

# Coping with Gender Dysphoria

## A QUICK WORKBOOK

Coping with gender dysphoria can be a significant challenge for people who are transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse (TGD). While not all TGD people will experience gender dysphoria in the same way (or at all), gender dysphoria can impact nearly all areas of a person's life.

Research indicates that gender affirmation through social, physical, or medical steps is the most effective way to alleviate gender dysphoria. But how do we cope if we can't take those steps? Or if we've transitioned and still struggle with gender dysphoria? This guide provides some suggestions to help in these areas.

Please keep in mind that this guide isn't a substitute for professional mental health support. If anything in this workbook feels like too much to handle alone, there are resources available that can help.

## Terms to know

**Gender dysphoria** is a feeling of distress caused by a disconnect between a person's sense of self and the gender and/or sex that they were assigned at birth. Gender dysphoria can be about the physical body (for instance, secondary sex characteristics such as facial hair, size of breasts). Gender dysphoria can also be about social interactions, such as being called the wrong name, gender, or pronouns.

**Gender euphoria** is a feeling of alignment and happiness at having one's gender affirmed. This can come from the outside (like being gendered correctly), or from the inside (like feeling more comfortable and confident while binding or tucking).

**Body neutrality** is a "middle ground" that allows us to acknowledge both our positive and negative feelings toward our bodies. Body neutrality encourages us to view our bodies as a tool that help us to live our lives. Loving our bodies can be tricky when we experience dysphoria, but body neutrality says that we don't have to love our bodies to respect them.



SHINE SA

Funded by  
**phn**  
COUNTRY SA  
An Australian Government Initiative

Updated May 2023

# Ways of coping with gender dysphoria

When it comes to coping with gender dysphoria not all actions are created equal. The following table outlines the evidence-based options available in terms of what is helpful to you.

Strong evidence it's helpful	Some evidence it's helpful	Evidence it's unhelpful or harmful
Affirming your gender through social steps	Practising a body neutral approach	Conversion practices*
Affirming your gender through physical and medical steps	Increasing the amount of social support around you, including peer support	Waiting for gender dysphoria to go away on its own

\*Conversion practices seek to “normalise” a person’s gender, i.e. make a person cisgender. Conversion practices may take place in religious or non-religious settings and may even represent themselves as reputable therapeutic practices.

## Affirming your gender

Research tells us that gender dysphoria can be reduced or alleviated when we take the gender affirming steps that are best for us. Gender affirmation is the process of bringing all parts of ourselves into alignment with our gender identity. The process of gender affirmation is different for everyone. What’s right for one person may not be for the next.

Gender affirmation may include but is not limited to:

### Social affirmation

- Exploring different identities, experiences, and transition pathways, and deciding what’s right for you.
- Changing your name and/or pronouns to better fit you.
- Changing aspects of your appearance (such as clothing, hairstyles or make up).
- Telling others about your identity.
- Increasing connection with the LGBTIQ+ community and other supportive people.

## Physical and medical affirmation

- Using gender affirming items (e.g. binders, breastforms, packers, tucking underwear).
- Accessing speech therapy or voice training.
- Using medication called puberty blockers (primarily for children and young people).
- Taking gender affirming hormones.
- Accessing fertility preservation.
- Having gender affirming surgeries, such as “top” and “bottom” surgeries.

## Legal affirmation

- Changing your name and/or gender marker legally.
- Updating your name and gender marker with current and former institutions (e.g. workplace, school, university, bank, Medicare, Centrelink).

Which of these steps would help alleviate your gender dysphoria? Are there any other steps you can think of? List the gender affirmation steps you think are most important for you (you can copy from the previous list if needed and add your own).

### **The gender affirming steps I would like to take are...**

Example: *Using my chosen name at school, and asking all teachers, staff, and students to call me by this name.*

<b>1</b>	
<b>2</b>	
<b>3</b>	
<b>4</b>	
<b>5</b>	

It can be tricky to know where to start with these goals. If you can, write down what you think is the first step toward each goal.

### **The first steps I'll take towards my goal/s are...**

<b>1</b>	
<b>2</b>	
<b>3</b>	
<b>4</b>	
<b>5</b>	

Not sure what the next step is? That's okay!

To learn more about gender affirmation in South Australia, see [SHINE SA's FAQs Gender Affirmation \(AKA Transition\) Pathways](#).

For people based in regional or rural SA, [Gender Connect Country SA](#) can offer peer support, information, and resources via phone and webchat. See the last page of this workbook for more information about places you can go for help.

# Practicing body neutrality

Body neutrality is an alternative to 'body positivity', which may feel like less of 'a stretch' for people experiencing gender dysphoria. Practising body neutrality won't fix gender dysphoria entirely, but it might help keep feelings of distress at bay, by shifting your thoughts and feelings towards your body.

## How to practice body neutrality

### *Acknowledge the things that your body does for you*

This will be different from person to person since all bodies (and people) are slightly different! Examples might include: "I like that my hands let me create things" or, "My body lets me take my dog for a walk" or, "My body helps get me from place to place."

### *Acknowledge the things that aren't working for you*

This could mean noting the things that cause you gender dysphoria. It could also include other aspects of your body e.g. "My back is stiff and causes me pain".

### *Notice and neutralise negative self-talk*

It's okay to acknowledge the negative feelings you might have about your body. But when this results in self-criticism or unrealistic expectations (for example, expecting your body to look like a cis person's body and then getting frustrated if it doesn't), this can affect your mood and sense of self-worth. Try to notice when negative thoughts arise and see if you can turn them into a neutral statement instead.

An example of practicing body neutrality:

#### Body negative thought

"I hate my voice. I should be a lot better at passing after practising so much."

"I hate the way I look in this shirt. This stupid binder isn't getting me flat at all."

#### Body neutral thought

"It makes me so uncomfortable when people misgender me after hearing my voice. I really want to do something about it."

"I'm not happy with the way this shirt looks. I wish that it worked better with this binder. I should change into something that makes me feel less dysphoric."

### *Treat your body with respect, even if you can't love it right now*

When we think and feel negatively about our body, it's only natural that we tend to neglect our physical needs or treat our bodies poorly. One way to counter this is to act in a way that respects our bodies, regardless of how we feel about them. After all, we only have one body! Taking care of our body now will put us in the best shape to take gender affirming steps in the future.



## How to practice body neutrality *continued*

There are questions you might ask yourself about how you treat your body, this includes:

- Do I rest when my body is sick or tired?
- Do I eat regularly?
- Do I eat a range of foods that I enjoy and that give me adequate nutrition?
- Do I take the medications my body needs, regularly and as prescribed?
- Do I avoid mood altering substances if I know they negatively affect my physical or mental health?
- Do I move my body in ways that make me feel good, such as exercising, playing an instrument, stretching when I am stiff, dancing, or walking for pleasure?
- Do I usually sleep enough at night?

(Note: what is 'enough' might vary based on your age, health status, and other individual factors)

Practising body neutrality is a long-term goal. No one can completely change their mindset towards their body overnight. If you're struggling to practise body neutrality, a mental health professional can support you with this. The [\*Trans Health SA Practitioners List\*](#) is a good place to start when looking for TGD-friendly mental health help.

## Increasing social support

Being surrounded by people who respect, support, and affirm our gender is another way to alleviate dysphoria. This can mean making some changes, such as:

- connecting with other LGBTQIA+ community members, in person or online
- prioritising relationships that make us feel safe and affirmed
- setting boundaries with, or minimising/cutting contact with people who do not respect us.

Reflect for a moment, and see if you can complete the following statements.

### Social support statements

**One way I can connect with the LGBTQIA+ communities, big or small is:**

**One person who affirms my gender and makes me feel safe and respected is:**

**One person or group of people who I would like to set boundaries with or minimise contact (if any) is:**



## Increasing social support *continued*

Sometimes we face barriers to receiving social support – in other words, there are things outside of our control that make receiving support difficult.

We might have access needs related to a disability, a physical health condition or mental illness/mental health challenges. We might not live in a safe, LGBTIQA+ affirming environment. Or we might have financial barriers that make it difficult to access some community spaces or medically affirm our gender.

Think about whether you have any barriers to accessing social support, and list any below.

### Barriers

1	
2	
3	

For each barrier, think about possible solutions.

Are there creative ways you could get around the barrier? Are there people who could help? For example, if you have physical access requirements, could you discuss this with the event organiser to make sure you'll be able to access the space? If you have anxiety about attending a group on your own, could you reach out to a facilitator to get more information? If you can't attend in-person, are there online events you could attend instead?

Consider some possible solutions/ways to make connection with social support more achievable. It can be helpful to outline these options below.

### Possible solutions/options available

1	
2	
3	

If you find that you've listed a lot of barriers, or you're struggling to think of possible solutions, it might be a good idea to enlist some outside help. We've listed a few options in this workbook, with links to further information.

# Where to get more information and support

## Gender Connect Country SA

*Gender Connect Country SA* provides telephone and webchat-based peer support to TGD people living in country SA. Peer support workers are available during the evening, Monday through Thursday, 6 pm to 8 pm.

Learn more: [www.shinesa.org.au/gender-connect](http://www.shinesa.org.au/gender-connect)

## LGBTIQA+ Specialist Mental Health Service

Thorne Harbour Health's LGBTIQA+ Specialist Mental Health Service in Adelaide is a service for LGBTIQA+ community members 16 years and over who live within the Adelaide metropolitan area and are experiencing mental illness and psychological distress. Here, service users can access gender affirming mental health services including peer support, brief intervention, clinical care coordination, counselling and structured psychological therapies free of charge.

Learn more: <https://thorneharbour.org/south-australia/mental-health-service/>

## Trans Health SA

*Trans Health SA* is an online information hub for the TGD community in South Australia, as well as for health professionals and loved ones. The Trans Health SA Practitioner's List is a resource that lists the details of health professionals known to the community. This list can be a great starting point to accessing gender affirming medical care.

Learn more: [www.transhealthsa.com](http://www.transhealthsa.com)

## Trans Hub

*Trans Hub* is an information hub by ACON, a community organisation in New South Wales. Trans Hub contains an array of information for TGD people, the people who love us, and the professionals who work alongside us.

Learn more: [www.transhub.org.au](http://www.transhub.org.au)

## QLife

*QLife* is a telephone and web-based peer support service for LGBTQIA+ people in Australia. Qlife is available from 3pm to midnight every day.

Learn more: [www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)





Updated May 2023

**SHINE**<sub>SA</sub>

Funded by

**phn**  
COUNTRY SA

An Australian Government Initiative

