



Guide to supporting a student to affirm or transition gender identity at school.

What is gender identity?

Gender identity is broadly defined in the *Sex Discrimination Amendment (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Act 2013* as meaning ‘the gender-related identity, appearance or mannerisms or other gender-related characteristics of a person (whether by way of medical intervention or not), with or without regard to the person’s designated sex at birth’.

This law protects people from discrimination in regards to their gender identity. It does not matter what sex the person was assigned at birth, or whether the person has undergone any medical intervention. This includes people who identify as women, men or as neither male nor female. The terms people use to describe their gender identity may include transgender, gender non-binary or agender. Although the Sex Discrimination Act does not use these specific labels it is intended to cover these identities and more.

Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities use various terminology to describe or identify a person assigned female or male at birth and identifying or living partly or fully as another gender. Some communities may use terms such as ‘Sistergirl’ or ‘Brotherboy,’ or they may use alternative words relevant within local language. Use and spelling of the terms may vary across different groups and communities, and other cultures will use different terms to describe gender diversity. This guide also applies to supporting those students.

“The day that my friends at school said ‘she’ instead of ‘he’ and I could be myself was the best day of my life.”

– Jennifer, transgender female student.

How this guide can help.

This guide is intended to help all schools to provide support for students who are taking steps to affirm a gender identity at school that is different from the sex that they were assigned at birth. This process is often referred to as gender transition or affirmation.

This guide aims to help schools to develop active school processes that respond appropriately and positively to the student’s needs, address privacy and safety concerns, and acknowledge the specific support needs of other students and staff.

Many schools have managed this process in a seamless and supportive manner. The following steps may assist you to create a written management plan that reflects both the needs and desires of the student and the unique capacity of the whole school community.

Ensure a student led process.

The person who understands most about their gender transition or affirmation is the student themselves. It is crucial to the success of this process that they are included in every decision made and every action taken. Consideration should be given to the age and maturity of the student and whether it would be appropriate to involve the students’ parent(s) or guardian(s) in each decision.

Assess the support given by a student’s family members or carers, and think through the needs of any siblings, especially those attending the same school. If a student does not have family or carer support for the process, a decision to proceed should be made based on the school’s duty of care for the student’s wellbeing and their level of maturity to make decisions about their needs. It may be possible to consider a student a mature minor and able to make decisions without parental consent.

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Ensure student privacy.



Establish a support team.



Establish timeframes.



Name:
Pronouns:

Use correct identity, names and pronouns.



Consider the following:



Toilets and changing rooms.



School uniforms and dress codes.



School sports and physical education.



School camps and events.



School documents and records.



Support staff and students.



Prepare for community responses.



Update school policies, create a safety plan.



Take a whole school approach.

1

Ensure student privacy.

It is important to maintain appropriate levels of privacy and confidentiality. There is no need for everyone in the school to know whether a student is transgender or gender diverse, particularly if they are new to the school. For the student, making decisions about what information is shared, with whom and when, is crucial to their health and wellbeing.¹

All decisions about sharing information should be made with their explicit consent (or parental consent for students unable to give explicit consent). Information should only be shared with those who have an appropriate reason to know and be limited to what they need to know.

2

Establish a support team.

It is important to work with the student to identify a core group of staff, family members or carers to be involved in planning discussions and to act as a support team throughout the process.

It is a good idea to involve leadership and wellbeing staff; however students may like to involve other teaching staff that they have a good relationship with.

The names, roles and responsibilities of the support team can be recorded in your written management plan.

3

Establish timeframes.

It is important to work with the student to settle on a suitable date for the various changes to occur. Most children and young people will have a clear idea about the most appropriate time for the transition to occur: this may be at the beginning of a new school term or year. It may be critical to some children and young people's health and wellbeing to make changes as soon as it is possible and safe to do so.

While information about their gender identity may be new for you, the student may have been sure of their gender identity for a long time and are very prepared to affirm their gender.

The confirmed date will signify when all of the transition details outlined in the support plan will take place.

4

Use correct identity, names and pronouns.

Most transitions will involve the use of a new name and pronouns (he, she, they, etc.)¹ and it is crucial that the whole school makes an effort to get this right. These changes should be recorded in the written management plan and the new name and gender updated on school records prior to the transition date. This is the most crucial aspect of a gender affirmation process that needs to be respected and forms the basis of the provision of facilities and the creation of a respectful and positive environment for the student.

Where appropriate, all staff should be briefed on a new name and pronouns before the transition date, and make a commitment to adhere to these changes.

Mistakes are okay if the commitment and respectful intention to get pronouns and names correct are still there! Simple apologies and corrections are part of the adjustment process.

5

Toilets and changing rooms.

As part of the written plan, confirm the toilets, changing rooms, showers, and swimming facilities based on the student's gender identity and the facilities they will feel most comfortable using. Schools can also consider providing gender-neutral toilet options, which should be accessible to any student who wishes to use them and will help to establish a more inclusive environment for transgender and gender diverse students. There is no requirement to use a unisex or accessible toilet or changing room unless a student makes an active choice to do so. Continued use of unisex or accessible facilities can cause additional stigma and potential for discrimination.

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School uniforms and dress codes.

Confirm the appropriate uniform that matches the gender identity of the student and adheres to your school dress or uniform code. It could be timely for the school to consider how inclusive your current dress code or uniform policy is and whether it could be updated.

For students affirming an identity that is neither male nor female, provisions could be considered by the school for the student to wear elements of the uniform they feel most comfortable with.

7

School sports and physical education.

It is vital that transgender and gender diverse students are able to continue participating in Physical Education and school sports. While it is possible to lawfully discriminate on the basis of sex and/or gender identity in single sex competitions if strength, stamina or physique is relevant, it is critical to note that this does not mean that you have to segregate on the basis of sex or gender identity.

The focus needs to be on whether the student wants to participate and how this can be made possible. Consider the fact that all students have physical differences (height and weight) and that this has not been a preventative factor in their ability to participate equally in sport.

8

School camps and events.

When a student is expected or wishes to participate in a school camp or event ask them what accommodation arrangements would make them feel most comfortable. Check with your accommodation provider to see what options are available. If there are private changing areas, the student will be able to stay in the same space as people of the same gender.

9

School documents and records.

It is necessary to update all school records to reflect the student's preferred name, gender identity and gender marker (e.g. F/M/X). This name and gender should be considered their real ones.

If, after transition, a student receives documentation with their old name and/or gender marker, it can cause significant distress. All attempts should be made to ensure that these situations do not occur.

10

Support school staff.

It is important to create opportunities to educate staff through professional learning (offered free of charge by Safe Schools Coalition Australia) and briefings on the arrangements for the student where appropriate. The session can be tailored to address the needs of the specific student, or give an introduction to supporting gender diversity and transgender students more broadly. It is integral that you get explicit consent from the student on all content that refers to their personal experiences and wishes.

11

Support other students.

You may decide to prepare and educate students through discussions with those who may have known the student prior to transition. These discussions should be based on the decisions of the student and can involve year level groups, house groups, form groups, student leadership teams, or groups of individuals selected by the student. Safe Schools Coalition Australia can provide support to individual teachers to help plan and facilitate these discussions.

12

Prepare for community responses.

The school leadership team should be prepared to respond to questions or concerns from parents or members of the broader school community. This can be as simple as affirming the facts of the situation and policy that applies while maintaining the confidentiality of the student and their family.

For example if someone asks why a student is wearing a girl's uniform you can explain that the student is a girl and that you want her to feel as comfortable as possible at school.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia can assist you to develop some affirmative messages to share with all staff to ensure that they are confident to respond to potential concerns across the school community in a consistent and positive way.

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Update school policies.

Update your school policies to include support for gender diverse and transgender students. Use the experiences of supporting an individual student to inform future provisions made available to other transgender or gender diverse students. Consider how to create teaching and learning materials, anti-bullying procedures, and diversity policy that include transgender and gender diverse students, teachers and families. Some state and territory departments of education have policies or guidelines relating to supporting transgender and gender diverse students in school. Contact Safe Schools Coalition Australia to see what is in place in your part of the country. Policies help schools significantly reduce violence and wellbeing risks for LGBTI people.²

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Create a safety plan.

Create a safety plan that identifies supports that are currently in place and clear processes to deal with any discriminatory or bullying behaviour that the student may experience. Organise regular opportunities for the student to report on their experience post-transition; this could be as simple as having a weekly appointment with a trusted staff member to check in on anything negative or positive that has been going on at school.

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Take a whole school approach to including gender diversity, intersex and sexual diversity.

Write down all your decisions and identify processes to review the written management plan to ensure the student is continuing to receive appropriate support and is engaged and happy at school.

If your school is not yet a member, you are invited to join Safe Schools Coalition Australia and access support from your local state or territory delivery partner.