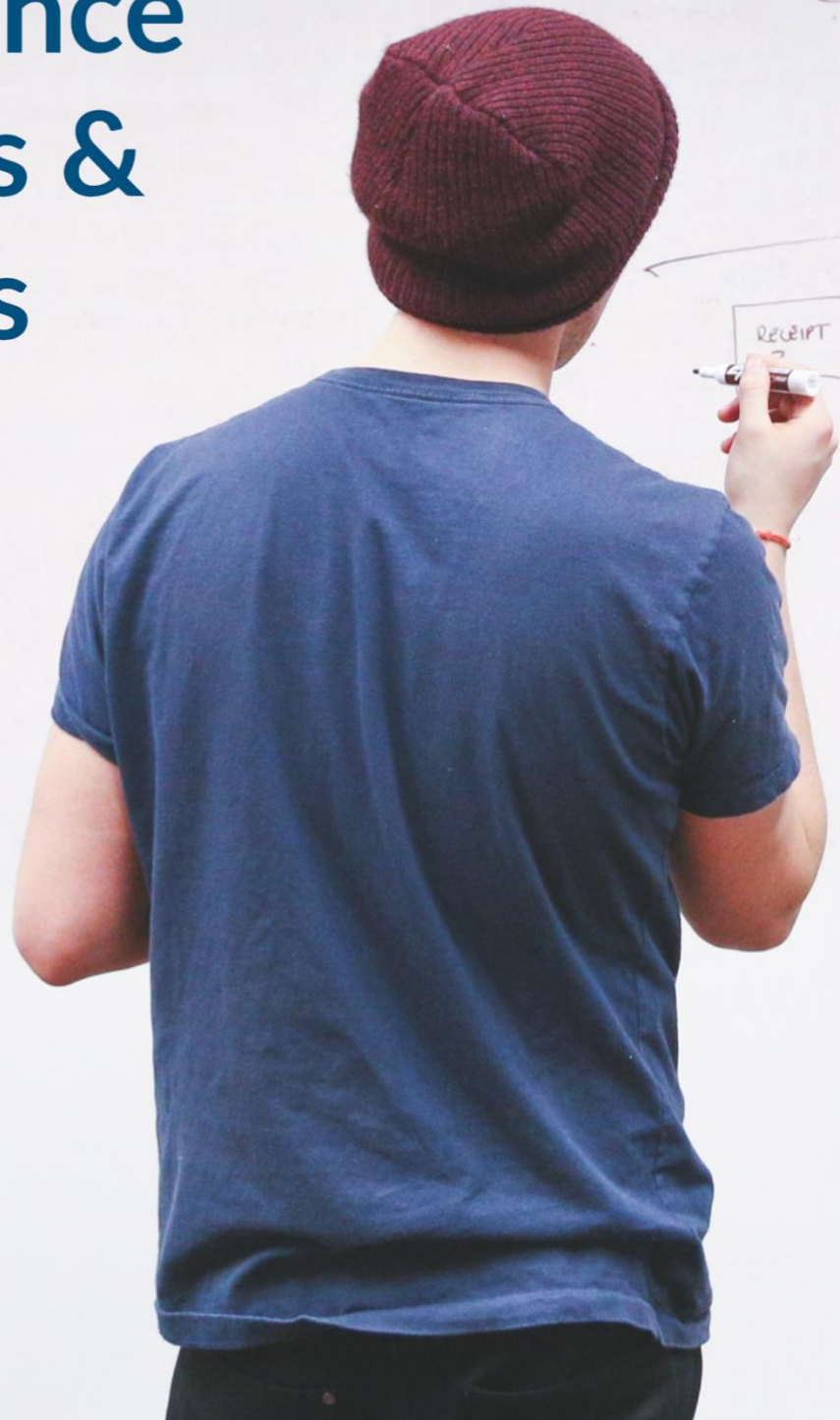




Brief Guidance for Colleges & Universities



CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Colleges and universities welcome many gender non-conforming students and students with different sexual orientations. This provides a wonderful opportunity to celebrate diversity and uniqueness, to empower young people to transcend stereotypes, and to encourage everyone to be themselves.

MAXIMIZING OPTIONS

We want to help colleges and universities as they equip young adults with skills and knowledge, preparing them for successful and fulfilling lives. We believe that young adults should embrace their autonomy. We also believe that they should leave as many options open as possible, rather than closing off potential pathways.

ABOUT THIS GUIDANCE

Our brief guidance outlines the various ways your college or university can help create an authentically supportive atmosphere for everyone. We want to assist in ensuring that no individual's rights impinge upon the rights of others. We also offer background on the highest quality scientific literature, so that the policies you adopt are grounded in good research.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Sexual orientation refers to whether a person is romantically or sexually attracted to people of the same or the opposite biological sex. Sexual orientation describes how you feel about other people; for example whether you are heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual – or even asexual.

Gender identity and gender expression refer to whether people feel that their birth sex aligns with stereotypically masculine or feminine traits and behaviors, and how they wish to express themselves and be seen in society. Gender identity describes how you feel about yourself – for example, whether you identify as transgender or non-binary.

Not everyone feels they have a gender identity, but we all seem to have a sexual orientation. Most of us discover this during adolescence, and it usually endures for the rest of our lives. It is important to note that some people have described how [they utilized their gender identity as a form of sexual repression](#), due to unacknowledged feelings of internalized homophobia.

SEX AND GENDER

Sex relates to biology and the two sexes: male and female. We all have chromosomes (XY for males and XX for females*) within [almost every cell of our bodies and our brains](#), determining our physical development along male or female pathways.

*Although all people are born either male or female, some people have different chromosome combinations which, on very rare occasions, can make it more challenging to ascertain which sex they are at birth. People who are born with these differences are described under the umbrella term of Differences of Sexual Development (DSDs), previously known as "intersex". There are over 40 unique and rare medical conditions that can impact sex development in males and females. [Find out more.](#)

Sex differences are important, and are acknowledged within society, whether in single-sex toilets, changing-rooms and accommodation, or most sports. In recent years, many schools, colleges and universities have moved away from single-sex spaces – [with mixed results](#).

This is an ongoing debate, and we recommend that colleges and universities provide three spaces – male, female and single-occupancy – until this matter has been resolved.

Gender relates to culturally influenced, masculine and feminine societal expectations of behavior, aptitudes and appearance based upon sex.

Gender can also influence the assumptions we make about the academic strengths that young men and young women will have, the disciplines and topics which they might prefer to study, and the recreational activities they might prefer.

Some people wish to rid themselves of the shackles of gender identity, while others seek to medicalize their gender identity. This is a process of identity formation that does not need substantial input from colleges or universities. Identity formation is a personal journey that thrives when each individual is free to examine different aspects of their sense of self, without concretizing any aspect of this, and without creating a premature landing place.

THE TRANS UMBRELLA AND GENDER DYSPHORIA

Many people who feel that their gender does not align with their sex identify as transgender or non-binary. Some people who identify as transgender or non-binary experience “[gender dysphoria](#),” a severe type of distress or impairment in functioning due to a feeling of misalignment between gender and sex.

There is no equivalent condition to gender dysphoria experienced in terms of sexual orientation. For example, there is no equivalent condition experience by people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Historical evidence shows that when gender dysphoria presents in childhood, most cases resolve naturally, with [61%-98% of children reidentifying with their biological sex](#) during puberty. No studies to date have evaluated the natural course and rate of gender dysphoria resolution among the new cohort of adolescents presenting with adolescent-onset gender dysphoria.

While it was historically true that most people who presented with gender dysphoria were natal males – either at a very young age or in middle-age – [this pattern has reversed in recent years](#). However, over the last decade, a new – and predominantly female – cohort has started presenting at clinics with gender dysphoria.

Although [there has been a roughly 2000% rise among adolescents suddenly presenting with gender dysphoria](#), this is a new phenomenon; as such, no studies to date have evaluated the natural course and rate of gender dysphoria resolution among this new cohort of adolescents. Some people refer to adolescents and young people with sudden-onset adolescent gender dysphoria as experiencing “Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria” (also known as ROGD). This term, which is not a clinical diagnosis, describes a phenomenon that was first studied by [Dr Lisa Littman](#) and described by [Lisa Marchiano](#). While the term is not universally accepted, the research upon which it is based [has stood the test of substantial academic scrutiny](#).

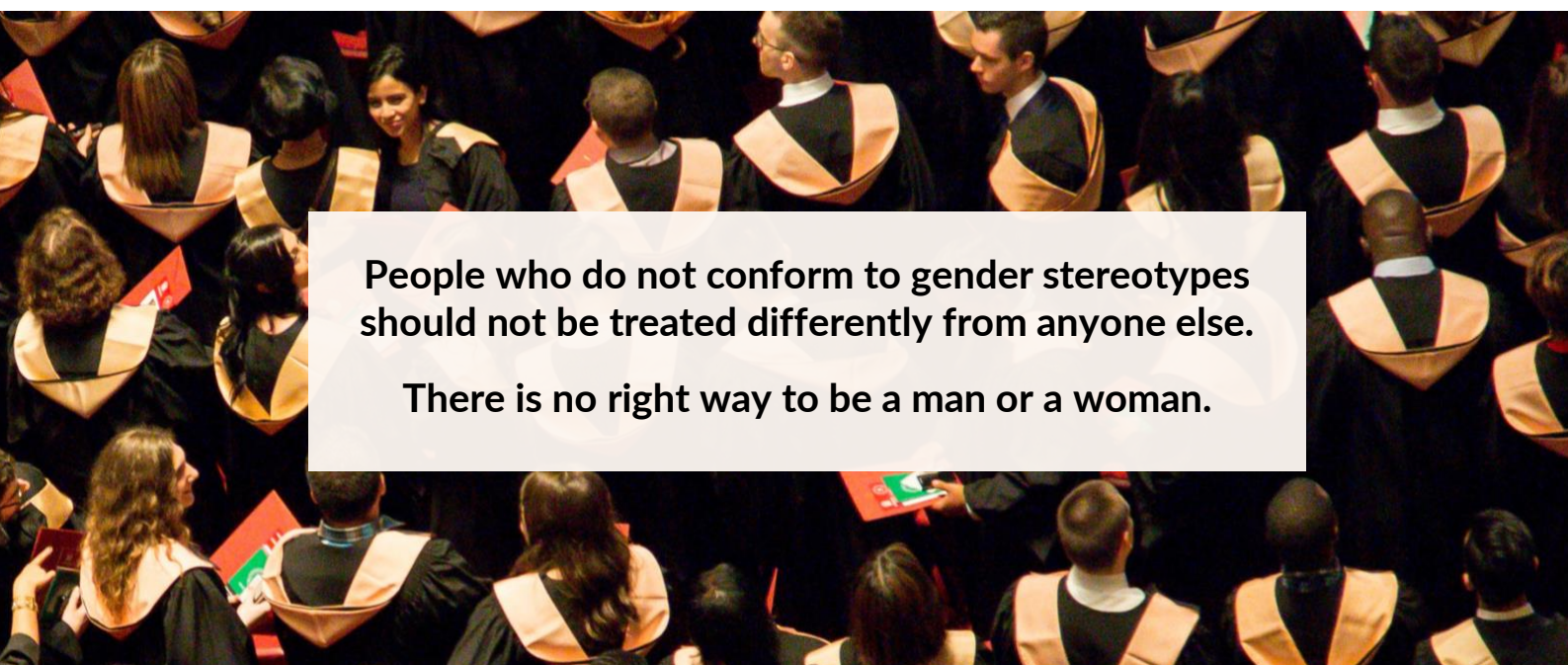
It is notable that the majority of today’s adolescents who have gender dysphoria have also been diagnosed with [Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\)](#), ADHD, or other [mental health diagnoses](#). Childhood trauma also occurs at higher rates among these adolescents and young people. This is a significantly under-researched and fast-growing phenomenon, which is why we encourage a cautious and compassionate approach.

AFFIRMATION AND SOCIAL TRANSITION

Many transgender organizations advise colleges and universities to “affirm” students’ gender identities by using the names and pronouns students request, and letting students use the bathroom that matches their gender identity. This is known as social transition.

Influencing a student’s gender identity can verge on positive encouragement, intervening during a critical period to push a young adult in one direction at the expense of another. Identity formation is a personal process and [an important psychosocial stage](#) of development for young people between the ages of 12 and 25.

In this formative period, it is not the function of colleges or universities to concretize an identity that is in transition — particularly not if this results in a young person being denied the opportunity to explore and develop different aspects of their sexual self, unimpeded by medical intervention. We recommend that colleges and universities foster a tolerant and caring approach with all students and ensure that everyone feels accepted, no matter what their beliefs.



People who do not conform to gender stereotypes should not be treated differently from anyone else.

There is no right way to be a man or a woman.

AFFIRMATION AND THERAPY

In the last five years, many mental health professionals who work on campuses have suddenly started to follow the gender identity affirmative model. This model is a new approach, and is not substantiated by any evidence to show that it has a long-term positive impact on a young person. We have serious concerns about [affirmation-only therapy](#), which we believe forecloses other options for the therapeutic client.

While it is important to affirm the depth of the young person’s feelings, and affirm their feelings and beliefs, affirmation can stray into confirmation unless the therapist retains [the ability to explore the whole picture](#). We recommend that therapists use more conventional approaches to therapy, including an exploratory approach that takes a depth-perspective of the young person’s feelings.

THErapy IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

When it comes to the provision of therapeutic services on campus, we do not think it is helpful to gloss over significant factors which may be causing an individual to question their gender identity. We believe that gender exploratory therapy is a less invasive and more compassionate approach to the therapeutic process.

We have particular concerns that counselors and psychotherapists operating in college and university settings may be unaware that the students in their care are in a formative stage of identity development. While it may be tempting to fall back on the defense that the student is a legal adult, young people under 25 are not well-placed to make medical decisions with which they will have to live for the rest of their lives. We advise colleges and universities to be mindful of this in their offer to students struggling with these, and any, mental health challenges.

MEDICAL TRANSITION

Theoretically, there are three ways to approach difficulties in relation to gender:

- The individual's sense of gender can become aligned to their biological body;
- The individual's body can be altered to align with their sense of gender;
- The individual's distress can be helped with a range of different approaches.

Given the heavy medical burden associated with medical transition, we believe that the least-invasive-first approach is most beneficial for the individual. For that reason, [we encourage psychotherapy and other psychosocial supports](#) for anybody experiencing gender-related distress.

The role of colleges and universities is to provide an education, to act as repositories and generators of knowledge, to wield their significant social and cultural influence responsibly, and to produce graduates who have benefitted from education and may one day become leaders in society.

Research institutions also provide new knowledge to help society meet developing challenges. To date, there is a significant lack of long-term evidence on medical transition of adolescents and young people. With this in mind, we recommend that colleges and universities add to the scant research in this field, rather than presuming that there is only one way to treat gender dysphoria.

SUICIDE

Every suicide is a terrible tragedy.

Young people suffering from gender dysphoria are an extremely vulnerable group deserving of support. Although high suicide rates among people who identify as transgender are frequently mentioned, the [data](#) show that suicidality rate among young people referred for gender issues is about the same as those referred for other mental health difficulties. In other words, [suicide statistics are misused](#).

[There is currently no evidence](#) showing that social or medical transition reduces the risk of suicide among young people with gender dysphoria.

Young people are particularly susceptible to suicide contagion; college and university staff should therefore avoid any speculation about direct links to a single cause or "trigger" for a suicide. Speaking responsibly about suicide is an acquired skill. Staff worried about this can complete suicide skills programs to ensure that they are well-equipped to deal appropriately with this complex matter.

SPORTS

It has taken many decades of progress and activism to ensure that sporting contests are representative, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to compete without hindrance. Whether it is the creation of the Paralympic Games, or the many strides taken by women to achieve parity of place in the sporting arena, these hard-won gains should not be dismissed lightly.

While we recognize that gender issues can be sharply felt by young people whose identity is at odds with their natal sex, we believe it is paramount that colleges and universities not compromise the rights of the wider student community to participate in sporting activities by placing natal males in female contests.

Whether it is in the shape of the pelvis, the length of the bones, differences in muscle development or lung capacity, there are [critical distinctions](#) between male and female bodies which go beyond hormones – and often pre-date pubertal changes. Providing a “third space” for transgender students can help to create an arena in which they may compete fairly without impinging upon women’s rights.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Recent controversies seem to demonstrate that the weight of public opinion falls firmly behind a desire to protect women’s sports. With this in mind, we strongly advise colleges and universities to do all they can to give their female students the right to participate – and to win – fairly.

It can be hugely demoralizing to female students to enter a contest without the prospect of victory being available to them. This is something which is not lost on the average member of the public. The [recent events at the University of Pennsylvania](#) have demonstrated beyond any doubt that, notwithstanding any sympathies which people understandably extend to those suffering with gender dysphoria, most people do not see sports as an appropriate arena in which to deconstruct the sex binary. The category of women’s sport was not created as a therapeutic option for males with gender dysphoria; the absence of transmen seeking to compete against natal males only serves to demonstrate the clear asymmetry between the two biological sexes.

As such, we counsel all colleges and universities not to risk their public reputations by erasing single-sex sporting categories.



THE NEEDS OF DETRANSITIONERS

Until relatively recently, it was vanishingly rare for someone to medically transition and then to decide to reverse the process (to detransition), re-establishing themselves in their biological sex. However, in the last five years, there have been sharp rises in the number of people detransitioning.

We do not know the scale of this phenomenon, not least because [most detransitioners decide not to inform the gender clinic which initially provided their treatment](#). Recent peer-reviewed studies on detransition (such as [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) show that other unexplored issues can motivate a person to transition. There are currently over 24,000 members on [one Reddit community for detransitioners](#), and the numbers continue to rise.

We recommend that colleges and universities create welcoming spaces for people who have detransitioned and remain sensitive to the way these people have been damaged by medical and psychological interventions related to gender – interventions which they have come to regret.

We also recommend that colleges and universities provide literature and other resources relating to the needs of detransitioners as part of their wider offer to students, ensuring that detransitioners are not excluded from the college community.

[Useful resources for detransitioners are already available in both digital and printed formats](#), and we encourage you to make these available where possible.

Take a wider look at gender, with the **Gender: A Wider Lens** podcast.

Click **here** to listen.



WHAT WE RECOMMEND

These recommendations list the steps we believe colleges and universities can take to ensure that they are dealing with issues of gender sensitively and equitably, without putting staff or students at undue risk.

It is important to note that this is a quickly developing area, and the suggestions below do not constitute a “code of conduct”. College and university leaders must assure themselves that they can back up their policies with robust logic, and be sure that policies are **compliant with all local laws**.

- In all cases, we recommend that colleges and universities **develop a sex and gender policy**, so as not to end up creating policy “on the fly”; that colleges and universities carry out rigorous **risk assessments** relating to all sex and gender policies; and that colleges and universities also carry out **impact assessments** to ensure that all members of the community are considered when policies are being drafted.
- We recommend an approach that seeks to avoid political or ideological positions, and instead focuses on the many psychological ways educators may positively use their unique skills when working with individuals with gender-related distress.
- It is recommended that colleges and universities provide a single-occupancy option for sports activities, toilets, changing rooms, and sleeping arrangements, while preserving single-sex spaces in each situation.
- College and university authorities need to maintain professional records according to the legal requirements in their jurisdiction. This helps to avoid confusion in correspondence and communications. Names might be changed – students have used alternative names for generations – but this does not mean that educators are forced to accept these name changes. This is a matter to be resolved between students and educators.
- Medical transition is a powerful therapeutic intervention with far-reaching consequences and it should not be undertaken without a significant level of clinical supervision. While we recognize that colleges and universities may already find it challenging to meet their students’ mental health needs, we believe it is vital that they are in a position to provide accurate information and quality therapeutic support in this matter. Equally, teaching staff must be aware that they are not clinically qualified to influence such decisions.
- The language and terminology involved in gender-related issues is constantly changing, which may lead people to the mistaken belief that they do not understand the issues at hand. It is helpful to take some time to learn the language, terminology and acronyms, so these do not become superficial obstacles to the provision of appropriate support.
- Colleges and universities should be aware that gender dysphoria is statistically likely to occur with **comorbidities**, such as ASD, ADHD, anxiety and other conditions. They should ensure that they are providing all the resources that young adults need to cope with these complex circumstances. They should also be mindful that young adults who are questioning their gender may well benefit from assistance which is not gender-related, and in particular, from holistic psychotherapy which explores the many factors which may be affecting them.
- Colleges and universities should provide suicide skills training so that concerned individuals do not inadvertently increase the risk of suicide.
- Colleges and universities should provide resources and support for detransitioners and promote public awareness of this fast-growing phenomenon to ensure that their establishments are welcoming to everyone. They should ensure that literature for detransitioners is publicly available alongside other materials relating to gender and sexuality.
- The brain does not fully mature until the age of 25, and it is important not to prematurely concretize an identity that is still developing. As teenagers experiencing gender dysphoria mature into adulthood, the majority of them might be able to one day accept and happily live with their biological sex, adult body and sexual orientation. This is why we advocate for a cautious, least-invasive-first approach that warmly supports identity formation and gender exploration.

Genspect offers a range of training programmes for colleges and universities, covering topics such as inclusivity, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental health, scientific research, and how to provide practical solutions to conflict.

Our trainings mix group exercises and individual reflections with engaging contributions from the presenters, complemented by downloadable digital resources that empower participants to reflect on the challenges they face in today's climate.

Our team can also provide you with digital materials in advance of delivery, giving you an opportunity to reflect on the topics we cover and participate more actively in the sessions. We are also happy to make resources available after each training event.

...an engaging, entertaining, informative and knowledgeable presenter. She was very open about there being opposing views to hers and facilitated an open undefended discussion amongst the group.

Room for questions; not just reading from slides... knew her subject matter and was an experienced presenter.

I am leaving with many new ideas and food for thought around ways in which I can further my knowledge in this interesting topic!



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at our sister site,
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FURTHER READING

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