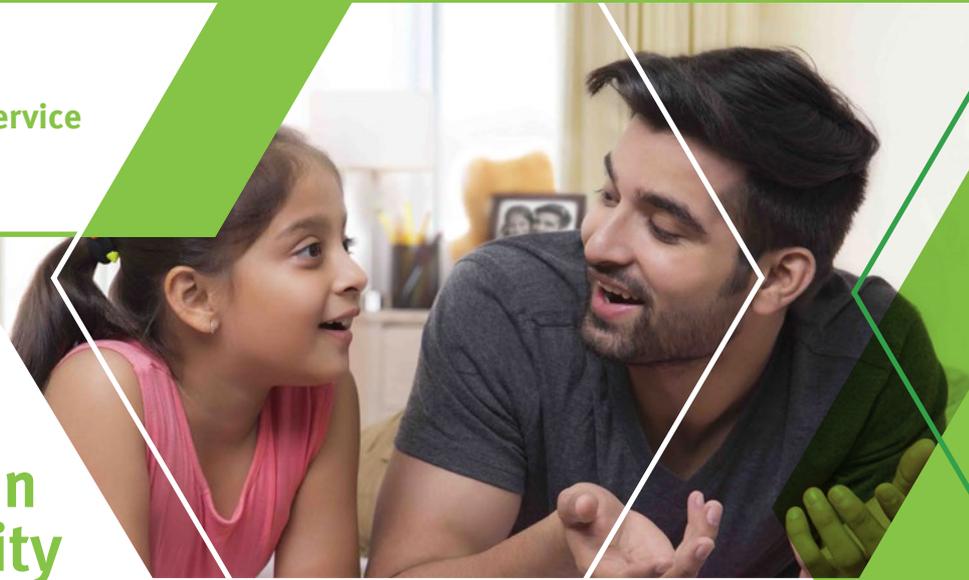


Gender Clinic and Statewide Service

Information for parents of children diverse in gender or sexuality



Parents or carers are central to the healthy development, growth and wellbeing of their child. From the beginning, the loving care that parents or carers provide a child lays the foundations of their child's future emotional and social health and promotes healthy brain development.

Strong, positive relationships help children develop trust and empathy, to communicate emotions and deal with challenges. Most importantly, children learn who they are by how they are treated.

Gender and sexuality

The majority of children will have a strong inner sense of their gender as male or female and this matches the sex they are assigned at birth. Sex is determined by our chromosomes (genes), endocrine system (hormones) and body formation (reproductive organs). This is different for transgender and gender diverse (TGD) children who have a gender that is different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender is not something you can influence. We all have a gender identity, which comes into our awareness in the first years of life, usually consolidating by age six. Most TGD children do not speak about feeling different until much older, often at the onset of puberty or later.

Sexuality develops later, usually during puberty but can evolve and change throughout a child's life. Feeling comfortable with sexuality is essential to healthy development and is influenced by personal experiences, upbringing and cultural background. Parents are an important role model and can help children by modelling values of respect and beliefs about safety, responsibility and honest communication. While the majority of children grow up to identify as heterosexual, some children will describe their sexuality with terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual or pansexual. Variations in gender and sexuality are found in all cultures and continents across the world and are part of the diversity of humankind.

Children and young people who identify as transgender, non-binary, lesbian, gay, bisexual or another diverse gender or sexuality label are at higher risk of depression, anxiety, self-harm and attempting suicide. These challenges will not necessarily occur in all gender or sexuality diverse children. External factors such as rejection by friends or family, bullying, transphobia, messages of shame from public figures or community leaders cause or contribute to psychological distress. Parents and the child's siblings are the most important people in contributing to a diverse child's overall wellbeing.

“ The real concern was the statistics on suicide... I didn't want my son to be one so I supported him in the decisions ahead and informed him as best as possible. ”

– Father of 10-year-old trans boy



Parents can be the number one protective factor in their child's life

Studies show that strong parental support of their gender diverse child leads to a 95 per cent reduction in suicide attempts, comparative to parents who are unsupportive or only somewhat supportive. Some parents may experience struggles understanding and affirming their child. Parents may think it is a phase, that they're confused, or they may have their own difficulties reconciling who their child has grown to be with their own beliefs. Seek support from a counsellor experienced in this area if you are struggling or connect with other parents also with diverse children for peer support.

“Research tells us that young people diverse in gender or sexuality will have the opportunity to grow up happy and healthy with the love and support of their families.”

– Trans PULSE 2012



“ She’s now happier than she’s ever been. She’s delighted to attend school every day, she’s engaging in group activities, confidently making new friends, challenging herself academically – and her grades have improved markedly. ”

– Mother of 12-year-old trans girl



“ One of the things that helped me to be 100 per cent in support of my child being himself, was realising we weren't alone on this journey; I spoke to so many other parents with unbelievably similar experiences. ”

– Mother of 12-year-old trans girl

Useful websites

These websites provide useful support information:

www.pgdc.org.au

www.genderhelpforparents.com.au

<https://bit.ly/2sjZ26f> (Beyond Blue – Families like mine)

www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/service-gender-clinic

References

‘Social and Emotional Development’, <https://www.zerotothree.org/early-development/social-and-emotional-development>

‘Teenage sexuality’, http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/sexuality_teenagers.html/context/1708

‘Transgender and gender diverse children’, www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/03213f59-9b8f-45b9-8575-2605958fd791/Trans-and-gender-diverse-children.pdf

‘Trans Pathways’, <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/our-research/brain-and-behaviour/mental-health-and-youth/youth-mental-health/trans-pathways/>

‘Impacts of Strong Parental Support for Trans Youth’, <http://transpulseproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Impacts-of-Strong-Parental-Support-for-Trans-Youth-vFINAL.pdf>

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