



This booklet was created by Student Health Services, Personal Counselling and the Office of Human Rights and Equity Services. We would like to acknowledge resource sharing by the Vancouver Coastal Health – Transgender Health Program, on which this resource is based.



## Trans Info

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A resource for students, staff and faculty who identify as trans, gender variant and/or questioning, and their allies

## St. Catharines and Niagara Region

- **Rainbow Youth Niagara - Niagara Pride Support Services**

905-380-4576

[www.niagarapride.com](http://www.niagarapride.com)

- **Transgendered of Niagara**

905-359-4486

[www.transgenderedofniagara.com](http://www.transgenderedofniagara.com)

- includes referrals to local health care and counselling professionals

- **Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line**

Confidential and toll free peer-support

1-800-268-9688 (Sunday to Friday, 4:00 pm-9:30 pm)

[www.youthline.ca](http://www.youthline.ca)

- **TransParent Canada**

[www.transparentcanada.ca](http://www.transparentcanada.ca)

[trans-parent@hotmail.com](mailto:trans-parent@hotmail.com) or 905-401-1044

- **OUTniagara**

905-688-3992

[www.outniagara.ca](http://www.outniagara.ca)

- **PFLAG- St. Catharines Chapter**

905-934-9933 or 905-937-0202

[www.pflagcanada.ca/stcatharines.html](http://www.pflagcanada.ca/stcatharines.html)

- **PFLAG- Niagara Falls Chapter**

905-658-1832

[www.pflagcanada.ca/niagara.html](http://www.pflagcanada.ca/niagara.html)

## Toronto

- **Sherbourne Health Centre**

333 Sherbourne Street, Toronto

416-324-4180

[info@sherbourne.on.ca](mailto:info@sherbourne.on.ca) [www.sherbourne.on.ca](http://www.sherbourne.on.ca)

- **The 519 Church Street Community Centre**

519 Church Street, Toronto

416-392-6874

[info@the519.org](mailto:info@the519.org) [www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org)

This booklet is for students, staff and faculty who want information about being trans, gender variant, gender transition, coming out as trans, or finding resources and getting support. We hope that it will be a resource that can be used by people who identify as trans, gender variant, and/or questioning as well as loved ones (sometimes called SOFFAs – significant others, friends, family, and allies).

## What does “trans” mean?

*Trans* is an abbreviation of *transgender*. People who identify as trans have a way of expressing themselves, a way of describing their gender, or an identity (knowing who you are) that doesn't fit society's rules about women and men. This can include:

- People who identify as having more than one gender
- People who don't identify with any gender labels
- People who identify as gender variant
- People whose gender identity doesn't match their body (e.g., someone with a male body who identifies as a girl)
- People who have changed their bodies to better match their gender identity (e.g., someone born female who uses hormones/surgery to make their body look more masculine)
- Men who like to wear women's clothes, and women who like to wear men's clothes
- Anyone else who feels the word “trans” fits for them

Being trans is a normal part of human diversity, and people who identify as trans have always existed. They can be found in myths, legends, and oral and written histories on every continent. In some cultures and times, they were seen as sacred and special while in others, they have been hated or feared. Being trans is considered normal and is no big deal in some cultures.

Learning about the histories of people who identify as trans can be helpful in accepting and honouring yourself or someone you love who is trans. If you want to learn more, there are lots of websites and books that can help.

## How do I know if I'm trans?

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Some people say they always knew they were trans. For other people it's more of a gradual process, having feelings that come and go over time or that get increasingly strong as they get older. Some people suddenly realize they are trans when they meet another person who identifies as trans, see a person identifying as trans on TV, or read about trans issues. Lots of people who identify as trans describe it as just being themselves and not knowing there was a word for it.

People who identify as trans describe starting to question their gender or thinking they might be trans because they:

- Have an internal sense of being a gender that was different than the one in which they were raised, a mix of genders, gender-neutral, or genderless
- Feel a sense of sameness, closeness, or belonging when meeting, seeing or reading about a person who identifies as trans
- Feel an affinity for a trans role from their cultural community (e.g., Fa'afine, Hijra, Mahu, Sx'int)
- Feel uncomfortable living as a girl/woman or boy/man, being referred to as male/female, or doing gender-specific things (e.g., using the women's washroom)
- Like wearing the clothes of the "other" gender
- Dislike body parts that are often associated with gender (e.g., breasts, vagina, facial hair, penis), or dream/fantasize about their body being that of the "other" sex

**If your frustration is building up to the point where you feel hopeless, suicidal, or need to use drugs/alcohol to cope with the stress, talk to a health professional about ways to get more support. Hurting yourself won't speed up your transition.**

## Resources to assist you

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### At Brock University

- **Student Health Services**

905-688-5550 ext. 3243

[www.brocku.ca/healthservices](http://www.brocku.ca/healthservices)

- **Personal Counselling Services**

905-688-5550 ext. 4750

[www.brocku.ca/sdc/counselling](http://www.brocku.ca/sdc/counselling)

- **Human Resources**

905-688-5550 ext. 3274

[www.brocku.ca/hr](http://www.brocku.ca/hr)

- **Employee and Family Assistance Program**

Wilson Banwell Human Solutions

1-800-663-1142

[www.humansolutions.ca](http://www.humansolutions.ca)

- **Office of Human Rights and Equity Services**

905-688-5550 ext. 5657

[www.brocku.ca/humanrights](http://www.brocku.ca/humanrights)

- **Brock Pride**

brockpride@hotmail.com

[www.busu.net/pride](http://www.busu.net/pride)

- **Brock's Positive Space Campaign**

Students, staff and faculty designated with the Positive Space postcard or button can be approached for support

[www.brocku.ca/positivespace](http://www.brocku.ca/positivespace)

### Legal Name Change:

If you are from Ontario or have lived here for 12 months, changing your name legally is relatively simple – please see:

[www.changeofname.serviceontario.ca](http://www.changeofname.serviceontario.ca)

etc. Similarly, you can also apply to graduate with your preferred name listed on your degree/diploma. Staff and faculty should contact Marg Skeoch (ext. 4266) in Human Resources regarding use of preferred name on identification cards and other correspondence.

- Students have the right to hand in essays, exams, etc. labeled with their chosen name – this will be simpler and create less confusion for faculty and teaching assistants if you have changed to your preferred name in the university information systems, via the Registrar's Office, as noted above. You will generally need to show your student identification card during exams and the name on your exam will need to match the card.
- You have the right to use the washroom labelled with the gender by which you self identify. However, you will need to assess how safe and/or comfortable you feel in using washroom facilities – for some people, using an accessible washroom labelled for both genders feels safer and more comfortable.
- Students have the right to receive quality medical and emotional care by sensitive, competent professionals.

#### **Stuff we can't change (yet)**

- The sex (male or female) designation associated with your student number and file within the Registrar's Office information system – this cannot be changed due to reporting requirements of the provincial ministry. However, this designation does not appear on your student identification card, class lists, etc.
- Staff and faculty information relating to payroll and income tax must match the name that is shown on your Social Insurance Card. If you have legally changed your name, you will need to ensure that you have also updated this name change to your SIN card.
- Labelling of medical forms, blood samples, etc. at Student Health Services – name and gender must match your health card.

#### **If I look or act more feminine/masculine than other girls/boys, am I trans or gender variant?**

Being trans or gender variant isn't about whether other people think you look or act masculine or feminine – being trans is about how you feel about yourself. Some masculine women and feminine men identify as trans, and some don't.

#### **How do I know if I'm trans, and not lesbian/gay/bisexual?**

Being trans or gender variant is about your gender (how you feel about and express yourself as a man, woman, bi-gender person, androgynous person, etc.). Being lesbian/gay/bisexual is about to whom you are sexually attracted.

Some people who identify as trans also identify as heterosexual, while others identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. People who feel that the categories of straight, lesbian/gay, and bisexual are too limiting may describe their sexuality in other ways.

#### **If there's nothing wrong with being trans, why do I feel messed up?**

In dominant North American society, assumptions and expectations about gender start as soon as you are born. Some people feel confused, upset or threatened by the existence of people who identify as trans (transphobic) because transgenderism challenges societal rules and beliefs about gender, or because they assume people identifying as trans are gay/lesbian (homophobic). People who identify as trans can internalize these negative messages and feel embarrassed or guilty about being trans.

For some people there is social dysphoria – a mismatch between how you feel about yourself and how other people perceive you (e.g., people thinking you're a boy even though you feel like a girl).

**A trans-friendly health professional can help if you are:**

- So bothered by gender issues that you are finding it hard to relate to other people or go out in public
- Ashamed, embarrassed, guilty, worried, overwhelmed, stressed out, or depressed about gender issues
- Thinking about cross-dressing or gender issues so much that you're having difficulty focusing on anything else
- Uncomfortable about having male or female body parts, strongly wishing you had a different body, or otherwise feeling that your body doesn't match who you are inside

For other people, there is physical dysphoria – feeling that you are in the wrong body because your body doesn't match how you feel inside (e.g., being uncomfortable with having breasts and getting your period because you feel like a boy and want to have a boy's body).

There are a variety of ways people deal with having gender dysphoria. For some people it's mild and not a big deal. For other people the discomfort is so intense that changing gender role/appearance or the body is the only option.

If gender dysphoria is stressing you out or is getting worse, a trans-friendly health professional can help you sort out what is happening, and help you consider your options.

**What if I'm not sure if I'm trans or not sure what I want to do about it?**

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Having doubts and questions is a normal part of figuring out who you are and how you want to express yourself. It's important that people questioning their gender identity feel okay with taking as much time as they need to explore options, without any pressure to identify or live in any particular way. The only "right answer" for what you need and who you are comes from what feels right within

**How do I deal with the rest of the world and deal with being trans or gender variant?**

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The good news is that despite all the difficulties, many people who identify as trans or gender variant are happy and healthy. The following are things that these people have described as helping to cope with the stress of living in a transphobic society:

- Having a sense of humour, keeping perspective that being trans isn't the end of the world
- Making time to focus on other parts of who you are
- Activism – using personal experience to try to change things
- Physically blowing off steam through exercise – weights, running, etc.
- Having a creative outlet: art, writing, music, 'zine-making, etc.
- Knowing other people who identify as trans (e.g., through the internet, peer support)
- Having supportive friends
- Having a supportive cultural/faith community
- Spending time in nature; looking after animals/having pets
- Peer counselling or professional counseling

**Your rights at Brock University**

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- Every student, staff member, and faculty member at Brock has the right to be treated with dignity and respect by fellow students, faculty and staff. If you face harassment, discrimination or bullying, you are encouraged to contact the Office of Human Rights and Equity Services for assistance.
- You have the right to be called by whatever name and pronoun you wish – regardless of whether you have legally changed your name. In order for students to have their preferred name appear on your student identification card, class lists, etc., they need to contact Thomas Good (ext. 4622) or Barb Davis (ext. 3566) in the Registrar's Office to make this request. They can also ensure that your 'birth' name is suppressed within the University's information systems so that it won't also appear on class lists,

trans means, don't understand it, and find it confusing and threatening.

As part of planning, it's helpful to think about information and resources you can use to help people understand your specific circumstances. At first, shock and surprise make it difficult to take in information, so it's helpful to just let the person know that the information is there if they want it (without pushing it on them). Counselling can be helpful for people who are having a hard time accepting that you are trans, as can support groups. Advocates can help educate teachers or other professionals in your life who are not understanding about trans issues. Resources are listed at the end of this booklet.

## Gender transition

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*Gender transition* is an option for people who are dysphoric or are uncomfortable with the difference between internal feeling and outward expression. Gender transition is a change in the way you live in your day-to-day life – from female-to-male (FTM), male-to-female (MTF), single gender to bi-gender, gendered-to-androgynous, etc. Please see additional pamphlets at Student Health Services for more detailed information on a variety of health issues related to gender transition.

Transition involves changes in some or all of the aspects of life that are gendered:

- Physical appearance: hair, clothes, jewelry, makeup, body (perhaps via hormones and/or surgery)
- Behaviour: posture, gestures, language, voice
- Identification: name, gender pronoun

Not all people who identify as trans transition. Some are happy with having trans issues be a part of their private life and don't feel the need to change their day-to-day life. Other people may want to transition but don't for reasons relating to health, money, family, community, culture, or spirituality. Some people transition slowly and gradually, while others do it as quickly as possible.

yourself. Everyone's path is different in coming to that "right answer". Options include:

- Finding out more about transgenderism: internet, books, movies, trans community
- Meeting one on one with a peer counsellor
- Being part of a trans peer-support group
- Talking with a trans-friendly professional counsellor
- Writing about trans feelings and questions (e.g., in a journal)

For many people, trying out changes to see what they feel like is a big part of the process. Even if you have a very clear idea of what you want to do, trying it out in real life might be very different than what you expected it to feel like – it might feel absolutely right, or you might feel it's not the right choice at this point in your life.

Some changes can be tried on your own, without telling other people. For example:

- Thinking of yourself as trans, gender variant, a boy/man, a girl/woman, androgynous, bi-gender, etc.
- Trying out a different name or a different pronoun (he/him, she/her, or a gender-neutral pronoun like sie/hir) when you refer to yourself in a diary or journal, or online
- Wearing girls'/boys' underwear
- Changing your clothes, hair, or makeup in private
- Shaving off your facial/body hair, or gluing on facial hair in private
- Wearing breast forms (prosthetic breasts) or prosthetic testicles/penis
- Binding your breasts or tucking your penis/testicles (get someone with experience to show you how to do this safely)

Other changes involve letting other people know you are trans. For example:

- Coming out: telling friends, family members, and other people in your life that you're trans
- Asking people to call you by a different name or use a different gender pronoun
- Changing your appearance in public (e.g., going out cross-dressed)

- Getting help from a speech professional to make your voice more feminine/masculine
- Having surgery to make your body look and feel more feminine/masculine

## Coming out

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“Coming out” refers to a process of getting comfortable with your own identity and telling other people in your life about it.

Regardless of who else you come out to, coming out to yourself – acknowledging and accepting who you are – is a milestone worth celebrating.

In some situations there is no choice about coming out: there is something about you that doesn’t fit how women or men are expected to look, act, or dress, or someone in your life finds out by reading your diary or finding you cross-dressed. Many people talk about learning to hide any evidence of being trans because they received messages early in life that being trans was weird, freakish, deviant, or otherwise not OK. Having to hide creates a lot of internal pressure, both from keeping the secret and not being able to fully express yourself to the people around you. Coming out is one way to deal with this pressure. Other people deal with it by coming out in some parts of their life and not others, or by talking with friends, other people who identify as trans, or professional counsellors.

Some people consider being trans or gender variant a private matter and don’t tell others. Others find it important to come out to people who they are close to, or to be out as trans in day-to-day life. ***When making decisions about coming out, it’s important to remember***

***that you are under no obligation to tell anyone that you are trans.***

Coming out is something you do for yourself. It’s OK not to be out to other people. What matters is that you are OK with the decision you have made. It is important to note, however, that in all cases failing to inform your doctor or health professional about any medications and/or supplements you are taking may put your health at risk – particularly if you are experimenting with hormone therapy or other aspects of transitioning. In order to ensure you remain

healthy, you should consider coming out to your health professional in order to understand and reduce potential health risks.

## Planning how to come out

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If you have kept trans issues secret, coming out is a big step. Friends and family members typically go through stages of adjustment, involving shock, disbelief, fear, anger and betrayal, sadness, and eventually acceptance and celebration (although some people are never accepting).

Deciding who to come out to, what to tell them, and when to tell them is a personal decision that only you can make. You may want to ask yourself:

- Would I be safe if this person knew this about me being trans? What are the possible consequences if they are angry or upset? (e.g., Is there a risk of getting kicked out of the house, or of violence?)
- How important is it to me that this person knows about my being trans?
- What do I want them to know, and how will I tell them?
- If this person had a negative reaction to my coming out, could it affect my ability to go to school or to keep my job?
- How would it be for me if they are not supportive when I come out? Do I feel strong enough in my own identity and the rest of my support system that I would be okay?
- Where could I go for emergency help if I needed it? Where could I go for support?

Many individuals start by telling people they think will respond reasonably well and be understanding. Starting with the people who you think will be accepting helps you build up support before you tell the people who might have a harder time with it.

Coming out as trans or gender variant is similar in some ways to coming out as lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB), but the processes aren’t exactly the same. Even though heterosexuals aren’t always supportive of LGB people, they generally recognize and understand what it means to be LGB. In contrast, many people don’t know what