

Common sense tips to support those working with Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI)

Perhaps you may save a life

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The Australian Men's Health Forum (AMHF) 2020

Key findings were 24% of 12 to 14 year olds who die by suicide identify as LGBTIQ
LGBTIQ people account for 1 in 10 suicides who are under 30 years of age

The Aust Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Australia Health 2018

Reports from a social survey had 11% of youth identify as either questioning their sexual identity
or did identify as LGBT.

Foreword

This booklet has been written for teachers to provide some insight and practical ideas to be more supportive and understanding when meeting or recognising a young person struggling with their diverse sexuality or gender identity.

We are using the term diverse sexuality and gender identity in this resource to simplify terms and to ensure inclusiveness. Additionally, when referring to youth, please assume they are gender and sexuality diverse.

Many of the tips and issues raised in the booklet have come from personal research and the personal experiences from young people I have spoken with over the last twenty years.

Many parents often feel confused or incapable of communicating appropriately with loved ones when they disclose. The same can be said for some professionals who can also be taken aback when coming into contact with a person struggling with their sexuality or gender diversity, regardless of age.

Please note this booklet has only generalised tips and information; it is not designed to be an education package or policy to be implemented.

Introduction

This booklet is focused on creating awareness and understanding of diversity in youth. It addresses the critical issue of bullying and the general lack of understanding that our children continue to encounter.

This handbook offers a guide to teachers from a parent's perspective about the difficulties and trauma experienced by many students. Due to their fear of disclosing to family (or lack of support from family) stress often impacts negatively on their study. Effects of these stresses can be seen in the high rates of depression, suicide, alcohol abuse, illicit drug taking and often, sadly, homelessness for some.

Many teachers feel uncertain or uncomfortable about how to talk to struggling youth in a professional capacity. Including the issue of how to combat bullying.

It is of great concern, when young people are advised to 'conform' to avoid 'drawing attention to them'. Or, be told 'what would you expect, the way you behave?'

Sexually and gender diverse youth living in rural areas often suffer more, due to the lack of access to facilities and information that their counterparts in the city access with relative ease. Additionally, fear of lack of confidentiality, is a huge concern for rural youths if they disclose

One of the major concerns for rural youth is they may not know any supportive school staff or another sexually or gender diverse student or person in their town to confide in or seek support from.

Additionally, there is the issue of rumours spread about them. Not surprisingly, this can be very isolating, causing feelings of hopelessness and isolation, often exacerbated by the effort expended keeping a low profile.

Rural communities are usually very tight knit and if the young person is ostracised (self- imposed or otherwise) due to diversity, the repercussions can be very different from those living in the city.

Both rural and metropolitan youth have the fear of abandonment. Additionally, suicidal thoughts are common and should never be trivialised. Fortunately, for city youth they generally have a greater range of options for support.

The problem encountered by many rural and regional youth who have moved to the city to escape rumours and ill-feeling, is the difficulty in returning home. If they cannot foresee being welcomed home, the area loses a person who would probably, given the opportunity, prefer to live and work in the community.

For other youth, staying in the rural area and concealing their diversity adds pressure, both external and internal. Friendships, social and marriage expectations may clash often with disastrous consequences.

Honesty is the best policy

Clinical researchers from the American Psychologist Association (APA) suggest that the more honest a person is regarding their sexual or gender diversity; the better it is for them. Additionally, strong support systems within the family are a huge benefit.

Difficulties of Coming Out

Most of our loved ones have some form of internalised homophobia or transphobia regardless of family support or best intentions. Internalised homophobia/transphobia may create depression and low self esteem which makes "coming out" difficult for many young people. The APA is not suggesting that the path will always be easy. However, when loved ones are supportive the challenges are easier to overcome.

Many young people when considering "coming out" are conflicted about who to tell and how to tell. This can be due to fear of being abandoned or rejected by those who matter most.

However, it's suggested teachers/professionals just listen to the young person's concerns, provide information and other referrals where possible. It is never appropriate to insist they "out" themselves or to break confidentiality unless absolutely necessary.

Additionally, the Australian Psychological Society (APS) states that there is no evidence to suggest that acceptance of homosexuality or bisexuality in the community will cause or encourage anyone else, regardless of age to be homosexual/bisexual.

The APS research shows sexual orientation is not a choice but often emerges in early adolescence without any prior sexual experience. So please be supportive by taking the time to talk and listen.

The APS research shows that sexual orientation is not a choice but often emerges in early adolescence without any prior sexual experience. So please take the time to talk, listen and be as supportive as possible.

What is sexual orientation?

We have three commonly recognised sexual orientations, heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. The APS states sexual orientation is not well understood with various theories providing different explanations

determining what causes sexual orientation. Despite much research, there is no proven explanation on how it's determined. This theory also applies to heterosexuality.

The APS also states that conversion therapy cannot change a person's sexual orientation. While some practitioners do attempt conversion therapy other practitioners question the ethics and legality of trying to alter a trait that is not a disorder.

Early Stages of “coming out”

The first stage can be the realisation of being different to classmates. For many they know they're different, they just don't understand why. This awareness of difference can happen at an early age, but many don't realise what that difference is.

The second stage is the awareness of being attracted to same sex friends or acquaintances. For many when this first begins, they are unaware of the significance of the attractions.

For others, they soon learn and practice hiding feelings and emotions because of the stigma involved with the negative reaction of those around them. This is often the beginning of a very difficult period that can last several years.

Stereotyping

Society's stereotyping of gay males being effeminate and lesbians being butch, along with the gay jokes and derogatory comments, is often all that many young gay youth and lesbians know about their sexual orientation. This, of course is incorrect.

Stereotyping and name calling causes huge problems for young people. Many try to deny their homosexuality by being in heterosexual relationships. Carrying this secret can often lead to substance abuse to dull their pain and anxiety.

A problem with stereotyping is lesbian and gay youth don't see themselves as they are often portrayed in the media or in jokes and wonder where they fit in the world. To a young person this can be most confusing including the danger of considering themselves worthless or second rate. Additionally, many develop a personal self-loathing that is reinforced by societal ignorance.

The added possibility of experiencing rejection by family when the secret is disclosed is of equal concern to most regardless of age. This can be an overwhelming time for many young people. Suicide can be seen as a very real option or at least a serious consideration for many just prior to disclosing to family and loved ones.

Some studies have shown that seven out of ten LGBTIQ young people have seriously considered suicide at some time in their life.

Intolerance and stigma through misinformation and entrenched beliefs are the greatest risks for youth. They hear and learn through media, the church and family that sexuality or gender diversity is bad, disgusting, and sinful or to be trivialised.

No person should ever be proud of the fact their homophobic and transphobic beliefs could be the cause of another person's death

Homosexuality doesn't discriminate - society does

Myths and Facts about homosexuality

Myth #1: Many believe there are no gays or lesbians in their class at school, social group, church or workplace and believe they don't know anyone who is lesbian or gay.

Fact: Realistically and statistically this isn't possible. Statistics vary a little depending on the researcher and the honesty of those surveyed, because many are hesitant to admit their true orientation.

Myth #2: Being lesbian/ gay is a choice.

Fact: Research shows that presently there are no proven theories as to why a person is sexually diverse, conversely there is also no proven theory as to why a person is heterosexual.

Myth #3: Homosexuality is a mental illness.

Fact: In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from their list of mental illnesses or psychiatric disorders. It is now considered a natural variant of human nature.

Myth #4: There is no homosexuality in the animal kingdom.

Fact: Homosexuality is present in animals. Research has identified homosexuality in sheep, birds such as the Australian black swans and penguins, lizards, dolphins and whales, the list goes on.

Myth #5: Being gay or lesbian is abnormal.

Fact: There are less homosexuals (which makes them a minority) than heterosexuals, but being gay is no more abnormal or rare than being left handed. In the past, left-handed people were persecuted for something they had no control over. Sexuality is like eye colour, we have no choice.

Myth #6: Homosexuality is a modern-day western phenomenon.

Fact: All cultures, races and religions have lesbian and gay people in their community. Some Native American and African tribes believed homosexuals had special healing powers.

Myth #7: Homosexual men are predators and pedophiles.

Fact: Statistics show that the vast majority of child molesters are heterosexual males, known to the victim. Sexual orientation must not be equated with criminal acts of violence towards children.

Myth #8: All gay men are effeminate.

Fact: Gay men work in all professions, e.g. Police, armed forces, plumbers, farmers, doctors, lawyers, nurses. Stereotypes are restrictive and damaging to all members of society.

Myth #9: Lesbians have been abused by males, want to be men themselves, or they just can't get a man.

Fact: Many lesbians come from caring families as often as heterosexual women do. Their sexual orientation is not the result of sexual abuse; is not a response to hatred of men; and is not a second best choice of female partner.

Myth #10: Homosexuality can be cured.

Fact: Many have tried to be "cured" which ultimately causes more distress in the family and the individual. Homosexuality is not a disorder to be cured. Failure of conversion therapy seems inevitable when it is attempting to cure a person's sexual orientation.

Myth #11: Why do gays and lesbians want to "flaunt" their sexuality?

Fact: Hand holding or a kiss goodbye is considered the norm for heterosexuals . We talk about what we did on the weekend with loved ones. We publicly announce our engagements and weddings and have pictures of partners on our desk at work.

Myth #12: Homosexuals will, if given the opportunity try and recruit others into their lifestyle.

Fact: It is not possible to make or encourage a person to be homosexual. Homosexuals are born, not made.

Myth #13: If parents recognised their child's homosexual orientation earlier they could have prevented them from being gay or lesbian.

Fact: Because people are born with their sexual orientation, it isn't possible for parents to prevent or alter their son or daughter's diverse sexual orientation or gender identity.

A lesbian or gay male may not have had sex, but they are still gay or lesbian

Desmond Tutu says homophobia is to the gay community like apartheid was to black people (in South Africa); it blames and persecutes people for something they have no control over.

Suicide and homosexuality

Statistics show that rural Australia has one of the highest rates of suicide in the world. Towns with less than 4000 people have experienced the greatest increase in male youth suicide.

The most dangerous period for suicidal contemplation or attempts by gay youth regardless of country or city, is between 15 and 24 years. Sadly, for some, it is the actual abandonment and rejection by family or friends, after 'coming out' that can cause the suicide, rather than an anticipated fear.

Statistics show gay males are six times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual men. Lesbians are twice as likely to suicide as heterosexual females and one third of the suicides occur before the age of seventeen years.

Many struggle to pass as "straight" in communities while working to understand and accept themselves. This can be a particularly draining and futile exercise.

People fear what they don't understand

It must be understood that sexual and gender diversity is not a choice or preference. Heterosexuals didn't make a conscious choice to be straight and our children did not choose diversity.

It is no surprise that suicide is common when youth are constantly hearing that they are bad, child molesters, filthy 's and deviants. Terms such as "..... is so gay" "faggot" and "poofter" are used as put downs and terms used to insult others.

Society, in certain regions is still basically not supportive, with very little positive information available. Schools need to provide information about sexual and gender diversity in their curriculum and protect youth from their peers, to ensure equality and educational opportunities.

Teachers and Schools can make a Difference

Nearly every school would have diverse students and nearly every teacher would come in contact with them on a daily basis. So it's very important for teachers to be very careful about derogatory comments made regarding sexual and gender diversity.

I have found that many of the young people I have talked to while researching this booklet, have made reference to phobic comments made by teachers, which were hurtful and made the young person doubt their self-worth. This can be particularly damaging especially if the young person respects the teacher's opinion.

Strategies, to address homophobia and transphobia injustices related to sexuality and gender diversity should be the same as those being used to address racism or any other minority group.

There should be a whole school approach with systematic strategies to address homophobia and transphobia at all levels, to include office staff, teachers, students, ground staff etc.

Due to feelings of rejection and isolation, youth are often marginalised in school. Homophobic and transphobic behaviour needs to be recognised so that it can be halted effectively. Some argue that to implement anti homophobic/transphobic education is to promote sexual and gender diversity. However, this logic is unfounded.

It is important to be aware that neither are learned conditions. Additionally, it's important to acknowledge the presence of diverse sexual orientation and gender diversity, in the same way we acknowledge different races and cultures in society.

Adopting policies and curricula on this issue is about students' rights to an education in safe surroundings.

- The first step is support - not retribution. We need to recognise unacceptable behaviour not condone it. Always remember, silence or inaction condones.
- We need to get the community involved in strategies to combat transphobia/homophobia.
- Do not tolerate derogatory language – either in the classroom or school ground.
- Do not permit bullying under any circumstances.
- **A young man once told me he was badly bullied at school and always by the same person. One day a teacher caught the bully and gave him a warning and told the student to report to him each time he was bullied. The student did complain but nothing was ever done. The teacher's excuse was, if the bully was expelled or suspended his education and schoolwork would suffer. The bullied student asked the question, "What about his education and schoolwork?"**
- Have information available. Familiarise yourself with services available and where they can be accessed. Check the internet for information and support and have it discreetly accessible for students
- Use gender neutral terms.
- Take note around the school to see who is being bullied. Provide safe areas for pupils.
- Don't stereotype as it perpetuates myths and contributes to homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- Never make negative comments at any time about sexual or gender diversity, students will always hear you.
- Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual.
- Discuss current events that involve all people and diverse groups positively.
- Educate school staff and promote community awareness issues faced by youth. Dispel myths and misunderstandings surrounding homosexuality and trans issues.

- Don't assume that homosexuality or being trans is just a passing phase and therefore ignore the problems the young people are experiencing. It will only exacerbate the problem for them. The young person's orientation or gender isn't the problem; it's the reaction of others around them. Have the courage to do the right thing for these students.
- Use positive LGBTI information in school, e.g. social studies, health, history etc. Encourage inclusive language, e.g. partner, not husband/ wife.
- Don't accept slurs. Racial and sexist slurs are no longer permitted and silence condones.
- Initiate staff and student discussions, about the negative impact, homophobia and transphobia has on young people.
- Access expertise, from within the gay community e.g. the local LGBTI police liaison officer. Utilise existing Department of Education resources dealing with homophobia or transphobia.
- Don't assume all students, staff and parents are heterosexual.
- Reducing bias in schools should be part of the school curriculum and should include issues such as racism, sexism, anti-immigrant bias and disability bias. It will also only work if teachers and professionals intervene quickly and consistently.
- Involve parents in the school commitment to providing a safe and inclusive school community. All teachers should make blanket statements condemning homophobic or transphobic statements or actions.
- Focus on challenging the negative opinions and put downs, rather than the person.
- Failure to act often comes from the lack of awareness and staff not willing to take on the job. A holistic approach needs to be taken including race, religion, and gender while getting the school, parents and local groups involved.
- Reduce isolation and negativity – provide positive role models.
 - Arts and music – Michelangelo 15th century, Leonardo da Vinci 15th century, Rudolph Nureyev 20th century, Tchaikovsky 19th century.
 - Sport – Ian Roberts, Martina Navratilova, Billy-Jean King, Renee Richards, Ian Thorpe, Caitlin Jenner, Karina Brown and Vanessa Foliaki (Australian Rugby) all 20th or 21st century.
 - Sciences – Evelyn Hooker, Dr Kerryn Phelps.
 - Aust. History and Politics – Sen. Bob Brown, Justice Michael Kirby, Sen. Penny Wong.
 - Authors and Poets - Hans Christian Andersen 19th century, Tennessee Williams 20th century, Lord Byron 18th century, Oscar Wilde 19th century.
 - Actors - James Dean, Rock Hudson, Montgomery Clift 20th century, Elliot Fletcher 21st century.

- General – Yves St. Laurent (designer) 20th century, Soldier and author T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) 20th century, J Edgar Hoover (head of US FBI) 20th century, Chaz Bono (writer, musician actor), K.D. Lang and Melissa Etheridge singers 20th century, Chelsea Manning (American activist) 21st century.
- Rulers and Royalty Roman Emperor Hadrian 1st-2nd century, Alexander the Great 300 BC, Richard the Lionheart 12th century, Russian Emperor Peter the Great 17th-18th century, Marie Antoinette 18th century, Julius Caesar, 100-44BC, Eleanor Roosevelt 20th century, Queen Anne 18th century.
- Popes - Pope Julius 111, 1550-1555, Pope Benedict IX 1032-1044, Pope John XII 955-964.
- Philosophers - Socrates 400BC, Aristotle 384-322BC.
- Joan of Arc

This small sample of famous gay, lesbian and bisexual and trans people can be used as an example to heterosexual students, that LGBTIQ people have made a great difference and positively influenced society as we know it.

This exercise also positively impacts on students in the classroom by sending the message that they are worthwhile and can succeed. Become better informed and ensure confidentiality. Schools and teachers need to accept ownership for what is happening.

Studies show that 90% of respondents to a gay rights survey had been called names and nearly 50% attacked and half of these attacks occurred at school. Every large high school is certain to have sexually and gender diverse staff and pupils, even if they keep this information to themselves.

Plus, the results of all surveys done regarding lesbian and gay youth and "coming out", show they have to face everything from ignorance to open hostility and not surprisingly many become long term truants.

Who is bullied?

Boys are more likely to be physically abused, more so at school than on the way to/from school and usually in the play or lunch areas.

Girls are more likely to have rumours spread about them.

Facts about bullies

Children and youth who bully are not always loners and not socially isolated. Very often they are in groups, sometimes sporting and the bullying tactics are effective due to the audience factor.

Children who bully do not necessarily have low self-esteem. Many are often filled with their own self-importance. The concern with this belief is that if you work to improve their self-esteem, all you have are more confident bullies.

Warning signs of bullying

- Child returns from school with torn, damaged or missing articles of clothes, books etc.
- Has unexplained cuts and bruises. Have few friends, if any.
- Appears reluctant to attend school. Has lost interest in school.
- Complains of headaches, stomach pains, trouble sleeping and/or nightmares. Appears sad, depressed or moody.
- Appears anxious or has poor self-esteem. Appears quiet, sensitive, passive and less likely.

What can be done?

Bullying is an aggressive act intending harm, carried out repeatedly and over time. Bullying occurs in relationships characterised by an imbalance of power.

Many youth are reluctant to report bullying because of the fear that it will only worsen the problem. The belief is that no one will listen. Other times it's the fear that it will draw attention to their diversity or the possibility of being "outed" by staff or students.

Bullying often exacerbates the problems of anxiety, depression, etc. and can often have long lasting effects, even after the person has left school or the region. I have talked to several young people who have experienced dreadful bullying at school, with little support from those in power and one can see their stress levels heighten as they recount their horrendous experiences.

It's not surprising that they still suffer depression and once contemplated or attempted suicide as an option of escape.

Many believe that it's better for the young person to deal with the issue of bullying themselves and it's sometimes considered character building, while others just turn a "blind eye". But realistically, it is the entire school's problem, not just the individual's concern.

Research shows that the programs with more success are the ones that adults are actively involved in, with increased monitoring of student behaviour and a plan to deal with bullying.

Professionals who recognise the abuse or bullying should talk to the young person and be prepared to work with them and their family. It is ideal if referrals can be offered to the health nurse or guidance officer at the school and outside agencies that can offer strategies and assistance to overcome long term effects for the bullied youth.

What young people had to say

- Most feel there is a general lack of understanding regarding diversity by professionals.
- They want more general awareness about sexual and gender diversity.
- They want talks at assembly.

- They want the world to know they have morals.
- They don't want to hide at lunch time in classrooms and toilet blocks because of fear from other students.
- They want to hear non-judgmental comments from teachers.
- They want derogatory terms stopped in classrooms and school grounds by other pupils and staff.
- They want diversity taught in a sexuality unit at school.
- They believe the bullies are often the kids trying to show who's "cool" in the group.

If a student complains about bullying and a teacher has witnessed the incident, when confronting the bully the teacher should state that the attack was observed.

Mentioning that the bullied student complained often makes the acts of bullying or abuse worse.

What not to do or believe regarding bullying

- Bullying should not be seen as a part of growing up.
- Telling bullies to be nice and behave themselves does nothing.
- Believing "boys will be boys" is just an excuse to do nothing and is justifying bad behaviour.

It isn't always realistic to expect the bullied person to be the one to make the complaint about bullying, because this can often make them more victimised.

A simple strategy to avoid this happening is if the person does make the complaint, state to the bully that "you observed" or "somebody else observed". This can take the pressure off the victim.

Not so gay - project

Homophobic name calling such as "poofter" or "faggot" are terms used to keep those in line that have moved out of the accepted or perceived "macho heterosexual" bounds.

When "you're so gay" or "this is so gay" comments are heard, adults in charge should not assume the student doesn't understand what he/she is saying. They know it's a put down, because the term is never used as a compliment. This in turn is again reinforcing that "gay is not a good thing" to the lesbian or gay students in the class.

Some strategies to halt this often used put down include:

- **The disciplinary approach** – just by stating this is an unacceptable term and is not to be used, can be seen as antagonising and will rarely achieve the wanted goal, especially if there is no consequence linked to the continuation of the derogatory terms.
- **The personal approach** - "I find your comments offensive. I have friends and family who are gay and I don't appreciate what you're saying and comments like that are hurtful. Plus, others in this room may have someone they care about who is gay."
- **Humorous approach** – Involves making light of the word e.g. "You said your ruler was gay; I wonder how many others have gay rulers? Perhaps we should put the gay rulers together and the straight rulers over here".
- **Correct language approach** – Involves letting the student know they used the word incorrectly. "Last time I checked gay meant something positive".
- **Minority approach** – Suggest they use other minority terms for example, "that's so aboriginal" or "that's so woman" or "that's so disabled". Then discuss whether it would be permissible to use these terms and would they be able to get away with it. This approach is great to discuss why people think they can put down gays but not other minorities.
- **Student(s) as experts' approach** – acknowledges that the teacher doesn't necessarily know what a student means. Then a broader discussion can occur. For example "when you say 'that's so gay' it seems like you mean it's not good?" "When I think of gay I think of something positive".

Another approach is called the NAC approach...

- **Name it** - Name the problem ("you said that's so gay")
- **Agreement** - Refer to an agreement ("we have a clear understanding in this class/school that there are no putdowns")
- **Consequences** - Alert the student(s) to consequences of their behaviour ("as you know this means.....")

This assumes a number of things including an agreement has been set up that students are aware of.

Finally, when these homophobic comments or behaviours are noted, immediate action should be taken and the message swiftly given that homophobia is not acceptable and this needs to be consistent. Things probably won't always go smoothly but it shows the others in the group that you aren't accepting and the LGBTI in the class will feel as if at least you're trying.

I call this the three "C's communicate/ be consistent/ and follow through with consequences.

What is Homophobia and Transphobia

Both are an irrational fear which stems from a misguided belief that homosexuals and trans people can/will cause personal harm. It is important to note that statistically, those with diverse sexual orientation or gender diversity are in more danger from heterosexuals than vice versa.

Generally, people are fearful or feel threatened by what they don't understand and the enduring nature of myths and stereotyping keeping the fears unchallenged. Furthermore there is an unwillingness or inability to change opinion and beliefs often taught in early life.

For some people homophobia can also be based on confusion about their own sexual orientation.

Homophobia and transphobia are often displayed by harassment and discrimination of others based on their sexual or gender diverse identity. It hampers student's productivity, affects self-esteem and contributes to catastrophic events such as self-harm and suicide.

Who is likely to be homophobic or transphobic?

Statistically, those who are more likely to be phobic are older heterosexual men often not well educated, religious, living in rural areas, and politically conservative. They are also authoritarian, less sexually permissive, have a belief in the traditional gender roles and are less likely to have LGBTIQ friends.

It's my personal belief that besides the group mentioned in the previous paragraph, for many it's the lack of exposure to meeting LGBTIQ people which results in a general lack of awareness that causes unrealistic fears and negative beliefs regarding the LGBTIQ community. So, for this group if a loved one "comes out" it is a real challenge for them to alter their beliefs and be supportive.

Difficulties regarding homosexuality

Not everyone becomes aware of their homosexuality at the same time in life. A few realise they're gay or lesbian during puberty and resist their natural desires.

Working with and Supporting Trans Youth

This section of the booklet is intended for teachers to understand how important it is for trans youth to live their lives honestly.

Young people are identifying as transgender at a much earlier age and it is now recognised as a real issue, not to be ignored or trivialised. It is recommended by medical experts that it's important to understand supporting the child and treating them as individuals, does no harm at all. It is also equally important to

understand that being supportive of a child is extremely important. When people insist the child represses how they see themselves it's likely to cause long term mental health problems.

There has been an increase in the number of young children who are identifying as transgender over the last few years. It may be confusing for the child and especially so for the parents and they need professional support. Being transgender has nothing to do with (good or bad) parenting skills, abuse, any form of trauma, what the mother did during pregnancy, the child seeking attention or poor mental health. It is genuine.

Gender Dysphoria is diagnosed as a difficulty identifying with the biological sex with causes being unclear. It is not a mental illness, or attention seeking behaviour. However, the young person's needs should be recognised and addressed appropriately.

Mental health issues can manifest when these children are ignored, shunned or treated badly, not as a consequence of being gender dysphoric.

Suicidal ideation is extremely high for trans people regardless of age. Most contemplate suicide at some time.

It is not uncommon for youth to self-harm, develop anxiety, become introverted and/or develop a suicidal ideation if compelled to remain as the biological sex. Additionally, young people quickly become withdrawn and rebellious which is very challenging for teachers and parents because they are angry, confused and extremely unhappy.

Supporting and accepting the child as their preferred gender is not condoning poor behaviour. Transgender children, youth or adults are not living a "preferred" lifestyle, being Trans is just plain difficult due to transphobia and a lack of understanding and support.

Simply put, trans youth need support and are entitled to an education the same as any other student. Schools should seek information that explains Gender Dysphoria. Ignorance on the part of staff is no excuse for poor treatment of the child.

Ideally as the anti-discrimination act states children should be:

- permitted to use their chosen gender name and be called by that name and by the relevant pronouns
- permitted to use the toilet of their chosen gender
- permitted to dress in their chosen gender uniforms and general clothing
- treated as their chosen gender in all situations.

More information about how to support trans students is available in a resource called [Trans@School](#) on the Queensland Human Rights Commission website.

There has been an increase in the number of young children who are identifying as trans over the last few years. It may be confusing for the child and especially so for the parents and the last thing parents need is for the school staff to be difficult or allow bullying by students.

A recent advantage for trans children now is, once puberty begins, they can be prescribed puberty blockers which hinder typical bodily changes from happening. Puberty blockers help to decrease anxiety from unwanted bodily changes. They do not decrease general anxiety.

As a professional person you may be skeptical or perhaps just not be familiar with young people identifying as transgender or with Gender Dysphoria and that's ok, but it's the young person's perception that's important. Medical specialists believe if those in the young person's life allow them to be themselves, there is no harm done, especially if they then decide NO they are not the opposite gender. However, harm is done if adults refuse to acknowledge the young person may have gender dysphoria.

There can be no argument that a child must feel safe and comfortable at school, if they are to thrive in the learning environment. We need to recognise that Gender Dysphoria cannot harm or endanger other children and accepting the child as their preferred gender is not condoning poor behaviour. Transgender children, youth or adults are not living a "preferred" lifestyle. The suggestions often made that an individual is likely to coerce or assault another to adopt the lifestyle are dangerously ignorant and clearly untrue.

Additionally, Educators need to understand this is not a fad or phase the child is experiencing. Young trans children need to be taken seriously, supported and respected.

If the child is genuine, it is most definitely detrimental to the child's mental health and self-esteem if they are denied the right to dress as they feel is correct for them. Whether the stage the child is going through is permanent or not is immaterial, it is important to support them with understanding and compassion.

In conclusion, a young child may not understand sexual orientation or what that means, but children do know if they are a boy or girl. Sadly, it is not uncommon for young male children to attempt to remove their genitals or have children talking about wanting to die so they can come back as the opposite sex. So, to professionals in whatever area of expertise you have chosen, I implore you to please think very carefully, if you are considering, denying a child the right to dress as they see themselves, in their chosen gender. If the child's preferred clothing makes staff or other parents of the school feel uncomfortable, imagine the anxiety the child experiences when forced into the perceived wrong clothes just to make uniformed adults feel better. If this does occur, remember this is doing what's easiest not what's right for the child.

In conclusion, I ask that as a professional you carefully consider the needs of the child first, which includes minimising issues including the pronouns, dress codes, which toilet is to be used, sports and school camps etc. If uncertain about what is correct procedure always refer to the legislation or phone the education department for clarification.

Thank you and I hope this booklet helps staff to be more understanding of our special and much-loved children.