



OUR HEALTH IN OUR HANDS

# Working with Gender Diverse Young People and their Families

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*Please note:*

*The views expressed in this webinar are those of the presenters, and may not reflect those of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or the Australian Government*





# Overview:

- Who is Queerspace
- Definitions
- Facts and stats about clients
- Safety and sensitive practice – language, awareness & attitudes
- Whole of family and community approach
- Resources





# Queerspace

- Health and wellbeing service for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, questioning and queer (LGBTIQ+) people and families
- Safe space for counselling and support and for meetings of various groups and orgs
- Service delivered by specialist queer and queer-friendly mental health practitioners
- Mental Health Psychological Services via Access to Psychological Support (ATAPS) and Better Access





# Drummond Street

- Psychologists
- Social workers
- Counsellors
- Youth development workers
- Health promotion officers
- Community development workers
- Stepfamilies experts
- Family violence trainers
- Royal Commission clinicians
- Parenting coaches



**WHOLE OF FAMILY MODEL**





# Why this webinar

- Time Magazine March 2017
- GLAAD (LGBTI advocacy organisation in USA) - Harris poll
- 12% of Millennials identify as transgender or gender nonconforming
- That is to say, they do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth or their gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity





# Definitions:

- **Sex:** A person's sex includes genetic, hormonal and physical characteristics.
- **Gender identity:** Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation. Gender is different from physical sex. It is a very personal sense of who we are, and how we see ourselves.
- **Queer:** An umbrella term to refer to LGBTIQ+ people. It is also used as a political statement which advocates breaking binary thinking, and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as fluid and diverse.
- **Gender Diversity:** An umbrella term that includes all the different ways gender can be experienced and perceived. It can include people questioning their gender, those who identify as trans/transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, and many more.
- **Transgender:** An umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially defined gender norms. It may mean someone who mentally and emotionally identifies as a different gender to the one they have been assigned by society, often living their lives as that gender, and who may or may not choose to undergo any form of medical transition (hormones, surgery etc). Or it could be a person whose gender is outside of, or between, the binary gender system altogether.
- **Non-binary:** A person whose gender sits outside of the binary of man or woman. They may identify as neither, both, or something else entirely.



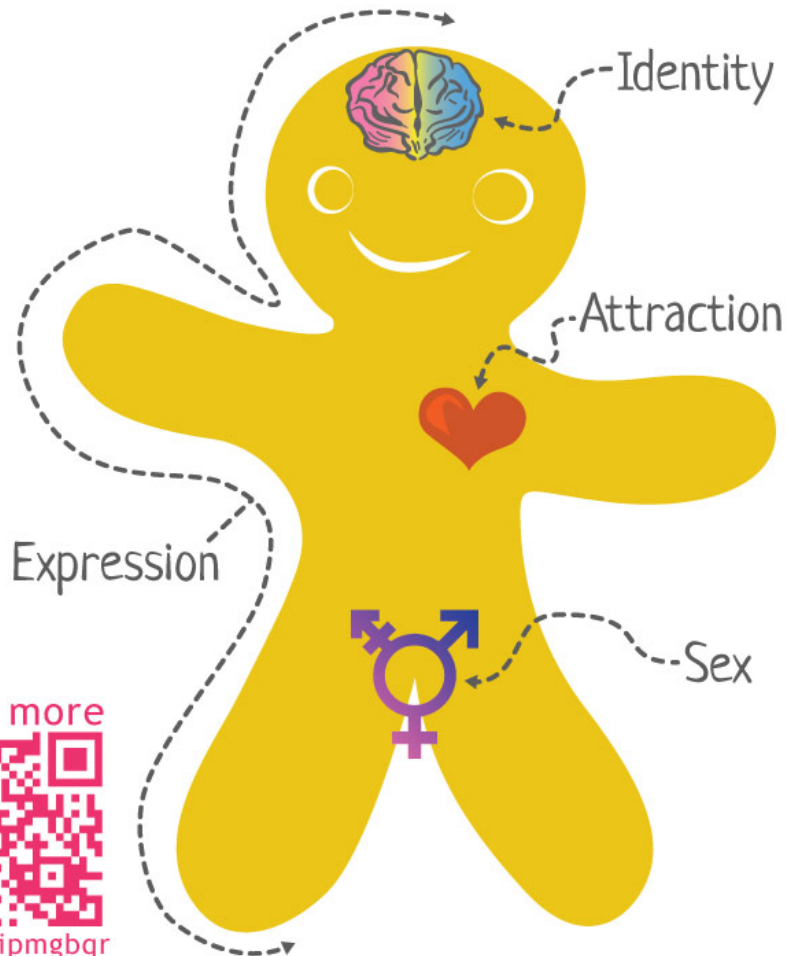
# More Definitions:

- **Transman:** a transgender person who was assigned female at birth, but who is a man (uses he/him pronouns).
- **Transwoman:** a transgender person who was assigned male at birth, but who is a woman (uses she/her pronouns).
- **Brotherboy:** some Aboriginal/Torres Straight Islander people who were assigned female at birth but who are a boy/man in spirit.
- **Sistergirl:** some Aboriginal/Torres Straight Islander people who were assigned male at birth but who are a girl/woman in spirit.
- **Sexuality:** who a person is attracted to, who they have sex or not have sex with, and who they wish to be in a relationship with.
- **Gender expression:** how a person presents their femininity and/or masculinity using socially recognised markers. e.g. clothes, make-up, jewelry, hair.
- **Cis (cis-gender):** A person whose gender identity is aligned with that which they were assigned at birth.
- **Cissexism:** A belief or attitude that being cis-gender is more natural, healthy or superior to transgender or non-binary ways of being.



# The Genderbread Person v2.0 by it's pronounced METROsexual.com

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more.

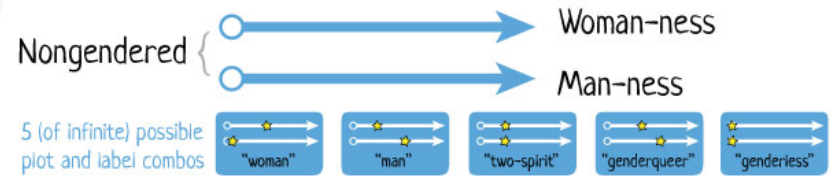


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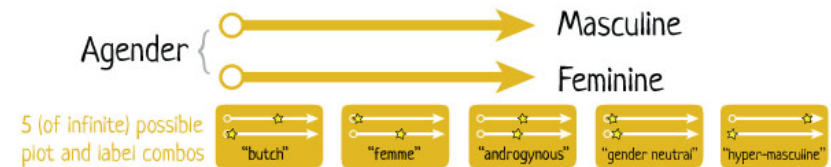


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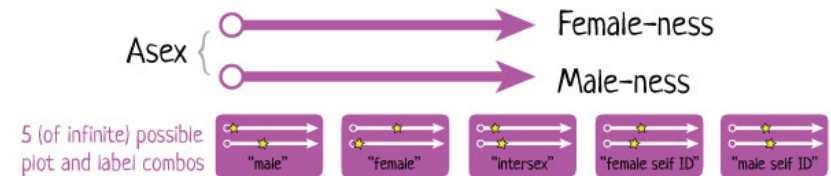
## Gender Identity



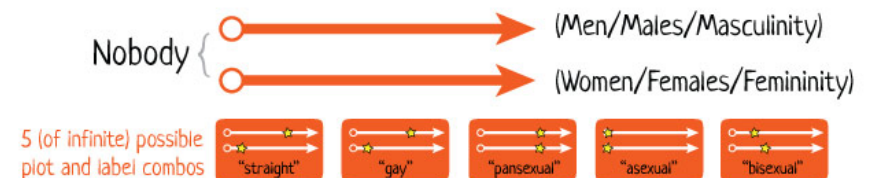
## Gender Expression



## Biological Sex



## Attracted to





# Our Clients

2015/16

- 144 cases sexuality and gender diverse children and young people (under 25) and their families



50% increase in gender presentations 2016/17



- Clients present for counselling, **not** medical treatment





# FROM BLUES TO RAINBOWS

The mental health and well-being of gender diverse  
and transgender young people in Australia

## **Produced by**

La Trobe University and  
University of New England,  
funded by Beyondblue  
(2014)

## **Participants**

189 gender diverse and  
transgender young people  
aged 14-25. 40% identify  
with a gender that is not  
man or woman



65

% experienced  
verbal abuse  
because of their  
gender identity or  
expression

21

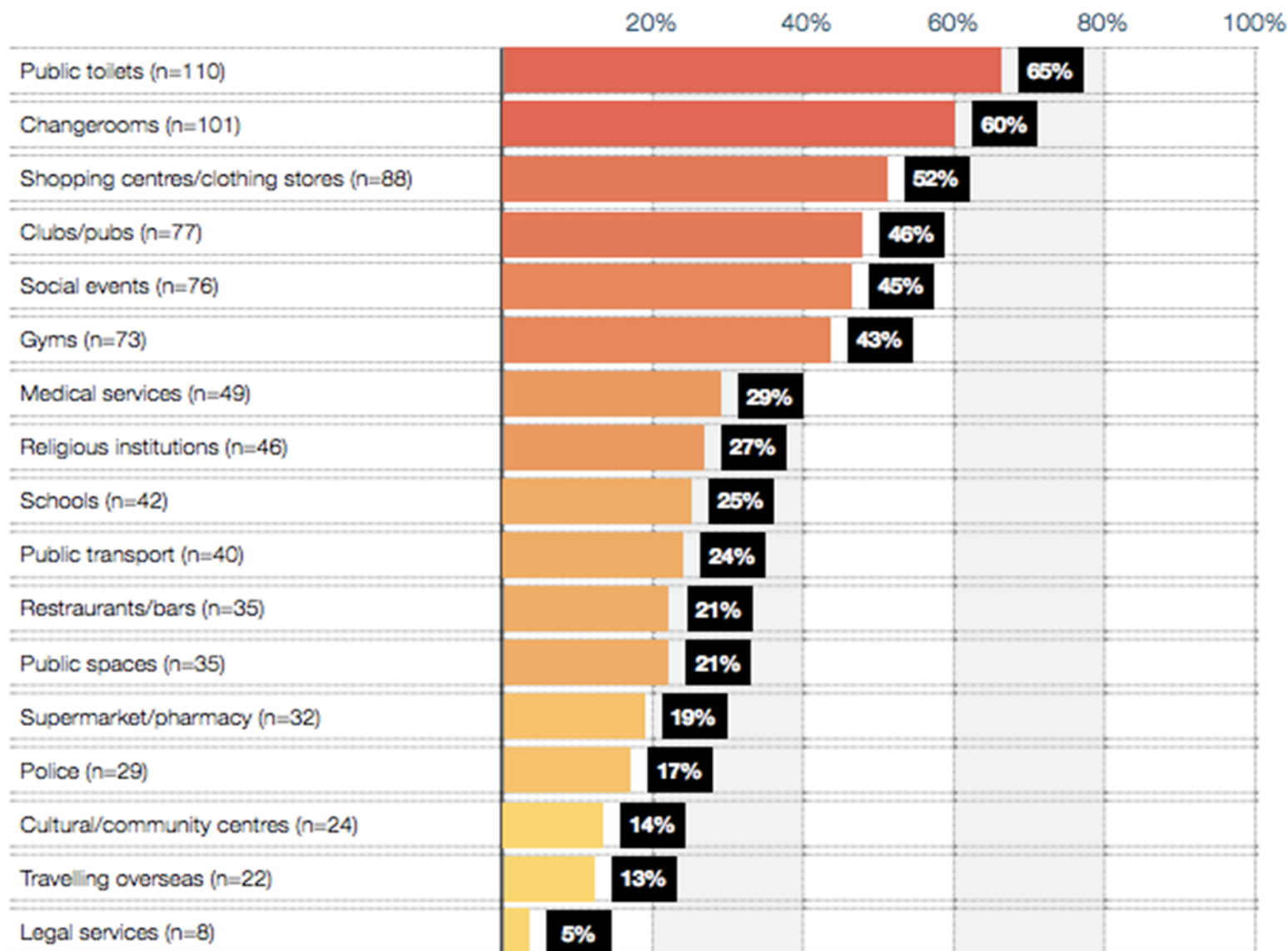
% experienced  
physical abuse  
because of their  
gender identity

90

% of those who  
had experienced  
physical abuse  
had thought  
about suicide



## PLACES PARTICIPANTS AVOIDED DUE TO NOT CONFORMING TO GENDER STEREOTYPES





## *Suicide Attempts among Transgender & Gender Non-confirming Adults*

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Report  
(2014)

- 41% attempted suicide
- 57% rejected by families
- 78% sexual or physical harassment at school



# Cultural safety

- Young person needs to know that their way of being is **respected**, or at least not harmed or challenged
- Young person needs to feel that their **gender is real and valid**, and that they do not need to proscribe to traditional gender stereotypes to be accepted as their gender (or that they can if they wish to without judgment).
- Young person needs to be able to **enact control** over their own body/presentation/journey





# Queer Sensitive Practice

- Provide a **VISIBLY** queer friendly and safe welcome
  - reception (inclusivity on posters/flyers)
  - documentation (male/female/other options)
  - website (gender diverse images)
  - toilets (non-gendered)
- Ask and use the correct pronouns & language – show respect
- **Assume nothing** and be open to disclosure
- Talk about privacy
- Make sure your questions are relevant – seek knowledge
- Check in on safety and wellbeing
- Have awareness of your own attitudes



# Language

- **Be curious - ASK**

How do you identify?

What pronouns do you use?

- **Use person's own language** - creative words can celebrate authorship of own self

transboi, a-gender,  
beautisome, femme,  
broster, etc

- **Use current name (and pronoun) even when referring to a previous time.**

- **Avoid phrases such as:**

“born a girl” / “turned into a girl now”

Use instead:

“assigned female at birth” and/or  
“affirmed their gender identity”

- **From parents:**

“it doesn't matter that you are [trans/gay/lesbian/bi]”

Use instead:

“that is wonderful that you feel like you are getting to know yourself – I love you and thanks for sharing with me”



# Attitudes

Beliefs influence Attitudes

Attitudes influence Behaviour

Our behaviour impacts on clients



Attitudes Towards Differences: The Riddle Scale

Negative Levels of Attitudes	<b>Repulsion</b>	People who are different are strange, sick, crazy, and aversive. Anything which will change them to be more normal or a part of the mainstream is justifiable.
	<b>Pity</b>	People who are different are somehow born that way and that is pitiful. Being different is definitely immature and less preferred. To help those poor individuals, one should reinforce normal behaviors.
	<b>Tolerance</b>	Being different is just a phase of development that people go through and most people “grow out of.” Thus they should be protected and tolerated as one does a child who is still learning.
	<b>Acceptance</b>	Implies that one needs to make accommodations for another’s differences and does not acknowledge that another’s identity may be of the same value as their own.
Positive Levels of Attitudes	<b>Support</b>	Works to safeguard the rights of those who are different. Such people may be uncomfortable themselves but they are aware of the climate and the irrational unfairness in our society.
	<b>Admiration</b>	Acknowledges that being different in our society takes strength. Such people are willing to truly look at themselves and work on their own personal biases.
	<b>Appreciation</b>	Values the diversity of the people and is willing to confront insensitive attitudes.
	<b>Nurturance</b>	Assumes the differences in people are indispensable in society. They view differences with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be advocates for that difference.



# Scope of the work:

- Young person
- Parenting
- Siblings
- Parent couple
- Extended family
- Family friends
- Broader community







# Working with the whole family

- working with WOF **de-pathologises** the child
- family supports sense of self
- families of queer young people often require their own coming out process
- family members don't always see the need to attend, or for others to attend e.g. non-resident parent
- young person doesn't want family members involved



# GENDER DIVERSE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE: what you'll hear

## **In Childhood (often)**

- Dressing in clothes of non-assigned gender
- Activities of non-assigned gender
- Urinate as non-assigned gender
- Vocalising not being assigned gender

## **Onset of puberty (often)**

- Discomfort with secondary sex characteristics
- Growing awareness of self in social and sexual relationship

**Gender dysphoria:** feeling that your gender does not match your assigned gender – may or may not cause significant distress – any age

**How a gender diverse child or young person presents depends greatly on their family, social and cultural context - their experience of stigma.**



# Stages of gender diverse emergence

*Transgender Emergence*, Arlene Istene Lev (2004)

STAGE	THERAPEUTIC TASK
<b>1. Awareness: often great distress</b>	<b>Normalise the experience</b>
2. Seeking information/reaching out for support	Encourage links and support seeking
3. Disclosure to significant others	Support integration into family system
4. Exploration: identity and self-labelling	Support articulation and comfort with identity
5. Exploration: Transition issues/possible body modification	Resolution of decisions and advocacy towards manifestation
6. Integration: acceptance and post-transition issues	Support adaptation to transition-related issues



# Young person concerns

- Safety – self, family, school,
  - self-harm
  - parents and siblings
  - school toilets
  - change rooms
  - sport and camp
  - documentation
  - social environment - transphobia
- Allies (social supports)
- **Passing** as affirmed gender (dependent on age)
- All other concerns that any young person may have (avoid focusing solely on gender)
  - Intra and interpersonal experience
  - Integrated identity e.g. ethnicity



# Working with the young person

**AIM:** the child or young person can get on with the business of being a young person in a safe, supportive and affirming family, social and educational environment.

- **Therapeutic relationship:** builds sense of self in relationship – safe place
- **Exploration:** Not an assessment of identity – rather an exploration of self and relationships (age appropriate) – when are where do they feel their best self?
- **Safety** (physical and emotional) – self/home/school/social environment – how to navigate changes
- **Mental health:** anxiety/depression/self harm
- **Allies** – who has been welcomed in? How to tell people. Encourage supportive social connection
- **Knowledge:** be open to questions and be equipped to provide information or refer

## IN EXPLORATION:

- Affirming – accept person has always been this way unless otherwise stated (do not ask “when did you become ...”)
- Sexuality - cannot be assumed
- If you get it wrong apologise and move on





# Working with the parents

- **Intention:** they have brought young person – for what reason?
- **Education:** – different generation, they may have misinformation built on stereotypes
- **Grief:** previous expectations
- **Anxiety:** safety, future, stigma/judgment, advocacy, making right decisions
- **Guilt:** ‘what did I do’ – seeking a reason – cis-sexism
- **Anger:** having to deal with transphobia
- **Couple relationship:** not on same page – exacerbation of this with separated couple
- **Advocacy:** family, friends, school
- **Referrals** – social and medical



# Working with siblings and whole of family

## **SIBLINGS**

- sibling transphobia
- being 'missed'
- change of role and relationships

## **WHOLE FAMILY**

- how to make social transition – where and when
- Names
- coming out or inviting in
- extended family members
- access to support and other services
- Making a plan for transition



# Take homes:

- Sensitive practice environment
- Self-educate and check attitudes
- Work with whole of family, school and social environment – **safety** concerns
- Encourage social network
- Individual work with parents – grief & anxiety
- Assume nothing
- Raise awareness



# Resources:

## Reading:

- The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals. Pepper, R. & Brill, A. (2008)
- The Transgender Teen. Pepper, R. & Brill, S. (2016)
- Treating Transgender Children and Adolescents: An Interdisciplinary Discussion. Drescher, J, & Byne, W. (2014)
- Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender Non-Conforming Children. Ehrensaft, D. (2011)
- The Gender Quest Workbook: A Guide for Teens & Young Adults Exploring Gender Identity. Testa, R.J. et al (2015)

## Services:

- The Royal Children's Hospital Gender Service, Melbourne
- Gender Clinic, Westmead Children's Hospital, Sydney

## Peer support:

- Transcend: support for transgender children and their families <http://www.transcendsupport.com.au>
- Transfamily <http://transfamily.com.au>
- <https://ygender.org.au/>

## Further resources:

<http://www.rainbownetwork.com.au/>

<https://qlife.org.au/>

## Contact Drummond Street:

Website: <http://http://ds.org.au/>

Email: [enquiries@ds.org.au](mailto:enquiries@ds.org.au)

Ph: [03 9663 6733](tel:0396636733)





# Questions?

## **Join the conversation & access key resources**

Continue the conversation started here today and access related resources on the CFCA website:

[www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/news-discussion](http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/news-discussion)