



**SUPPORTING  
STUDENTS  
AFFIRMING  
GENDER AT  
SCHOOL**

**SAFE AND INCLUSIVE  
SCHOOLS INITIATIVE**

**GOOD PRACTICE  
GUIDE**



**FOR  
SCHOOL  
LEADERS**

This guide was produced as part of the ACT Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative, and developed collaboratively with staff from Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT and A Gender Agenda. The Initiative is grateful for the review and input of educators and others from ACT Education Directorate.



The ACT Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative provides assistance to schools to develop and maintain safe and inclusive environments for all students regardless of their gender presentation/identity, intersex status or sexual orientation. The Initiative is funded by the ACT Government Education Directorate. [www.saisact.info](http://www.saisact.info)

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**THIS GUIDE DEALS SPECIFICALLY WITH THE WAYS SCHOOL COMMUNITIES CAN BE PROACTIVE IN GENDER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE, AND SUPPORT STUDENTS WHO ARE TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE (TGD) WHEN THEY DECIDE THEY WISH TO SHARE OR EXPRESS THEIR GENDER IDENTITY AT SCHOOL.**

It has been written with school leaders specifically in mind. School leaders carry significant responsibilities for learning, school climate and culture, student and staff wellbeing and safety, compliance with laws, regulations and policies, and communication with others within and outside the school community.

This Guide is not a procedural manual. There are many existing information resources that discuss the more practical aspects of supporting an individual student when they are affirming gender at school. Some of these are included as additional resources later in the Guide.

Depending on the school system (public, Catholic, or independent), schools may need to implement system-wide policies in a standard or consistent way, in their administrative processes, student welfare supports, and implementation of teaching/learning programs. Schools may choose to shape these according to the specific needs and profile of their school community. All schools must comply with legislation and regulation, including anti-discrimination laws, in the way they manage these processes.

This Guide sets out *Guiding Principles* and important other considerations for school staff for gender inclusive practice in general, and approaches that can be used specifically when supporting students who are affirming a transgender, gender diverse or non-binary identity (see section on *Affirming Gender*), or a different expression of gender at school.

# STARTING POINT GENDER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Many of the specific individual needs of transgender and gender diverse students are accommodated when school communities have broad gender-inclusive practices.

Accounting for diversity in gender in the way we structure all of the school experience - from enrolment/administrative processes, through learning design and curriculum, participation in school-related activities, events and programs, access to facilities and resources, and the way community diversity is recognised and celebrated – can improve this experience for all students. The starting point for good practice is a gender-inclusive standard.

It may not always be possible to attain this goal, due to systemic and individual factors. In that case, we use the *Guiding Principles* (p16-p17) and *Key Questions* (p19) to help us find the next best set of solutions for individual student needs and the whole school community.

This guide includes a list of common areas where changes, adjustments, accommodations, or adaptations may be required when a student affirms gender at school. There are a range of other resources available to assist in the implementation of these steps, and information about some of the more recent and comprehensive of these is included towards the end of this guide.

# HERE ARE SOME STATEMENTS THAT DESCRIBE HOW **GENDER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE IN ACTION** LOOKS IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

## PERSON-CENTRED & PROACTIVE

The school approaches the learning and support/welfare needs of all students in a person-centred way, consistent and connected with school values. The school is proactive in addressing the gendered experience of school.

Students are consistently addressed using their pronouns and preferred name, as a matter of course. Information used by many school staff (including casual relief staff, e.g. class rolls,) use (or include) students' preferred name.

Effective responses to bullying and harassment are inclusive of sex and gender-based discrimination. Expectations of behaviour are clearly articulated and responses to incidents are consistent, regardless of the content of any bullying, harassment or discrimination. Gender-based harassment and bullying that targets transgender/gender diverse students is not treated as different or exceptional.

Communication to others in the school community about changes in a student's circumstances or needs is based on student-identified priorities first.

Affirmation of gender is not treated differently from other significant changes in students' lives.

School leaders communicate proactively with the wider school community that diversity in gender, sex and sexuality are recognised and welcome in the school.

## PARTICIPATION, ACCESS & EQUITY

All students have non-discriminatory access to all facilities, activities/ programs and services at school on an equal basis as others in their age cohort and/or learning program.

Schools are designed with accessible toilet and change facilities (ideally including single-person access options as standard)

The school has a gender-neutral uniform policy and practice.

All students attend school within uniform policy. Cultural and religious diversity in the school community is accommodated within the uniform policy.

**KNOWING AND USING  
PEOPLE'S PREFERRED  
GENDER PRONOUNS IS  
ONE STEP TOWARDS  
BUILDING A SCHOOL  
CULTURE THAT IS  
INCLUSIVE**

# GENDER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE IN ACTION

## TEACHING & LEARNING

The school understands that the whole school experience, not just the formal or explicit curriculum, is salient and communicates what is important, valued and accepted.

The formal/explicit curriculum acts as both 'mirror' and 'window' – reflecting both the diversity of the school community, (students find themselves represented in it), and opening students to ideas and opportunities beyond their own immediate personal life experience.

## RESPECT FOR PRIVACY

Privacy and confidentiality of personal information, personal health information and sensitive information about all students is always handled respectfully and consistent with statutory obligations. This includes communication within school community and outside the school community.

The right of a student to direct how personal and sensitive information about themselves is communicated to and used by others is respected.

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES & RECORDS

School records and administrative systems reflect affirmed gender identity and include a non-binary identifier option.

Sex/gender identifiers are not collected when unnecessary. If the information collected is not treated differently by the sex/gender identifier, consider removing it.

Information used by many school staff including casual relief, e.g. class rolls, use (or include) preferred name. Students are consistently addressed using their pronouns and preferred name, as a matter of course.

Administrative processes for updating all/any personal information:

- ▶ are as simple and easily accessible as possible
- ▶ are communicated across school community
- ▶ can be changed or updated on parent or student initiative, and
- ▶ provide an opportunity for students and parents/carers to identify if additional support would be helpful.



## WHAT IS GENDER DIVERSITY?

All people have an experience of both gender identity and gender presentation. These experiences may differ widely from person to person.

Gender identity and gender presentation are distinct but closely related concepts.

Sometimes when people talk about gender these aspects may be blurred.

The difference between sex (anatomy, chromosomes and hormones) and gender roles (sociocultural roles, expectations and values) is also sometimes confused.

## GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity is the way a person thinks about themselves in gendered terms. It refers to a person's sense of being a man, a woman, or both or neither. A person's gender identity may or may not relate to the person's biological or legal sex identifier. There are many different words, and identity labels people may use that try to best describe their gender identity.

## GENDER PRESENTATION/ EXPRESSION

Gender presentation or expression refers to the way a person chooses to present themselves to the world in gendered terms – as masculine, feminine, both or neither. We all choose ways to express our gender identity – including through our choice of clothes, hairstyles, mannerisms, and even what kinds of jobs, sport or social activities we engage in.



**A PERSON'S  
GENDER MAY  
ALIGN WITH  
SOCIAL AND  
CULTURAL  
IDEAS ABOUT  
SEX AND  
GENDER ROLES,  
OR DIFFER  
FROM THESE.**

**TRANSGENDER PERSON 18 YEARS**  
*"Having uniform policies that recognise  
the needs of transgender and gender  
diverse young people would make a  
difference to student wellbeing."*

A person's gender may align with social and cultural ideas about sex and gender roles, or differ from these.

There are many different words and labels people may use to describe their gender identity and gender presentation/ expression.

Some gender identities and expressions, especially those that differ from traditional binary ideas about sex and gender roles, have been stigmatised, marginalised and subjected to discrimination and violence.

Challenging and changing rigid and restrictive ideas about who people are, what they are capable of, what jobs they may choose, what roles within family and community they may take up, based on their sex or gender is not new. People have been advocating for social and civic recognition and participation for all citizens for hundreds of years (for example, voting rights for women).

Schools and education programs have been engaged in processes that broaden the vocational and employment or sporting participation options available to both boys and girls for decades (often referred to as 'gender equity' strategies).

Transgender and gender diverse people are already part of all school communities, whether they are visible or known to others or not.

## WHAT IS TRANSITION/ AFFIRMATION?

Gender affirmation means changes in the way a person shares and expresses their gender.

The word 'transition' is also often used to describe this process. Transition suggests a process of change from one state or place to another, in this case shifts from one way of expressing gender identity to another.

**'AFFIRMATION' SUGGESTS THE RECOGNITION BY OTHERS OF SOMETHING THAT IS ALREADY KNOWN AND TRUE FOR THE PERSON THEMSELVES ABOUT THEIR GENDER.**

In this Guide, the term 'gender affirmation' reflects both of these ideas. Some transgender and gender diverse people will refer to their own experience and process as 'transition', or use the word to refer to specific aspects of this process, and it is respectful to reflect this when communicating with them.

Schools have an important role to play in many, but not all, aspects of a transgender/gender diverse person's transition/affirmation. Gender affirmation may have social, interpersonal, legal, or medical dimensions.

Transgender and gender diverse people may express their gender in a variety of ways and that may vary in certain contexts and at certain times. There is no one way to 'be' transgender or gender diverse, as it can mean many different things to different people. Gender affirmation is a highly individual experience. There is no one 'correct' way to transition or affirm gender.

# WHAT IS TRANSITION/ AFFIRMATION?

Gender affirmation for some people may mean changing the way a person presents themselves and interacts with others – a process that is often referred to as ‘social transition’ – and may include using a name and pronouns that feels more appropriate. At school this may also include wearing clothing that better reflects their gender, participating in activities and accessing facilities accordingly.

There are other processes, such as having formal legal documents like birth certificates and identity documents (e.g. passport or licence) updated to reflect a different sex or gender identifier appropriate to the person’s gender identity, or simply a change in name. These administrative or legal processes are more complicated in some situations than in others. School records and other administrative systems can be an important part of this process.

For others, transition may involve gender affirming medical treatments, such as hormones and surgical interventions – processes referred to as ‘medical transition’. It is not typically the responsibility of school to be involved in this aspect of transition, nor is ‘medical transition’ common for pre-adolescent children.

But school staff do need to understand and support any student who has health and medical needs that affect school attendance and participation.

For some transgender/gender diverse people, health and medical interventions are essential<sup>1</sup>. Medical and treatment decisions are properly the responsibility of the student, their parents/guardians, and healthcare providers.

This does not mean staff with responsibility for student welfare and wellbeing cannot be engaged, aware and supportive, as would be the case for any other health or medical needs.

Affirming gender is not a linear or unidirectional process. It is not a single moment or the same for everyone, nor is it a checklist of things that ‘must’ happen.

Gender affirmation reflects a person’s current and growing understanding of self, identity and relationships. These are core developmental tasks for all children and young people. For transgender/gender diverse children and young people, they may have additional dimensions or challenges when their experience of gender does not align to the assumptions or expectations of others - including family, peers, and the wider community.

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*1. Many trans people experience a feeling of distress which is clinically termed ‘dysphoria’. Dysphoria is experienced differently by different people and it can be both fixed (experienced consistently) and fluid (experienced partially or periodically). Some trans people report that their dysphoria is triggered when their gender is not affirmed by others (sometimes called ‘misgendering’), whilst others report that certain contexts, clothing types or body parts trigger their dysphoria. It is important to acknowledge that not all distress trans people feel may be dysphoria: trans people often bear a load of systemic discrimination which can lead to poorer mental health outcomes. [genderrights.org.au/information-hub/what-is-transgender](http://genderrights.org.au/information-hub/what-is-transgender)*



## WHY DOES IT MATTER AT SCHOOL?

All children and young people should be provided with a safe and inclusive learning environment. Schools have existing responsibilities to ensure this. School is an important site of social participation and development. All students should be welcome and safe at school for who they are. Gender identity and gender expression should not have to be left at the school gate.

All children and young people need developmentally appropriate support, without assumptions and presumptions based on sex or gender being made about what the future may hold for them. The absence of a sense of belonging, safety or engagement at school can have significant impacts on students' education participation and attainment, their subsequent employment opportunities, and their health and wellbeing.

Transgender and gender diverse people (including those who affirm a LGBTIQ identity and those who do not) report school as a significant site where they experience prejudice, discrimination, harassment and violence. This not only affects education engagement and participation while a student is enrolled at school, but can have lifelong social and economic consequences in terms of education attainment, and ongoing effects from discrimination, harassment, bullying and violence.

Acceptance and affirmation are strong protective factors against this. Accepting and affirmative responses to transgender and gender diverse young people reduce mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression, and other associated health problems (Strauss et al, 2020). When transgender and gender diverse young people are affirmed in their experience of their gender and their identities, their mental health is comparable to their non-transgender peers (Olson et al. 2016).

# WHY DOES IT MATTER AT SCHOOL?

Acceptance and affirmation is especially important in a school context, where the experience of exclusion, isolation, discrimination, bullying, or harassment can negatively impact social relationships and school engagement. Children who experience bullying and harassment or experience difficulties with mental health often develop issues with self-esteem and academic performance that disadvantage them in their cohort (QHR, 2020). This can have long-lasting impacts throughout their life, often affecting individuals well beyond their school years.

The ACT is a Human Rights jurisdiction and is committed to upholding the dignity and human rights of all Canberrans. Sex, gender identity and gender expression (amongst other attributes or characteristics) are protected by the ACT Discrimination Act (1991) and the federal Sex Discrimination Act (1984).

All children and young people are required by law to attend a school or education program, and all children and young people have the right to access to education free from discrimination.

But this right must be affirmed, enacted and protected by the way that schools welcome, include, and provide a safe environment for their students, staff and families.

**AN AFFIRMATIVE  
APPROACH TO THE  
GENDER IDENTITY  
AND GENDER  
PRESENTATION/  
EXPRESSION OF  
TRANSGENDER AND  
GENDER DIVERSE  
YOUNG PEOPLE IS THE  
EVIDENCE-BASED,  
BEST PRACTICE  
APPROACH**

# APPROACHING GENDER AFFIRMATION WITH CONFIDENCE

The role of school communities in gender affirmation is very important for many transgender/gender diverse students. Feedback from school leaders and staff who support students with gender affirmation shows that it is often not as hard or difficult as imagined.

School staff concerns often centre on whether they will be able to adequately provide the required level of support or adjustment needed (often based on limited or incorrect understandings of what gender affirmation might mean), and what other people's reactions are going to be.

Once engaged with students and their families/carers, it is not uncommon to find that most 'problems' can be resolved by being person-centred and student-led in identifying needs and priorities, and that many needs just require adaptations of existing processes or approaches. A positive solution-focused approach addresses many needs.

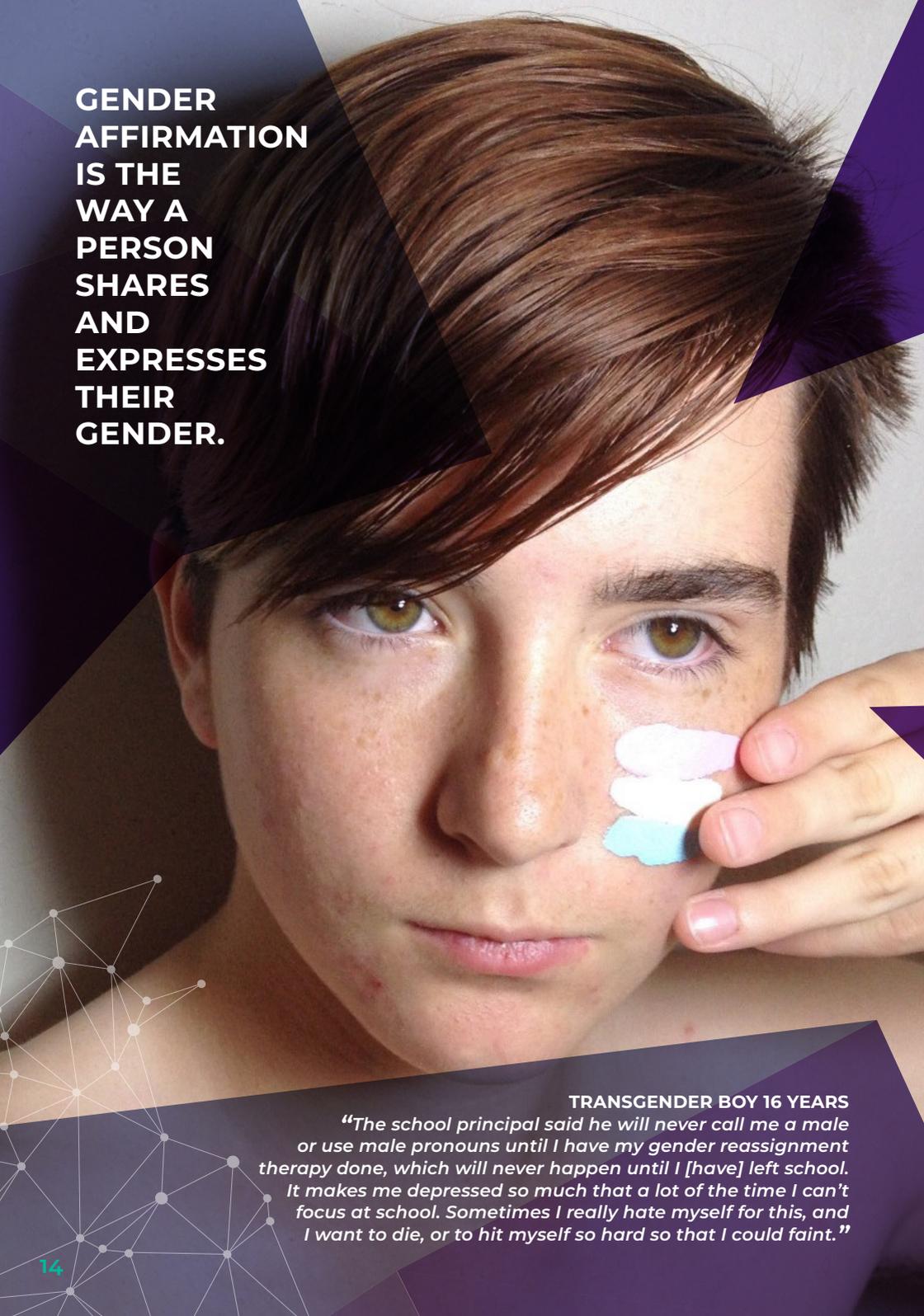
Children and young people regularly demonstrate high levels of acceptance and confidence in accepting gender diversity in their peer group.

They are not troubled that other people have a different way of understanding or experiencing gender, sex and sexuality, have different identities, and express their gender differently. They also don't feel that this imposes any obligation on them to be other than who they are.

As a sense of safety, inclusion and acceptance in our community increases, so has the willingness of students to express their gender identity more openly in the school context.

Gender diversity is not new, but a more accepting and open social environment means more people feel comfortable talking about their sense of gender, gender identity and gender presentation/ expression.

Focusing on students' health, safety and wellbeing at school right now— not being overwhelmed by how issues outside the scope of school to support, or what might come later — is the key responsibility of educators and student support staff.



**GENDER  
AFFIRMATION  
IS THE  
WAY A  
PERSON  
SHARES  
AND  
EXPRESSES  
THEIR  
GENDER.**

**TRANSGENDER BOY 16 YEARS**

*“The school principal said he will never call me a male or use male pronouns until I have my gender reassignment therapy done, which will never happen until I [have] left school. It makes me depressed so much that a lot of the time I can’t focus at school. Sometimes I really hate myself for this, and I want to die, or to hit myself so hard so that I could faint.”*

# APPROACHING GENDER AFFIRMATION WITH CONFIDENCE

CONTINUED

## PEOPLE CAN BE REACTIVE WHEN THEY ARE NERVOUS OR UNCOMFORTABLE.

For people who have never considered that others' experience of gender is different from theirs, and different from a binary based on assumed sex, learning about gender diversity can be a steep learning curve.

People can also feel very strongly that they want to 'get it right' in providing care and support, but not be sure how to do this, or what is appropriate.

For all these reasons and others, some people's reactions to becoming aware of a student who wishes to transition/affirm their gender presentation at school can be unhelpful, or even sometimes hostile.

But there are some approaches to managing differences of opinion about the needs and best interest of students that school leaders can adopt:

## MANAGING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

### ► GUIDE

Use the Guiding Principles and gender inclusive practice standards set out in this Guide to structure discussion.

### ► APPLY

Apply approaches used for resolving other issues in the school. Avoid making gender diversity and gender affirmation 'exceptions' to how the school approaches supporting individual student needs.

### ► TRAINING

Use training and/or information sessions to build a common understanding and approach across the school community, and establish professional expectations regarding gender diversity and gender inclusive practice in the school community.

### ► APPROACH

Approach differences of opinion (and conflicts that may arise from them) in an open and problem-solving way. Focus on expectations of behaviour rather than congruency of beliefs.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR AFFIRMING GENDER AT SCHOOL

## BE STUDENT-LED AND FLEXIBLE

It is important to allow the student autonomy over how they choose to approach their gender affirmation and recognition in a school setting.

Each student will have unique ways in which they wish to express, acknowledge, and affirm their gender and identity. Importantly, there is no 'one-size fits all' checklist that is going to work for every student.

Some students may already be 'out' in other parts of their life – they may feel very clear and confident about what they want at school. For other students, school may be an important first place that they wish to affirm their gender, to test what acceptance they will experience, and they may be less clear about exactly how this should happen. Supportive family and school staff can help clarify what is important to the student. It is not the role of staff to impose their ideas about what gender affirmation should mean for the student.

## RESPOND TO WHAT IS CURRENT, AND FOCUS ON HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

While there may be a range of needs that transgender and gender diverse students have more broadly in their lives, the first responsibility of school staff is to the health, safety and well-being needs and educational outcomes for children and young people at school.

## TAKE A UNIVERSAL DESIGN THINKING APPROACH

A universal design approach to inclusion ensures all members of the school community benefit equitably from their experience at school. Universal Design Thinking is not a 'one-size-fits-all' or 'what works for the majority or average person'. The wider school community benefits by understanding and catering for the range and diversity of needs in the student community.

## BE INFORMED ABOUT AFFIRMING GENDER

For transgender/gender diverse students affirmative and inclusive practice is critical to achieving the purpose of schooling. Understanding what affirming gender may involve, that it can include having different priorities or needs for different students, which may encompass a range of personal, presentation, social, or legal steps or changes, is important. It may involve healthcare services outside the school.

## ADOPT A BIAS TOWARDS CONSISTENCY WITH OTHER SCHOOL APPROACHES AND PROCESSES

Good practice responses will be consistent with existing policy for student wellbeing, teaching and learning, school activities, and adapted further to individual circumstances as required. If existing approaches are not fit for purpose, review and change these towards a gender-inclusive standard.

## BE REFLECTIVE, ADAPT AS YOU LEARN

Gender affirmation is a process, not a single moment. The school response can also evolve and change based on reflection.

This should involve time with students and their families to reflect on how things are going, to evaluate whether the priorities and responses identified worked, whether other things are now more important, whether issues that weren't anticipated now need attention.

This is particularly helpful in improving the quality and kinds of questions and discussion about student needs that school staff can ask next time, rather than assuming that the responses and actions will be the same.

## OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Be aware of relevant legal and policy frameworks.
- ▶ Be proactive in addressing the gendered experience of school. Don't wait until you know about an individual student or students to begin working towards gender-inclusive practice.
- ▶ Be aware that school is always communicating about gender.
- ▶ Use school values as a starting point for expectations within the school community.
- ▶ Shape professional expectations regarding gender diversity in the school community:
  - ▼ whole staff team training can assist to build a common understanding and starting point for gender-inclusive practice, addressing common needs, how to approach making mistakes (e.g. misgendering and repair), build awareness of own values/attitudes and the ability to work in a person centred/student-led way.
  - ▼ gender and culture intersect in students' lives. Consider professional development to build the cultural competency of staff, and ways to increase cultural safety in the school community.

## KEY QUESTIONS

THE FOLLOWING FLOW CHART MAY ASSIST YOU TO USE THE INFORMATION SET OUT IN THIS GUIDE WHEN SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO AFFIRM GENDER, AND ALSO TO REVIEW THE SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO GENDER INCLUSIVE PRACTICE.

## WHAT STUDENT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES HAVE WE IDENTIFIED?

### START WITH THE GENDER-INCLUSIVE STANDARD/OPTION

What is the gender-inclusive practice/standard or universal approach?



Can we achieve or implement this?



What factors or barriers make this not possible (systemic factors) or not appropriate (individual factors)?



Using the Guiding Principles (PG16), what alternatives can we identify?



Are these consistent with our overall school approach?



Are these acceptable to the student? (exclude if not)



What areas of school policy or practice need review/updating towards a more gender inclusive standard?

Who will do this?



Who do we need to communicate this information to? How will we do this? Who will do it? Does the student consent to the information being shared?

# SEEKING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT & RESOURCES

This Guide provides important general information for school leaders about gender-inclusive approaches at school, and important considerations when supporting students who affirm gender at school. When schools support individual students, especially when making adjustments and adaptations for their needs, it is helpful to access additional information and support to address specific issues.

► Contact available community-based supports

► **Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative**

02 6247 3077

saisact@shfpact.org.au

saisact.info

► **A Gender Agenda**

02 6162 1924

support@genderrights.org.au

genderrights.org.au

- Organise staff training on gender diversity and inclusion to help establish a common approach and understanding.
- Connect with school leaders you know who have already gained experience in supporting students who have or who are currently affirming their gender at school.
- Engage with appropriate contacts in ACT Education Directorate (Canberra public schools) or Catholic Education (Catholic system schools) or any other relevant governing bodies for specific assistance with implementing relevant policy.
- Read available resources (below) that assist with practical needs and issues.

## Recommended resources for supporting students to affirm gender



Queensland Human Rights Commission (2020) *Trans @ School: A guide for schools, educators, and families of trans and gender diverse children and young people.*  
[qhrc.qld.gov.au](http://qhrc.qld.gov.au)



Transcend (2020) *A Guide for Schools: Information on supporting trans, gender diverse or non-binary students to affirm their gender.*  
[transcendaus.org](http://transcendaus.org)



True (2018) *Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students in Your School Community.*  
[true.org.au](http://true.org.au)



## PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR AFFIRMING GENDER AT SCHOOL

Schools already make adjustments and adaptations for a range of student needs.

Transgender and gender diverse students are already part of every school community. Some may want to affirm their gender identity differently during their school years, others may not. And some will have already previously made changes to affirm gender before they enrol at your school – school staff may not be aware of these students unless they disclose this information.

When school staff become aware that an individual student is wanting to make changes in the way they affirm and express their gender at school, or a new student chooses to tell the school they are transgender or gender diverse, there are a range of areas that can be considered to ensure that school is safe, welcoming and inclusive for them.

The following list identifies key information to understand and discuss, and common areas of need or concern for students affirming gender.

Each includes questions or topics for discussion, as well as some general principles for good inclusive practice. In this section we have also included some quotes from Jones (2015) research on transgender student experiences at school.

It may be useful to document information and commitments in a support plan so there is a record of priorities and what has been agreed, to ensure consistent communication to appropriate people within the school community. However, do not assume that all students affirming gender will necessarily need or want a detailed formal support plan.

Use existing processes and document templates wherever possible.

# PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR AFFIRMING GENDER AT SCHOOL

CONTINUED



**Understanding what gender affirmation at school means for the student**, what their priorities and needs are (gender affirmation can mean a wide range of things, identify first what is important to the student). Be student-led and informed about the ways gender affirmation is different for each person.



**Updating school documents and records** to reflect:

- ▶ Chosen name
- ▶ Affirmed pronouns
- ▶ Appropriate affirmed gender identifier
- ▶ Confidentiality of identity documents that have not been updated to reflect these<sup>2</sup>



**Seeking information about the student's support network person.**

- ▶ Parent/family/carer contact information, knowledge about and level of support for student affirming gender at school.

- ▶ Parent/family/carer contact information, knowledge about and level of support for student affirming gender at school
- ▶ Information about friends and siblings at same school, knowledge support for student affirming gender
- ▶ Staff support team at school – both those with specific responsibility for student wellbeing, and those viewed positively and supportively by the student
- ▶ Other health or community supports the student accesses, and their knowledge of and /or support for the student affirming gender at school
- ▶ Identify if any of these people also need information or supports in place



**Ensuring the student can wear uniform appropriate to their affirmed gender**, within the school uniform policy.



Work with the student and their support network to identify **a timeframe for any specific steps or changes in gender affirmation**, and the order of any changes and communication.

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*2. You may hear students and others in the community refer to 'misgendering' (addressing or referring to a person contrary to their affirmed gender) and 'deadnaming' (refusing to use the person's chosen name, referring to them by their previous name). Both behaviours can have a significant negative impact on transgender and gender diverse people, especially when they are intentional and repeated. During a process of gender affirmation/transition, everyone is making adjustments, and both misgendering and deadnaming can happen accidentally. Staff training can assist to build understanding of these impacts, and ways to approach repair when they occur despite best intentions. School policy should clearly address these behaviours as inappropriate when intentional.*



### Communication within the school community.

- ▶ Not everyone in the school community needs or is entitled to know personal information about transgender and gender diverse students.
- ▶ Who does the student want to know about their gender affirmation?
- ▶ Who else may need to know?
- ▶ Who will the student want to tell themselves, who would they like assistance to communicate with?
- ▶ What things does the student not want other people in the school community to know?
- ▶ How will privacy and confidentiality of information be maintained?



### Access to toilets and changing facilities

- ▶ It is essential that students have access to these at all times. It is better that access does not require 'gatekeeper' permission to access unless no acceptable safe and accessible alternative is available.
- ▶ The gender-inclusive standard is gender-neutral facilities with single person options for both toilets and change facilities. Alternatives where this is not possible include using facilities that align with their affirmed gender, access to gender-neutral facilities, and re-designating (some) gender-segregated facilities as gender-neutral options.
- ▶ Some students will feel comfortable using accessible facilities designed for people with mobility limitations, others will not find this acceptable.
- ▶ Remember that access to change and toilet facilities will also be required for off-campus activities like school sport, excursions, camps, events, etc.



# PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR AFFIRMING GENDER AT SCHOOL

CONTINUED



## Gender-inclusive curriculum

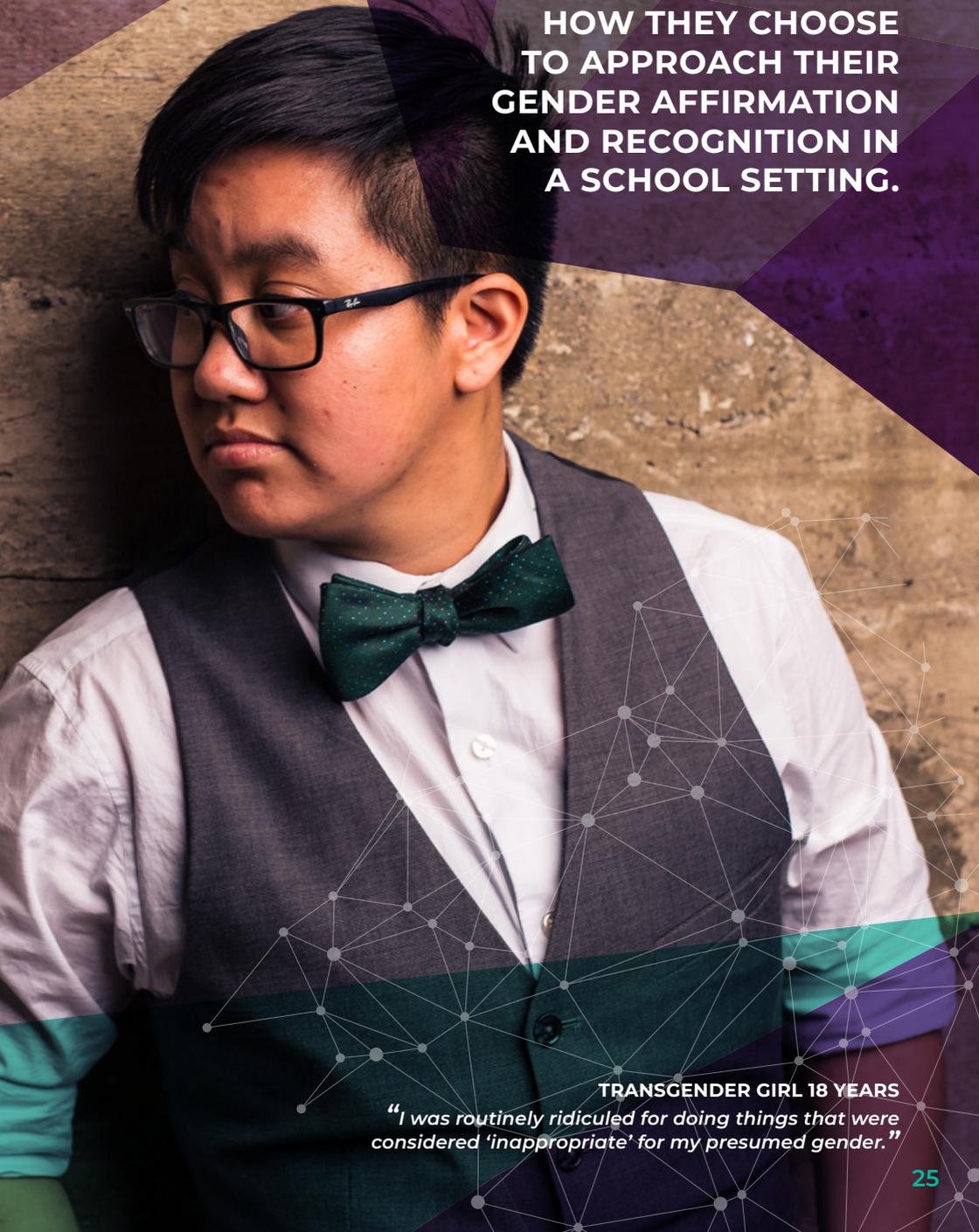
- ▶ Teaching/learning materials and approaches should reflect gender diversity in the school and wider community.
- ▶ Sex/gender segregation for learning activities should be minimised. Where it does occur, educators should be explicitly clear on the purpose/need for such separation (not just allowing it to be a default way to organise groups of students) and students should participate in the group that best aligns with their affirmed gender identity.



## Participation in health, physical education and sport

- ▶ Health education program content should reflect that gender diversity exists in the school and wider community.
- ▶ Physical education in the school context does not generally require sex/gender segregated approaches. Although PE & Sport have historically been highly gendered activities, the primary focus in the Australian Curriculum on development of physical movement skills and promoting participation in physical activity does not require this.
- ▶ Students should be supported to participate in the way that best aligns with their affirmed gender identity, including uniform and access to facilities. Be aware that sports uniforms and safety equipment should also be gender neutral and comfortable wherever possible.
- ▶ Organised inter-school sport competitions and representative sports may need to follow sex segregated or other gendered rules established outside the school. Students should be supported to participate in the way that best aligns with their affirmed gender identity wherever possible.

**ALLOW STUDENTS  
AUTONOMY OVER  
HOW THEY CHOOSE  
TO APPROACH THEIR  
GENDER AFFIRMATION  
AND RECOGNITION IN  
A SCHOOL SETTING.**



**TRANSGENDER GIRL 18 YEARS**

*“I was routinely ridiculed for doing things that were considered ‘inappropriate’ for my presumed gender.”*



**TEACHING  
MATERIALS AND  
APPROACHES SHOULD  
REFLECT GENDER  
DIVERSITY IN THE SCHOOL  
AND WIDER COMMUNITY.**

# PRACTICAL SUPPORT FOR AFFIRMING GENDER AT SCHOOL

CONTINUED



## Camps, excursions and other events

- ▶ Similar needs regarding access to activities and facilities are also true for school activities off-campus. Students should participate and access these in the way that best aligns with their affirmed gender identity.
- ▶ Liaise with venues to understand what flexibility their facilities permit. Work with the student, their family/parents/carers, and support network at school to identify needs and solutions for specific issues, such as sleeping arrangements. These are often more easily resolved than school staff initially anticipate.
- ▶ Recognise that some safety equipment and clothing may make some students very uncomfortable or self-conscious, which can limit participation.



## Safety, bullying and harassment

- ▶ Establish clear expectations that bullying, harassment and discrimination are unacceptable in the school.
- ▶ Address inappropriate behaviour consistently and immediately.
- ▶ Do not isolate the student affirming their gender to avoid the inappropriate behaviour of others.
- ▶ Do not make exceptions for gender-based and transphobic bullying and harassment. Support an 'active bystander' culture in the school community.
- ▶ Work with the student to identify their experience and concerns about harassment and bullying at school. Identify and address any times and places at school where they feel unsafe.
- ▶ Identify supportive staff, friends, and peers that they can rely on and approach when needed.
- ▶ School staff should model respectful discussion about gender diversity, and appropriate communication with the student by using their affirmed name and pronouns, acknowledging and repairing when errors are made.

# REFERENCE LIST

The following resources, guides, policy statements and publications were reviewed in the preparation of this guide. For online copies, scan QR code.



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**Fact Sheet for Schools Offering Students Equitable Uniform Options**



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**Supporting people of diverse sexuality and genders in education**



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True (2018)  
**Supporting Trans and Gender Diverse Students in Your School Community**



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**A Guide for Schools: Information on supporting trans, gender diverse or non-binary students to affirm their gender**



QLD Human Rights Commission (2020)  
**A guide for schools, educators, and families of trans and gender diverse children and young people**

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**Mental Health of Trans Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities**

Strauss, P., Cook, A., Winter, S., Watson, V., Wright Toussaint, D., & Lin, A. (2020).  
**Associations between negative life experiences and the mental health of Trans & gender diverse young people in Australia**

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**GENDER  
PRESENTATION  
OR EXPRESSION  
REFERS TO THE  
WAY A PERSON  
CHOOSES  
TO PRESENT  
THEMSELVES TO  
THE WORLD IN  
GENDERED TERMS  
– AS MASCULINE,  
FEMININE, BOTH  
OR NEITHER.**

**TRANSGENDER GIRL 18 YEARS**

*“Everything is split into ‘boys’ and ‘girls’, and me and my best friend — who is also transgender — have considered just not going to that class”*



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