

FAQs- Gender Identity Diversity - young people (under 18)

This section covers:

FAQs Relating to a young person's gender identity:

- *My child has disclosed a **gender diversity** I'd like to support them, but don't know what to do?*
- *If I/my child attends a gender clinic, will it 'make it all real' / 'go down an irreversible road'?*
- *My child has disclosed a **gender diversity** and I / another close family member is struggling to understand /accept it (possibly for religious or personal reasons)*
- *My child has disclosed a **gender diversity** and I feel it's just a 'phase'*
- *I worried that I might have done /not done something that has made this happen?*
- *My child/the child I'm supporting has **ASD (Autism spectrum disorder including Asperger syndrome)**, is the gender diversity not simply part of that?*
- *My child/the child I'm supporting has a **learning disability**, how do we appropriately support their exploration of this diversity?*

Responses:

- ***My child has disclosed a **gender diversity** I'd like to support them, but don't know what to do?***

The first step is to consider asking your GP for a referral to the children's and adolescents gender identity diversity service (The NHS Tavistock and Portman Clinic, 'GIDS').

Other things you could do

Download our **Information sheet for GPs** (FAQ section) which will help the GP if they are not familiar with the referral process.

- ***If I/my child attends a gender clinic, will it 'make it all real' / 'go down an irreversible road'?***

The quick answer is no, the clinic is the national NHS specialist centre for under 18's and are there to support the young person and offer a space to explore without expectation or judgment, what is right for each individual, what is going on for them and what it means to them, whilst keeping all options open. Many young people attend the clinic and do not go on to access further medical services. See <http://gids.nhs.uk/parents>

The clinic run outreach clinics in the Southwest. They do have a long waiting list (over a year) so try to do this as soon as possible even if it feels 'a bit early' right now.

Other things you could do

Contact our help, support and advocacy team if you or family members or school need any help and guidance around any practical or emotional issues.

We run gender identity family days so you can meet other families sharing similar experiences

<https://www.intercomtrust.org.uk/directory/trans-groups/gender-identity-family-days>

If the young person is aged 13 + they can attend one of the specialist LGBT+ youth groups so they can meet others. This importantly will help them feel less isolated and offers a safe space to explore their emerging identity and see the wide variety of ways to identify with a gender diversity (rather than assume what may be embedded as a social stereotype)

<https://www.intercomtrust.org.uk/directory/youth-groups/>

- ***I / another close family member is struggling to understand /accept it (possibly for religious or personal reasons) and finding it too distressing to contemplate***

We do offer support to those family members who are struggling with their feelings around the changes the young person is experiencing. Our experience of working with young people and families shows us that the family days can also help with this <https://www.intercomtrust.org.uk/directory/trans-groups/gender-identity-family-days>

For some people, such an unexpected turn of events can trigger a family member to have strong internal thoughts that they 'might not be a good enough' parent, or find a conflict with religious or cultural beliefs, or they have internalised archaic social messages about transgender people and feel 'shamed' ('what will the neighbour's think?').

Often a strong fear of potential rejection by other family members or their local community is felt by themselves as well as by the person who is experiencing the gender identity diversity. Family members may be struggling with trying to support their offspring whilst at the same time grieving the dreams and expectations they had imagined of them in the gender they were assigned at birth.

It is vitally important that these difficult feelings and thoughts are not transferred against the young person, and that the adult is able to step back and see their own internal issue and seeks support to work through those feelings. When a young person 'comes out', they are in a vulnerable place and need a safe space to retreat to from the now more challenging world. The most important thing the young person needs is to have the unconditional support of their family and not to feel shamed or blamed or rejected at this the most difficult time of their own young lives.

Getting support yourself means you can remain strong for your offspring for whatever is happening for them.

- ***My child has disclosed a **gender diversity** and I feel it's just a 'phase'***

For the young people we work with, the word 'phase' can be very triggering and distressing, as it undermines the very real feelings they are currently experiencing. The clinic guidance is to try to stay focused on where the young person is at 'now' and not (hard as it is) to assume what may or may not happen in the future. It is vitally important for long term mental health and well-being that the young person is supported (not rejected or left unheard), as evidence shows that a supportive approach offers these young people the best outcomes long term.

- ***I'm worried that I might have done /not done something that has made this happen?***

It is not possible to 'make' someone have a gender diversity. Currently there are a few ideas about how this comes about, but no firm evidence. Some thoughts lean toward a hormonal influence (within the womb and later at puberty) and others are to do with social and psychological factors that shape them as individuals

<http://gids.nhs.uk/parents#why-does-my-child-feel-this-way>

- ***My child/the child I'm supporting has ASD (Autism spectrum disorder including Asperger syndrome), is the gender diversity not simply part of that?***

Statistics show that people with a gender diversity have a slightly higher rate of ASD type presenting characteristics. If your child has ASD and is expressing a gender diversity, then follow the guidance for neuro-typical young people <http://www.autism.org.uk/About/Family-life/Parents-carers> 'Waiting it out to see if it's a phase' is not an appropriate approach to these young people.

GIDS team have specialists who can help explore this and are very experienced in to working with ASD as a co-presentation <http://gids.nhs.uk/parents>

The Intercom support team are also experienced in working inclusively.

- ***My child/the child I'm supporting has a learning disability, how do we appropriately support their exploration of this diversity?***

GIDS team have specialists who can help explore this <http://gids.nhs.uk/parents> and are very experienced in to working with LD as a co-presentation. 'Waiting it out to see if it's a phase' is not an appropriate approach for these young people.

The Intercom support team are also experienced in working inclusively.