



Supporting Gender Diverse Pupils in Secondary School – Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if I think a pupil is questioning their gender identity?

- Ensure pupils know that they can come to you and discuss any issues in their own time. Be open, honest and approachable.
- If you have built up a good relationship with a pupil and are concerned about their gender identity, it may be appropriate to question them in a polite and thoughtful manner. Queries such as: *“Are you having any difficulties at the moment?”* *“I’ve noticed a change in your appearance lately, would you like to talk about that?”* can often serve as precursors to larger discussions.
- It is important to create an environment where pupils feel as though they can be themselves and speak to their teachers about any issues they may be facing.
- It is important to allow children the freedom to explore their gender identity at their own pace without labelling them as gender diverse or transgender.
- Take time to understand the young person’s thoughts, feeling and experiences which might be leading them to question their gender identity with an approach of professional curiosity. For pupils with additional support needs using concrete and/or visual approaches may be beneficial in exploring their experiences.
- Provide reassurance that gender questioning can take time and that there is no rush to decide a particular label or identity. The young person’s thoughts and feelings at that time should be respected, and also the young person reassured that these may change over time.
- Teachers can help to create a welcoming and supportive environment for gender diverse and transgender pupils by avoiding activities that separate their class by gender, addressing any instances of LGBT bullying proactively and sharing in discussion that challenges traditional gender roles.

What should I do if a pupil tells me they are gender diverse?

- If a pupil confides in you that they think they are/may be gender diverse or transgender, the first and most important thing to do is reassure them that this is okay.
- Ask the pupil questions about what support they would like from school to make them feel comfortable.
- The pupil may decide that they would like to undergo social transition whilst they are at school (i.e. to begin living as the gender they most strongly identify with), however this is their choice and may take time before they reach this conclusion. When a pupil first comes to you, they may just want to speak to someone about how they feel. Be open, attentive and listen to what they have to say.
- The pupil may wish to be known by a different name and pronoun, cut or grow their hair and begin dressing as the gender they most identify with. If there is a change in name or pronoun, discussion should be held between the child’s parents and teachers.



- Some pupils may wish to “come out” publicly to their class/school whilst others may not feel comfortable sharing their gender identity with others. By listening to the needs and wants of the pupil the school can support them most effectively.
- Alternatively, a pupil might decide against socially transitioning whilst at school for whatever reason. This is the choice of the young person and should be respected.
- Any actions around a child or young person who decides to socially transition whilst at school should be planned carefully in accordance with the views of the pupil and their parents, with parents and the pupil being consulted and central to discussions.
- For neurodivergent young people, particularly those with autism, there is a higher correlation with being gender diverse. Approaches such as social stories, comic strip conversations and concrete, visual tools may be helpful in planning the support around the young person.

Who should I tell?

- A child or young person identifying as gender diverse or transgender is not a child protection issue in itself, therefore it is important to request the pupil’s consent before passing this information on. The young person’s views should be central in terms of who they want to tell, when and how.
- However, where there are additional concerns regarding the pupil’s mental health and/or wellbeing it may be appropriate to consider additional support planning with the young person and their parent.
- A transgender or gender diverse pupil may request your support in informing other people about their gender identity. This could include parents, friends, classmates or other teachers. In this instance, these conversations should be led by the young person and their views should be gathered and listened to.

How do I talk about this with other pupils?

- If a transgender or gender diverse pupil wishes to disclose their gender identity to other pupils and requests your support to do so, it is important to plan for this accordingly and to actively seek the views of the pupil and their parents.
- School staff can raise awareness around their approach to gender diverse and transgender issues through PSHE (e.g., using the RSHP resource [Home - RSHP](#)) and by sharing information with pupils via newsletters and the school website.
- It is important for school staff to actively counteract any prejudice or negative attitudes expressed towards gender diverse and transgender pupils. If a pupil makes a remark that is transphobic, it is appropriate to respond with the following: *“At this school we treat everyone with respect. That word is an insulting term for people who may be transgender, therefore it is not respectful to say such things.”* Or alternatively: *“I am surprised and disappointed to hear you say that. I would have hoped that you would recognise that it is important to treat everyone, including transgender people with respect and therefore it is wrong to use transphobic language.”*

Is it just a phase?

- Some adults may be concerned that a pupil is too young to make a decision regarding their gender identity.
- Dismissing a pupil's identity as "just a phase" can be harmful to their wellbeing and may knock the pupil's confidence in coming to you for support. It is important to allow a pupil to explore their gender identity at their own pace, and not to make assumptions.
- Support services for young people are available e.g., national helplines such as LGBT Scotland and direct support through clinical psychology. Psychological support offers young people and their families a chance to receive care and advice to help them cope if they are experiencing emotional distress in relation to their gender identity issues, without rushing into physical transitioning through health pathways.

What if the child's parents are not supportive?

- Some parents may find it difficult or upsetting to find out that their child is gender diverse or transgender. If parents are struggling to accept that their child is gender diverse/transgender, it is important to protect the best interests of the pupil whilst signposting supports for the parents (such as the materials available on LGBT Youth Scotland).
- As teachers, you have a duty of care to support pupils to feel safe and comfortable to be themselves within school. If there are concerns surrounding a pupil's well-being as a result of a conflict with home, these should be discussed with parents through an arranged meeting.

What should I say to other parents?

- Confidential information about an individual pupil must not be shared with other parents. A statement such as the following ought to be used in instances relating to issues surrounding gender diverse or transgender pupils:
"This issue concerns the personal circumstances of a child, and as such we are unable to comment on this individual case. Our school is committed to working with families and relevant agencies/partners to ensure that we meet the needs of all pupils and provide a supportive environment for children to learn and achieve their academic potential."
- What you can do is let parents know that they can discuss any worries or concerns with you, and if they have any concerns about their own child, you can support them and plan proactively around this.
- However, if the pupil and pupil's parents are happy for the school to share information it is good practice to consult with the pupil and parents regarding what information they would like shared with others and how this should be worded.