Gender-affirming care is a supportive form of healthcare. It consists of an array of services that may include medical, surgical, mental health, and non-medical services for transgender and nonbinary people.

For transgender and nonbinary children and adolescents, early gender-affirming care is crucial to overall health and well-being as it allows the child or adolescent to focus on social transitions and can increase their confidence while navigating the healthcare system.

Research demonstrates that gender-affirming care improves the mental health and overall well-being of gender diverse children and adolescents.1 Because gender-affirming care encompasses many facets of healthcare needs and support, it has been shown to increase positive outcomes for transgender and nonbinary children and adolescents. Gender-affirming care is patient-centered and treats individuals holistically, aligning their outward, physical traits with their gender identity.

Gender diverse adolescents face significant health disparities compared to their cisgender peers. Transgender and gender nonbinary adolescents are at increased risk for mental health issues, substance use, and suicide.2,3 The Trevor Project’s 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 52 percent of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.4

A safe and affirming healthcare environment is critical in fostering better outcomes for transgender, nonbinary, and other gender expansive children and adolescents. Medical and psychosocial gender affirming healthcare practices have been demonstrated to yield lower rates of adverse mental health outcomes, build self-esteem, and improve overall quality of life for transgender and gender diverse youth.5,6 Familial and peer support is also crucial in fostering similarly positive outcomes for these populations. The presence of affirming support networks is critical for facilitating and arranging gender affirming care for children and adolescents. Lack of such support can result in rejection, depression and suicide, homelessness, and other negative outcomes.7,8,9

Common Terms

Cisgender: Describes a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth

Gender diverse or expansive: An umbrella term for a person with a gender identity and/or expression broader than the male or female binary. Gender minority is also used interchangeably with this term

Gender dysphoria: Clinically significant distress that a person may feel when sex or gender assigned at birth is not the same as their identity

Gender identity: One’s internal sense of self as man, woman, both or neither

Nonbinary: Describes a person who does not identify with the man or woman gender binary

Transgender: Describes a person whose gender identity and or expression is different from their sex assigned at birth, and societal and cultural expectations around sex

HHS uses LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, or intersex) to reflect the diversity of this community. More specific terms are used in alignment with research and information sources. However, people who are part of this community may use various other terms to define their identity.

Additional Information

- Endocrine Treatment of Gender-Dysphoric/Gender-Incongruent Persons: An Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guideline
- Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents | American Academy of Pediatrics
- Standards of Care (SOC) for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People | World Professional Association for Transgender Health

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Gender-Affirming Care and Young People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affirming care</th>
<th>What is it?</th>
<th>When is it used?</th>
<th>Reversible or not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Affirmation</td>
<td>Adopting gender-affirming hairstyles, clothing, name, gender pronouns, and</td>
<td>At any age or stage</td>
<td>Reversible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>restrooms and other facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puberty Blockers</td>
<td>Using certain types of hormones to pause pubertal development</td>
<td>During puberty</td>
<td>Reversible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hormone Therapy</td>
<td>Testosterone hormones for those who were assigned female at birth</td>
<td>Early adolescence onward</td>
<td>Partially reversible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estrogen hormones for those who were assigned male at birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Affirming Surgeries</td>
<td>“Top” surgery – to create male-typical chest shape or enhance breasts</td>
<td>Typically used in adulthood or case-by-case in adolescence</td>
<td>Not reversible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Bottom” surgery – surgery on genitals or reproductive organs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facial feminization or other procedures</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Resources

- Discrimination on the Basis of Sex | HHS Office of Civil Rights
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health | Healthy People 2030
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: Health Services | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Institutes of Health Sexual & Gender Minority Research Office
- Family Support: Resources for Families of Transgender & Gender Diverse Children | Movement Advancement Project
- Five Things to Know About Gender-Affirming Health Care | ACLU
- Gender-Affirming Care is Trauma-Informed Care | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- Gender-Affirming Care Saves Lives | Columbia University
- Gender Identity | The Trevor Project
- Genderspectrum.org
- Glossary of Terms | Human Rights Campaign
- Health Care for Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals | ACOG
- Transgender and Gender Diverse Children and Adolescents | Endocrine Society