Gender Dysphoria

How children learn to understand gender starts at an early age. It is a process that grows over time and lasts through puberty and adulthood. Gender is a spectrum. It is not just about being a boy or a girl. People may express and identify varying degrees of being either masculine or feminine. It is common and natural for youth to explore their gender.

Definitions

- **Transgender** – This is a person who feels their gender is not in line with their sex assigned at birth.
- **Gender diverse** – This is a broad term to describe people that express their gender or identity differently than what is deemed normal for a given culture.
- **Gender dysphoria** – This describes a sense of unease that someone may have due to their gender identity not being in line with their sex assigned at birth.

Be there for your child

- Talk with your child. Be open to hearing what they have to say. Research shows that children with caregivers and family members that are accepting of them have a lower chance of self-harm, suicide attempts, substance use and overall risky behaviors.
- Keeping a child from exploring their gender expression or identity will not stop them from feeling the way they do.
- Gender identity is not a phase. Trying to change your child's gender identity, either by denial, punishment, reparative therapy or any other tactic, is not effective. It is harmful and may lead to ongoing mental health problems.
- People begin to understand their gender identity and gender diversity at different times. For some it occurs in childhood, for others in the teen years and beyond.
- Ask questions. Be open to hearing what your child says.

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- No matter when your child comes out, knowing they have your support is important.
- Be respectful. Be open to appreciating that your child may need to explore gender by using a different name or pronoun.
- It is important to find out if your child is experiencing gender dysphoria or is exploring their gender.

Professional guidance

You should seek out professional support if your child does the following:

- expresses distress about their gender
- has interest in exploring their gender identity with a provider
- expresses discomfort with their body in relation to gender
- expresses self-harm or suicidal ideas due to distress with their body in relation to gender
- wants to explore medical interventions that relate to gender identity

Heath care providers in all settings see children with gender diversity. They want to best support your child and your family.