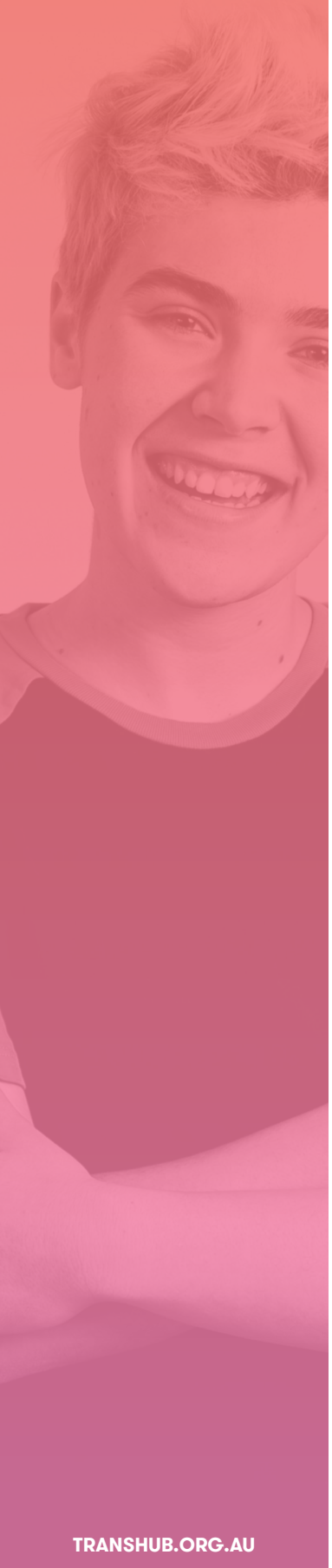
TRANS HUB

HEALTH & GENDER AFFIRMATION IN NSW



A guide to supporting young trans people at school

Twenty10 and ACON worked together to update this resource, first launched in 2012, for school and education communities. It is underpinned by the belief that all young people deserve strong support so that they can reach their full potential.

Education professionals have voiced concerns about how best to support young people who are trans or gender diverse. Often this is simply because educators do not have enough knowledge or confidence. This resource aims to address these concerns.

- **What name and pronoun should be put on a trans student's school documentation?**

All school documents should use a student's preferred name (as opposed to their legal name, or the name they were given at birth).

The best way is to check with each trans student for their preferred name and pronouns, then consistently use those terms, regardless of what is on the student's birth certificate.

If all primary carers or guardians agree to this change, their new name can be used and recorded as a first name by the school, including on electronic and paper records. If one or more carer or guardian does not agree, a decision can be made by the principal about what will be in the student's best interests.

It's unlikely that trans students will have been able to update the gender marker recorded on their birth certificate while still at school. If the details on a student's birth certificate need to be referenced or sighted, this should be kept as confidential as possible.

- **Who needs to know that a trans student is enrolled at the school?**

In most instances only the school principal, school counsellor and the trans student's teachers need to be aware if a student is trans. This can help the relevant staff address any issues privately and sensitively. In some situations, it may be appropriate for more staff to know that a student is trans but any such decisions should always recognise the student's right to privacy.

It is never appropriate for a school to disclose a trans student's gender identity or history to other students or their families, except with the student's express permission.

- **Should trans students tell other students they are trans?**

Trans students should be supported to decide if, and when, they want to share their identity and history with other students. Many may simply wish to blend in, or not make a big deal about being trans. For example, a trans boy often may just want to be treated the same as other male students.

- **What toilets should trans students use?**

Trans students should have the choice of using toilet facilities that best affirm their gender. This can be an important way to support a trans student's identity and wellbeing. The NSW Department of Education states that "students should not be required to use the toilets and change rooms used by persons of the sex they were assigned at birth if they identify as a different gender."

An all-gender, or single cubicle toilet might be a good alternative for any students who may feel uncomfortable about using shared bathroom facilities, but is not to be offered instead of allowing a student to use the bathroom that best suits their gender. It can help to make clear to all students that privacy and safety are important when using bathroom facilities, and that any form of harassment will not be tolerated.

It is important to have clear and accessible signage indicating single cubicle or all-gender toilets. Alternatively, cis students expressing concern about sharing facilities could be offered a single cubicle toilet.

- **What changing area should trans students use?**

Like many other students, some trans students may feel uncomfortable having to change clothes in front of other students.

> "Students should not be required to use the toilets and change rooms used by persons of the sex they were assigned at birth if they identify as a different gender."
>
> **Legal Bulletin 55, NSW Department of Education**

Trans students, like other students, should have the option of using the changing area that best affirms their gender. Other options include ensuring there are private areas in the changing rooms through the use of curtains or cubicle doors and creating options where students of any gender can change in single cubicle toilets.

- **What uniform or dress code applies to trans students?**

Trans students should be allowed to wear the uniform that best affirms their gender. The NSW Department of Education states that trans students "should be allowed to choose from the uniform options available at the school." Gender-neutral uniform options, if available, may be preferred by some trans students.

- **What about gender-segregated activities at school?**

If boys and girls are separated for classes or activities, trans students should be allowed to participate in the group that best affirms their gender. Holding mixed activities open to any student is a preferred option, especially for students who do not identify as either a boy or girl.

For health and sex education, it's important to have a conversation with a trans student's carers/guardians about the best option for them, especially if information that may be important to them will involve being outed or uncomfortable (eg. a trans girl being asked to attend the boys sex education session). This may include the student sitting out of the school run sex or health education and being provided relevant and affirming information by organisations such as Twenty10 & the Gender Centre.

- **What about sports uniforms or swimming costumes?**

Many trans students choose clothing that feels most affirming and comfortable about their body. This may include binders or other items, which are then hard to conceal if they are required to wear a close fitting sports uniform or swimming costume.

Loose fitting options are a better alternative. Like other students, trans students may feel uncomfortable about their bodies and may be distressed by having to wear tight, revealing swimming costumes. Longer swimming shorts, rash suits or shirts may help, and should be offered to all students.

In some cases, the possibility of being excused from swimming should be discussed with both the student and their carers/guardians.

- **If trans students want to play sport what team should they play for?**

Where possible, trans students should be able to play in the team that best affirms their gender, wearing the appropriate uniform

or an option that isn't explicitly gendered, if preferred. This applies across the board for any sport before a child starts puberty.

After the start of puberty, you can have a conversation with a trans student's carers/guardians, as what will be right will likely differ from student to student.

- **What about school camp?**

When it comes to camps or overnight excursions, in accordance with Bulletin 55, a trans student should use the facilities of their identified gender or use all-gender facilities when available.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to arrange private sleeping quarters in consultation with the trans student and their carers/guardians.

- **How to respond to bullying of trans students?**

Schools are responsible for creating a safe physical and emotional environment for all students, including students who are trans. Schools need to ensure that trans students, like any other student, are able to express themselves at school without discrimination or harassment.

Bullies will pick on anybody they see as different, or who is socially isolated, especially if they think they can get away with it.

There is no reason to think that the school's usual ways of dealing with bullying will be less effective for trans students, but it is important that staff are committed to supporting their trans students by working to establish an environment that protects and affirms all students, including trans students.

Including materials about gender diversity within the curriculum will help foster a supportive environment for trans young people, and benefit other students too.

What can teachers, counsellors and school staff do to be more inclusive?

- Display materials and posters relevant to gender diverse people in your spaces. (as a good starting point visit **twenty10.org.au** and **zbgc.org.au/**).
- Doing your own homework is important, and you can find more information about this at **transhub.org.au/allies**
- Don't assume all trans people want hormones and/or surgery, or to medically affirm their gender at all.
- Remember that a person's gender is different from their sexual orientation.
- Model using a trans student's pronouns and name. If someone makes a mistake, correct them, whether or not the person is present (pronouns are most often used when talking about someone).

  This helps to avoid future mistakes and corrects any assumptions forming for anyone who heard the mistake. Refusing to use the correct pronoun for someone is discrimination.
- Saying someone was "born a girl" or "used to be a boy" can be disrespectful to a trans person's gender. If you need to refer to their history saying they were "presumed to be a different gender at birth".
- Asking personal questions about bodies, sexual behaviours, hormones or surgeries is inappropriate and invasive. It's OK to ask people of diverse genders "who" they are, but not "what" they are.

  It is a breach of any person's privacy to ask them about their bodies, their genitals, or how they have sex.
- Listen. Especially if a trans student is coming out to you or is trusting you with something, make sure to give them space to share without interrupting, making assumptions, or asking unnecessary questions.
- Consider booking in training for staff with Twenty10, who deliver school-specific training on this topic.
- Consider a Gender and Sexuality Alliance Group. These groups can be set up and run by students, with approval and oversight from a champion staff member.
- Consider celebrating or highlight key calendar days such as **Trans Day of Visibility** (31 March), **Wear it Purple Day** (last Friday in August) or **IDAHOBIT** (17 May).

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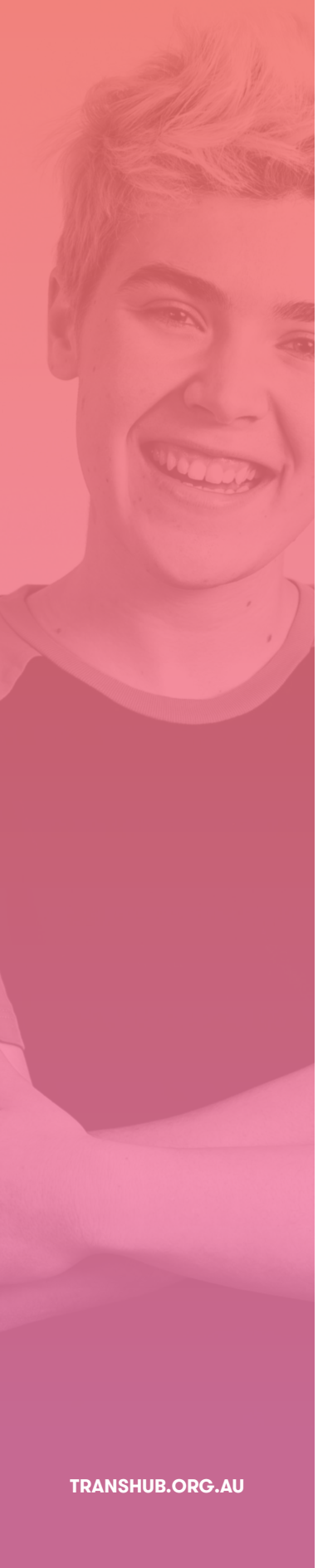

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- **How to respond to the outing of trans students?**

Outing a trans student is a form of bullying and should never be tolerated. In an ideal world, trans people would feel free to be open about their gender and history, if they so wish, and not feel like they need to be careful about who and how they share.

Setting this aside, however, it's a simple matter of privacy, rather than secrecy. If a trans student wishes to keep their gender experience private, it is their decision to make. It is never OK to share personal information about anyone else without their expressed permission.

Outing someone without permission should feel similar to disclosing the password to someone's e-mail account, however, unlike having the ability to simply change a password, outing a trans student can have tragic consequences to their health and wellbeing.

- **How can schools support the carers or guardians of trans students?**

Often a parent, carer or guardian of a trans student may be fearful about how their child will be treated at school. Reassure them that the school respects diversity and every student's right to a safe school environment.

It may help them to know what strategies the school will use to support their child to be affirmed in their gender, including the student's privacy.

Making time to meet with parents, carers and guardians to talk them through your strategies for supporting trans students is a great first step.

This resource has been written by Twenty10 in collaboration with ACON for TransHub. It was orginally created by Twenty10 in 2012.

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twenty10
SPACE TO BE YOU
GLCS
gay & lesbian counselling service of nsw

Twenty10 is an organisation that works within NSW to support young LGBTIQA+ people, their families and communities around gender and sexuality, and provides a wide range of services including housing, counselling and social support groups.

For direct support, contact:

Twenty10
Address: Level 1, 45 Chippen St, Chippendale NSW 2008
Contact: 02 8594 9555
info@twenty10.org.au
www.twenty10.org.au

This resource uses the terms 'trans', 'transgender' and 'trans & gender diverse' as umbrella terms for a population of people whose gender is different to what was presumed for them at birth and we mean all people of diverse gender experiences, or those who are not cisgender.

For a full glossary, please visit **www.transhub.org.au/language**

If you require further support, resources or information visit **www.transhub.org.au**

TransHub is a digital platform for trans and gender diverse people in NSW, their loved ones, allies and health providers.

It is an initiative of ACON, NSW's leading health organisation specialising in community health, inclusion and HIV responses for people of diverse sexualities and genders.

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