

# Supporting Younger TGD People

*by Taryn Dorrough (they/he)*

**Whether you run a cosy café, large medical practice or simply a single office desk, it is important to create an inclusive and safe space.**

For young Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) people, reaching out for the first time can be the most difficult hurdle to overcome. On that note, visibility matters! Whether it's a rainbow flag, ally sticker or gender inclusive forms, a young person exploring their sexuality or questioning their gender will most likely notice and it'll brighten up their week.

In situations around school, the shops or simply visiting the doctor, hearing the wrong pronouns or refusal to use a preferred name can have a devastating impact on the mental health of already vulnerable teens. Below, and on the next page, are some ways you can support young TGD people.

## **Politely correct others if they make a mistake.**

If you notice colleagues using incorrect language or names/pronouns for an individual, politely correct them. You wouldn't expect a teen to call out their bully's behaviour, so stand up for those who are unable to themselves if you can.

## **Affirm the young person (despite expectations from family and society)**

Don't say 'it's just a phase,' or 'they are too young to know'. Instead, listen to what they want and encourage gender exploration without the pressure to make any firm decisions.

## **Transitioning is not just medical.**

When a young TGD person comes out, it doesn't automatically mean they want hormones or surgery. Changing names, pronouns, clothing or style are just some of the ways to validate or affirm someone's gender identity.

## **Don't confuse gender and sexuality.**

For people exploring non-binary gender identities, explaining who they are attracted to can be complicated. TGD people are not always straight, nor do they necessarily identify with being gay, bisexual, asexual or any other label. If you are aware of a person's gender identity, it does not mean you can ask about sexuality. Their sexuality is most likely not relevant, and none of your business.

## **If we do reach out, we are seeking help.**

Transgender youth are not your teachers so be willing to educate yourself and put in the effort to learn. If you don't know something, find out!

There are many guides for supporting TGD youth at school (check out MINUS18), navigating transition, connecting with social groups and much more. We don't expect you to have all the answers; most of the time we just need a bit of affirmation and support.

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## 1 CHECK NAME AND PRONOUNS

- Check if they go by a different name to what may be on formal documents
- Ask which pronouns they use
- Should these be used publicly, among friends or remain between the two of you?

## 2 KEEP THINGS CONFIDENTIAL AND PROFESSIONAL

- Don't disclose their identity without permission, as this could place the young person in an unsafe environment
- Do not assume parents/guardians are aware or supportive of someone's identity
- Remember that inappropriate or irrelevant questions are a breach of privacy

## 3 ENCOURAGE CONNECTIONS WITH PEERS

- Suggest LGBTIQ+ hangouts like 'As You Are' at Headspace
- Check out Twenty10 for online chats and events for people aged 12-25
- With permission connect them to other TGD people, maintaining the privacy of everyone involved

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## BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

- Use preferred names and pronouns and politely correct others if they make a mistake
- Call out transphobic comments and behaviours. If you don't know what this looks like, find out!

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## EDUCATE YOURSELF

- Browse plenty of reliable resources online
- Be willing to put in the effort and learn

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## BE A VISIBLE ALLY

- Individuals: Use stickers, posters, flags and resource handouts
- Companies: Have inclusive policies and clear complaint/discrimination procedures. Use gender neutral forms and aim for gender neutral bathrooms or signage

