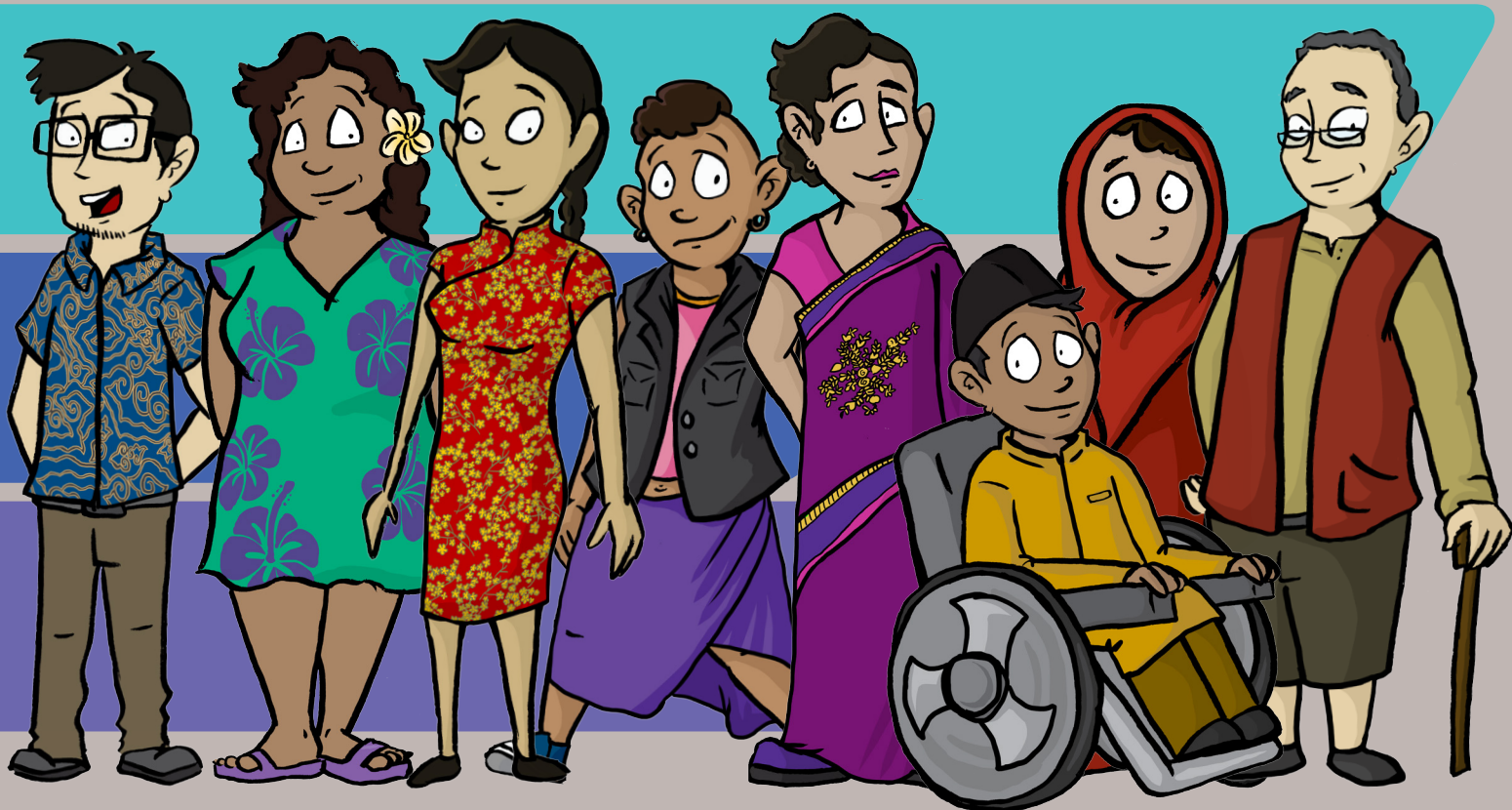




APT N

Asia Pacific Transgender Network

APT N FACT SHEETS: Being Trans in Asia and the Pacific



INTRODUCTION

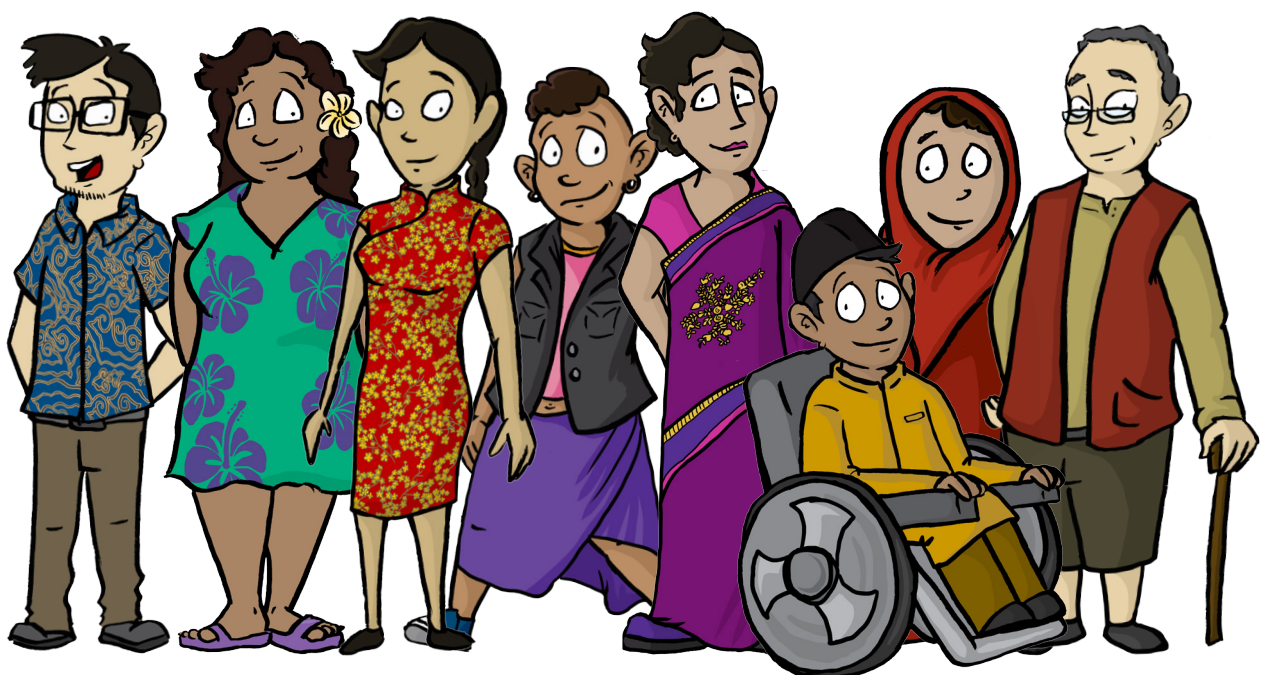
These resources have been created by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTN) for trans people, their families, friends and colleagues.

There are some huge gaps in the information available to trans people across Asia and the Pacific. APTN asked its members to share the most common questions they are asked in their country. Those issues are covered in the following 7 resources:

1. **I think I might be trans**
2. **Telling others that you are trans**
3. **Changing your appearance or gender expression**
4. **Legal transition steps**
5. **Other legal issues for trans people**
6. **Medical transition steps**
7. **Keeping safe and strong**

At the end of each resource are contact details for APTN and for the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network. Email them if you want contacts or more detailed information about your country. These fact sheets have links to other resources too, including sections of the Asia and Pacific Trans Health Blueprint that was published in October 2015. It includes information and examples from many countries in the Pacific and in Asia.

APTN's goal is to find funding to translate at least some parts of these resources into local languages.



APT N

Asia Pacific Transgender Network

I THINK I MIGHT BE TRANS



Asia Pacific Transgender Network is grateful to Jack Byrne, a consultant and primary author of the “APTN Fact Sheets: Being Trans in Asia and the Pacific” and the illustrator and designer Sam Orchard.

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Joe Wong coordinated and managed the development of this document.

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I THINK I MIGHT BE TRANS

I THINK I MIGHT BE TRANS

First published in 2016 by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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I THINK I MIGHT BE TRANS

Welcome

This resource is for anyone who thinks they might be trans and is something that people may want to share with their family or friends.



Trans people have always existed. They have been respected in many cultures and communities. Some religions and faiths traditionally gave valued roles to trans people, often because they considered trans people to be both male and female. Yet, today, there is widespread discrimination against trans people, including in this region. There is also growing understanding that trans people have the same human rights as anyone else and these must be respected.

What does the word 'trans' mean?

What are some other words that trans people use in Asia and the Pacific?

I feel like I am male and female - am I still trans or am I confused?

What does it mean to transition?

Exploring your gender identity

How do I know I am trans? Is this just a phase?

What is gender dysphoria?

Why do we need labels? I am just me.

What is the difference between being trans and being gay or lesbian?

Can I be trans and also lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer?

Maybe I am not trans – I might be gay or lesbian instead?

Does transitioning change my sexual orientation?

What does it mean to be intersex? Can I be trans and intersex?

Will I ever pass? And does it matter?

I am not very feminine - but I still feel like a woman/I think I am a trans man but I am not very masculine.

Can I just try it out? What if I change my mind?

Do trans people always hate their body?

Why am I trans? Am I mentally ill?

What does the word 'trans' mean?



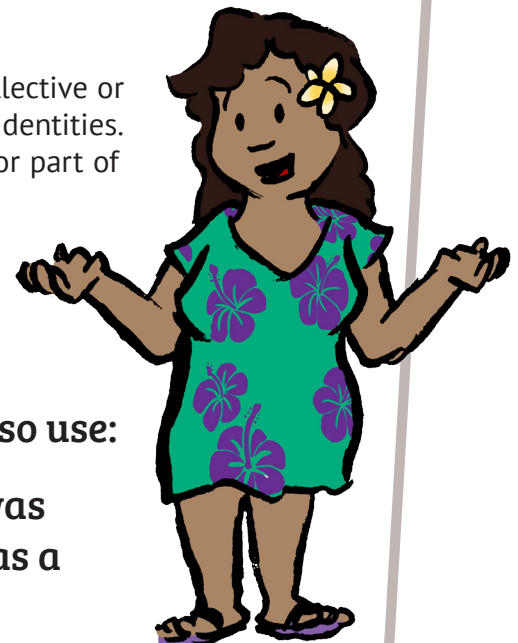
The word 'trans' describes anyone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were given (assigned) at birth. Some people describe this as the difference between the physical body they were born with – and their deep internal sense of their gender.

Cisgender is an opposite term to 'trans' or 'transgender'. It describes people who are not trans, because their assigned sex at birth matches their gender identity.

'Trans' does not replace local terms from your own culture or language, including those that have existed for a long time.

In this region, the words 'trans' and 'transgender' are both used as collective or 'umbrella' terms when people want to include lots of different gender identities. Both are broader than more specific terms that refer to one country or part of the community.

Sometimes trans is spelt as trans*, to show that it is not just one identity, but many different identities that continue to evolve and often are specific to local cultures.



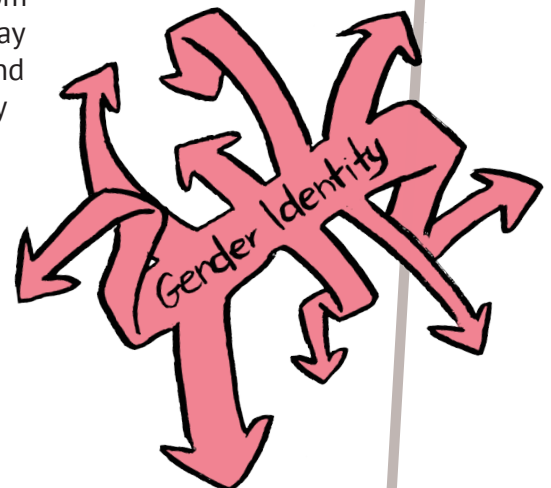
These APTN resource uses the term 'trans'. They also use:

- **'trans woman' - to describe someone who was assigned a male sex at birth and identifies as a woman**
- **'trans man' - to describe someone who was assigned a female sex at birth and identifies as a man.**



Not every trans person wants to transition from being male to being female – or the other way round. Trans people may identify as both male and female, as neither, and/or as a third option. Many countries in this region, particularly in South Asia and the Pacific, have terms in their own languages that refer to people who are a third gender.

You can use whatever words or term you want to describe your own gender identity.



What are some other words that trans people use in Asia and the Pacific?

There are lots of different terms that trans people use to describe who they are, including culturally specific terms. In many parts of the Pacific and in Asia, we are lucky to have a history of positive terms for trans people, in different languages. These are just some examples.

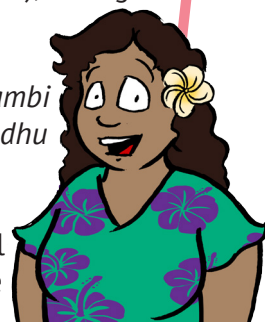
For people assigned male at birth who identify as female or as a third gender, some terms include: *hijra*, *mangalamukhi*, *kinnar*, *aravani*, and *thirunangai* (India), *khwaja sira* (Pakistan), *meti* (Nepal), *katoey* (Thailand), *waria* (Indonesia), *mak nyah* (Malaysia), *transpinay* (the Philippines), *kwaa-sing-bit* (Hong Kong), *fa'afafine* (Samoa, American Samoa and Tokelau), *fakaleiti/leiti* (Tonga), *fakafifine* (Niue), *akava'ine* (Cook Islands), *mahu* (Tahiti and Hawaii), *vakasalewalewa* (Fiji), *Palopa* (Papua New Guinea), *Sistergirl* (Australia), and *whakawahine* (New Zealand).

For people assigned female at birth and who identify as male, some terms include: *thirunambi* (India), *kua xing nan* (Malaysia), *trans laki-laki* (Indonesia), *transpinoy* (the Philippines), *bandhu* (Bangladesh), *Brotherboy* (Australia) and *tangata ira tane* (New Zealand).

There are fewer traditional terms describing trans men and it is rare to hear historical stories about their lives. Trans men in this region have used online videos to overcome this invisibility. In these videos a thirunambi from India and indigenous Brother Boys from Australia share their stories.¹

Unfortunately, most countries also have negative terms that have been used to put down trans people. In some cases, these have been reclaimed as positive terms by the trans community.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDQhl6RVSGs>;
<http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2015/06/08/being-brotherboys-coming-out-transgender>



I feel like I am a woman and a man – am I still trans or am I confused?

There are many trans people who feel both female and male. This does not mean you are confused.

Gender identity is a spectrum or continuum, with male at one end and female at the other. There are many other options between those two, binary, ends. These include people who identify as a third gender, or as both male and female. 'Genderqueer', 'Genderfluid' or 'non-binary' are other terms used to describe gender identities that are not exclusively male or female. You can read more about non-binary transition [here](#).²



“Once I realised that I didn’t have to ‘want to be a man’ in order to be transgender, I felt huge relief, and immediately settled down and got cosy with the trans label”.

“You do not need to be just one gender. It is only you who can decide the gender identity that is right for you. Who you are is OK - wherever you are on the spectrum.”

2 <http://neutrois.me/2014/03/06/5-myths-about-genderqueer-transition/>



What does it mean to transition?



For trans people, transitioning means the steps they take to live in their gender identity. There are lots of different ways that trans people transition – after all, the word ‘transition’ simply means ‘to change’. The steps you choose to take are about finding ways to express who you are. It is your decision what steps you take, in what order, and if you want to transition slowly.

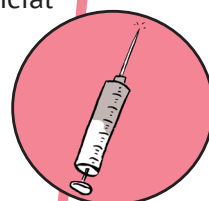
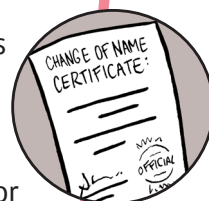
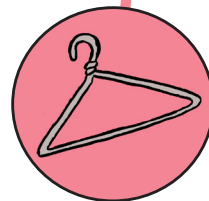
Some of these steps involve changing the way you dress, your mannerisms or the name you use around friends, family or online. This is sometimes called social transitioning. There are more details in the resource about Changing your appearance or gender expression. For some trans people these are the only steps you may ever take. Family pressure may mean you are only able to change the way you dress when you are away from relatives, with other trans people.

Other transition steps involve legal changes, such as formally changing your name or gender marker on official documents. These documents might include your birth certificate, citizenship certificate, or passport. There are more details in the Legal Transition Steps resource.

Transitioning may also involve medical steps such as taking hormones or having surgeries to physically change your body. You can read more in the Medical Transition Steps resource.

A trans person might start transitioning at any point in their life. They can transition at any age, might be single or married when they begin, and come from any culture, religion, class or caste. Someone’s background does not stop them being trans, though it often affects the financial and other support they may have to transition.

People have different end goals for their transition too. Some people want to move from one end of the gender identity spectrum to the other – for example from male to female. Other people may want to move part way along that spectrum (to become slightly more female or male). These decisions may evolve or change over time.



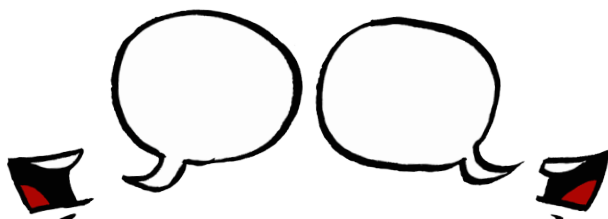
Exploring your gender identity

The first person who needs to understand and accept your gender identity is YOU.

Take plenty of time to explore what gender identity fits you best and how you want to express it. Be honest with yourself and how you feel. Discovering your gender identity can be a journey. Many people’s sense of how feminine or masculine or androgynous they feel inside, or how they express it, evolves over time.

“You do not have to conform to other people’s sense of what is male or female, or prove that you are ‘trans enough.’”

Talk to other trans people or look online to see the many different types of trans people and gender identities that exist. Then be yourself. This is your journey; you do not have to be the same as anyone else.



How do I know I am trans? Is this just a phase?

Some trans people feel different from others from a very young age, or at puberty when their body starts to change. Other trans people may not start wondering about their gender identity until they are much older.

“How to know if you are trans? Look in the mirror, then ask yourself ‘How do I see myself?’ and ‘Does it match what I have in between my legs?’ These two questions might help you figure it out.”



“I kept worrying about other people’s reactions if I transitioned. One day someone asked me, ‘If you lived alone on a deserted island, what gender identity would you be?’ When there was no-one else to worry about, it was simple. That’s when I knew how important it was for me to transition.”

Take your time to decide whether or not you are trans – and what that means for you.

Someone who identifies as a trans woman today may have started her journey as a cross-dresser, wearing women’s clothes but not yet identifying as a woman. Other people use the word ‘gender-questioning’ when they are not sure if they are trans.

Taking small steps can be a way to explore your gender identity. These might include using a different name when you are with close friends or changing the types of clothes you wear when you are home alone.

What is gender dysphoria?

‘Gender dysphoria’ is a medical term that describes the discomfort or distress that some trans people feel because of the difference between their gender identity and their assigned sex at birth. As this distress is often about parts of your body that do not match your gender identity, some trans people describe it as ‘body dysphoria’. If this is how you feel, talking to a trans-friendly counsellor can help you find ways to cope with ‘gender dysphoria’ or accept differences between your body and your gender identity. The Changing your Appearance or Gender Expression resource includes practical tips too. For example, some trans women ‘tuck’ to hide their genitals or use products to create breasts or cleavage. Some trans men ‘bind’ their breasts to create a flat chest or ‘pack’ to create a bulge in their pants that is the shape of male genitals.

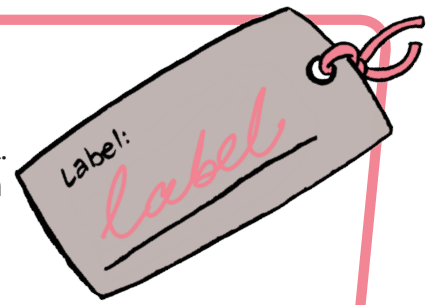


For some trans people, it helps to have a medical name like ‘gender dysphoria’ to describe how they feel. You can read more about gender dysphoria and how it is diagnosed in the Medical Transition Steps resource.

Many trans people and health professionals think mental health diagnoses such as gender dysphoria can increase prejudice against trans people because they describe gender diversity as a mental illness. They argue that trans people should be able to medically transition without requiring a mental health diagnosis. There is more information about these campaigns in section 3.4.2 of the Asia and Pacific Trans Health Blueprint.³

Why do we need labels – I am just me.

You do not need to use the words trans or transgender or any other label. Many trans women transition and identify as women, and many trans men identify as men. Some people feel that they are a part of a trans community, while others do not.



A trans woman from Indonesia explains how she uses different words, depending on the context:



“I personally identify myself as woman. But in the movement I identify myself as a trans woman (waria). This is the political identity I use to advocate to the government in the fight for transgender rights.”

Here’s what one trans man from Malaysia wrote a few years ago about labels:

“The way I look at it, the labels I use do not define me. Instead, they are just shortcuts I use when explaining how I define my external self, what sex I was born with, what gender I feel more affiliated to, what kinds of people I’m interested in (which is everyone), where my recent ancestors originated from... the list goes on.”

You can read more of his story on the [opinions](http://www.weareaptn.org/opinions/) page of the APTN website.⁴ APTN is always looking for stories and opinions to share. You can submit them online [here](http://www.weareaptn.org/submit/).⁵

4 <http://www.weareaptn.org/opinions/>

5 <http://www.weareaptn.org/submit/>

What is the difference between being trans and being gay or lesbian?

Being trans is about your gender identity.

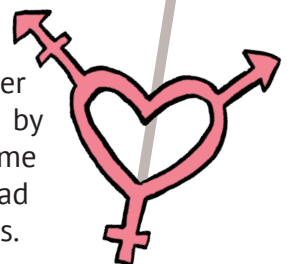
Being lesbian, gay or bisexual is about your sexual orientation – who you are attracted to romantically and/or sexually.



In this region, the same terms have sometimes been used to describe trans women and more feminine gay men. Examples include kothi in India, okama in Japan and fa’afafine in Samoa. Similarly, the terms onabe in Japan, fa’afatama in Samoa, and lesbian or LB in Cambodia have been used to describe both butch lesbians and trans men.



For some trans communities it has been important to create terms that distinguish gender identity and sexual orientation. In the Philippines, the term transpinay was created by trans women as an alternative to the terms baklâ that was being used to describe some gay men and trans women. Similarly, trans men in the Philippines use transpinoy instead of ‘tomboy’ which is often used by others to describe both trans men and butch lesbians.



Can I be trans and also lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer?

Yes, trans people can be attracted to another person, whatever their sex or gender identity.

There are many different words that trans people might use to describe their sexual orientation. The list below includes just some examples, including that trans people might identify as:

- Lesbian or queer: for example: a trans woman with a female partner
- Gay or queer: for example, a trans man with a male partner
- Heterosexual or 'straight': for example, a trans woman, *hijra*, *waria*, or *meti* who has a male partner; or a trans man with a female partner
- Bisexual: for example, trans people who are not solely attracted to people of one sex
- Pansexual: for example, trans people who are attracted to another person, regardless of their sex or gender identity; or
- Asexual: for example, trans people who are not sexually attracted to other people, or who are not interested in sex.

You cannot tell someone's sexual orientation, or gender identity, just by looking at them. For example, a trans woman with a female partner might identify as lesbian or as bisexual. A trans man who is attracted to other men might describe himself as a gay man or as queer. Some trans communities have their own terms for these relationships, including specific words for relationships between a trans man and a trans woman

Maybe I am not trans – I might be gay or lesbian instead

When you feel different from others, it can be hard to know exactly why. Even though sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same, other people often assume they are identical or are linked.

For some trans people, discovering who they are attracted to is part of their journey towards transitioning. Some trans women transition after living first as gay men, by realising they are attracted to men but want to be recognised as women. Until recently, trans men have been less visible in this region and many did not know it was possible to transition. For trans men attracted to women, being in a lesbian relationship may have seemed to be the only option. Now it is possible for trans men in more countries to start transitioning. But it is hard if people assume they are lesbians, when they identify as men.

In a few countries, it can be harder to live as a gay man or as a lesbian than as a trans person. This can mean that a gay man who has a male partner may feel pressured to identify as a trans woman. Or a lesbian might decide that the only way she can be with her female partner is if people thinks she is male. This may seem to be the only option in countries where women are expected to be dependent on men.

No-one should feel forced to either identify as trans, or to pretend they are not trans, to avoid discrimination. You have the right to define your own identity including your:

- gender identity - whether you are trans or not
- gender expression - how masculine and/or feminine you are and
- sexual orientation - who you are attracted to



Meeting lesbians, gay men and bisexual people, or reading about their lives, may help you clarify whether you identify as a gay man (and not a trans woman), or are a lesbian (and not a trans man). Being part of a group that is open to all members of the LGBT community can be a safe place to explore these issues, whatever decision you make.

Does transitioning change your sexual orientation?

When someone transitions, often it does not change who they are attracted to – but it can change the words they or others use to describe their sexual orientation.

A trans woman with a male partner may have always seen herself as a woman in a relationship with a man. Before transitioning, other people may have called her a feminine gay man. After transitioning, other people may be more accepting of her identity as a heterosexual (or 'straight') woman.

If a trans man had a female partner before transitioning, other people may have assumed he was a lesbian. He may not have identified that way. After transitioning, it is more likely that other people will see him and his female partner as a heterosexual couple. Some couples like these may describe their relationships as queer, because they still feel part of a wider lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) community.



A trans woman who was married to a woman, then transitions, might identify as a lesbian. A trans man who was married to a man, then transitions, might identify as a gay man.

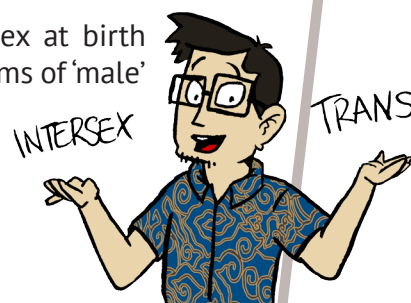
Any person's sexual orientation can also change during their life. This is true for trans people and for non-trans (cisgender) people. For example, some trans men who had only been attracted to women before transitioning, become attracted to men after starting hormones and may identify as a gay man. Trans people may also become more open to accepting they are attracted to someone, whatever that person's sex or gender identity. They may use words such as bisexual, pansexual or queer to describe this sexual orientation.

What does it mean to be intersex? Can I be trans and intersex?

Intersex is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of natural, bodily variations. What these intersex variations have in common is that a person's physical features, hormones or genes do not fit stereotypes of male or female bodies. Some intersex variations are visible at birth, including if a baby's genitals are not clearly male or female. Other intersex traits may not appear until a person's body does not go through puberty in the usual way. Some adults discover they are intersex when they have tests to check fertility or other health concerns. This may be when some trans people find out they are intersex too.

Intersex variations are relatively common. There are as many intersex people in the world as people with red hair or people with green eyes. Intersex people exist in all parts of Asia and the Pacific. They are part of the rich diversity of humanity. There is a small but growing number of intersex activists in Asia. These links show you the work of some of those activists in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Nepal.⁶

For many intersex infants or children, the process of being assigned a sex at birth involves surgeries or hormone treatment to make their bodies fit narrow norms of 'male' or 'female' bodies. Usually these hormones and surgeries are medically unnecessary and most are performed when a child is too young to be involved in the decision. Often they have irreversible, lifelong physical and mental health consequences. Intersex adults and human rights experts are speaking out against these practices.



⁶ <http://intersexday.org/en/category/regions/asia-en/>, <http://pahichan.com/national-conference-of-inter-sex-people/>, and <http://pahichan.com/np/2016/02/4843> [Nepali]

What does it mean to be intersex? Can I be trans and intersex?

Most intersex people are not trans – and most trans people are not intersex. However, some people are both intersex and trans. While most intersex people identify with the sex they were raised as, some do not. A minority may change their gender as adults, including through surgeries or hormone treatments that they have chosen. Some of these intersex people may also identify as trans.

Will I ever pass? And does it matter?

'Passing' is a term used to describe when other people do not know someone is trans and they see a trans woman as a woman and a trans man as a man. Many trans people do not like the term 'passing' because it implies deception, trickery or pretence.

"I am a woman. I live my life as a woman and that's how it should be perceived. I'm not passing as anything. I'm being – being myself." ⁷

Trans people react in different ways to the pressure to 'pass' as cisgender. Here are some other quotes people shared in this online video about what the word 'passing' means to them:⁸

"Survival. It meant that you could walk safely down the street, you could go to and from work, you could have a job."

"It's sad that it matters."

"It just felt like this unattainable goal that I was trying to reach. And once I did reach it, it just seemed really insignificant."

"Degrading. I don't want to pass. I want to be seen for who I am."

Whether or not people like the term 'passing', in communities where there is a lot of violence or discrimination against trans people, it may be very important to trans people that they 'pass'. In safer communities, trans people have more choice to be themselves and to decide whether they want to disclose they are trans. This can be less stressful than wondering whether or not you are 'passing'.

Some trans people do not feel they need to 'pass', or are happy to disclose to others that they are trans. It should always be a trans person's choice whether or not they share this information.

When a trans person 'passes' in their true gender identity, and does not disclose that they are trans, they are described as 'being stealth'. This is different from a lesbian or gay man who is 'in the closet'. Many trans women identify as female and many trans men identify as male. If their trans identity is disclosed to others, they lose the choice to be seen as simply female or male.

Whether or not you will 'pass' can depend on a lot of things, including your family genetics or your age when you start transitioning. There are many steps a trans woman can take to look more feminine or a trans man can take to look more masculine, if this is what you want. There is more information in these 2 resources - *Changing your Appearance and Gender Expression* and *Medical Transition Steps*.



7 Janet Mock: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmqi3LaTef4>
8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNXK_CzfNvg

I am not very feminine – but I still feel like a woman I think I'm a trans man but I am not very masculine

Gender identity is about how male or female someone feels inside. Gender expression is how a person expresses their masculinity or femininity. Many communities have stereotypes or gender norms that all men must be very masculine and all women must be very feminine. However feminism has taught us that there are many different ways to be a woman or a man. Sometimes trans people feel like they need to conform to gender norms in order to pass and be safe. That is understandable. However you do not need to be very feminine in order to identify as a trans woman Nor do you need to be very butch to identify as a trans man. You just need to be yourself.

Sometimes it helps to remember that there is a huge diversity amongst non-trans (cisgender) women and men too. There are very tall women and very short men, men who have no facial hair or a high voice, and women with facial hair or a low voice.

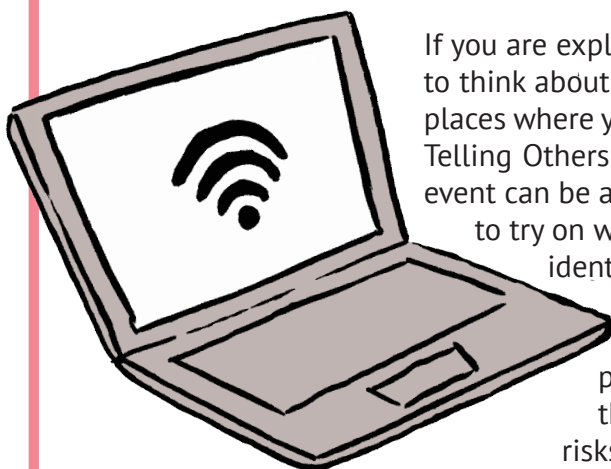


Can I just try it out? What if I change my mind?

There are lots of small transition steps that you can take to explore your gender identity. It does not matter if you change your mind. For some people, testing out different options is how they make a final decision about their gender identity.

There are also people whose gender identity combines a shifting mix of male and female. A gender identity that combines both male and female aspects, and moves between them, is sometimes described as 'gender fluid'.

Online communities, particularly private groups, are a safe space to talk with others. You do not need to disclose your name, share a photo or use your voice – so you can see what it feels like to change your gender identity. If there is a trans community group or drop-in-centre near you, that is a good way to meet other trans people. Trans support groups should understand how important it is to respect people's privacy and not disclose people's names or stories.



If you are exploring your gender identity, one step that you can take is to think about the people you can trust with this information and the places where you will feel safe. You can read more about this in APTN's *Telling Others You are Trans* resource. Going to a private community event can be a particularly safe place for trans women to try on women's clothes or make-up, or for people to explore identifying as both male and female.

Some of the effects of medically transitioning are permanent. Therefore, it is important to learn about the risks and benefits of these procedures before making any decisions. There are more details in the *Medical Transition Steps* resource.

Do trans people always hate their body?

Many trans people find it really hard to have a body that does not match their gender identity. The medical term 'gender dysphoria' describes this discomfort or distress. Only some trans people experience gender dysphoria. For some people this distress reduces if they wear clothes that hide parts of their body. For many trans people who have 'gender dysphoria', it lessens or disappears if they take hormones or have surgeries to modify their body. Other trans people are very comfortable in their bodies, without needing to change them.

There are other reasons why a person may not like their body. Talking to a trans-friendly counsellor, who supports trans people who wish to transition, can be useful. It may help you to explore any negative feelings you may have about your body, and whether or not it has anything to do with your gender identity.



Why am I trans? Am I mentally ill?

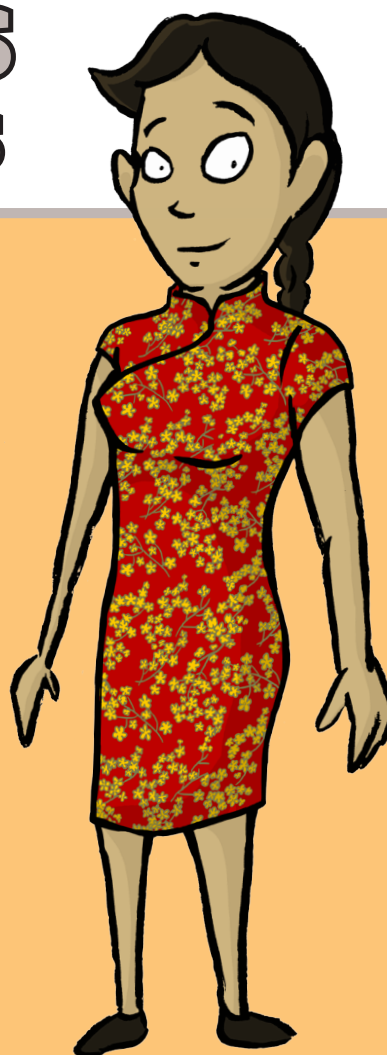
Many trans people and health professionals consider that trans people are born trans. This does not mean that being trans is a mental illness.

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) has clearly stated that being trans is not an illness or negative, and is common across many cultures in the world. There is more information from WPATH in the Medical Transition Steps resource.⁹



9 http://www.wpath.org/uploaded_files/140/files/de-psychopathologisation%205-26-10%20on%20letterhead.pdf

TELLING OTHERS THAT YOU ARE TRANS



A P T N

Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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Joe Wong coordinated and managed the development of this document.

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First published in 2016 by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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TELLING OTHERS THAT YOU ARE TRANS

Part of the process of being trans often includes telling other people about your gender identity. Who to tell, when to tell them, and how to tell them is entirely up to you.

Who should I tell?

When should I tell people?

Are there resources for partners, friends and family?

Can I practice my religion or faith and be trans?

How should I tell people that I am trans?

What if other people disclose my gender identity?

What questions do I need to answer when people ask me about being trans?

What if people do not want to listen?

How can I cope with negative reactions?

Can I transition at school or university?

Should I tell people I am trans when I apply for a job? Can I transition at work?

I am a sex worker. Should I tell my clients I am trans?



Who should I tell?

It is your choice whether you tell someone about your gender identity. If you are thinking about whether you are trans it can help to talk through your feelings with a supportive friend, a family member or a trans-friendly counsellor.

One of the hardest decisions many trans people face is telling a partner they are trans. Try to communicate as openly as possible and be clear about what you do know at this point in your journey. There are online support groups for partners of trans people, including those who have children.

If you are telling your children, share the information they need to know, taking into account their age. Keep explanations as simple as possible for younger children. Reassure children about all the things that will not change.

Who should I tell?

Many trans people get positive reactions when they tell others they are trans. However, it is often a very hard thing to do because other people may have negative stereotypes about trans people. This means many trans people fear being rejected when they disclose their gender identity to their family, a partner or to friends. Some people start by telling just a few people that they are close to, to reduce the stress involved and limit the number of people who initially know. If you want people to keep this information private, make that very clear to them.

When you are deciding which family members or friends to tell, it may help to look for people who:

- are trans themselves
- have supported other trans people or understand trans issues
- respect you and the choices you make in your life
- listen without judging or pressuring you to make a decision
- will respect your privacy and not share the information with others and/or
- may know where you can find more information.



It can be scary to contact another trans person for the first time. Often, people fear that they are not 'trans enough' or will not be taken seriously, especially if they have not started their transition. Try not to worry. Other trans people have been in the same situation, and many will understand how you feel.

Who you tell, when, and what you say can be depend on the situation you are currently in. For example, if you want to discuss your fears or doubts about transitioning, it can help to talk to someone who understands that this is a normal part of exploring your gender identity.

When should I tell people?

It is important that you feel safe when you tell someone you are trans. This includes feeling safe from emotional bullying, as well as from physical or sexual violence. It can be very hard to tell people who you depend on for financial or other support, such as parents or a partner.

If you live with your family, some questions you may want to think about before telling your parent/s or legal guardian/s are:

- Do you feel safe enough to tell them? If not, what support can you get to feel safe?
- Do you have support from anyone who your parents respect and would listen to?
- If you know another parent who has supported their trans child, would your parent/s be willing to talk to them?
- Do you have somewhere else to stay if telling your family does not go well?

If your family is very religious, they may seek the advice of a minister, rabbi, imam or monk. The religious leader might try to lecture you and persuade you to change your mind. This can increase your confusion or indecision if you are still exploring whether or not you are trans or if you will transition. Sometimes it can help if you are able to give your family material from religious leaders who accept trans people. You may be able to access this sort of information from online networks for trans people who come from specific religious or faith backgrounds.



When should I tell people?

In Asia and the Pacific, many parents still have an important influence on their adult children's lives and decisions. Some people who do not have any family support try to finish their education before disclosing their gender identity to their parents. Other people plan how they can become more independent in the future, including financially. This can give them more choices about transitioning and they may gain greater acceptance if they are providing some financial support to the family.



If you do not live at home, another option may be to start your transition without telling to your family. However, this means that you will need to find ways to respond to their questions or comments when you do come home. Here is the story of one trans man from Taiwan, who lives overseas, and how his family reacted when he returned for a visit after having chest surgery.¹ He chose to tell only his parents about his chest surgery and did not disclose that he had started hormones. This trans man still felt loved and supported by his family.

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_ohySyYOUs

Are there resources for partners, friends and family?

The resources in this series can be useful for family and friends too. They will help explain what it means to be trans and the many different ways a person may transition.

It can also be useful for people very close to you if they can read information that focuses on their own journey too. For example, a parent may want reassurance from other parents. Even if they are supportive of your transition, parents may still have some grief about losing their 'son' or 'daughter'. There are resources for parents with a young trans child, and also for those coming to terms with their adult child's transition. *Families Like Mine* is an Australian online e-book with practical resources for parents and family of gender diverse and questioning young people.² In Thailand, the Thai Transgender Alliance has created a resource for parents whose adult children identify as *katoey*.³

When trans people have a partner, that person may want to find out how get the support they need too, during their partner's transition. This may include being able to talk about whether or how their partner's transition impacts on their own identity. Here are some resources, blogs and online groups for partners of trans people.⁴ They also include tips on how to be a good ally to trans people. In Asia, this resource for allies comes from Malaysia's *I am You: Be a Trans Ally* campaign.⁵

Children are generally able to adapt much more easily to a parent's transition if family relationships stay loving and supportive. Children can have less fixed views about gender than adults, particularly when they are younger. If a child has a difficult emotional response, support them to deal with this in a healthy way. If you and other adults in the family, including a partner, have found support to deal with your own feelings, you will be better able to support your children's needs too. Some children may also find it helpful to have contact with other children who have trans parents.

2 <http://familieslikemine.beyondblue.org.au/#folio=1>

3 <http://www.thaitga.com/index.php/library/publications/416-transgender-family-guideline>
[in Thai]

4 <https://translucidity.wordpress.com/resources/>

5 <http://mytransally.weebly.com/19-ways-to-be-a-trans-ally.html>



Can I practice my religion and be trans?



Trans people exist in all religions and faiths. Traditionally, in a number of cultures, people who were assigned a male sex at birth but lived as women or as a third gender were valued. This included being given specific religious roles.

Religion plays a significant role in many countries across the Pacific and Asia and remains important for many trans people too. Every person has the right to hold on to and practise their personal religious (or non-religious) beliefs. Today some trans people are accepted in their religious or faith community. However, many others are not accepted or are expelled. This trans man describes how he continues to practise his religion by being stealth in the church. This church is known for its strict rules and men and women sit in separate areas to pray.

“Some have told me, you are fooling your own God, you come to his church dressed as someone you are not. I tell them, I firmly hold my faith in the teachings of the church. For many years now, the greater Being above still hears my prayers and keeps me safe from the judgement of other people.”

In the Pacific, many fa’afafine, leiti and other trans women are able to attend church services dressed as women.

“A lot of us are very involved in our churches. Some of us are youth leaders, some are choirmasters . . . When I walk into church, it’s just between me and God.” ⁶

Some places of worship have been set up as inclusive, safe places that welcome people of all gender identities and sexual orientations. In this region, some trans people have created their own places of worship. For a number of years this included an Islamic school for *waria* in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

⁶ This interview can be found in Stonewall’s 2015 publication Christian role models for LGBT equality.
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/christian-role-models.pdf>

How should I tell people that I am trans?

If you are worried about how someone will react, you may prefer to talk about trans issues more generally before sharing your own journey. This might include talking about well-known trans people or a video that includes a trans character.

It is normal to feel very scared when you are about to tell someone you are trans. It is easy to forget what you want to say or to feel overcome by emotions. Writing down what you want to say can help you to remember. You could ask a friend to come along to remind you if you forget to say something important.

Many people’s reactions to someone transitioning are based on fear for your future, stereotypes about trans people and lack of information.

Reassure them that you are still the same person and that you want them in your life. There are many online examples you can show them of trans people who are happier after transitioning.

How should I tell people that I am trans?

Sometimes grandparents or other extended family members may be more accepting than parents, because they do not feel as responsible for the choices you make in your life. This is how one grandmother in Southeast Asia reacted when her grandson explained what it means to be trans: *"So you're like a Windows OS on a Mac computer?"*

Some people find it easier to tell others they are trans in a letter or email. If there is something specific you want in response, consider asking for it. For example, here is something you may want to say to someone important to you.



"You are one of my closest friends and I still want to have you in my life. I know this news may come as something totally new and might be a shock to you. While it is new for you, this is something I have thought about for a long time. When you have had time to think about it, please contact me."

If you are worried about your safety, have someone else come with you for moral support or let someone else know what you are doing. Have a plan for leaving the situation if it becomes unsafe or too hard for you.

What if other people disclose my gender identity?

Like everybody else, you have a right to privacy. If a government agency or organisation discloses your gender identity to someone without your permission, you can ask to see their privacy policy.

Sometimes, people or organisations do not understand the impact of disclosing that someone is trans and how this makes you vulnerable to discrimination. If you want to share your experience this might improve policies or result in staff training so that this does not happen to others in the future.

The right to privacy and to freedom from discrimination are in international human rights standards. Some countries have also put these rights in their laws. Privacy laws often give you the right to ask to have inaccurate information corrected on your records.



What questions do I need to answer when people ask me about being trans?

It is your choice how much personal information you share. You do not need to prove that you are trans. Some people assume that you need to be on hormones or have surgeries to be trans. That is not true – we are all different.

Often, people ask very personal questions about your body, that they would not ask non-trans people. You do not have to answer these questions. You have the right to your privacy.



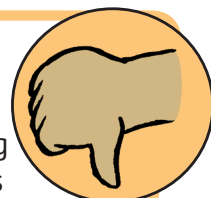
You may feel pressure to answer people's questions because you really want them to understand and support you and other trans people. However, it can be very stressful doing this a lot, especially early on in your transition. It is not your responsibility to answer everyone's questions or to help them understand trans people's needs. If someone wants to learn what it means to be trans, you can encourage them to read this resource or other information written for family, friends and allies of trans people.

What if people do not want to listen?

Often trans people have thought about our gender identity for a long time before telling others. It can be easy to forget the steps we took to get to this decision. For some trans people, that has involved overcoming negative stereotypes or beliefs about being trans.

When we disclose our gender identity to other people, this may be the first time they have heard or thought about trans issues. They may have a lot of emotional reactions. If parents have been taught that being trans is bad, they may blame themselves for your decision. There is a lot of information for them to absorb, and that takes time.

It is normal to want friends and family to support us immediately, especially since transitioning can be a hard and lonely journey. However, it can take a while for people to adjust to your identity, especially if they have known you for several years. You may want to explain how you realised you are trans and why being yourself, and sharing this information with them, is so important to you. It can help to give them some time to think about what you have said, and to read any resources you have given them. If they have fears about future discrimination you may face, it may help to share examples of trans people who have had a happy and fulfilling life after transitioning.



How can I cope with negative reactions?

Trans people often fear rejection when we disclose our gender identity to someone else. When other people do not understand or want to believe you are trans, they may try to pretend it is not happening. This may include saying you are not trans, based on their past memories of you. These words can be very hard for you to hear, especially if you were hoping for their support.

“Trust yourself and hold on to what you believe in. Do not shove the rejecting people out of your life just yet. They may just need time.”

Some negative reactions are based on myths and prejudices about trans people. People mistakenly dismiss your gender identity as being a ‘lifestyle choice’ or a ‘bad habit’ that you must change. But your gender identity is a core part of who you are. Health experts,⁷ human rights organisations and governments have all said that ‘conversion therapy’, designed to force a trans person to change their gender identity, does not work and is unethical.



It is hard to disclose your gender identity and then get a negative reaction. You do not have control over what someone else says or does. You do have a choice about how you react. If you feel safe and comfortable, you might choose to respond to the other person’s fears about your decision. However, you do not have to answer personal questions or prove that you are trans.

If the discussion is too hard for you or is making things worse, consider stopping it. You can always continue talking in the future, but it is harder to take back harsh words said when you are upset or angry.

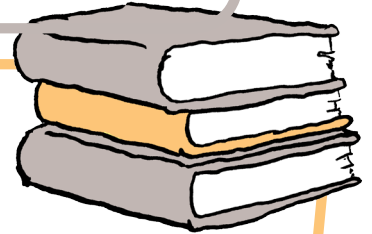
It can help to have a friend or counsellor you can talk to about what happened. Many online trans support groups are safe places to share the pain and grief of not being accepted, as well as the joy when things go well.

⁷ For example, see page 16 of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health’s Standards of Care, Version 7: http://www.wpath.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=1351. These have been translated from English into other languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

How can I cope with negative reactions?

Many trans people's parents or friends react badly at first, but become be very supportive as they learn more about what it means to be trans. These online resources include some suggestions about how to deal with people's negative attitudes towards trans people (transphobia).⁸

8 <http://m.wikihow.com/Deal-With-Transphobia>



Can I transition at school or university?

All students have the right to be safe at school, including if they transition.

Few countries in this region have specific laws, policies or guidelines supporting trans children to transition in school. However, individual trans students and their families have had positive reactions and support from schools. In some instances, this has changed school or university policies to benefit other students as well.

A 2014 government in survey in Japan found that 60 percent of the 606 gender-variant children recognised by schools were receiving some level of support to live as their true gender.

In 2008, there was significant international publicity when a secondary school in Thailand introduced a unisex toilet after a survey showed 200 of the school's 2,600 students were katoey or transgender. A number of universities in Thailand have allowed trans women to wear skirts in class or when graduating. A trans man who had been barred from sitting exams because he refused to wear a skirt complained to the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand. Students at his university now have the option of applying each semester to wear their uniform of choice during examinations.

In New Zealand, both the Human Rights Commission and community groups have produced resources for schools about supporting trans students, including so they can play sport or transition at school.⁹ In 2015 the Safe Schools Coalition Australia published new resources for schools about supporting trans students as well as teaching resources on gender diversity.¹⁰

Local trans organisations may be able to help you write a letter to your university or school asking to wear a uniform that matches your gender identity. Schools or universities that do not have uniforms can also be good options for trans people.

9 <https://www.hrc.co.nz/your-rights/social-equality/our-work/trans-people-facts-information/> and <http://insideout.org.nz/trans-resource/>

10 <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/resources>

Should I tell people I am trans when I apply for a job? Can I transition at work?

You do not have to tell someone that you are trans when you apply for a job. However, sometimes that choice is taken away from you. This may be because of your appearance or how people perceive your gender identity or expression. Official documents, like your references or qualifications, may disclose your previous name or sex details. If this happens, you might want to tell the employer that you expect your privacy to be respected, and that being trans does not affect your ability to do the job.

Should I tell people I am trans when I apply for a job? Can I transition at work?

It can be very scary to transition at work. It can also be very affirming if workmates use your correct name and pronoun and respect you for who you are.

In some countries, there are laws that say you should not be discriminated against at work because of your gender identity.¹¹ Even if there are no laws, some companies, particularly larger employers and international companies, may have Equal Employment Opportunity policies. This means that they value a diverse workforce and should have guidelines to prevent discrimination.



If there is no law or policy protecting you from discrimination, you may want to think about both the risks and benefits of telling people that you are trans. If you can be yourself at work, it reduces the stress of worrying whether or not people will find out. On the other hand, you may experience discrimination and harassment or even lose your job. If you belong to a trade union, if the trade union is trans friendly, you could talk to them about your rights and how other union members could support you if you disclose your gender identity.

Some trans people choose to look for a new job after they have transitioned, so they have the choice of a fresh start with new work colleagues.

¹¹ For example, this New Zealand government resource explains the legal protection for trans employees there: <http://employment.govt.nz/er/minimumrights/transgender/Transgenderpeople.pdf> In September 2015, Thailand passed its Gender Equality Act and Nepal added anti-discrimination protections to its Constitution.

I am a sex worker. Should I tell my clients I am trans?

If you are trans and considering becoming a sex worker, find out if sex work is legal in your country, and if there are other laws used to harass sex workers. Try to find a sex worker organisation or a free legal advice clinic to ask about your rights.¹²

If you disclose you are trans, this may bring you clients who prefer to have sex with trans people. For example, in many countries there are clients who want to pay for sex with trans women who have not had genital surgery.

If you do not disclose you are trans, you may decide to restrict the services you offer, so that clients do not see or feel your genitals. Know the limits of what you are prepared to do and keep to them. Many trans women 'tuck' their genitals so there is no visible bulge. There is some information about tucking in the *Changing your appearance or gender expression* resource.

Whether or not you tell clients you are trans, you may still have to deal with violence from them. Learn safety advice from other sex workers. There is good information available online including in this resource.¹³

Some clients are very violent when they realise they are attracted to someone who is trans. There is no excuse for a client's violence against you or for their transphobia. Protect yourself and plan what you will do if you are threatened, harassed, or someone refuses to pay. Talk to other trans sex workers about how they decide whether or not to disclose their gender identity to clients.

¹² Details of organisations belonging to the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers can be found online here: <http://www.nswp.org/members/asia-and-the-pacific/asia-pacific-network-sex-workers-apnsw>

¹³ <https://uknswp.org/um/uploads/RSW2.pdf>



CHANGING YOUR APPEARANCE OR GENDER EXPRESSION



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CHANGING YOUR APPEARANCE OR GENDER EXPRESSION

What is social transition?

Will changing the types of clothes I wear make any difference?

Can changing my hairstyle help me socially transition?

Will voice therapy help to change my voice?

How can I hide a bulge in my pants?

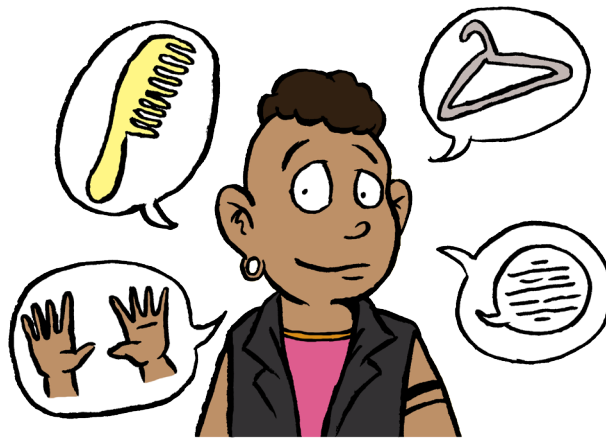
How do I fill a bra when I have a flat chest?

Can I bind my chest to make it flatter?

How do I remove facial or body hair?

How can a trans man get facial hair?

How do I create a bulge in my pants?



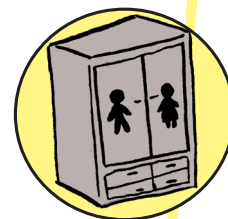
What is social transition?

Social transition is about exploring your gender identity in your everyday life. Many of these steps are about how you express your gender identity externally, in ways that other people can see. This might mean changing your hairstyle, the types of clothes you wear, your body language, mannerisms or voice because you want them to be more masculine or feminine. It is your choice how masculine, feminine or androgynous you want to look, and whether or not this is important to you.

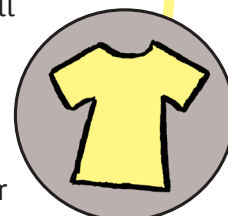
This resource focuses on non-medical ways that some trans people choose to change their appearance. Only some people take these steps. This is about how you express your gender identity – and that is **YOUR CHOICE**.

Will changing the types of clothes I wear make any difference?

Ideally, every person should have the choice to wear whatever clothes they want. However, the majority of people in the world assume that everyone is either male or female. They then use someone's appearance to put that person into one of those two (binary) boxes. Changing how you dress can make a big difference between people perceive you as male or female, or question your gender identity.



There is a huge diversity of people in the world. Not all men are very masculine and not all women are very feminine. In some places it is common to have androgynous or gender-neutral clothing styles that can be worn by anyone. Examples include jeans or pieces of fabric that you can wrap around your waist.

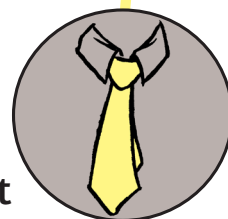


If it is important to you that people see you as female, look at types of clothes that other women your age wear. Picking a common style that you like may help you blend in. Unless you come from a culture where men wear skirts, it can be a big step for trans women to wear a dress, sari or skirt. Some trans women start with smaller steps, such as wearing women's trousers or more floral patterns. You might want to try these clothes on in private first or when you are with people you trust.



In many parts of the world, it is common for girls and women to wear trousers or shorts, not just dresses or skirts. So for some trans men, there is not a big difference in the clothes they grew up wearing and what they wear after transitioning. This can sometimes make it hard for you to be recognised as trans because people assume you are simply a masculine woman and maybe a lesbian.

If it is important to you that people see you as male, look at other men in your community and any differences between their clothes and those worn by masculine or butch women.



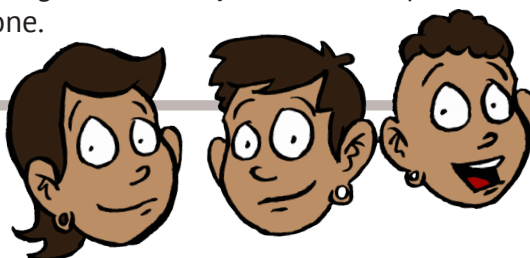
"I remember when I wore my first ever neck tie and suit, it felt so great. It felt so grown up. Like finally, I won't have to wear those skirts for church worship."

Can changing my hairstyle help me socially transition?

Often people make assumptions about your gender, based on your hairstyle. In cultures or communities where women generally have long hair and men have short hair, changing your hair style can make a big difference in how people perceive your gender identity.

If you have a receding hairline, it is more likely that people will think you are male. Some trans men shave the hair at their temples so that their hairline looks like it is receding.

Some trans women choose to wear a wig or hair extensions to hide a receding hairline, bald patches or thinning hair. It is your choice whether or not you want to wear a wig, and what style or colour you pick. If you want a wig to look like your own hair, pick a colour similar to your own hair or that matches your skin tone.



Will voice therapy help to change my voice?



How a person communicates is an important part of their gender expression. For some trans people, it is very important to be able to change your voice to match your gender identity.

Speech therapy can be effective for trans people. After puberty, each person's speaking voice pitch adopts a permanent pattern. These patterns are different for people who go through a male puberty compared to those who go through a female puberty. Speech therapy can help trans people to re-educate the voice to change some of those patterns. Trans women are more likely to seek this support because hormone replacement therapy will not change their voice. You can find information online about exercises to retrain your voice, including You Tube videos and mobile phone apps.¹

For trans men, hormone replacement therapy can lower the pitch of the voice and increase chest resonance and volume. Speech-language therapy can also help trans men use their voice in a way that makes the most of these effects from taking testosterone.² There are also YouTube videos of trans men talking about how they lowered their voice before taking hormones.

Voice and Communication Change for Gender Nonconforming Individuals, is a 2015 companion document to the WPATH Standards of Care.³ It has technical information for speech-language therapists about ways to support someone to develop a more feminine or more masculine voice.

1 For example, <http://nobullying.com/voice-training/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2YLpHqvJU>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IJSo_uApts; and <http://exceptionalvoiceapp.com/>

2 <http://transguys.com/features/testosterone-ftm-singing>

3 Shelagh Davies, Viktória G. Papp & Christella Antoni (2015) Voice and Communication Change for Gender Nonconforming Individuals: Giving Voice to the Person Inside, *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 16:3, 117-159. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15532739.2015.1075931>

How can I hide a bulge in my pants?

Many trans women who have not had genital surgery are uncomfortable if the shape of their genitals is visible through their clothes. Wearing loose fitting pants and longer tops can take the attention away from your genitals.

Often trans women 'tuck' their genitals if they want to wear tighter pants without showing a bulge. 'Tucking' involves gently pushing the testicles up inside existing pockets in your body and then pulling the penis back between your legs. This is all held in place with tight-fitting underwear or surgical tape. Surgical tape does not peel off the skin when it is removed. It helps if you shave the hair in your groin area very short before using the tape, or it will hurt when you remove the tape. 'Tucking' for too long can cause chafing and sores, so it is wise to spend some time each day not tucking. It can also lower your sperm count, which will be important to consider if you want to have a child in the future.

These websites includes drawings about tucking, either with or without tape, and videos where people explain how they tuck.⁴

4 <http://m.wikihow.com/Tuck-and-Tape>; <http://www.buzzfeed.com/meredithtalusan/all-the-questions-you-had-about-tucking-but-were-afraid-to-a#.lk109VOVe>

How do I fill a bra when I have a flat chest?

'Falsies' or breast forms are made of silicon and move and feel like breasts. Often, they are made to stick to your skin. You can make your own cheaper breast forms, for example by filling pantyhose with rice or bird seed.

A 'cleavage creator' looks like the back of a bra. It creates a cleavage by pulling your skin and body fat together at the front of your chest. A homemade option is to use tape to create this effect. This can be combined with wearing a bra and filling it out with cheaper 'cookies' (oval bits of foam that are covered in fabric) or 'chicken cutlets' (silicone inserts). On their own, 'cookies' or 'chicken cutlets' will only add 1 or 2 cup sizes to your bra. Some bras come with pockets sewn in to hold this extra padding.



Can I bind my chest to make it flatter?



It is common for trans men who have not had chest surgery to flatten (or bind) their chest using a chest binder. These can be bought online, including from companies in Asia (for example in Thailand, Taiwan and Manila). It is also possible to make one yourself.⁵

If possible, do not use any of these 3 things to bind as they can cause bruising or skin conditions, damage your ribs or affect your breathing:

- *an Ace bandage* or other a stretchable compression bandage that is used to treat muscle sprains and strains. It will tighten as you move.
- *plastic wrap* that is sold in rolls, sticks to itself, and is used for wrapping food. A lot of sweat will collect on top of your skin, under the wrap.
- *duct tape* – it may irritate your skin and then tear your skin when you remove it.

The Asia Pacific Trans Health Blueprint includes results from a recent survey of 1800 people who have bound their chest. This research found that binding made people feel a lot better and more confident and safe in public. More than half experienced some back pain from binding. There were fewer negative side effects for people who did not bind every day. These findings suggest that having 'a day off' from binding makes the most difference in reducing the risk of negative health outcomes. Other options used by trans men include limiting their binder use to 8 or 12 hours a day, or taking it off when they are sleeping.

If a binder hurts, cuts your skin, or prevents you from breathing, it is too tight. If the binder material doesn't breathe and collects sweat, you can end up with skin sores or rashes. You can reduce this risk by wearing a thin undershirt beneath your binder, or by applying a non-irritating body powder (such as baby powder) to your skin before binding.⁶

5 <http://transitioningdownunder.com/post/60059037344/tutorial-chest-binder;>
<https://minus18.org.au/index.php/resources/sexuality-info/item/441-how-to-bind-your-chest> ; <http://ftmbinding.tripod.com/>

6 <http://transguys.com/features/chest-binding;> <http://www.ftmguide.org/binding.html>

How do I remove facial or body hair?

If a trans woman transitions after puberty, often she will have coarse facial hair or body hair. Often taking hormones will slow the growth of body hair and make it softer. It may disappear completely in certain areas of the body after a few years. Hormones are less likely to change existing facial hair, or to stop a beard, sideburns or moustache from growing.

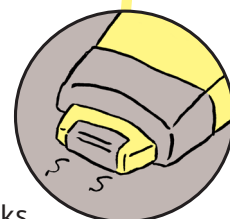
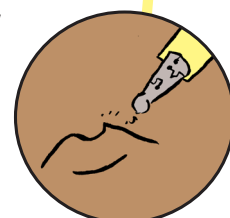
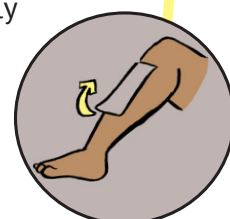
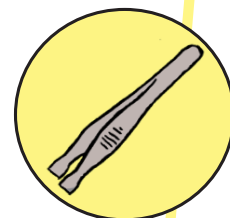
Plucking hair with tweezers temporarily removes hair but can be very time consuming. Some trans women in India use 'chimta', traditional tweezers. If you are plucking, the hair shaft must be long enough to grasp with tweezers. Pulling hair out of the follicle may damage the follicle enough over time to stop it producing more hair.

Waxing requires regular treatments to maintain smooth, hair-free skin. If you wax regularly you may get less hair regrowth or the hair might become softer.

The permanent ways to remove hair are through laser treatment or electrolysis. This should be done by a qualified, trained person.

Electrolysis is the most consistently permanent option for removing body and facial hair. The technician inserts a probe into the hair follicle and passes a small bit of electricity into it. Once the hair has been zapped, it is usually pulled out. With enough treatment, the hair follicle eventually dies and the hair will no longer regrow. This method is very time consuming (and therefore expensive) and can be very painful. Also, there must be enough hair above the skin for the technician to grab with a pair of tweezers. Electrolysis will remove hair of any colour and can be done anywhere on the body. After treatment, your skin will be significantly more sensitive and, you should not use makeup or expose your skin to sunlight for at least a day.

Laser hair removal may be a permanent solution for some people, if done by a qualified person who has the skill and equipment to work on your type of skin. The technician sends a concentrated pulse of light into the hair follicle to kill the root of the hair. If it is successful, the hair follicle dies which means hair will no longer grow. However, laser works best on people whose facial hair is a colour that contrasts with the complexion of their skin. For example, a very fair skinned person with dark brown facial hair will have much better results than someone who has both dark skin and dark hair.



How does a trans man get facial hair?

If you take testosterone, facial or body hair starts growing after 3 to 6 months. The full effect of these changes may take an average of 3 to 5 years. This varies a lot for individual trans men, and depends largely on your genetics. Before you start taking testosterone, it is important to know about its other side-effects. These are explained in the *Medical Transition Steps* resource.

Shaving more often does not increase facial hair growth. Some trans men use products sold to increase beard growth, but there is no research evidence that these work.⁷

Facial hair can be softer and a lighter colour at first. Some trans men make it more visible by using products designed to dye eyebrows, without staining the skin.



How do I create a bulge in my pants?

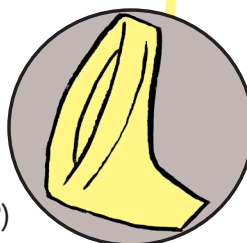
For some trans men, creating the shape of male genitals in their pants makes them feel more confident in their bodies. This is commonly known as 'packing'. The prosthetics are made of either plastic or silicon. Wearing one may be an important safety precaution for trans men in some situations. You have to also check if you have allergies with these materials as they can cause skin reactions.

There have always been trans men who created a bulge by putting a sock in their underpants. Another homemade option is putting hair gel inside condoms, then wrapping these in pantyhose.⁸ There are also many online stores selling cheap 'packers' for trans men, including in Asia.



It is possible to buy a packer that can also be used for peeing at a urinal. These are called stand-to-pee (STP) devices. Before spending money on one of these, it can be useful to try out some of the homemade stand to pee devices first.⁹ Some people find them hard to use and, like many other men, sit when they use a toilet cubicle. Here is a link for reading more about STPs and one of the online stores where different options can be bought.¹⁰

Some STP devices are also promoted as an option for penetrative sex. It is not easy to create something that works well for all functions. If it is large and stiff enough for sex, it may be uncomfortable to wear all day, and look like you have a permanent erection or "hard on". Better and multi-functional prosthetic devices can be expensive.¹¹ If you are considering a multi-purpose packer like this, it may be worth trying a cheaper (STP) device or other packer first to see whether you like using it.



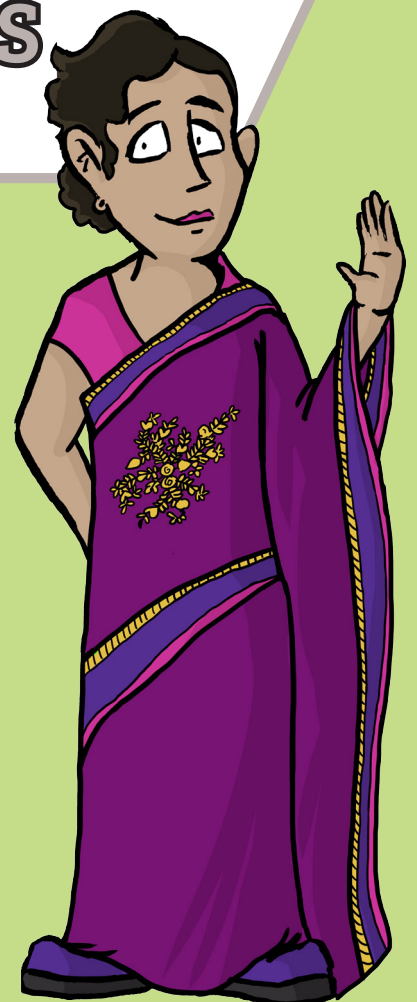
8 <http://transmandad.tumblr.com/post/43514557560/how-to-make-a-packer-tutorial#notes>

9 [http://m.wikihow.com/Make-an-Easy-StP-\(Stand-to-Pee\)-Device](http://m.wikihow.com/Make-an-Easy-StP-(Stand-to-Pee)-Device)

10 <http://transguys.com/features/stp>; <http://www.ftm essentials.com/collections/stp-devices>;
<http://www.ftmguide.org/bathroom.html>

11 <http://www.ftmguide.org/packing.html#prosthetics>

LEGAL TRANSITION STEPS



A P T N
Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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First published in 2016 by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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LEGAL TRANSITION STEPS

Whether you can legally change your name or sex on official documents depends on laws, policies, regulations and previous court cases trans people have taken in your country. This resource cannot give legal advice. However it provides information about the questions you might want to ask other trans people or a community lawyer

Can I use a different name or pronoun if I have not changed my name on legal documents?

Can I legally change my name?

When does using your legal name matter?

Do identification cards always include your sex?

How do I find out whether I can change my legal sex?

What if I change my details without taking the required legal steps?

If there is no law, is there anything else I can do?

Introduction

Many trans people who transition want to be able to change their name, title, sex and/or gender on official documents to match their gender identity. Having a form of photo identification with these details affirms who you are and may help to avoid stigma and discrimination. It can also ensure you have access to the same rights as other people of that sex or gender identity.

If you take hormones or other medical steps that change your visible appearance it can become very hard to use an identification document if the name, sex or photo no longer match how you look.



If you want to change your name, title, sex or gender on official documents, the first step is to find out if it is possible to do this in your country. You can contact a local trans organisation, or APTN, to find out whether they know of any law, policy or court decision in your country that enables these details to be changed.¹ Even if it is possible, the process is often time consuming and costly. It often involves separate applications to change details on each document or official record. The rules and process may differ depending on the document and the agency responsible for issuing it.

Section 3.5 of the Blueprint describes the legal situation in some parts of Asia, in June 2015 when it was written. At that time there were no Pacific Island countries where a trans person could change their legal sex.

¹ APTN is a partner in a legal gender recognition project that the United Nations Development Programme is conducting as part of the Being LGBTI in Asia programme. This will provide more detailed information about laws, policies and court decisions in 9 countries in Asia. The country reports and a regional report are due to be completed by the end of 2016.

Can I use a different name or pronoun if I have not changed my name on legal documents?

Yes. Freedom of expression includes being able to choose a name or pronoun for yourself that matches your gender identity. When other people use that name or pronoun, it supports your sense of identity. For example, a trans woman can ask to be referred to as “she” even if her legal documents still record her as male.

“What’s in a name?. . . . You put this on your social media accounts and tell all your friends. You feel so good when people start calling you this very special word. This new name will personify your courage ... to have reached this point in your transition.”



People who have known you for a long time may find it hard to break the habit of using your old name. It may help if you explain to them why using your new name is important.

Can I legally change my name?



Some countries in Asia and the Pacific allow anyone to change their name easily, by taking on an assumed name or pseudonym. This is typically the situation in countries with a common law tradition.² Trans people in these countries may find it easier to change their name to match their gender identity, even if there is no form of legal gender recognition.

In contrast, countries with a civil law tradition, for example Taiwan, have stricter rules about whether and how someone’s name can be changed.³

² Countries that were British colonies at some point follow the English common law system. These include Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan and many Pacific countries. For example, Niue, Fiji, and Tonga all allow someone to legally change their name.

³ The civil law tradition developed in Europe and was used by the Spanish and Portuguese in their colonies, and later adopted by other countries. For example, Japan, South Korea and China can be said to be civil law countries. Other countries have a mix of common and civil law (the Philippines) or may have a mixture of common/civil law and religious law (Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei).

When does using your legal name matter?

It can be possible to use a different name in your everyday life without legally changing it. However, in legal situations, such as signing contracts or official documents like a passport application, you may be required to use your legal name.

You will need to check the laws and regulations in your own country. In some countries once you have assumed a name it can be used on legal documents too. In other situations, you may be asked to use the name on your birth certificate or other official identity document. These laws apply to everyone but have much more impact on the daily lives of trans people.



Do identification cards always include your sex?

In some countries, photo identification (ID) cards do not include a person's sex. In these cases, if it is possible to change your name and photo, that ID can be useful in affirming your gender identity.

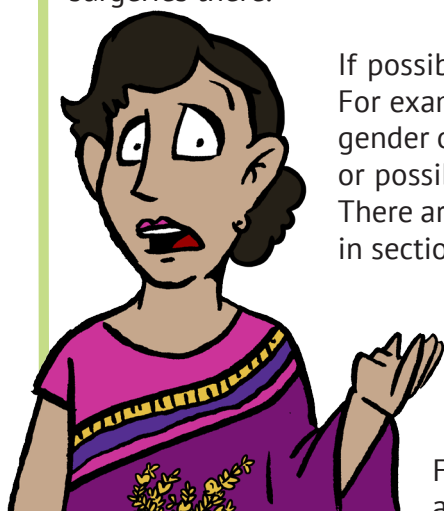
In other countries, any form of ID will disclose the sex a person was given when they were born. This could be because the ID includes your original name or sex, or if the number or title on your ID makes it obvious if you are male or female.



How do I find out whether or when I can change my legal sex?

In Asia and the Pacific, there are many countries where sex details cannot be changed on any identification documents. For example, in December 2015, when this resource was being written, it was not possible to change your sex details in Thailand, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

In other parts of the region, there are strict steps a trans person has to take before they can change their legal sex. Often this requires having gender affirming / sex reassignment surgeries. For example, this is what has been proposed in Viet Nam, after it becomes legal in January 2017 to perform such surgeries there.



If possible, find out the exact wording of the laws or policies where you live. For example, are trans people able to choose between male, female or a third gender option? Other trans people or organisations may have this information, or possibly a LGBT or human rights group or free legal clinic in your country. There are also some details about legal gender recognition laws in this region in section 3.5 of the Blueprint.

Knowing what your country's laws or policies say will help you to decide if you are able and prepared to take the required steps. There may be some flexibility in applying policies or interpreting the law, perhaps based on what judges have said in other cases. For example, in countries where 'sex reassignment surgery' is needed, a health professional may be able to write you a letter of support if

you have some, but not all, possible surgeries. If your surgery was performed in another country, ask the surgeon for a letter of support that you can use back home.

What if I change my details without taking the required legal steps?

For many trans people, transitioning involves building a new identity, to some extent. What you can do without legally changing your name or sex is likely to be different depending on where you live. If your country does not have marriage equality laws, it may be risky for a trans person to try to marry someone who is not legally the 'opposite' sex.

It can be tempting for trans people to change their identity documents illegally or to buy fake documents. However, this is a crime and can have serious impacts. In some countries, trans people have been convicted of crimes after amending their sex details on official documents without having the surgeries that the law requires. For instance, section 3.5.3 of the Blueprint describes how the Ardhany Institute has documented 11 cases of this happening in Indonesia since 2011.

If there is no law, is there anything else I can do?

Sometimes, when there is no law or policy in a country, this means there is still some discretion for individual officials or judges to make a decision. However, it may also mean that the courts or government agencies will not interfere, saying that the Parliament has to decide. In many parts of the world, trans people are campaigning to get laws that will make it easier to legally change your name and sex details on official documents. These campaigns have often been most successful when the general public realises how hard it is for people to get on with their lives without such legal gender recognition. Getting better gender recognition laws is one of APTN's priorities. If you are interested in this project, please contact hello@weareaptn.org

Some countries may have no law or policy allowing gender recognition, because they do not believe in trans people's rights. Or, even if a law exists, it excludes certain groups. For example, many countries in this region say that people under the age of 20, those who are married, or those who have children cannot legally change their sex. Sometimes it can help to raise these issues when your government appears before the United Nations to report on its human rights record. Groups like the [International LGBTI Association](#)⁴ and [OutRight Action International](#)⁵ have helped trans groups in Asia and the Pacific write submissions to these United Nations processes.



Trans people have taken court cases arguing that they have the right to legal gender recognition. Supreme Courts in India, Nepal, and Pakistan have all legally recognised a third gender status, and in India this has included recognition of trans women and trans men too.

In other countries, trans people have not been successful in court cases. A 2007 Supreme Court decision in the Philippines removed the right previously held by trans people to apply to the Regional Trial Court for gender recognition.⁶ When a court case fails under one law, some trans people see if they can take a case under a different law. For example, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines has stated it would support taking a case under the women's equality law to clarify whether trans women are able to change sex details on their birth certificates.



⁴ <http://ilga.org/>

⁵ <https://www.outrightinternational.org/>. In 2015, OutRight Action International changed its name from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

⁶ *Silverio v. Philippines*. Supreme Court of the Philippines, First Division (22 October 2007) <http://www.icj.org/sogicase-book/silverio-v-philippines-first-division-of-the-philippines-supreme-court-22-october-2007/>

OTHER LEGAL STEPS FOR TRANS PEOPLE



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OTHER LEGAL ISSUES FOR TRANS PEOPLE

What are my human rights and legal rights as a trans person?

Do countries have to show that they respecting trans people's human rights?

What laws in your own country support human rights for trans people?

What are my rights at work or school if there is no anti-discrimination law protecting trans people?

Can trans people legally get married?

Can I get an exemption from military service?

If I am stopped by the police for cross-dressing, should I plead guilty?

What are my rights if I am arrested?

What are my human rights and legal rights as a trans person?



Human rights are universal. They are the rights of all people, in all places, at all times. So trans people have the same human rights as every other person. In the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

The Yogyakarta Principles explain how these existing universal human rights apply to gender identity and sexual orientation issues.¹ They cover many different human rights issues, starting with the right to equality and non-discrimination. If you are treated worse than other people because you are trans that is discrimination based on your gender identity.

Other common human rights issues for trans people include when we are denied the following rights:

- *the right to security* – because there are high rates of violence against trans people
- *the right to the highest attainable standard of health* – because many trans people face discrimination from health professionals and most cannot access health services we need to medically transition
- *the right to work* – because trans people struggle to get the same types of jobs as others, and many are in low paid work or unemployed
- *the right to education* – because many trans people are harassed, bullied, and pushed out of school
- *the right to marry and found a family* – because most trans people do not have legal rights to marry and adopt

¹ <http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/>



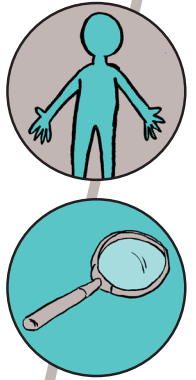
What are my human rights and legal rights as a trans person?

- *the right to physical integrity / bodily autonomy* – because many trans people are only legally recognised and protected if we have surgeries and medical treatment that results in sterilisation
- *the right to privacy* – because trans people's gender identity is often disclosed to others without our consent, especially when identification documents include our sex assigned at birth.

Section 2 of the Blueprint includes more information about these human rights issues, and how they affect the lives of trans people in the Pacific and Asia.²

2

<http://www.weareaptn.org/asia-pacific-trans-health-blueprint-in-action/>



Do countries have to show that they respecting trans people's human rights?



There are 9 international United Nations (UN) treaties that explain these human rights obligations in more detail. All countries in this region have signed at least one of these treaties and have to provide progress reports to the UN. There are also UN experts who work on particular human rights or focus on specific countries. You can write reports to these experts or to any of the committees in charge of the international treaties (if your country has signed that treaty), to complain about human rights violations. This may mean that your government is questioned about these issues. It is also possible to make individual complaints to the UN,

but often only after you have tried all options in your own country. The UN has no power to force a country to change its laws. However, many countries care about their image in the international community, or the opinions of some countries that are their allies. Strong criticism from the UN or other countries in this region can help to improve human rights in your country.

What laws in your own country support human rights for trans people?

While all countries are required to respect the universality of human rights, only some incorporate these rights in their constitution or domestic laws. Therefore, the legal rights of trans people differ from country to country.

In a few countries in this region, laws state specifically that a person cannot be discriminated against because of their gender identity. For example, both Fiji and Nepal have anti-discrimination protections for trans people in their constitutions. In Asia, the Philippines has some local anti-discrimination ordinances and in September 2015, Thailand passed its Gender Equality Act. There may be other laws in your country that protect everyone, including trans people. Examples include laws that say all children have the right to be safe at school, or that no one can be discriminated against at work.



Learn about the laws in your own country and how you can complain if you are treated worse than others because you are trans. Human rights organisations, free legal clinics, or LGBT groups may have this information.

What laws in your own country support human rights for trans people?

In some countries you can complain to a national human rights institution (NHRI). You can see a list of all NHRIs in this region on the Asia Pacific Forum's website.³ There may be other similar bodies that look into trans human rights issues. For example, in Indonesia this work is also done by the Commission on Violence against Women.

The most obvious anti-discrimination laws say trans people are protected based on your gender identity or gender expression. Sometimes, trans people are protected under sex discrimination laws too, for example in New Zealand.

Many countries have some laws that talk about the rights of women or of men. If you are unable to legally change your sex or gender, it may be unclear how these laws apply to you. Gender-neutral laws may provide better protection for trans people. This includes, for example, rape laws that recognise any person can be raped whatever their sex, gender identity, or body.

3 <http://www.asiapacificforum.net/members/>

What are my rights at work or school if there is no anti-discrimination law protecting trans people?

If you are studying, the school, college or university may have an Equal Educational Opportunities Policy, supporting all students' right to education. Some institutions have diversity policies to encourage minority groups to get higher education. You may want to ask for a copy of these policies, to see if they include trans students.



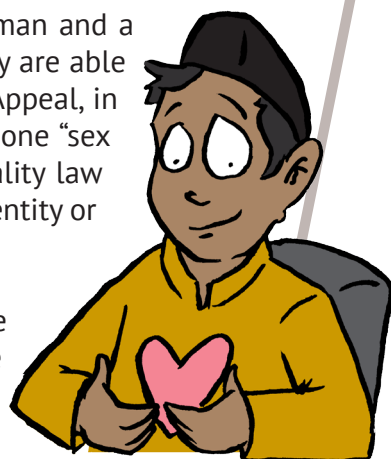
If you experience discrimination at work, your company may have an Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) policy that protects you, particularly if it employs a lot of people or is a multinational company.

If the company has an EEO officer, or a group for LGBT and intersex employees, you may want to ask their advice. Even without an EEO policy, health and safety and anti-harassment laws may require an employer to make sure their workplace is safe for all employees. If you belong to a trade union, consider asking their advice.

Can trans people legally get married?

Most countries in Asia and the Pacific only recognise marriage between a man and a woman. Increasingly, if a trans person is able to legally change their sex, they are able to marry as that sex. For example, in 2013, the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal, in *W v. Registrar of Marriages*, finally allowed a trans woman who had undergone "sex reassignment surgery" to marry her boyfriend. New Zealand's marriage equality law allows people to marry another eligible person, whatever their sex, gender identity or sexual orientation.

When trans people are not able to marry legally, some trans couples have commitment ceremonies or other rituals to celebrate their relationship. These ceremonies have no legal status and the two people will not be legally recognised as a couple.



Can I get an exemption from military service?

Some countries, including Thailand, Singapore, and South Korea, have military conscription, so all male citizens have to serve in the military.

In Thailand, trans women can get an exemption from military service if they have a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder. With the support of APTN, the Thai Transgender Alliance have updated resources for trans people about military conscription, based on human rights standards. These include a video and illustrated comic resource.⁴



It is possible for trans women to get a military exemption in South Korea. In some cases, a diagnosis on its own is enough. In other cases, you may be asked to provide further evidence, such as proof of some form of surgery (such as removing your testes). It is against human rights standards to require anyone to undergo medical procedures, including those that result in sterilisation, without their consent. If you are under pressure to show this evidence in order to get an exemption from military service, consider seeking legal advice.

In Singapore, trans women are required to have a psychiatric assessment and can then be exempted from military service. This exemption groups gay men and trans people together with paedophiles and is stigmatising. If you are under the age of 21, your parents will be called in for an interview too.

Trans men under the age of 35 may be called up for military service in Singapore once the gender marker on their identification card is changed to male. You are required to undergo the standard medical and psychological clearance as other national service recruits. Medical officers are likely to suggest that you get an exemption once they are aware you are a trans man. In other countries in Asia, trans men are commonly excluded from conscription, as they are not recognised to be male.

⁴ Video: <http://youtu.be/Q51uZ1nPILE> [Thai with English sub-titles]; comic resource <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1516606058641894.1073741829.1448611702107997&type=3> [Thai] and <http://bangkok.coconuts.co/2016/02/23/how-treat-katoey-thai-transgender-alliance-hands-out-guidelines-military> [English].

If I am stopped by the police for cross-dressing, should I plead guilty?

Crossdressing laws make it illegal for someone assigned a male sex at birth to dress as a woman. This is often called 'female impersonation'. It is much less common to have crossdressing laws that make 'male impersonation' illegal. Many trans women (and trans men) object to being told they are only 'impersonating' a female (or a male).

Where crossdressing laws still exist, pleading guilty to cross-dressing charges can be very risky. In Malaysia, Justice for Sisters found that trans women were being arrested many times under section 66 of Negeri Sembilan Shariah law. Most pleaded guilty because they thought that who they are and being transgender was wrong. The trans women also often wanted to settle the cases quickly so they could get on with their lives. However, once they had one conviction, if they were stopped again for dressing in their normal female clothes, they would be charged as a repeat offender. They would go to court and could be fined or sentenced to time in a male prison. Justice for Sisters has developed a card with practical advice about trans women's rights if they are arrested, to reduce the pressure they face to plead guilty.



If I am stopped by the police for cross-dressing, should I plead guilty?

Justice for Sisters is also one of the groups in this region that have legally challenged female impersonation or cross dressing laws.⁵ Since 2011, Justice for Sisters has challenged cross dressing laws in Malaysia. In November 2014 the Court of Appeal found the law in Negeri Sembilan was inconsistent with trans women's constitutional rights.⁶ This decision was overturned on a technicality in October 2015. In Samoa, female impersonation was removed as a crime in the Crimes Act 2012.

5 <https://justiceforsisters.wordpress.com/laws/>

6 Section 66 of the Syariah Criminal Enactment 1992, in the state of Negeri Sembilan: <https://justiceforsisters.wordpress.com/2015/10/06/section-66-appeal-at-the-federal-court/>

What are my rights if I am arrested?

There are some laws and policies that can have a worse impact on trans people than on others. These include conscription, public nuisance and vagrancy laws, and laws that prohibit or criminalise sex work or 'cross-dressing'. Therefore, it is important to understand your rights if you are arrested. These include the right to be told why you have been arrested and any charges against you. You are required to give the police your name and address but can then choose whether or not you answer other questions they ask. There are limits on how long you can be detained without the chance to defend yourself against any charges.

It is a human rights violation if police hit you, harass you or force you to have sex with them when you are detained.

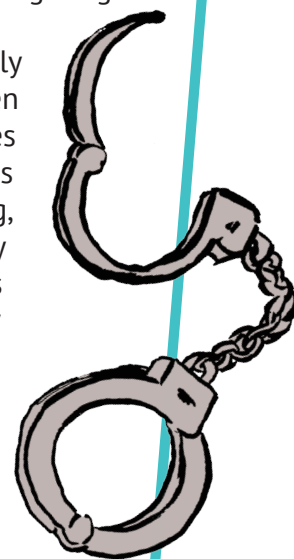
If cross-dressing, vagrancy, or public nuisance laws are used against trans people in your country, ask free legal clinics or your local Law Society for more details about your rights if you are arrested. Trans people who are migrant workers may want to contact a migrant workers' centre or helpline for advice. If sex work or homosexuality is criminalised in your country, then advocacy organisations for sex workers or men who have sex with men should also have information about your legal rights.⁷

In many parts of the region, there is police violence against trans people, particularly trans women. When transgender people are detained they are vulnerable to abuse when search and detention policies do not recognise their gender identity. UN committees and experts have highlighted concerns about violence and abuse against trans people in detention, particularly trans women held in male prisons. In Hong Kong, the Transgender Resource Centre examined trans people's experiences with security services, including the Police, Immigration Department and the Correctional Services Department.⁸ The Equal Opportunities Commission supported that research. The New Zealand and Australian Human Rights Commissions have said detention policies should be reviewed so that transgender people in prison are safe, and can access rehabilitation and medically necessary hormone therapy.⁹

7 APTN or the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (<http://www.nswp.org/members/asia-and-the-pacific/asia-pacific-network-sex-workers-apnsw>) may have this information.

8 Speech by Dr York Y.N. CHOW, Chairperson, Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission, August 2015.

9 New Zealand Human Rights Commission, *To Be Who I Am: Report of the Inquiry into Discrimination Experienced by Transgender People*, 2008; Australian Human Rights Commission, *Resilient Individuals: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Inter-sex Rights*. National Consultation report 2015.



MEDICAL TRANSITION STEPS



A P T N
Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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MEDICAL TRANSITION STEPS

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First published in 2016 by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network

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MEDICAL TRANSITION STEPS

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What are other gender affirming surgeries available for trans people?

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Are there any surgeries that trans people must have for health reasons?

Are there extra health check-ups I need if I have medically transitioned?

Am I too old to transition?

Can I undergo hormone replacement therapy and/or surgery if I am HIV positive?

Introduction



This resource gives you some background information about hormones, surgeries and other medical steps that affirm your gender identity. If you want to take hormones or have surgeries, please talk to a health professional. Having information helps you make informed choices about your transition. Look for a trans competent health professional who has some knowledge and experience about trans health needs, and an open attitude to gender diversity.

The Asia and Pacific Trans Health Blueprint includes lots of health information that you can read or show to a health professional.¹ The Blueprint is based heavily on the work of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). WPATH's Standards of Care, Version 7 provides clinical guidance for health professionals based on consensus amongst experts working on trans health and the best available science. It can be downloaded from the WPATH website in 10 languages, including English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean.²

1 <http://www.weareaptn.org/asia-pacific-trans-health-blueprint-in-action/>

2 http://www.wpath.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=1351&pk_association_webpage=4655

Informed consent – deciding what steps you want to take

There are many different medical treatments that you can undergo so that your body better matches your chosen gender identity. These are sometimes called medical transition, or gender affirming, steps.

There is no fixed order or number of medical steps that a trans person should take. Every person has the right to make decisions when it comes to their own body. Trans people should never be forced to take hormones or have gender affirming surgeries that they do not want.

Trans people often talk about wanting access to health services based on informed consent. This means that health professionals provide the information you need to voluntarily choose to accept or refuse treatment. It comes from the legal and ethical right that allows you to decide what treatment you want to undergo to change your body. It is also based on the ethical duty of health professionals to involve you in decisions about your health care.

Talking to health professionals will provide you with the information that you need to give informed consent. This should include both the benefits and possible risks of any treatment. Health professionals might also describe the medical benefits of doing some transition steps before others. For example, trans women are often encouraged to wait to see how much their breasts develop from taking hormone replacement therapy before deciding if they require breast implant surgery as well. Trans people might also make decisions based on what steps will improve their day to day life. For many trans men, this means a high priority is having surgery to create a male chest. For trans women, removing facial and body hair is often a very important initial step.



Does it cost a lot to transition medically?

Cost is a significant barrier preventing many people in Asia and the Pacific from medically transitioning. Most gender-affirming health services are not covered by public health systems or private health insurance. As a result, trans people have to pay for counselling, a diagnosis, laboratory tests, hormone replacement therapy, hair removal, surgeries, and other treatment. These services are often available only in private hospitals or clinics and so are too expensive for many trans people.

In many parts of Asia, at least some of the hormones that trans women use can be bought at a relatively cheap price without a prescription. Often trans people decide what hormones to use based on what is cheapest and to get physical changes to their body as quickly as possible. This unregulated access to hormones carries risks. Shops in some parts of Asia, including Thailand, still stock hormones that doctors no longer recommend for trans people. In other countries, including China, trans people frequently buy hormones from unqualified local producers and sellers.

A doctor or supportive health clinic worker can make sure you are on the right type of hormones and dosage for you. You should have blood tests or medical checks before starting hormones, and follow-up care to monitor side effects and adjust dosage levels.

Public funding for gender-affirming surgeries is rare in this region, apart from in Hong Kong and some partly subsidised services for hijra and thirunangai in at least one state in India.

Some sexual health clinics in Asia are exploring ways that they can provide transition health services to trans women alongside HIV services. One example is the Family Planning Association of India's GIZ Shadows and Light Project. Hijras and trans women can get hormone care, information about gender transition, laser hair removal, and referrals for gender-affirming surgeries.³

In late 2015 the Tangerine Community Health Center opened in Bangkok, Thailand to provide health services to both trans men and trans women.⁴ It offers counselling, hormone therapy, pap smears, and other services. The clinic, managed by trained trans personnel and gender-sensitive health professionals, aims to become a model for quality health services and research on trans health.

³ Chapter 4 of the Blueprint includes this example of how clinics in Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad provided this support. provided. The TRANSIT has other practical advice about implementing HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) programmes with transgender people: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/implementing-comprehensive-hiv-and-sti-programmes-with-transgend.html>

⁴ <http://bangkok.coconuts.co/2015/12/01/bangkoks-first-transgender-clinic-opens-thai-red-cross>



Do I need a mental health diagnosis to transition? Does this mean I have a mental illness?

In some countries, trans people can access hormones and sometimes surgeries without a mental health diagnosis. In those situations, it is very important that trans people know what changes hormones and surgeries can and cannot achieve, and any possible risks or side effects of the treatment. Only then can you make informed decisions based on informed consent.

In many countries, trans people need a mental health diagnosis of gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder in order to medically transition.⁵

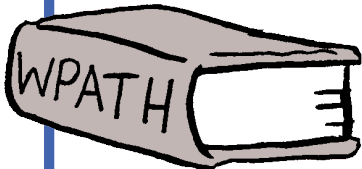
⁵ Till recently the term 'gender identity disorder' was used in both the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organisation's *International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD). In 2013 the DSM reverted to an older term, 'gender dysphoria'. Current proposals to revise the ICD include changing 'gender identity disorder' to 'gender incongruence' and no longer listing it as a mental health diagnosis.

Do I need a mental health diagnosis to transition? Does this mean I have a mental illness?

Gender dysphoria is the medical term used to describe the discomfort or distress that a trans person can feel because of the difference between their gender identity and their body. Only some trans people experience gender dysphoria. Transitioning often reduces and may take away these feelings of gender dysphoria.

Having a diagnosis can make it easier to access health care and to medically transition. However, a diagnosis does not mean that being trans is a mental illness. As the WPATH Standards of Care says:

Some people experience gender dysphoria at such a level that the distress meets criteria for a formal diagnosis that might be classified as a mental disorder. Such a diagnosis is not a license for stigmatization or for the deprivation of civil and human rights . . .

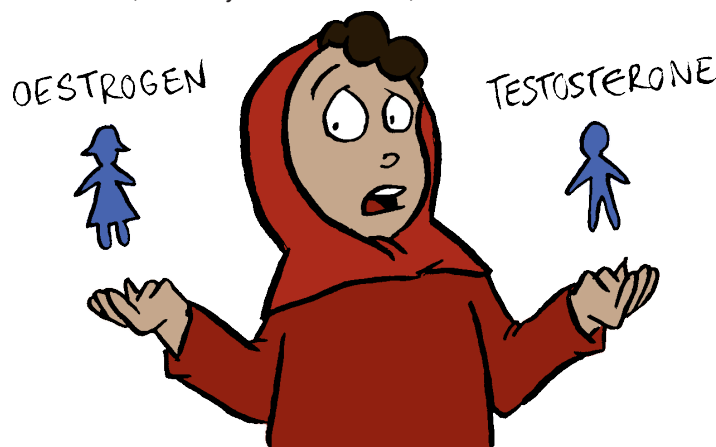


....A disorder is a description of something with which a person might struggle, not a description of the person or the person's identity."

What hormones should I take if I want to make my body more feminine or masculine?

Many trans women take hormones to make their bodies more feminine. These hormones include estrogen, which increases breast development and anti-androgens that counteract the effect of male sex hormones such as testosterone.

Many trans men take hormones, usually testosterone, to make their bodies more masculine.



The actual type of hormone and the dose may vary depending on other health conditions. You should see a health professional for:

- a medical check and blood tests before starting hormones
- ongoing health checks to monitor any side effects and, if needed, to adjust the dosage levels or the specific form of hormone.

What hormones should I take if I want to make my body more feminine or masculine?

Annex A in the Asia and Pacific Trans Health Blueprint has more information about hormones commonly available in this region.⁶ It includes these tables:

- Risks associated with taking hormones (Table A1)
- Recommended doses and types of estrogens for trans women (Table A2)
- Recommended doses and types of anti-androgens for trans women (Table A3) and
- Recommended doses and types of testosterone for trans men (Table A4)

Often people think that taking a higher dosage of hormones will speed up changes to their body. However, this is not true. Taking higher doses than needed is bad for your health and can have unwanted side effects. For trans men, too much testosterone can convert to estrogen, and slow down the changes you want. This is why male bodybuilders on high levels of testosterone can develop gynecomastia or ‘man boobs’.

Some trans people take lower doses as a more gradual way to transition. It is still important to have your hormone levels monitored regularly, especially early on, as your body adjusts.

⁶ Annex A is at the back of the Blueprint, pages 132-140:
<http://www.weareaptn.org/asia-pacific-trans-health-blueprint-in-action/>

Talking about our body parts

It can be hard for many trans people to talk about parts of our bodies that do not match our gender identity. Often trans people will have preferred words that better describe their genitals or other intimate parts of their body. From very early on their transition, trans women might use the word ‘breasts’ and trans men might use the word ‘chest’ to describe those parts of their bodies. Similarly, trans people often have created positive words to describe their genitals.

In regional resources like these, it can be hard to come up with alternative terms that everyone will understand. Therefore, at some points these resources use anatomical terms so it is clear what body part is being discussed. This includes sometimes talking about a trans woman’s penis or a trans man’s vagina.

Health professionals working with trans people will gain our respect and trust if they ask what language and medical terms we would prefer they use to describe our bodies.

Chapter 4 of the Blueprint starts by describing **two fundamental principles** for health professionals working with trans people, whether or not we have legally been able to change our name or sex details:

1. Respect a trans person’s true gender identity and use the name, pronouns and terminology that they go by.
2. Do not treat a trans person as if they are nothing more than their body. Respect the patient’s gender identity, and treat the body as if it belongs to them, rather than defines them.



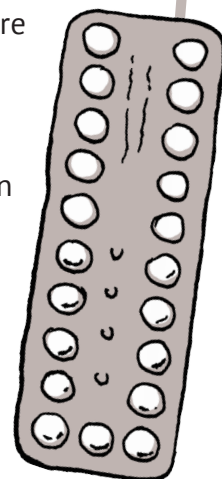
What changes will hormones make and are they permanent?

If someone assigned male at birth takes hormones to make their body more feminine, these are the physical changes that are expected to occur:

- You have some breast growth, your testicles get smaller and sperm count falls, you have less frequent and less firm erections, and your body fat increases compared to your muscle mass. Other changes include you have less upper body strength, your skin softens, your body hair decreases, and any loss of hair on your scalp slows or stops.
- Most of these changes are not permanent and if you stop taking hormones the effects will reverse. However breast development and lower fertility may be permanent changes.

If someone assigned female at birth takes testosterone to make their body more masculine, these are the physical changes that are expected to occur:

- Your voice deepens, your clitoris grows, your facial and body hair grows, and you may develop male pattern baldness. These changes are not reversible if you stop taking testosterone.
- Your sex drive (libido) increases, usually your menstrual period stops, your breast tissue shrinks slightly, your skin becomes oilier, and your body fat reduces compared to muscle mass. These changes may reverse if you stop taking testosterone.



Testosterone may have temporary or permanent effects on your future fertility. There are more details below.

For both trans women and trans men, most of these physical changes occur during the first two years of hormone replacement therapy. The amount of physical changes and how long they will take to happen varies a lot from person to person. Tables 1a and 1b in the WPATH SOC7 give some approximate times for when physical changes may occur.⁷

Some trans people record how hormones change their body and share these videos online. Here is one example, made by a trans man from the Philippines.⁸

7 http://www.wpath.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=1351&pk_association_webpage=4655, Tables 1a and 1b are on pages 37 and 38.

8 <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheVincentVan>

Are the effects of hormones reversible?

If a trans person stops taking hormones, only some of the effects are reversible. Other changes are permanent.



For trans women, almost all of the effects of estrogens are reversible. However, if a trans woman has grown breasts, they will not completely disappear after stopping hormones, and may require reconstructive surgery.

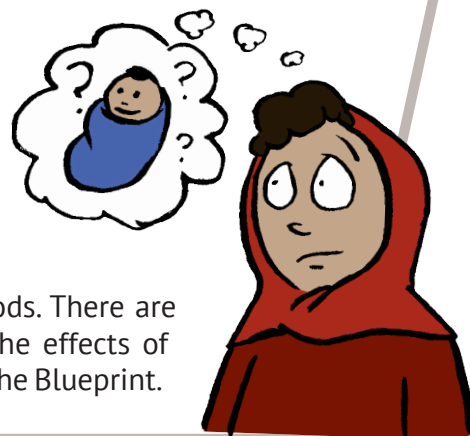
For trans men, only some of the effects of testosterone are reversible. If your voice has deepened, your clitoris grown, or if you have grown facial hair or started to lose your hair, these will not change if you stop testosterone.

Can I still get pregnant or make someone else pregnant if I am on hormones?

As a trans woman, if you have not had genital surgery, you may still make enough sperm to start a pregnancy.

As a trans man, if you have not had a hysterectomy, you can still get pregnant even if you are taking hormones and your period has stopped.

If you do not want a baby, use a condom or other birth control methods. There are birth control methods that trans men can take that do not reduce the effects of testosterone on their body. Some examples are listed in section 4.3.7 of the Blueprint.



I want to have a child. Is that possible after taking hormones?

Hormones do affect your fertility, so it can help to think about your options before you start hormones. It is also possible to come off hormone replacement therapy before attempting to have your own child.

Trans women may still be able to use their sperm to create a baby. They will not be able to get pregnant. If you are a trans woman who wants to have a child someday, here are a few options that you can consider thinking about:

- You can use your own sperm to make someone else pregnant. If you take hormones, you may need to stop for 3–6 months to make enough sperm.
- You can donate your sperm to someone who can carry the baby for you.
- You can save your sperm at a sperm bank for later, when you are ready to be a parent.

Trans men may still be able to get pregnant, but will never be able to produce sperm. If you are a trans man who wants to have a child someday, here are a few options that you can consider:

- If you still have a uterus and ovaries, you can have or 'carry' your own child.
- Stopping testosterone briefly might allow your ovaries to recover enough to release eggs. This is likely to depend on your age and how long you have been taking testosterone.
- You can save your eggs, like sperm banking, to use later on when you are ready to have a baby. You need to save your eggs before you have any surgery to remove your ovaries and uterus. Storing eggs can be very expensive.
- You can donate your eggs to a female partner, or to someone who is willing to carry the baby for you.

For all trans people, untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can cause problems with your fertility. So if you want to have children of your own, who share your genes, get regular STI checks and get treated immediately.

In some countries, trans people can legally adopt or foster a child. If legal adoption is not possible in your country, there may be informal ways you can raise or foster children.



Does taking hormones affect whether I can use my penis or vagina for sex?

Like the rest of the population, trans people have varied sex lives that are not solely focused on genitals. Hormones do affect how a penis works and affect the tissue inside a vagina. Adjusting the balance of testosterone and estrogen in your body can manage these side effects.

Advice for trans women who have a penis and use it for sex:

“It’s healthy and normal to use your penis for sex. You should know that to keep an erection, you need some testosterone (T) in your body. If you are taking female hormones, it may be harder to keep an erection. Ask your healthcare provider what hormone doses are right for you. Keep in mind [that] when you take a lower dose of female hormones, the changes you may want to see may take longer.”



Advice for trans men who have a vagina and use it for penetrative sex:

“Testosterone can also thin the walls of the vagina. You could use a low dose estrogen cream inside the vagina to keep it from thinning too much. This will help stop the vagina from bleeding if you have vaginal sex, which lowers the chances of getting an STI, especially HIV.”



There are more details in the Centre of Excellence for Transgender Health’s sexual health pamphlets.⁹

⁹ These pamphlets are at the bottom of the Transgender Health Learning Center page of the Centre of Excellence’s website: <http://transhealth.ucsf.edu/trans?page=lib-00-0>

Is taking hormones bad for my health?

As the WPATH Standards of Care (SOC7) states, “all medical interventions carry risks”, including taking hormones. The risks from taking hormones, based on current evidence, are listed in the SOC7 and in Table A1 in Annex A of the Blueprint.¹⁰

It is impossible to predict whether you will have adverse effects from taking hormones. Your individual risk depends on your general health, other health conditions, age and family history.

The only definite medical reason why someone cannot start or continue estrogen or testosterone is if they have a cancer that is sensitive to this hormone.

If you have other medical conditions, including high cholesterol or cardiovascular disease, a health professional should explain the likely risks from taking hormones. This means you can then make decisions based on informed consent. There are other steps, particularly stopping smoking, that can reduce your risk of cardiovascular diseases that affect your heart or blood vessels.

Some estrogens and most forms of testosterone are injected. Some can be self-injected. Ask a health professional to teach you how to do this safely to prevent scarring or inflammation. Use sterile needles and do not share them. Sharing needles can transmit infectious diseases, including HIV.



¹⁰ Annex A is at the back of the Blueprint, pages 132-140:
<http://www.weareaptn.org/asia-pacific-trans-health-blueprint-in-action/>

Are there hormones that stop puberty?

Puberty-suppressing hormones stop the effects of puberty. They are sometimes called 'puberty blockers'. Trans youth may be eligible for puberty-suppressing hormones as soon as puberty changes have begun.

While they are being taken, puberty blockers halt undesired, permanent changes to the body. These include beard growth and a deeper voice for someone who would otherwise go through male puberty, and breast growth for someone who would otherwise go through female puberty. This gives a young person time to explore their gender identity. It also means they can talk with health professionals, and usually their family, about future options. These might include taking cross-sex hormones that would make the body more feminine or masculine, depending on how the person identifies.

There is more information about supporting trans children and youth in Chapter 5 of the Blueprint. This includes case examples from health providers in Asia and in New Zealand.



What surgeries are available to create breasts or a chest?

For trans women, a breast augmentation is the same operation that is performed for other women. It usually involves inserting breast implants. The surgery scars can be hidden, for example under the armpit or breast. Infections or other complications after the surgery are not common.

The most common surgery that trans men have is a mastectomy, which removes the breast tissue and creates a male chest contour. Often trans men called this 'top surgery' or 'chest reconstruction'. There are different techniques based on the amount of tissue that needs to be removed.¹¹ Any excess skin that is removed will leave a scar. Complications can include that you have large scars, dips or bumps in the contour of your chest, excess skin, or lose some or all of the sensation in your nipples.

Public hospitals in your country may perform these surgeries for other medical reasons. For example, if a woman has breast cancer, she may have a mastectomy followed by breast reconstruction or augmentation. In some countries, trans people have lobbied for public hospitals to accept them for these operations too.

11 This website has drawings of the different techniques: <http://www.genderconfirmation.com/surgical-techniques/>

I cannot afford breast surgery. Is injecting silicon ('pumping') safe?

No, injecting silicone and other soft tissue fillers is not safe. Many women have died from these injections.

The injected products may harden, cause pain, and move to other parts of the body. This disfigures your body and creates permanent unwanted changes. These injections can lead to infection or chronic or acute systemic inflammation. This is very serious, particularly for people living with HIV.

The health risk increases when the injections are done by someone with no medical training or in a way that is not hygienic. There is a potential risk of HIV transmission if non-sterile equipment is used.



What is SRS?

The letters SRS stand for “sex reassignment surgery / surgeries”. This is an older term used to describe surgeries that trans people have to change their genitals to better match their gender identity. Trans people in many countries commonly use the shorthand term, SRS. Another older term is “sex change operation/s”.

Since these surgeries are about supporting or affirming a person’s gender identity, they are now often called ‘gender affirming surgeries’ or ‘gender confirmation surgery’.

What genital surgeries are there for trans people?

There are different genital surgeries that trans people might have. These are briefly described below. You can read more information in section 4.8.4 of the *Blueprint*.¹²

There are also different ways that surgeons can perform these surgeries. If you are considering surgery, talk to other trans people about their experiences and the pros and cons of different techniques and surgeons. There are many online forums where trans people share their experiences. Decide what surgery to explore based on whether it gives you the type of results that are important to you. Ask the surgeon lots of questions in your first consultation. If a friend comes to the consultation with you they can help by taking notes or reminding you of questions to ask.

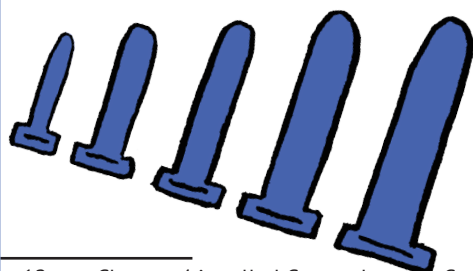


For trans women, possible genital surgeries include:

- *Orchiectomy* (removing your testes or ‘balls’). After this surgery you do not need to keep taking anti-androgen hormones and your estrogen dosage may be lowered too.
- *Penectomy* (removing a penis). This procedure is not commonly done on its own, but as one step towards creating a vagina.
- *Vaginoplasty* (creating a vagina). This complex procedure also aims to maintain your sexual sensation.



For trans women who have genital reconstruction the most critical form of after-care is vaginal dilation. Vaginal dilators are tapered devices in various sizes used to prevent a trans woman’s new vagina (neovagina) from narrowing or becoming shorter. After a trans woman has a vaginoplasty, whatever technique is used, it is recommended that she continues to use vaginal dilators for the rest of her life. There is more information about dilation on this [website](#).¹³



In parts of South Asia, castration is the most common surgery for hijra communities. It can involve removing a person’s testes (balls) and/or their penis. There is further information about castration in the *Blueprint*.

¹² Chapter 4 is called Comprehensive Care, Prevention, and Support. It provides clinical advice about supporting trans adults’ health needs. Section 4.8.4 looks at gender affirming surgeries, including genital reconstruction. <http://www.weareaptn.org/asia-pacific-trans-health-blueprint-in-action/>

¹³ https://www.susans.org/wiki/index.php/Vaginal_dilation

What genital surgeries are there for trans people?

For trans men, possible genital surgeries include:

- *Hysterectomy* (removing the uterus) and / or *oophorectomy* (removing the ovaries).¹⁴
- *Metoidioplasty* (creating a small phallus / penis).¹⁵
- *Phalloplasty* (constructing a phallus that more closely approximates the size of an erect male penis).¹⁶
- *Scrotoplasty* (constructing a scrotum / pouch that will contain testicular implants / 'balls' made of saline or silicone).¹⁷
- *Urethroplasty* (creating a urethral canal through the new penis). This means you can urinate/ piss through the penis, standing up.
- *Vaginectomy* (removing the vagina). This is needed if the vaginal opening is to be closed.

14 If this is done as part of a phalloplasty / vaginectomy, the vaginal tissue can be used to construct the urethral canal.

15 This is created by releasing the hood of the testosterone-enlarged clitoris and sometimes the suspension ligaments too. This procedure maintains sensation and the penis can still become erect. If a urethroplasty is done too, you can urinate standing up.

16 This uses tissue from another part of your body. The advantages are size and appearance. The disadvantages are that erotic sensation can reduce, and to get erect, your penis will need a semi-rigid or inflatable rod implant.

17 This procedure is usually done with either a metoidioplasty or a phalloplasty.

What other gender affirming surgeries are available for trans people?

The following procedures are typically labelled 'purely aesthetic', for most people. However, they may be medically necessary for some trans people with gender dysphoria.

Other surgeries for trans women that help to make the body more feminine are:

- *Reduction thyroidchondroplasty*: this reduces the size of a prominent thyroid cartilage, commonly known as an 'Adam's Apple'.
- *Voice surgery*: to raise the pitch of the speaking voice. Due to the risks of this surgery, speech therapy is recommended before seeking a surgical solution.
- *Facial feminisation*: this includes a variety of feminising plastic surgery procedures that change the proportions of the face. They include suction assisted lipoplasty (contour modeling) of the waist, rhinoplasty (nose correction), facial bone reduction, face-lift, and blepharoplasty (rejuvenation of the eyelid).

Other surgeries for trans men, that help to make the body more masculine, include:

- *Liposuction*, *lipofilling*, and *pectoral implants*.
- *Voice surgery*, to deepen the voice further, is rarely performed. However, it may be recommended in some cases if hormone therapy has been ineffective or is not an option for other medical reasons.



How do I find a good surgeon?

Some countries in Asia, including Thailand, have a lot of surgeons experienced in gender affirming surgeries. In other countries, such surgeries may be illegal. Stigma and prejudice against trans people can also be directed at surgeons too, making them reluctant to perform these surgeries.

Often, trans people or trans online groups share the names of surgeons who they would recommend. However, it is important to be careful and ask questions when you approach a surgeon. Many trans people have risked bad quality surgeries, mainly because it was the only option available at the time or all they could afford. Your health is more important than that.

Think about the sort of outcome that is important to you and ask surgeons if they can meet these expectations. Ask questions about different techniques, including how often the surgical team has done the operation you want and what could go wrong. If you are paying yourself, ask whether the price includes any revisions if you are unhappy with the result. This is your body, and you have the right to information that enables you to give informed consent. Avoid any pressure to have a specific operation or procedure that you do not want.



Are there any surgeries that trans people must have for health reasons?

No. Trans people have gender affirming surgeries to reduce feelings of gender dysphoria and/or to express their gender identity. It is a trans person's decision what, if any, surgeries they wish to undergo as part of their transition. Sometimes, a specific gender clinic may have a preferred approach or assume people follow a set order of medical steps. However, the WPATH Standards of Care is intended to be flexible. The principles it is based on include matching the treatment approach to the specific needs of an individual trans person.

In some cases, trans people may need these surgeries for other medical reasons. For example, a trans man who has fibroids, endometriosis or a family history of cancer may be advised to have his uterus or ovaries removed.

Are there extra health check-ups I need if I have medically transitioned?



The most important principle your doctor or health professional needs to remember is to provide care for the specific body that you have, in a way that supports your gender identity.

Section 4.3.5 of the Blueprint gives examples of when trans-related medical treatments may have an impact on the types of check-ups that a trans person needs. This can be a useful resource to give to your doctor. It looks at screening for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, various types of cancers, and osteoporosis. For example, these are the cancer screening recommendations for trans people.

Are there extra health check-ups I need if I have medically transitioned?

Cancer screening recommendations for trans women include:

- considering breast screening for trans women if they have other risk factors
- continue prostate examinations after genital surgery
- visually examine a neovagina

Cancer screening recommendations for trans men include:

- breast cancer screening is not necessary after chest reconstruction, unless the surgery was only a breast reduction
- cervical screening should continue if a trans man has retained his cervix, based on national standards for women
- There are no recommended ovarian cancer screening tests for trans men, though cases of ovarian cancer have been reported in trans men. The US-based National LGBT Cancer Network has collated this information about trans men and ovarian cancer.¹⁸
- The Endocrine Society's 2009 Clinical Practice Guidelines suggest that trans men evaluate the risks and benefits of a total hysterectomy (removing their uterus and cervix) and removing their ovaries.¹⁹ After these are removed, no further screening is required.

18 http://www.cancer-network.org/cancer_information/transgender_gender-nonconforming_people_and_cancer/transgender_men_and_ovarian_cancer.php

19 <http://press.endocrine.org/doi/full/10.1210/jc.2009-0345>



Am I too old to transition?

It is never too late to explore your gender identity and there is no upper age limit for transitioning. At the latter stages of someone's life, the medical options for transitioning may be different than for younger people. Your hormone dosages may need to be adjusted and other health issues considered when exploring the option of surgeries.

Can I undergo hormone replacement therapy and/or surgery if I am HIV positive?



Yes. Hormone therapy can be combined with HIV treatment and prevention such as antiretroviral therapy (ART) and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). More technical information is available for you and your doctor in this July 2015 resource from the World Health Organisation.²⁰

It is unethical to deny a trans person access to hormones or surgery solely because they are HIV positive. This is clearly stated on page 35 of the WPATH Standards of Care, Version 7.

20 <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/transgender/transgender-hiv-policy/en/>

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KEEPING SAFE AND STRONG

What is transphobia and how do I deal with it?

What is bullying - and what can I do to deal with it?

How do I look after my mental health?

Having a healthy relationship

Staying in contact with your extended family?

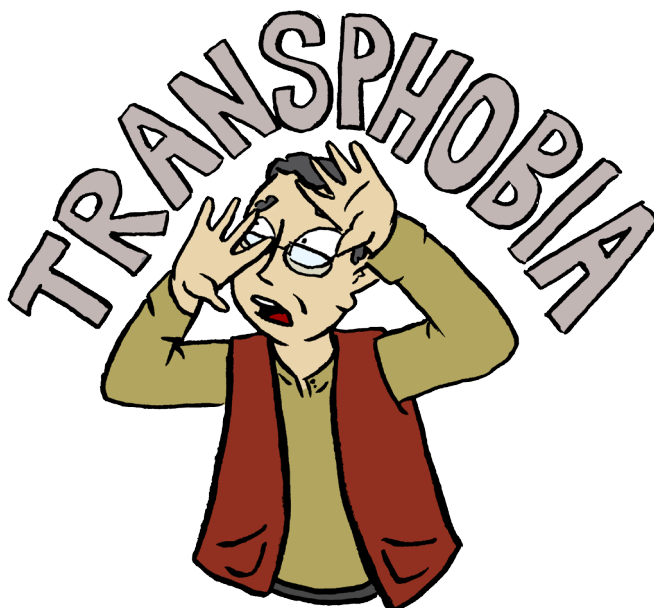
Where do I belong? How do I feel part of a community?

What is transphobia and how do I deal with it?

Transphobia is a word that describes negative attitudes and feelings towards trans people because of their gender identity. These can also be directed towards people who are assumed to be trans. Often transphobia is based on ignorance or stereotypes about trans people. Trans people are affected by this prejudice too and, as a result, can believe that being trans is a bad thing. This is called internalised transphobia or self-stigma and can be very harmful to your sense of identity and wellbeing.

Transphobia fuels a lot of discrimination and stigma against trans people, and their partners and families. This short online flyer describes some ways to cope with and tackle transphobia.¹ These include finding support, responding to transphobic comments, standing up for your rights, and sharing information that celebrates the lives of trans people.

The *Other Legal Issues for Trans People* resource describes some of the laws that might protect you from discrimination.



What is bullying – and what do I do to deal with it?

Bullying is repeated behaviour which is intended to hurt you emotionally or physically. Transphobic bullying is when someone bullies you because of your gender identity. People are also often bullied because of their sexual orientation, race, religion, disability or appearance.

Bullying can take many forms such as physical assaults, threats, name-calling and put-downs. It can happen in person or online, which is called cyber bullying. Cyber bullying can be through words or images that are sent as texts or put on social media or websites.

It is never okay for someone to bully or harass you. Tell someone you trust and ask them for help. If it is happening online, report the content. For example, this page answers questions about reporting bullying on Facebook.² Sometimes talking to the person who is posting or saying mean things about you can help. They may not realise how much it hurts you. Only do this if you do not feel threatened or scared.

In Thailand, research about transphobic and homophobic bullying in schools is being used to train current secondary education teachers. The Philippine is the only country in Asia Pacific to have a national law against bullying on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation.³

² <https://www.facebook.com/help/420576171311103/>

³ Republic Act 10627 / the Anti-Bullying Act 2013 prohibits gender-based bullying and covers both sexual orientation and gender identity. There is more information in UNESCO's 2015 report From Insult to Inclusion: Asia-Pacific report on school bullying, violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002354/235414e.pdf>



How do I look after my mental health?

The Minority Stress Model describes how stigma affects marginalised groups. For trans people, transphobia, stigma (including self-stigma), isolation, and secrecy are likely to cause chronic stress. Many trans people cope surprisingly well and most do not experience depression or any other mental health issues. However, discrimination and stigma can make trans people more vulnerable to emotional distress, depression and anxiety disorders. Trans people are also at greater risk of suicide and self-harm.

Addressing that isolation is a big part of looking after your mental health. This includes accepting yourself, finding your community, getting involved, and asking for help.

This Australian website provides mental health information and resources for LGBT and intersex people.⁴

What to do

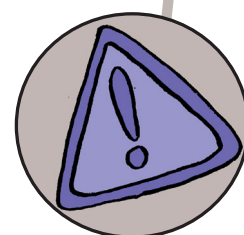
1. Know the signs

Your first step in minimising the impact of depression and anxiety should be to educate yourself on what you are experiencing. Anxiety and depression can be different for everybody, so through learning more, you can develop the best possible plan to maximise your wellbeing.

A key step can be completing a test like this to check your level of psychological distress.⁵

⁴ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/for-me/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-lgbti-people>

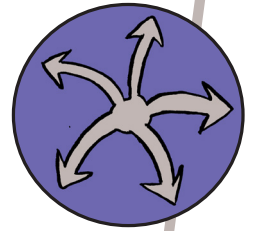
⁵ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety-and-depression-checklist-k10>



How do I look after my mental health?

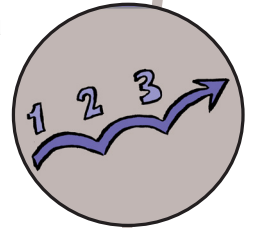
2. Know the options

There is no one proven way that people recover from anxiety or depression. However, there are a range of effective options to support you on the road to recovery. Many of these things can be done on your own but, as with any health condition, the best outcomes are more likely with the input of a health professional. The important thing is finding the right options and the right health professional for your own needs.



3. Develop an action plan

It can take some time to get everything right. This includes not only the options you have discussed with health professionals, but other ways to manage, and live with, the changes and challenges of having depression and/or anxiety.



Here are some ideas about how to develop your own action plan.⁶

Section 4.6 of the Blueprint focuses on trans people's mental health concerns. Section 4.7 looks at alcohol and other substance use and dependence.

⁶ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/for-me/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-lgbti-people/take-action-before-the-blue-takes-over>

Having a healthy relationship

Like everyone else, trans people deserve to have relationships that are healthy and free from violence and abuse. Partner violence is when one partner uses any form of abusive power to get and maintain control over the other. This can involve sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional violence.

One step in stopping partner violence is naming the types of abuse that occur. This resource talks about some specific types of transphobic violence that trans people have experienced and survived.⁷

Trans people deserve to be treated with respect in our relationships, just like everyone else. This includes having a partner or friends that do their best to remember our chosen name and pronoun.

If someone puts you down because you are trans that is not OK. This includes saying you are not “a real woman”, “a real man”, or “trans enough” – because of your gender expression, your sexual orientation or the choices you make when it comes to sex.

Some trans people put up with unhealthy relationships or abuse because they think there is something wrong with them for being trans. That is not true. Other trans people do not leave an abusive relationship because they are scared no one else will love them. This is not true.

Having a good relationship with yourself is the first step to being able to have healthy relationships with other people. If you accept and care about yourself, you can negotiate better relationships with others.

If you are worried about your relationship, talk to someone you trust or a support organisation. They can help you find ways to try and change the relationship, keep safe, or plan to leave.



⁷ <http://www.kahukura.co.nz/trans-and-intersex-survivors/>

Staying in contact with your extended family

Some trans people receive unconditional love and support from their family. They may also play important roles in supporting their extended family and hold key positions within their community.

However, many trans people have been rejected at some point in their life by their family. In some cases, this has involved physical, sexual or emotional abuse. So it is not always safe for trans people to stay in contact with some members of their family. Some trans people create new 'families of choice' with friends, supporting each other.

Trans people can carry a lot of grief about lost relationships with our grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, children or extended family members. If there are relations who accept you for who you are, they may be able to help you rebuild relationships with others from your family. Their support at family gatherings can influence the behaviour of others. If a respected family member uses your correct name and respects your gender identity, others may learn to do so too.

Our identity as a trans person is one part of who we are. Our family and cultural heritage is another important part. If we are able to rebuild healthier and stronger relationships with our families, it can support our identities as trans people. This video and print resource uses traditional concepts to encourage the celebration of gender and sexual diversity within indigenous families and communities.⁸

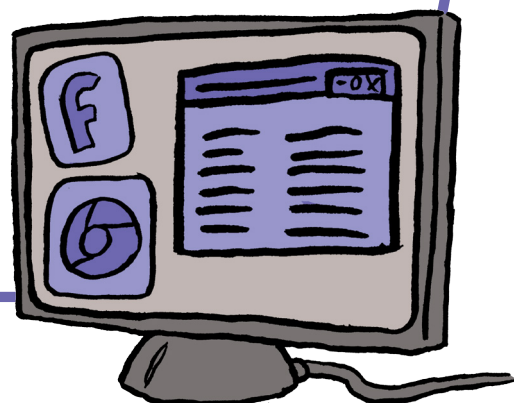


8 Takatāpui: Part of the Whānau is an indigenous LGBTI suicide prevention resource: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/home/news/article/96/indigenous-suicide-prevention-resource-first-of-its-kind>

Where do I belong? How do I feel part of a community?

We can feel isolated as trans people, particularly in communities where trans people are not very visible or accepted. Knowing other trans people can reduce that isolation. There may be trans support groups in your country, or wider LGBT groups or events that are welcoming to trans people. Being a part of online groups can help you feel part of a wider network of trans people. Even if you are 'stealth' and do not tell others that you are trans you can still be a part of the trans community and the trans movement.

Many trans groups in this region have Facebook pages or websites. If you cannot find a trans group in your country, the Asia Pacific Transgender Network (hello@weareaptn.org) or the Pacific Sexual Diversity Network (psdn.secretariat@gmail.com) may be able to put you in contact with a group.





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There is a lot more information in the other APTN resources the other APTN resources in these “Being Trans in Asia and the Pacific” series and can be downloaded at www.weareaptn.org/publications.

Take your time to find the support you need and to explore what is the right path for you at this time in your life.

1. I think I might be trans
2. Telling others that you are trans
3. Changing your appearance or gender expression
4. Legal transition steps
5. Other legal issues for trans people
6. Medical transition steps
7. Keeping safe and strong

If you have any questions or are looking for contacts in a specific country in Asia or the Pacific, please contact -

The Asia Pacific Transgender Network:

Email: hello@weareaptn.org (Website: <http://www.weareaptn.org>)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/weareaptn

The Pacific Sexual Diversity Network:

Email: psdn.secretariat@gmail.com (Website: <http://psdnetwork.org>)





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