

what is gender identity?

Gender identity is how you perceive your gender, how you show this to others, and how you express yourself.

About gender identity

The physical features you were born with (sex assigned at birth) don't necessarily define your gender. Although gender has traditionally been divided into 'male' and 'female', it's becoming more widely recognised that gender is not that simple and there are a diverse range of gender identities.

For example, you could identify with a gender that's different from the sex you were assigned at birth, such as:

- being assigned female at birth, but you identify as a male
- being assigned male at birth, but identifying as a female
- you identify somewhere between male and female
- you recognise yourself as another gender identity.



"It's important to know that gender diversity does not cause mental health problems."

Dani, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Young people who are gender diverse, or do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, can live fulfilling lives but, discrimination and transphobia – along with a lack of understanding or acceptance – may lead to an increased risk of mental health difficulties.

Why is this difficult for me?

Some common experiences that can affect your wellbeing and increase your vulnerability to developing mental health difficulties are:

- feeling 'different' from other people around you
- transphobic bullying whether verbal or physical
- feeling pressure to define or deny your feelings regarding your gender identity
- feeling unsupported or worried that your gender identity will not be accepted by friends and family members
- fearing the possibility of being rejected or isolated
- feeling stressed and anxious with the pressure to conform with your sex assigned at birth.



The way you want to describe your gender and sexuality, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.

Finding a supportive community

Sometimes when you're questioning your gender, it can feel isolating and confusing, especially when you don't have a network of people who understand what you're going through.

It might be nice to know that the trans – and greater LGBTIQ+ – community stretches across the world, and can be welcoming and diverse. Finding these communities can be tough, but be assured that they're out there! A simple Google search can help you find local support groups. If you're questioning who you are, there are people just like you. Everyone deserves to be surrounded by people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.

Transphobic discrimination

Transphobic discrimination is about being treated differently or excluded because of your gender identity. People's prejudices can make it difficult to maintain good wellbeing. It can also make it hard to ask for help, or know where to turn for help, when problems come up.

Getting the right help and support

While it's normal to occasionally experience some of these things, if you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life is being affected, then it's time to ask for help.

Getting help when problems develop can reduce the effects of mental health problems and prevent more serious issues developing in the future.



Some transgender or gender diverse young people find it especially hard to ask for help.

This might be because of discrimination by health professionals in the past, worries about privacy, or difficulty talking to strangers about gender identity.

It's important to find someone you can trust to support you throughout your journey. This might be your general practitioner (GP) and/or other health professionals experienced in working with gender diverse young people.

headspace can also help connect you with specialists for specific needs around gender transition if you decide to go down that path.

A trusted friend, teacher or family member might also be able to recommend someone to talk to. It can take time to find the health professional who is right for you, so don't give up if you don't find the right person straight away. Remember that you don't have to discuss your gender identity if you don't feel comfortable or safe.

You're not alone.

There are many young people exploring and questioning their gender identity. If you want to talk through any questions or concerns about your gender identity, there are people who can help and support you.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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