

Tip Sheet:

Back to School tips for Parents, Young People and Schools

The start of the school year can be a particularly anxious time for trans, gender diverse and non-binary young people and their parents and carers. Whether it is a new school, the same school and starting a new year with a new name, uniform, pronouns and bathroom, or an unwelcoming school, there is a lot at stake.

Educational environments are places that can potentially make issues worse by not allowing young people to explore their identity, when they should be places for supporting young people in their identity.

– Trans Pathways

Young people spend a lot of their time in educational settings. Many trans, gender diverse and non-binary kids have to move schools because of a non-accommodating or accepting school, and their families will find themselves trying to get into out-of-zone schools that offer the right support for their child. Trans Pathways found that 78.9% of trans young people experienced challenges with school or higher education settings, leading to poor mental health outcomes including self-harm, suicide thoughts or suicide attempts. (Trans Pathways, 2017)

An inability to be themselves or live their authentic lives, as well as the experience of gender dysphoria, bullying and harassment will have an impact on a student's motivation and ability to do well at school. School time can also be a very traumatic experience for some trans, gender diverse and non-binary young people unable to cope with multiple

and intersecting challenges: unsupporting parents, non-binary identities, puberty or the onset of puberty, living with a disability, other pre-existing conditions, etc.

However, it is also important to know that trans, gender diverse and non-binary students that receive support at home and at school to be themselves and access the supports they need, are more likely to be able to focus on their schoolwork and performance and do well at school.

To help prepare for as safe a return to school as possible, we have put together this tip sheet with information and some recommendations that can be used to help stay on top of things or in your advocacy efforts.

What are some of the fears your child might be experiencing?

- Fear of being isolated from friends and peers, losing friendships.
- Concerns about fitting in. This might be particularly relevant for non-binary young people.
- Fear and stress around having to pass and conceal their true identity.
- Fear of bullying, of becoming a target of gossip, or of being treated differently.
- Fear of violence.
- Fears relating to physical changes linked to their biology that might exacerbate their gender dysphoria.
- Fear or shame about asking for help.
- Being worried or feeling pressured about having to educate their peers or teachers.
- Not feeling ready or being worried about being outed to the whole school.
- Concerns that teachers or staff will not respect their pronouns and/or name.
- Concerns about school records not accurately representing their identity.
- Not feeling safe to report any issues that might come up or having a responsible person at school to go to that will protect and support them.

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What are some of the fears or concerns a parent might be experiencing?

- Fear for their child's safety and wellbeing.
- Concerns and doubts about how others in the school community will react or behave towards them or their child.
- Fear of being socially isolated or rejected.
- Concerns that their child will not be given the same opportunities as others to participate in activities, for example, attending camp or PE activities.
- Fear that their child will not be able to thrive and reach their full potential.

Unsupported TGDNB young people

There are also numerous trans, gender diverse or non-binary young people facing the prospect of a new school year without the support of their parents or families. For some young people, they might need assistance with:

- Finding the language to describe their feelings.
- Having someone to talk to at school
- Opportunities to make new and supportive friends.
- Feeling safe asking for help.
- Feeling accepted and heard.
- Having access to professional and trans-friendly mental health support.
- Having access to safe accommodation or child protection services.



The following are a set of recommendations and reminders to ease the stress and pressure of the new school year. We have included a short list of resources and links to more comprehensive documents at the end of this Tip Sheet.

Recommendations for Parents:

- You are not alone in this experience. There are many other parents with similar experiences and feelings. It can be helpful to connect with [online or local family peer support groups](#) in your area.
- A supportive family means everything. Parents are advocates for their children and break down barriers for them, and this might mean learning to be assertive, persistent and not giving up.
- This time can feel overwhelming and like you have no control. Ensure you have access to peer support, a social network or seek professional mental health support if possible.
- Some parents feel they owe the school community an explanation and choose to write a letter to all the parents in the class or year level. Others might think that coming to the school to give a talk might help others understand and make them more accepting. Remember, you and your child owe no-one an explanation. Any introductions, complaints or issues from others in the school are best left to be dealt with by the school. Ultimately, the school is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of your child.
- Do not attempt to address bullying incidents outside the school context. Report all bullying, whether face to face or online, verbal, written or physical, to the school. The school will be best placed and responsible for communicating with the parents of the offending child or children.
- Encourage the school to reach out and get help from the relevant Department of Education. If in Victoria, the school can reach out to Safe Schools (this is an opt-in service only).
- Maintain an open and ongoing dialogue with your school and touch base regularly. Request a Student Support Plan. Some schools organise a meeting every term to check in. See our [Student Affirmation Plan](#) if the school needs help with this.

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Recommendations for Schools:

- Schools have a responsibility to ensure everyone's right to a safe educational setting and to access to an education. This responsibility needs to be taken seriously by all members of the school community.
- If located in Victoria, reach out to Safe Schools for training, advice and support to ensure a welcoming and accepting environment for LGBTIQ+ students. Their services are free and available to all schools in Victoria.
- If not located in Victoria, the relevant Department of Education in your State or Territory is likely to have a range of policies and tools available to support schools. We have included a small sample at the bottom of this Tip Sheet. In the absence of any policies, you might reach out to Transcend Australia to help find other sources of support that could be relevant.
- Many education systems allow name changes and school record changes without requiring a legal name change. Reach out to Safe Schools for additional information and advice or the relevant Department of Education in your State or Territory for how to do this.
- Consider offering access to trans-friendly counselling services, wellbeing officers and staff that are trained and have good knowledge of how to support trans students.
- Keep channels of communication open with families and young people and touch base regularly about how they are going, looking out for any signs of distress, discomfort, anxiety or behaviours that might suggest all is not well. A Student Support Plan could be developed in consultation with the student and supportive family.
- Do not expect the student or the family to educate your staff or school community. This is the responsibility of the school.
- Ensure adequate procedures and processes are in place to guarantee the safety of trans students, especially in bathrooms and changing rooms, ensuring that there is access to suitable private facilities while also maintaining the dignity of the trans student.
- Do not punish self-harm or challenging behaviour and adopt a curious approach to understanding what might be driving it.
- Do not put the responsibility of protecting a child on the child and the family (for example, by recommending they don't participate in PE activities, or use their preferred bathroom). It is the school's responsibility to deal with bullying behaviour and violence, and to make offenders responsible for their actions.
- When a bullying or name-calling incident takes place targeting a trans student, ensure that, in addition to dealing with the offending student/s, a talk is delivered to the whole class or school to address any violations of school policies.
- Encourage academic special considerations due to mental health to relieve stress and pressure rather than expecting a student to seek help.
- It is ok to make mistakes and to ask what name and pronouns should be used. Apologise if a mistake has been made and ensure it does not keep happening.
- Ensure implementation of trans-specific policies, processes and education that ensure equitable access and address discrimination and bullying. This might include information and policies around toilet and uniform options, arrangements at school camps, privacy protection, data collection and school records.
- Do not put in place rules about what uniform should be worn for photo days or presentation occasions, and respect students' uniform choices.

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Recommendations for young people:

- You are not alone in your experiences of attending school as a trans, gender diverse, or non-binary person. There are many others like you. It can be helpful if you're able to connect with any peer support groups at your school or in your area.
- You deserve and have a right to express your identity at school and you should be respected by others.
- You have a right to education. The school has a responsibility to cultivate a learning environment that is safe and caters to the individual needs of all students.
- You have a right to privacy. The school is responsible for ensuring a safe environment for you.
- There are services available if you are experiencing an unsupportive family. A lot of those services will be free of charge.
- You do not have a responsibility to educate others and you do not have to tolerate abuse or discrimination.
- The school community should respect your name change (if any) and pronouns.
- You have the right to reaffirm your identity or change your mind. Don't be afraid to let your parents and school know if things have changed, and if your preferences have change.

Crisis numbers

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact the following services:

In case of an emergency, please call

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LifeLine

13 11 14

Kids Helpline (ages 5-25)

1800 55 1800

QLife (LGBTIQ counselling line, 3pm to midnight everyday)

1800 184 527

Suicide call back service

1300 659 467

Useful Resources (National):

Transcend Australia

- [A Guide For Schools – Information on supporting Trans, Gender Diverse or Non-binary Students to affirm their gender](#)
- [A Guide for Parents and Carers – Supporting your Trans, Gender Diverse or Non-binary child at School](#)
- [Student Support Plan – Gender Affirmation](#)

Transhub

- [Information and Resource Platform.](#)

Transforming Families

- [Academic and community collaboration supporting parents of gender diverse children. Find research, resources and support for your family.](#)

Student Wellbeing Hub

- [Supporting a student to affirm or transition gender identity at school](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission

- [Guidelines for the inclusion of transgender and gender diverse people in sport](#)

Helpful studies within Australian context

- [Trans Pathways: Mental health and care pathways of trans and gender diverse young people in Australia.](#)
- [Evidence affirming school supports for Australian transgender and gender diverse students.](#)
- [Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia](#)

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Useful Resources (State Based):

Victoria

Safe Schools

- [Guide to making your school safe and inclusive for LGBTIQ+ students.](#)

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school.](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia.](#)

Victorian Government

- [Inclusive Language Guide.](#)

Victorian Department of Education

- [LGBTIQ+ Student Support.](#)

New South Wales

Justice Connect

- [NSW:Your legal rights at school.](#)
- [NSW:How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia.](#)

NSW Department of Education

- [Transgender students in schools.](#)

Queensland

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia](#)

Queensland Government

- [Support for young people who identify as LGBTIQ+](#)

Queensland Department of Education

- [Diversity in Queensland Schools – Information for Principals](#)

Queensland Human Rights Commission

- [Trans @ School](#)

Western Australia

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia](#)

WAAC

- [LGBTIQ+ Education and Inclusion training](#)

School Sports WA

- [Inclusion and Transgender Students](#)

South Australia

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia](#)

South Australia Department of Education

- [Gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse children and young people](#)
- [Supporting gender diverse, intersex and sexually diverse children and young people policy](#)
- [Gender diverse and intersex children and young people support procedure](#)

Australian Capital Territory

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia](#)

ACT Government

- [Safe and Inclusive Schools Initiative](#)

ACT Department of Education

- [Support for Students and Families](#)

Northern Territory

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia](#)

Tasmania

Justice Connect

- [Your legal rights at school](#)
- [How to deal with gender discrimination and transphobia](#)

Tas Department of Education

- [Supporting Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools and Colleges Guidelines](#)