

## Tips and Practical advice for the support of transgender and non-binary young people in church settings

Gender identity is a topic of which we are becoming increasingly aware in society and in our churches, and one which brings with it a need for sensitive pastoral care and safeguarding considerations for all. This is even more the case in children's and youth work where young people are exploring gender and sexuality and gaining a greater awareness of many aspects of their identity. It is important that children and young people all find a safe place within the church and feel welcomed, loved, valued and part of God's family. With this in mind, we have put together a few initial ideas which can help you begin to ensure you work in an inclusive way with regard for the pastoral and safeguarding needs of all.

**Why has this been written?** This document is intended to support you in your work with all children, young people and young adults, regardless of their gender and sexuality. There is a growing awareness of the tendency to stereotype gender for all young people – distinctions between male and female when they are not really necessary – and these social stereotypes can be confusing and even harmful to many.

More specifically, some people experience gender dysphoria which means that they experience feeling detached from/ distressed by the gender assigned to them at birth. This can be physical or social and may lead them to transition to the person they feel themselves to be, in the way that they present themselves and in the way that they wish to be perceived and treated. This may or may not involve medical changes such as hormone treatment or surgery. Other people may not identify (or wish to be identified) as male or female or may be gender-fluid/non binary.

All children, young people and young adults will benefit from an environment where emphasis is placed on valuing each person as an individual.

### **In your venue/location**

If there is no need to divide by gender, don't. There are a lots of ways of arbitrarily splitting people into two groups if you want to do teams etc.

When referring to people, avoid binary-gendered language. The simplest way to do this is by using names in place of he/she etc. If people are filling in a written form in advance, it is always possible to ask which personal pronoun (he/she/ze/they) they would prefer you to use. You could use stickers to help people remember if this helps and everyone is comfortable with it. *(ze and zir, or they, are pronouns which can be used in the place of he and him/she and her, and are non-gender-specific)*

If there is no reason to gender the toilets (e.g. unless they have urinals), then look as a church into designating at least some of them unisex toilets (like the accessible toilet usually is – though do not assume that a unisex accessible toilet is enough as that is not appropriate).

If tackling gender sensitive subjects, give content warnings in advance and offer choices.

Use inclusive examples in your stories, discussions, pictures etc.

Do not try to offer counselling unless you have training and experience in this area, instead offer love and support and signpost organisations with the relevant knowledge and resources such as Stonewall (see below), Childline <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/sexual-identity/> , Beacon LGBTQ+ <https://www.beaconprimarycare.org.uk/help-and-support-service-types/lgbt/> and [www.transgenderchristianhuman.com](http://www.transgenderchristianhuman.com) where people can ask for guidance and support re trans identities.

## **Trips and Residentials**

Toilets – if on a residential, try to offer the use of a room with an en-suite bathroom. If you are in your own venue/location and there is no need to gender the toilets (e.g. unless they have urinals) then de-gender them so that anyone can use any toilet that's free. Otherwise simply allow people to choose which toilet they use without a fuss. Cubicles are private after all. Be attentive to the possibility that toilets and changing rooms may be places in which trans people are vulnerable to bullying.

Avoid using venues for residentials or for sporting events which use communal showers/changing rooms. In the information you provide in advance about the venue, give clear information about arrangements for toilets/showers/changing etc and ask parents and carers to share any concerns. Ensure that nobody feels uncomfortable and that dignity and respect are maintained for all.

On any documentation, ask for name and "Prefer to be known as". Use the latter to refer to the person in person, the formal name for any written records.

If asking about gender, first think "Why do I need to know?" If there is no need, then don't ask the question. If you do need to know (e.g. for rooming arrangements on a residential), instead of offering the two options of M/F, simply ask for gender \_\_\_\_\_

GDPR – Gender identity is sensitive information and as such comes under tight regulation for GDPR. It should be recorded only if completely necessary and should be kept securely confidential unless there are legally justifiable reasons for keeping or sharing that information (e.g. safeguarding concerns or pastoral information which needs to be passed on in the best interest of the person involved).

Ensure that the sleeping accommodation for residentials is rooms rather than dormitories. Offer the use of a single room or, if there is a small group of friends who know each other well and are comfortable with sharing, offer the option of a room sharing with these friends.

Please contact Sam Richards [sam.richards@urc.org.uk](mailto:sam.richards@urc.org.uk) or the Children's and Youth Work office [children.youth@urc.org.uk](mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk) if you need to discuss these further.

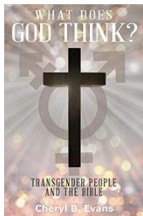
There are, of course, a wide range of theological, social, medical and individual views and responses to the topic of gender identity. The information given by the Children's and Youth Work team is practical advice only and given within that context.

Below we have listed a few resources and websites from a variety of sources and reflecting a variety of views for those wishing to explore this area further. These should not be taken as reflecting the views of the Children's and Youth Work team or the United Reformed Church as a whole.

## Transfaith



A Transgender Pastoral Resource  
**Chris Dowd, Christina Beardsley and Justin Tanis**  
978 0 232 53311 8  
Paperback | 224 pp | 216 x 135 mm  
**Price: £14.99**



**What Does God Think?: Transgender People and The Bible**  
**Paperback – 10 Sep 2017**  
by [Cheryl B. Evans](#) (Author), [Colby Martin](#) (Foreword)  
**£9.99**

Kindle Price: £5.53



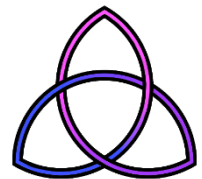
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/>

Stonewall, and youngstonewall, are an organisation who provide help, advice and support for the LGBTQ+ community. Their websites are a good starting point for anyone who is exploring sexual and gender identity. They also have a helpful glossary of terms <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms> which can help you negotiate the

broad new vocabulary which is associated with these.

<https://www.transgenderchristianhuman.com>

Transgender. Christian. Human. is a ministry of Alex Clare-Young, a URC student minister who offers advice and support to those navigating trans identities and to churches and community groups that would like assistance in understanding and supporting trans people.



<https://www.eauk.org/> The Evangelical Alliance has produced a booklet which is available to order or to download on their website <https://www.eauk.org/resources/what-we-offer/reports/transformed-understanding-transgender-in-a-changing-culture/transformed-the-resource>

<https://selfharm.co.uk/about-us> is a web-based project from Youthscape which is aimed at supporting young people impacted by self harm, providing a safe space to talk. As well as providing blogs and other information, the website hosts "Alumina", with online support for mental health and wellbeing in the form of small group chat with two trained counsellors.



**ACE** Ace is an umbrella term used to describe a variation in levels of romantic and/or sexual attraction, including a lack of attraction. Ace people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including, but not limited to, asexual, aromantic, demis and grey-As.

**ALLY** (typically) straight and/or cis person who supports members of the LGBT community.

**BI** Bi is an umbrella term used to describe a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards more than one gender. Bi people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including, but not limited to, bisexual, pan, queer

**CISGENDER OR CIS** Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

**COMING OUT** When a person first tells someone/others about their identity as lesbian, gay, bi or trans.

**GAY** Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality - some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.

**GENDER** Often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, gender is largely culturally determined and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth.

**GENDER DYSPHORIA** Used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn't feel comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth.

**GENDER EXPRESSION** How a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans.

**GENDER IDENTITY** A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

**GENDER REASSIGNMENT** Another way of describing a person's transition. To undergo gender reassignment usually means to undergo some sort of medical intervention, but it can also mean changing names, pronouns, dressing differently and living in their self-identified gender. Gender reassignment is a characteristic that is protected by the Equality Act 2010, and it is further interpreted in the Equality Act 2010 approved code of practice. It is a term of much contention.

**HETEROSEXUAL / STRAIGHT** Refers to a man who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women or to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards men.

**HOMOSEXUAL** This might be considered a more medical term used to describe someone who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more generally used.

**HOMOPHOBIA** The fear or dislike of someone, based on prejudice or negative attitudes, beliefs or views about lesbian, gay or bi people. Homophobic bullying may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay or bi.

**INTERSEX** A term used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal assumptions about what constitutes male or female.

**LESBIAN** Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women.

**NON-BINARY** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

**PRONOUN** Words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation - for example, 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their and ze/zir.

**QUEER** Queer is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 80s by the queer community who have embraced it.

**ROMANTIC ORIENTATION** A person's romantic attraction to other people, or lack thereof. Along with sexual orientation, this forms a person's orientation identity.

**SEX** Assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions. Sometimes the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are interchanged to mean 'male' or 'female'.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** A person's sexual attraction to other people, or lack thereof. Along with romantic orientation, this forms a person's orientation identity.

**TRANS** An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-queer (GQ), gender-fluid, non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois.

**TRANSGENDER MAN** A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

**TRANSGENDER WOMAN** A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

**TRANSITIONING** The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

**TRANSSEXUAL** This was used in the past as a more medical term (similarly to homosexual) to refer to someone whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. This term is still used by some although many people prefer the term trans or transgender.