant at birth. Our reproductive organs, as well as our brains, have distinctly different male and female characteristics. These physical differences define our **sex**, whereas **gender identity** describes the inner sense of knowing that we are men or women, and **gender role** describes how we behave in society. This is **different from sexual orientation**; that is, whether a person is sexually attracted to men, or women, or both or, very occasionally, neither.

Typically, our sex appearance, gender identity and gender role are consistent

with each other, so, as soon as the sex of a baby is apparent at birth, it is assumed that the gender identity matches.

What is gender dysphoria?

Occasionally, however, a few individuals find that the way they look on the outside doesn't fit how they feel inside. Also, the way they are expected to behave may be quite different from the way they actually want to behave. This causes a feeling of discomfort that is sometimes described as **gender dysphoria** (dysphoria means unhappiness). However, this is not a mental illness. Gender dysphoria is a recognised condition for which medical treatment is appropriate in some cases. The condition is increasingly understood to have its origins before birth. Research studies indicate that small parts of the baby's brain progress along a different pathway from the sex of the rest of its body. This predisposes the baby to a future mismatch between gender identity and sex appearance (www.gires.org.uk/assets/atypical-gender-development.pdf).



However, every individual is unique: each will experience gender variance to a different degree, and will react to social circumstances differently. So, people will express themselves in a wide variety of ways.

Although 'labels' don't really do justice to this variety, we have to use language to discuss these issues. Generally, the term used to embrace all varieties of unusual gender expression is **transgenderism**.

Some trans individuals will cross-dress occasionally or even on a regular basis (sometimes referred to as **transvestism**).

Others may live permanently in the gender role that is most comfortable for them, but without seeking any medical treatment.

The distinctions between these gender expressions can sometimes seem quite blurred.

Occasionally, people do not identify comfortably as either men or women, but feel that they have characteristics of both and live somewhere in between.

Choices about the future

For a few people, the discomfort arising from the mismatch between the way they look and the way they feel may become extreme through childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. In adolescence, stress is aggravated by the onset of puberty, when the body develops even further in opposition to the innate gender identity. In the Netherlands, the USA, Australia and some other countries, young people may have medical intervention to suspend puberty, allowing more time to confirm whether they wish to live as men or as women in their adult lives.

However, people experiencing gender dysphoria often live for many years in the gender role that society expects of them until, finally, their distress becomes intolerable and they undergo **transition** to live permanently according to the gender role that is more comfortable for them. When gender discomfort is this severe, it is referred to as **transsexualism**.

Types of treatment available

Transsexual people are legally entitled to treatment on the NHS but may also choose to be treated privately. Most of those experiencing transsexualism have a combination of hormone medication and surgery to bring the body more closely in line with the underlying gender identity.

This is called **gender confirmation** treatment (or gender reassignment). Others may be able to achieve sufficient comfort through hormone treatment alone. These treatments are generally very successful in giving people the sense of harmony and authenticity that they seek.

It is now quite common for those experiencing and/or expressing gender variance to describe themselves as **trans men** (female to male) and **trans women** (male to female). However, many of those who live full time in the new gender role wish to be regarded as ordinary men and women. Having established a sense of their own wholeness, they are then better equipped to make a valuable contribution to society, in all walks of life.

Protecting privacy

It is important that trans people do not experience discrimination in the clinical setting. Medical professionals should use names, titles and wherever possible hospital accommodation that the individuals concerned regard as appropriate. This will usually be consistent with their dress and presentation. If the situation is unclear, medical staff should discuss these issues with the individual, **privately**. Confidentiality is an especially sensitive issue for trans individuals. No non-essential disclosure of their trans status or history should occur. Those who

transition permanently may obtain a gender recognition certificate, which entitles them to special protection of their privacy under the Gender Recognition Act.

The need for privacy applies whether the treatment is specifically for gender discomfort or for any other medical condition, where such information may in fact be irrelevant. Trans people require the usual range of treatments, from flu jabs to heart surgery.

Facing discrimination at work

When trans people start to live permanently in the new gender role, they and their families, partners and spouses are likely to experience great stress. Many trans people suffer discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere at this time. For these trans people, including those who are themselves medical professionals, the Sex Discrimination Act provides protection in employment before, during and after the transition process. For more information on protection in employment, please visit

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/yourrights/equalityanddiscrimination

All trans people, whether specifically protected by the law or not, are entitled to respect and equal treatment.

Information and support

The following national organisations will be able to offer help and support to you and your family. They may also be able to provide details of local support organisations.

a:gender

Tel: 020 7035 4253

Email: agender@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.csag.org.uk

Support for staff in government departments and agencies who have changed – or who need to change – their perceived gender permanently, or who identify as being intersex.

Beaumont Society

27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 01582 412220

Email: enquiries@beaumontsociety.org.uk

Website: www.beaumontsociety.org.uk

For those who feel the desire or compulsion to express the feminine side of their personality by dressing or living as women.

Beaumont Trust

27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 07000 287878

(Tuesday and Thursday 7–11pm)

Email: beaumonttrust@gmail.com

Website: www.beaumont-trust.org.uk

Assists those troubled by gender dysphoria, and those involved in their care.

Depend

BM Depend, London WC1N 3XX

Email: info@depend.org.uk

Website: www.depend.org.uk

Free, confidential and non-judgemental advice, information and support for family members, partners, spouses and friends of transsexual people.

FTM Network

BM Network, London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 0161 432 1915

(Wednesday 8–10.30pm)

Website: www.ftm.org.uk

Advice and support for female-to-male transsexual and transgender people, and for their families and professionals.

'Buddying' scheme, newsletter (*Boy's Own*) and an annual national meeting.

Gender Identity Research and Education Society

Melverley, The Warren, Ashted, Surrey
KT21 2SP

Tel: 01372 801554

Email: info@gires.org.uk

Website: www.gires.org.uk

Promotes and communicates research, and provides information and education to those who can improve the lives of people affected by gender identity and intersex conditions.

Gender Trust

PO Box 3192, Brighton, Sussex BN1 3WR

Tel: 01273 234024 (office hours)

Helpline: 0845 231 0505

(10am–10pm Monday to Friday and

1pm–10pm Saturday and Sunday)

Email: info@gendertrust.org.uk

Website: www.gendertrust.org.uk

Advice and support for transsexual and transgender people, and for their partners, families, carers, and allied professionals and employers. Has a membership society and produces a magazine (*GT News*).

Gendys Network

BM GENDYS, 27 Old Gloucester Street,

London WC1N 3XX

Email: gendys@gender.org.uk

Website: www.gender.org.uk/gendys

For all those who encounter gender problems personally or as family members, lovers or friends, and for those who provide care.

Quarterly journal and biennial conferences.

Mermaids

BM Mermaids, 27 Old Gloucester Street,

London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 07020 935066

(Monday to Saturday 3–7pm)

Email: mermaids@freeuk.com

Website: www.mermaids.freeuk.com

Support and information for children and teenagers who are trying to cope with gender identity issues, and for their

families and carers. Please send an SAE for further information.

Press For Change

BM Network, 27 Old Gloucester Street,
London WC1N 3XX

Tel (emergencies only): 0161 432 1915

Website: www.pfc.org.uk

Campaigns for civil rights for trans people. Provides legal help and advice, information and training for individuals. Newsletter and publications. Please send an SAE for further details.

THE SIBYLS

BM Sibyls, 27 Old Gloucester Street,
London WC1N 3XX

Email: enquiries@sibyls.co.uk

Website: www.sibyls.co.uk

Christian spirituality group for transgender people.

Women of the Beaumont Society

BM WOBS, 27 Old Gloucester Street,
London WC1N 3XX

Tel: 01223 441246 or 01684 578281

Email: WOBSMatters@aol.com

Website: www.gender.org.uk/wobsmatters

Operated by and for wives, partners, family and friends of those who cross-dress.

Department of Health

Further publications on trans issues can be found at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Managing_yourorganisation/Equalityandhumanrights/Genderidentity/index.htm

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