

# Ambiguous Grief & Loss for parents and Carers of a Trans young person



## Information for Practitioners

When a child or young person comes out as trans, non-binary, or gender diverse, it can be a time of significant emotional adjustment for families. Some parents or carers may experience what is known as ambiguous grief — a sense of loss for the expectations, hopes, or identity they had previously imagined for their child. This is not uncommon, and with the right support, parents can move from grief to affirmation and connection.

## How to Support a Parent or Carer Experiencing Feelings of Ambiguous Grief or Loss?

### Validate and Normalise the Parent/Carer's Feelings

- Let parents/carers know that feeling a mix of emotions is a common and understandable response.
- Acknowledge that grief can co-exist with love and support for the child in their care.
- Avoid judgment; focus on listening and validating without reinforcing rejection or transphobia.

### Support Education and Connection

- Provide access to reliable, affirming resources on gender diversity.
- Where safe and appropriate, refer parents/carers to peer support groups or services for families with trans and gender diverse young people.
- Offer opportunities for parents/carers to hear lived experience stories to help shift fear or confusion.

### Focus on Maintaining Relationships

- Emphasise the importance of keeping the parent/carer–child relationship strong during times of change.
- Reinforce that continued love, presence and affirmation are protective factors for trans and gender diverse young people.
- Assist parents in understanding that their child has not “changed,” but is sharing more of who they truly are.

### Watch for Risk Factors

- Monitor for signs of rejection, disengagement, or emotional harm in the family/household dynamic.
- If grief is turning into ongoing distress or impacting care, support referrals to counselling or family therapy.
- Prioritise the safety, identity, and wellbeing of the child at all times.

## What Families or Carers Might be Feeling

While not all families, parents, carers or siblings experience feelings of grief and loss, many do. And some might feel overwhelmed and find it difficult to understand or process these feelings.

These feelings might come up shortly after finding out, or later on as milestones come and go.



## What role do case workers play?

Case workers can play an essential role in supporting a young person through providing the right support and information to the parents/families/carers.

Your role is not to convince anyone of anything, but understand where everyone is at, and how to best support them in accordance to where they are in their journey.

Options for support include:

- Understanding that different family members might feel differently about the situation.
- Supporting the whole family to understand and adapt to their child's identity in a safe and respectful way.
- Advocate for the young person's rights, including access to affirming care, education, and community.
- Model inclusive practice by using the child's affirmed name and pronouns and challenging transphobic language or behaviours.

- Connect families with culturally safe and affirming supports, including peer groups and lived experience services.
- Ensuring families/carers are not expecting the young person to educate them and they seek external support.
- Monitor for risks including rejection, emotional harm, or neglect stemming from a lack of understanding or support.
- Explain that it might take time for parents/carers to catch up with their loved one, who will be further down the journey.

## Why support matters?

Trans and gender diverse young people are at much higher risk of family rejection, which can lead to:

- Emotional or physical abuse
- Withdrawal of care or support
- Being forced to leave home or choosing to leave to escape unsafe conditions

Your early support can prevent this. Helping families move from fear to understanding may keep the young person safe, loved, and housed.

## Messaging to use with families and carers:

- It's okay to feel unsure, confused or sad. Families/carers can take time to adjust, but also need to understand their child needs them now more than ever.
- The child is still the same person — they are just helping their families/carers understand them better.
- Families/carers don't have to go through this alone — there are other parents who have been here and can help. There is support available.