



Gender-Affirming Care and Young People

What is gender-affirming care?

Gender-affirming care is a supportive form of healthcare. It consists of an array of services that may include medical, surgical, mental health, and non-medical services for transgender and nonbinary people.

For transgender and nonbinary children and adolescents, early gender-affirming care is crucial to overall health and well-being as it allows the child or adolescent to focus on social transitions and can increase their confidence while navigating the healthcare system.

Why does it matter?

Research demonstrates that gender-affirming care improves the mental health and overall well-being of gender diverse children and adolescents.¹ Because gender-affirming care encompasses many facets of healthcare needs and support, it has been shown to increase positive outcomes for transgender and nonbinary children and adolescents. Gender-affirming care is patient-centered and treats individuals holistically, aligning their outward, physical traits with their gender identity.

Gender diverse adolescents face significant health disparities compared to their cisgender peers. Transgender and gender nonbinary adolescents are at increased risk for mental health issues, substance use, and suicide.^{2,3} The Trevor Project's 2021 *National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health* found that 52 percent of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.⁴

A safe and affirming healthcare environment is critical in fostering better outcomes for transgender, nonbinary, and other gender expansive children and adolescents. Medical and psychosocial gender affirming healthcare practices have been demonstrated to yield lower rates of adverse mental health outcomes, build self-esteem, and improve overall quality of life for transgender and gender diverse youth.^{5,6} Familial and peer support is also crucial in fostering similarly positive outcomes for these populations. The presence of affirming support networks is critical for facilitating and arranging gender affirming care for children and adolescents. Lack of such support can result in rejection, depression and suicide, homelessness, and other negative outcomes.^{7,8,9}

Common Terms

Cisgender: Describes a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth

Gender diverse or expansive: An umbrella term for a person with a gender identity and/or expression broader than the male or female binary. Gender minority is also used interchangeably with this term

Gender dysphoria: Clinically significant distress that a person may feel when sex or gender assigned at birth is not the same as their identity

Gender identity: One's internal sense of self as man, woman, both or neither

Nonbinary: Describes a person who does not identify with the man or woman gender binary

Transgender: Describes a person whose gender identity and/or expression is different from their sex assigned at birth, and societal and cultural expectations around sex

HHS uses LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, or intersex) to reflect the diversity of this community. More specific terms are used in alignment with research and information sources. However, people who are part of this community may use various other [terms to define their identity](#).

Additional Information

- [Endocrine Treatment of Gender-Dysphoric/Gender-Incongruent Persons: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline](#)
- [Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents | American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [Standards of Care \(SOC\) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People | World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#)

Gender-Affirming Care and Young People

Affirming care	What is it?	When is it used?	Reversible or not
Social Affirmation	Adopting gender-affirming hairstyles, clothing, name, gender pronouns, and restrooms and other facilities	At any age or stage	Reversible
Puberty Blockers	Using certain types of hormones to pause pubertal development	During puberty	Reversible
Hormone Therapy	Testosterone hormones for those who were assigned female at birth Estrogen hormones for those who were assigned male at birth	Early adolescence onward	Partially reversible
Gender-Affirming Surgeries	“Top” surgery – to create male-typical chest shape or enhance breasts “Bottom” surgery – surgery on genitals or reproductive organs Facial feminization or other procedures	Typically used in adulthood or case-by-case in adolescence	Not reversible

Resources

- [Discrimination on the Basis of Sex | HHS Office of Civil Rights](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health | Healthy People 2030](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: Health Services | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [National Institutes of Health Sexual & Gender Minority Research Office](#)
- [Family Support: Resources for Families of Transgender & Gender Diverse Children | Movement Advancement Project](#)
- [Five Things to Know About Gender-Affirming Health Care | ACLU](#)
- [Gender-Affirming Care is Trauma-Informed Care | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
- [Gender-Affirming Care Saves Lives | Columbia University](#)
- [Gender Identity | The Trevor Project](#)
- [Genderspectrum.org](#)
- [Glossary of Terms | Human Rights Campaign](#)
- [Health Care for Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals | ACOG](#)
- [Transgender and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents | Endocrine Society](#)

¹ Green, A. E., DeChants, J. P., Price, M. N., and Davis, C. K. (2021). Association of Gender-Affirming Hormone Therapy With Depression, Thoughts of Suicide, and Attempted Suicide Among Transgender and Nonbinary Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 70(4). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.10.036>

² Rimes, K., Goodship N., Ussher, G., Baker, D. and West, E. (2019). Non-binary and binary transgender youth: Comparison of mental health, self-harm, suicidality, substance use and victimization experiences. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 20 (2-3); 230-240.

³ Price-Feeney, M., Green, A. E., & Dorison, S. (2020). Understanding the mental health of transgender and nonbinary youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 66(6), 684–690. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.11.314>

⁴ Trevor Project. (2021). *National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2021*. Trevor Project. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2021/>

⁵ Wagner J, Sackett-Taylor AC, Hodax JK, Forcier M, Rafferty J. (2019). Psychosocial Overview of Gender-Affirmative Care. *Journal of pediatric and adolescent gynecology*, (6):567-573. doi: 10.1016/j.jpap.2019.05.004. Epub 2019 May 17. PMID: 31103711.

⁶ Hughto JMW, Gunn HA, Rood BA, Pantalone DW. (2020). Social and Medical Gender Affirmation Experiences Are Inversely Associated with Mental Health Problems in a U.S. Non-Probability Sample of Transgender Adults. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 49(7):2635-2647. doi: 10.1007/s10508-020-01655-5. Epub 2020 Mar 25. PMID: 32215775; PMCID: PMC7494544.

⁷ Brown, C., Porta, C. M., Eisenberg, M. E., McMorris, B. J., & Sieving, R. E. (2020). Family relationships and the health and well-being of transgender and gender-diverse youth: A critical review. *LGBT Health*, 7, 407-419. <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2019.0200>

⁸ Seibel BL, de Brito Silva B, Fontanari AMV, Catelan RF, Bercht AM, Stucky JL, DeSousa DA, Cerqueira-Santos E, Nardi HC, Koller SH, Costa AB. (2018). The Impact of the Parental Support on Risk Factors in the Process of Gender Affirmation of Transgender and Gender Diverse People. *Front Psychol*, 27;9:399. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00399. Erratum in: *Front Psychol*. 2018 Oct 12;9:1969. PMID: 29651262; PMCID: PMC5885980.

⁹ Sievert ED, Schweizer K, Barkmann C, Fahrenkrug S, Becker-Hebly I. (2021). Not social transition status, but peer relations and family functioning predict psychological functioning in a German clinical sample of children with Gender Dysphoria. *Clin Child Psychol Psychiatry*, 26(1):79-95. doi: 10.1177/1359104520964530. Epub 2020 Oct 20. PMID: 33081539.