



Gender Identity Issues: Getting Support

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Overview

Gender identity is your inner sense of being male, female, both, neither, or another gender. For some people, their gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Most children start to identify their gender around age 3. Many transgender and gender-diverse adults remember feeling at a young age that there was a difference between their bodies and their gender identity. Others didn't feel this way until later in life.

Many transgender and gender-diverse people go through a process of coming to know, accept, and express their gender identity. This is called gender affirmation or transition. There are many ways to affirm your gender. These may include medical or nonmedical options. Nonmedical options can include using makeup, clothing, hair removal, or voice therapy to express your gender. Medical treatment options can include taking hormones and having surgery to help your body match your gender identity.

How stress can affect your health

For many reasons, LGBTQ+ people may have extra stress.

If you move through life with added stress, it can affect your health and how you feel day to day. For example, you may:

- Feel anxious, moody, or depressed.
- Be more likely to have headaches, an upset stomach, back pain, or trouble sleeping.
- Get sick more often.

One key to managing extra stress is to get better at recognizing when and how you feel it. In your back? In your sleep? It's even more important to find out what helps you feel better. A hot shower? Stretching? Calling a friend?

If you're in tune with how you feel and why, and if you have some tools to feel better, you'll be more likely to make healthy choices. And you'll be less likely to turn to things like alcohol, drugs, or food.

Having a strong support network can also be a great way to lower stress. Connecting with others can help people feel better and live longer.

How to get support

Whatever your orientation or gender identity, it's important to realize that there are lots of people like you. Many of them may have the same emotions and questions that you have.

It can be comforting and helpful to talk to people who know what you're going through. You can find these people through local or online groups. If you don't know where to find support, check with:

- Your doctor.
- Your school counselor or trusted teacher.
- A therapist or other counselor.
- LGBTQ+ clubs and organizations in your community.
- Websites and online organizations. Go to www.pflag.org to find a list of support groups on the PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) website.

Credits for Gender Identity Issues: Getting Support

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