

YOUNG
TRANS
PEOPLE
TALKING

Outcomers
LGBT SUPPORT SERVICE

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Foreword

Being “different” is not easy at the best of times. Being different and not knowing what to do about it is so much more stressful: to be lost in a dark place adds to the feeling of isolation, confusion and fear. Over the years speaking with young Transgender people in particular, the sense of knowing that there is light at the end of the tunnel or an answer to the questions in their head, or that someone simply understands what they are saying and it's not the first time we have heard the words, is sometimes enough to keep them going a bit longer. It can keep them safe and ready to take on the challenge ahead.

We as adults and service providers, carers and parents, counsellors and mental health professionals need to make it our business to understand this and know what to do when, and if, it comes up for us.

The information between the pages of this booklet is set out to help you the reader understand the experience of being transgender, about educating you to the challenges and stressors that can affect a young person going through it.

This is not everyone's story but it is a very common one. We ask you to inform yourself and be there as an ally or friend for anyone young or old who is transgender.

Your support and understanding can be the difference.

We have also seen how the right support, even in our stretched system, can make a difference and you will hear that in this booklet.

We as a country are not there yet with trans health services. We need investment and education and it is the responsibility of the trans community and its allies to lobby for those services and we do that all the time. But its not all down to services. It's also down to you to be aware and be informed, and I hope we have gone some small way to making that an easier task for you. Please read this resource and share it with friends and colleagues. Use it to make a difference.

Thank you.



Project Manager Outcomers LGBT Service

Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank for their involvement in this booklet:

James Thornton who provided the original graphic design, Ciarán Hearty for helping us prepare it for print, and Priority Printing (Dundalk) who pulled everything together including design elements and layout;

Ciarán, David and Saoirse who, as work placement students, did a huge amount of researching, interviewing, note-taking and typing;

Vanessa Lacey and TENI for advice, support, guidance and the incredible ongoing work they do;

Youth Work Ireland Meath for their support in this publication;

Sorcha, Zoë, Franky and Vanessa for proof-reading;

And above all, the young people who created this booklet through their willingness to talk with us, and their courage to live their lives being true to themselves.

Outcomers LGBT Support Service is funded by the Health Service Executive North East, through the Social Inclusion and Health Promotion Units.

Some Important Points

Identifying, or being identified, as 'Transgender' is an incredibly personal thing. As is 'gender fluid', 'gender non-binary', and the many identities which don't fall easily into what society views as *traditional* gender identities.

There is no particular way to be transgender. There is no particular experience - every person's story may be unique to themselves.

This booklet includes some of the experiences of a number of young people who identify as transgender. You may have all or none of these experiences. These are simply people sharing how it feels for them, how they have lived with it, and what they have done with it.

The format of the booklet is a compilation of answers that trans-identified young people gave us to a series of questions about their experiences. These questions were designed to explore the 'trans' part of their lives, and perhaps give an insight that goes deeper than statistics and media headlines.

We have retained the anonymity of participants. For this reason there are no indications of names, the compiled answers are arranged for narrative flow and not in order of respondents, and any references to family have only been retained if the experience has been shared by other participants.

In terms of language used in this booklet, we have tried to use terms (with the best of guidance and advice) that are inclusive and respectful. We have used 'trans' as a short-hand for all identities under the transgender umbrella. In the same way that everyone's identity is different, not all transgender people will feel comfortable with the term 'trans'. We hope that you will recognise and accept our best intentions.

Section 1

First Steps



1. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE OF BEING TRANSGENDER? HOW DID IT FEEL?

I don't know what that means... I've always felt this way!

I've always been 'girly', trying on mum's clothes, stuff like that. Always been "one of the girls".

I had an official diagnosis (of GD - Gender Dysphoria) when I was very young, so I never "didn't know"... I always saw myself as a girl.

For me it wasn't "Oh, I want to be a boy" because I thought I just was a boy...

When I started to get more access to trans people, it really changed the game for me. That's when I started to say, "Actually, **I think this applies to me a lot more than I thought it did**".

When I was 10 or 11 I heard what Transgender was and I thought, "Is this me?" I thought it couldn't be me, because what you hear is always so negative.

I told my Gran I wanted to be a girl when I was, like, 6, and she was just like "Oh no, don't let your dad hear you say that!"

I had this growing awareness of my trans identity, I went through social transition from 'male' to this grey area in between, back and forth between 'trans' and 'gender neutral' - it was really confusing.

I was calling it all sorts of things - crossdresser, transvestite - I didn't know what it was, there's a lot to it. Then I read a story of someone transitioning and knew it was me.

I was unsure of myself, of what I was and why I had these feelings about my gender. I felt alone on the subject, a bit embarrassed and strange, and only started getting a grasp of it in my early twenties.

2. DID YOU THINK THAT THIS WAS A BIG THING IN YOUR LIFE?

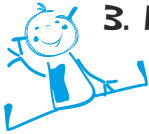


Most definitely, it was a massive deal to me.

Definitely knew it was a huge thing, a huge part of my identity. I believed a lot of people wouldn't like me.

Of course! My journey had truly begun that day, when I 'came out'. My mom brought me shopping to get my own clothes. My whole life was a build up to that moment of being accepted.

It was initially wonderful and freeing, as if I had an explanation to who I was, but it was quickly taken away by over-thinking "What does this mean? What am I? Do I have to have operations?" etc...



3. DID YOU TELL ANYONE?>

I didn't tell anyone straight away. It wasn't easy...

I told friends first, then girlfriend, then sister, then mam - it was a process.

I told my counsellor. It was a complete weight off my shoulders telling somebody - just even telling one person.

I was weighing up the decision with the belief in my head "If I do this, I'll have to lose everyone in my life, my friends, my family"- I couldn't see a situation where everyone could accept [my identity].





4. DID YOU TELL YOUR FAMILY? WHAT WAS THEIR RESPONSE?



I told my mom and sister - they made a few name and pronoun slip-ups and although I was upset and angry with them in the moment, I really shouldn't have been, as they became amazing with it.

My mum found my make-up bag - she always makes derogatory comments about me wearing make-up... and just makes me feel like shit.

My mum was afraid for me, but then, I was afraid for myself. Sometimes she accepted me and then times she would be like "Cop on," just for the sake of blending into society better.

My dad didn't take it very well. He had this big talk with me about how I'm doing the wrong thing and I must stop it.

My dad finally came to a point, through seeing that friends of the family could be so readily accepting and be happy for me.

My mum accepts it 100% and my brothers and sisters are not judgemental at all.

When I told my mom she was like, "Give me a while, I might need a day or two to process this" and I was okay with that.

My dad called me and said, "I am upset that I'm losing my only son..."

My parents were very positive, but they were kinda pretending to be good with it. My sister told me a few days later "They're not sleeping, they're crying the whole time, they think you hate your old self..."

I told my aunty first - she was great.

At the moment of writing this, I have not told my wider family.

When I go home for holidays [from college] I'll be going back to my birth name, because I want to at least start transitioning before I tell everyone.



5. WHO WAS THE HARDEST TO TELL, AND WHY?

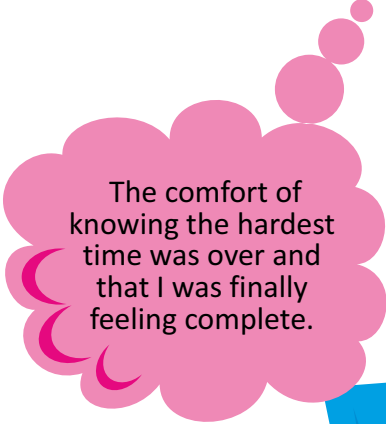
My mom was definitely the hardest as it had been on my mind for years and I only plucked up the courage in my late teens to actually tell her. She was also my only parent and I was still living in her home, so I had some reasons to be scared.

My mam - I went to tell her a few times and I went blank. The words wouldn't come out of my mouth.

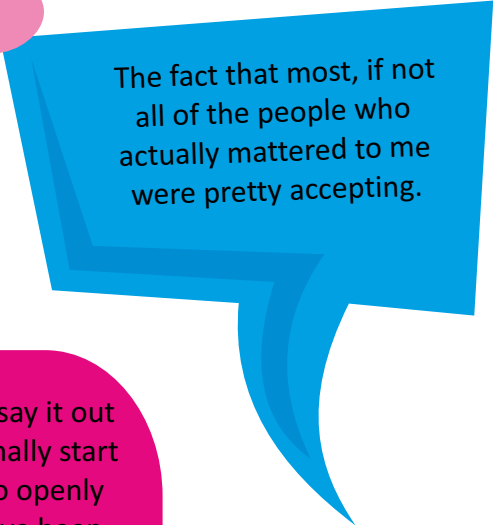
I waited to tell my dad 'til I'd been on HRT [Hormone Replacement Therapy] for about six months and then told him. Once I was on HRT, I was a lot more confident, and it made telling him a little easier. Also, he couldn't affect [the process] - it had already begun.

My parents were definitely the hardest people in my life to tell. I didn't want them to worry, be disappointed or be inconvenienced by it.

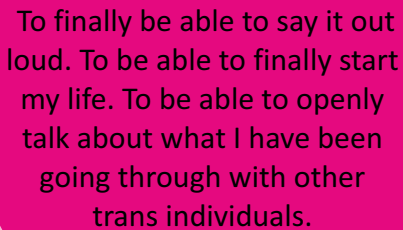
6. WHAT MADE YOU HAPPY DURING THIS INITIAL TIME?



The comfort of knowing the hardest time was over and that I was finally feeling complete.



The fact that most, if not all of the people who actually mattered to me were pretty accepting.




To finally be able to say it out loud. To be able to finally start my life. To be able to openly talk about what I have been going through with other trans individuals.

Section 2

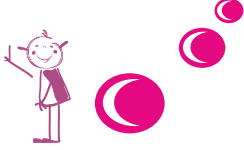
Into The Wider World



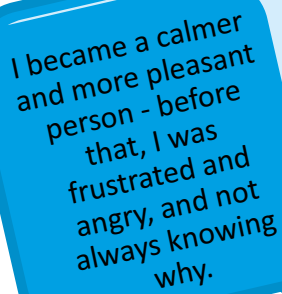
1. HOW DID YOU EXPRESS WHAT YOU WERE FEELING?



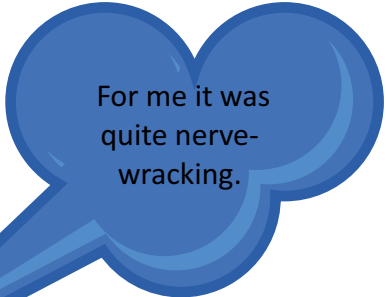
I was quite angry, frustrated - rebellious in a way - I wasn't happy with what I was and didn't know how to express it.



Coming to Outcomers [LGBT support service] helped explain a lot about how I was feeling and what to do, but above all, I felt like I was normal.



I became a calmer and more pleasant person - before that, I was frustrated and angry, and not always knowing why.




For me it was quite nerve-racking.

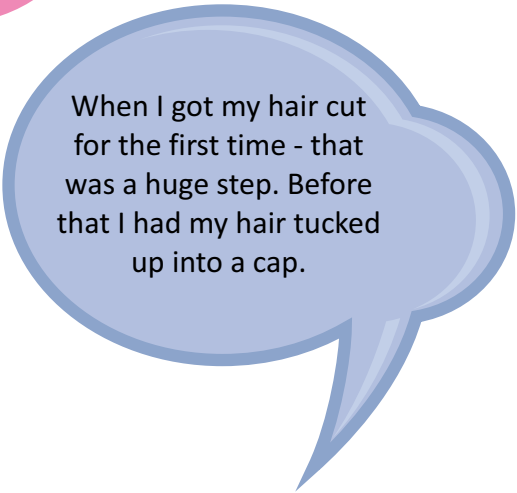


I felt wonderful and it showed.

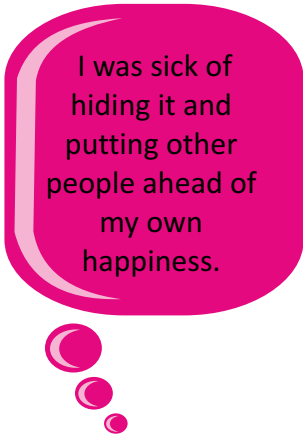




I felt comfortable being able to dress how I felt, but in secret for many years. I would dress to go out but I wasn't going anywhere and all I was doing was trotting around the house feeling amazing!



When I got my hair cut for the first time - that was a huge step. Before that I had my hair tucked up into a cap.



I was sick of hiding it and putting other people ahead of my own happiness.



2. WHAT KIND OF REACTION HAVE YOU HAD FROM PEOPLE?

Very accepting!


My initial reaction from everyone was terrible, apart from my best friend.

I was told at home, "Don't be trans for a few years. Wait it out and maybe you'll grow out of it".


I couldn't walk through town without being harassed!

I have often been chastised for being in "the wrong" bathroom.


I got the odd stare and weird glances and people sniggering from groups, young and old.



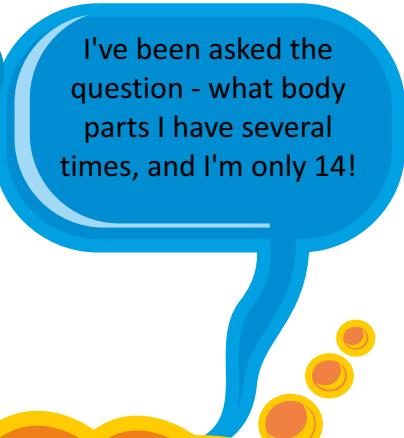
People freaked out when they found out I was bisexual. How will they react if they find out I'm trans?



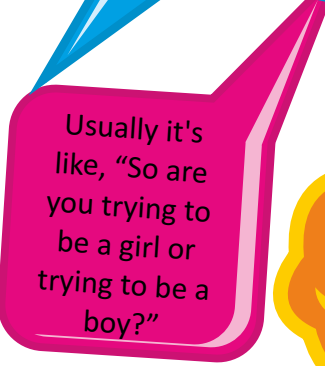
Every single person has asked me do I want surgery.



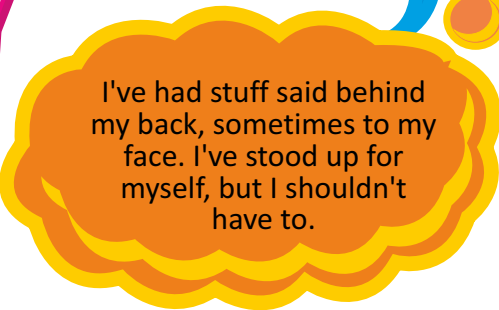
People would shout at me: "Here comes Caitlyn Jenner..."



I've been asked the question - what body parts I have several times, and I'm only 14!



Usually it's like, "So are you trying to be a girl or trying to be a boy?"



I've had stuff said behind my back, sometimes to my face. I've stood up for myself, but I shouldn't have to.

3. WHAT HELPED YOU?



The internet has been an enormous help to me - it has connected me to hundreds and thousands of people

who feel similarly or are open to it.

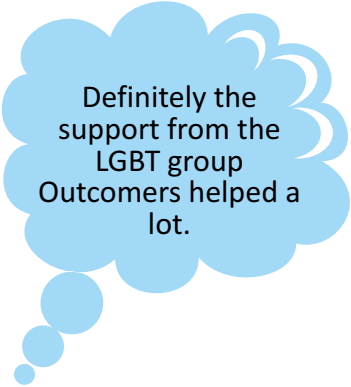
Joining the LGBT society in college.

Meeting other people the same as me...

Someone believing you, accepting what you're saying.

Getting away from home helped...

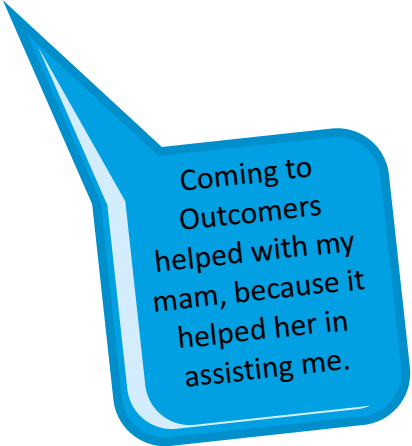
It's really important to be able to meet other 'T' people... having support and someone to talk to about it.




Definitely the support from the LGBT group Outcomers helped a lot.



Support from my family gave me a well needed boost of positivity.



Coming to Outcomers helped with my mam, because it helped her in assisting me.



If I hadn't had an LGBT centre, I don't know...

4. WHAT DIDN'T WORK/DIDN'T HELP?



Not coming clean, not being honest with myself.

There are times when the dysphoria is almost crushing, when it's really difficult, like a certain time of the month...

Those times you just feel you and your body just don't match.

The idea of 'gender binary' is bull-... the idea that people are only one thing or the other, and have to dress and act one way or the other!

People telling me that I'm not "trans enough".

The problem usually is with *other* people: They look at me and look at gender fluid people and say, "Oh, so you're like *that!*"

People asking: "Why are you not one or the other?"



5. WHAT WAS SCHOOL LIKE?


All the teachers and school staff are nice to me.

I can't do anything in school: It's an all-boys, and severely Catholic!


In school, there's a big divide - boys' toilets / girls' toilets; boys' end of playground / girls' end of playground.

When I changed uniform - that was a big thing.

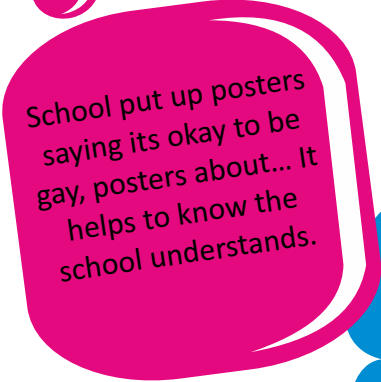
I know a mixed school where they allow transgender students wear the uniform they want.




Presenting as my preferred identity in school definitely improved my grades...



It's no different for me wearing a skirt and me wearing the trousers. I'm still the same person and I still do the same things, still ignore the people who give reactions.



School put up posters saying its okay to be gay, posters about... It helps to know the school understands.



Teachers started seeing change in me, staff started seeing change in me, my friends started seeing change in me and they said that I looked better this way.

6. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR IDENTITY NOW?



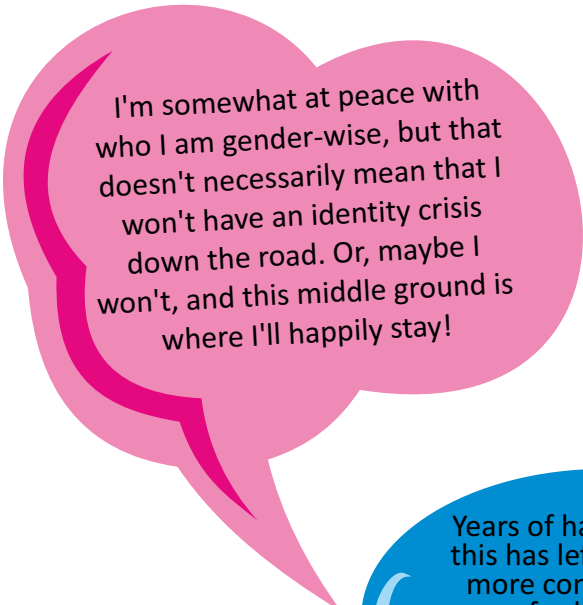
I feel very clear... as much as anybody else. Most people don't have to think about their gender identity at all, but for a trans person it's 'on the table' for discussion.

Once I had told people of my transition, I felt so strongly that I was in the right gender, it just took off and became so natural and easy for me. Probably because I was waiting for this most of my life.

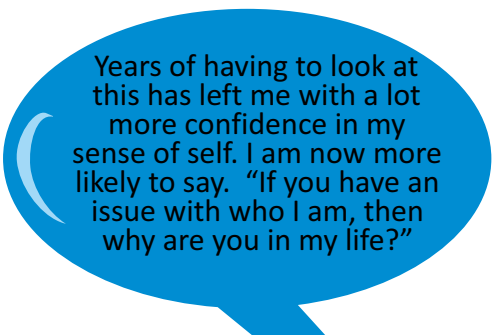
It's as clear as it can be. I was unhappy before the transition because I felt like I didn't belong in the gender, and now that my transition has happened and is still on-going,

I feel a sense of joy and look forward to my future now.

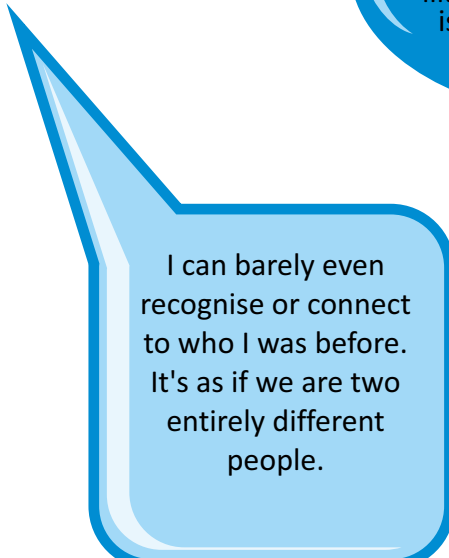
I just know how I want people to see me: just as a person, someone who is being themselves.

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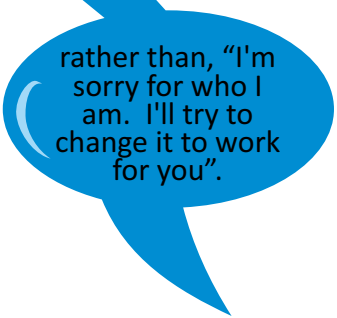
I'm somewhat at peace with who I am gender-wise, but that doesn't necessarily mean that I won't have an identity crisis down the road. Or, maybe I won't, and this middle ground is where I'll happily stay!

A blue speech bubble with a white outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom left.

Years of having to look at this has left me with a lot more confidence in my sense of self. I am now more likely to say, "If you have an issue with who I am, then why are you in my life?"

A blue speech bubble with a white outline and a tail pointing towards the top left.

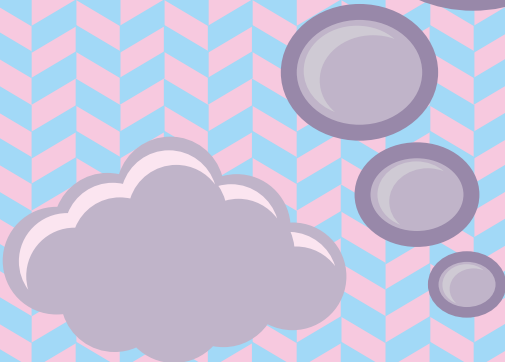
I can barely even recognise or connect to who I was before. It's as if we are two entirely different people.

A blue speech bubble with a white outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom left.

rather than, "I'm sorry for who I am. I'll try to change it to work for you".

Section 3

The Future





1. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE?>

Well, I'm waiting for the operation, which will allow me to stop a certain medication and eventually break the last tie with the hospital check-ups... and to feel free to just live my life, happily ever after.

I'd love to have surgery at 18 - I can't control that, but I hope I can.

Go to college and get a degree and a job like everyone else.

There is no plan, but I would be happy if the operation was completed by two years, which I feel will free me to just live my life as I want. Maybe then I could plan for other things in my life, like possible careers, homes and even kids.

Going to live in another country and growing a nice beard.

2. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE SOCIETY TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT BEING TRANSGENDER?

Look at us as the way you see your family and friends: as people with feelings and emotions.



It's simple. My body developed in a way it shouldn't have, so now I'm going through the steps to correct that.

It's like wearing a pair of shoes that are a bit too small for you - they're fine, they keep your feet warm and all, they're technically functional, but they wear away bits of you and pinch uncomfortably.

I see 'transgender' as a period of time, not as an identity. Once I go through my transition and come out the other side, I won't need the 'trans' label anymore.

You don't have to understand it to accept it.

As normal.
More like humans.
Not aliens.

I'm so tired of people asking me questions, receiving my answers, but dismissing them because they're not something they have personally experienced.

You don't have to 'get it'. The other person has just told you what they feel. It doesn't HAVE to be true to YOUR life for it to be real!

What to say and what not to say to trans people.

Just remember that everyone is going through something so why cause pain to someone over something

that is clearly a big thing to them.


3. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE BEING TRANSGENDER OR GENDER FLUID TO OTHER PEOPLE?



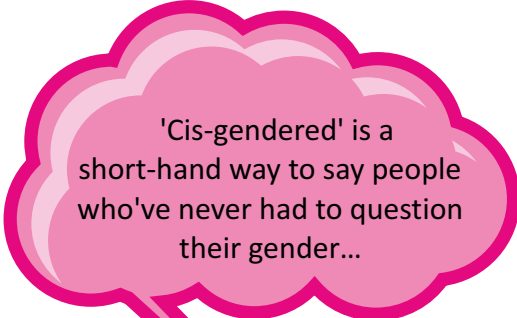
'Transgender' is not a gender (in it's own right). It's a term used to describe many people who don't identify completely with their assigned gender from birth.

Sometimes I feel more female, sometimes I feel more male, and sometimes I feel like neither. My gender identity and/or expression is NOT meant as a threat upon yours.

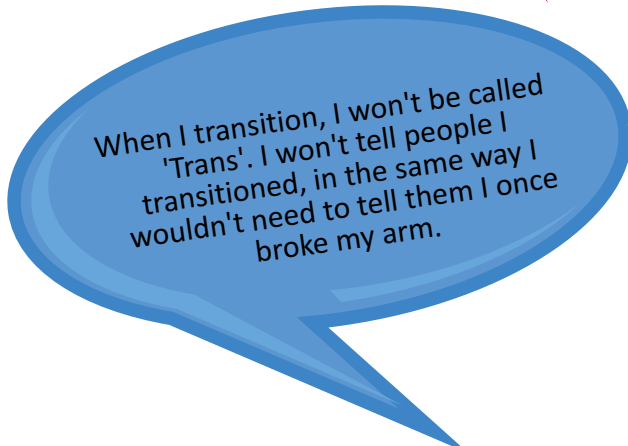
It makes me really uncomfortable when people say "a boy trapped in a girl's body"... It's not that I'm trapped, I just need to make a few adjustments!

A purple speech bubble with a white outline and a drop shadow, pointing towards the bottom left.

People can be
at different stages: it's a broad
range of experiences.

A pink thought bubble with a white outline and a drop shadow, connected to a pink lightning bolt pointing downwards.

'Cis-gendered' is a
short-hand way to say people
who've never had to question
their gender...

A blue speech bubble with a white outline and a drop shadow, pointing towards the bottom left.

When I transition, I won't be called
'Trans'. I won't tell people I
transitioned, in the same way I
wouldn't need to tell them I once
broke my arm.

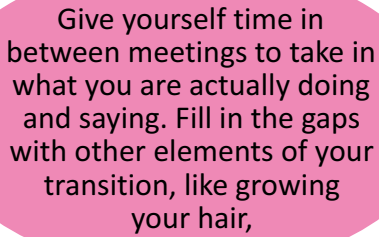
4. DO YOU HAVE ANY WORDS OF ADVICE FOR OTHER TRANS YOUNG PEOPLE?




I know it may hurt
but no-one's
opinion should
matter, whether it
be your parents,
family or friends.

When it comes to
your journey to
hormones I would
recommend you be
patient - waiting lists
are there for a reason.
You can rush some
things but you will
eventually hit that
metaphoric wall of
waiting lists.

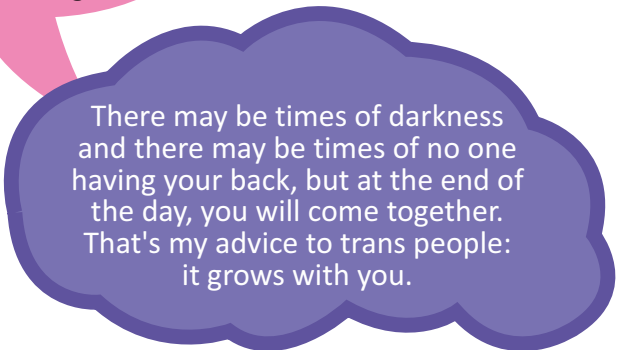
Take your time. Make
sure you have the
money to pay for
appointments.




Give yourself time in between meetings to take in what you are actually doing and saying. Fill in the gaps with other elements of your transition, like growing your hair,



or cutting your hair, voice training or finding your style when it comes to clothing.



There may be times of darkness and there may be times of no one having your back, but at the end of the day, you will come together. That's my advice to trans people: it grows with you.



Take your time. Talk to people you trust. And above all, be true to yourself - it's your life, not one else's.

Glossary

The language of *gender identity*:

Cis-gender: A term for people whose gender identity, or gender expression, is the same as the sex listed on their birth certificate.

Gender Dysphoria: is a distress a person experiences as a result of their gender identity not matching sex assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: how you express your gender identity to others through behaviour, clothing, etc.

Gender Fluid: gender identity which varies over time.

Gender Identity: A person's internal feeling of belonging to a certain gender.

Gender Transition / Transition: process when individuals change their gender expression and/or sex characteristics to reflect their gender identity.

Intersex: term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Transgender: People whose gender identity differs from the sex they were given at birth. Trans+ includes non-binary people.

Non-binary: gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine - identities which are outside the gender binary.

Trans man: person assigned female at birth, who identifies and lives as a man.

Trans woman: person assigned male at birth, who identifies and lives as a woman.

Useful Contact Details

Outcomers LGBT Support Service

The Coach House, 8 Roden Place, Dundalk, Co. Louth
(042) 9329816 / info@outcomers.org
www.outcomers.org

Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)

Unit 2, 4 Ellis Quay, Dublin 7
(01) 873 3575 / info@teni.ie
www.teni.ie

TransParenCI (family support for transgender people)

transparencigroup@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/Transparenci

BeLonG To LGBT Youth Service

Parliament House, 13 Parliament St, Dublin 2
(01) 670 6223
www.belongto.org

The National LGBT Helpline

1890 929 539
www.lgbt.ie

Youth Work Ireland Meath

046 9093402
www.youthworkirelandmeath.ie

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

To be contacted via referral from your GP. For more information see www.hse.ie and search for "CAMHS".

For mental health practitioners who are willing to give a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, please contact your local LGBT support service.

For a list of transgender peer support groups, see www.teni.ie/support

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Outcomers
LGBT SUPPORT SERVICE



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Web: www.outcomers.org

If you are a young (14-25 yrs)
LGBT+ person and would like
to contact us, please:

Call our Youth Co-ordinator
on 086 162 5030
Or Email: youth@outcomers.org

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**Department of Children
and Youth Affairs**



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