

Working with Transgender Youth

Like all young people, transgender youth are entitled to compassion and support, as well as bias-free attention to their unique needs, along with the freedom to express their identities. They should be supported in their gender identity and never required to conform to traditional conceptions of gender in order to receive appropriate care or services.

When working with transgender youth, you should be educated about transgender issues as well as prepared to work sensitively with these youth. Knowledge about lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues may be helpful in working with transgender young people, but gender-identity issues may be very different from issues related to sexual orientation.



Know what it means to be transgender and use the term appropriately. “Transgender” is an umbrella term used to describe a person whose self-image of their gender differs from the norms traditionally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth based upon their physiological anatomy.

For example, a transgender woman is a person who identifies as female, but was assigned “male” at birth. Conversely, a transgender man is a person who identifies as a male, but was assigned “female” at birth.

The term is also used to describe a person who may be gender-nonconforming—that is, whose behaviors, mannerisms, or clothing are perceived by others to be inappropriate for their birth sex based on societal beliefs or standards.

The terms “trans” and “genderqueer” are two additional terms frequently used by transgender and gender-nonconforming youth.

Avoid assumptions about transgender young people’s sexual orientation.

Transgender youth may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, heterosexual, or differently. It’s important to keep in mind that sexual orientation is separate from, and not determined by, one’s gender identity and expression.

Provide transgender-friendly role models and mentors.

Transgender youth, like all youth, need connections to adult role models and mentors. For transgender young people in out-of-home care systems (i.e., juvenile or foster care), these positive connections can be harder to find but are nonetheless crucial for their healthy development. Frequently cut off from their families of origin, and part of a misunderstood minority, transgender young people can find a sense of family and belonging from mentors and community role models.

Allow transgender youth to express their gender identity.

Allow transgender youth to express their gender identity through their chosen attire, names, and mannerisms without punishment or ridicule.

Don’t assume that transgender youth are “acting out” when they express their gender identity. Identity issues are profound and difficult to understand; it is not a choice a person makes, but rather who he or she is. The clothing and personal style that an individual chooses are an important aspect of self-expression. Support transgender youth in these choices and challenge restrictive policies that may not allow such freedom.

Use young people’s preferred names and pronouns.

Respect a transgender young person’s choice of name and gendered pronouns that best reflects their sense of self as female or male. By doing so, you validate their identity and sense of self-worth. If you’re unsure which pronoun an individual youth prefers, ask sensitively rather than simply assuming what they would prefer.

Ensure that transgender youth have access to trained and affirming medical and mental health care providers.

Advocate for transgender youth to receive competent and affirming mental health and medical services, including access to monitored use of hormones if deemed medically appropriate. When youth don’t have access to the health care services they need, they may resort to buying illegal medications and hormones from the streets. Using hormones without medical supervision can lead to serious medical injury, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections. Transgender youth may also engage in dangerous or illegal behaviors to pay for these services.



Resources For Transgender Youth

Lambda Legal

www.lambdalegal.org

120 Wall Street, Suite 1500
New York NY 10005

212 809 8585

cwla.lambda.network@lambdalegal.org

Gay & Lesbian Medical Association

www.glma.org

459 Fulton Street, Suite 107
San Francisco CA 94102

415 255 4547

info@glma.org

National Center for Transgender Equality

www.nctequality.org

1325 Massachusetts Avenue Northwest, Suite 700
Washington DC 20005

202 903 0112

ncte@nctequality.org

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health

www.wpath.org

1300 South Second Street, Suite 180
Minneapolis MN 55454

612 624 9397

wpath@wpath.org



Educate Yourself On Gender Identity Disorder

The incongruity between a person's internal sense of self as either male or female and their anatomical or birth sex can lead to depression and severe emotional distress. When these feelings rise to clinically significant levels, a person may be suffering from **gender identity disorder (GID)**, a diagnosable medical condition found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association.

Treatment of GID is focused on providing support, not changing a person's gender identity. It may include services such as individual and family counseling and medical care such as hormone therapy and surgery to align the physical body with the internal sense of self as male or female.

Once transgender people are able to express their gender identity, they are able to go on to lead happy, fulfilled lives. As a result, some people oppose the classification of transgender identity as a disorder, while others recognize the advantages of having explicit standards of health care for transgender individuals. All concur, however, that transgender youth need to be affirmed, safe, and free to express their identities.

Be Aware of the Health Care Protocols for Transgender Individuals

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (www.wpath.org) has developed internationally recognized protocols for diagnosing and treating youth and adults with GID. These protocols recommend that transgender young people gain real-life experience through dressing in clothes and using names and pronouns associated with their gender. Young people age 16 years and older are seen as candidates for an individualized assessment for medical treatment to enable them to begin their physiological transition from one gender to another.

Locate and Develop Resources to Help Transgender Young People with Unique Legal Issues

Transgender young people may need assistance and advocacy to obtain proper legal identity documents such as birth certificates, state identification cards, and driver's licenses that reflect the gender with which they identify. Also, they may need help to obtain a legal name change.

Developed from Fostering Transitions, a CWLA/Lambda Legal Joint Initiative

About the LGBTQA Initiative

Members in the community gather and give input as to how **Big Brothers Big Sisters** can effectively recruit, retain, and sustain members of the **LGBTQA community**. In an effort to maximize the positive effects of mentoring and increase recruitment strategies, we seek ways of connecting with LGBTQA communities as allies and advocates.

For more information about BBBS's LGBTQ Initiative, contact **Jesse Gilliam** at jesse.gilliam@bbbsps.org or **206.763.9060 x203**



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