



EQU ~~U~~ L GROUND

I MIGHT BE TRANSGENDER

A booklet for Transgender youth



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What does it mean to be Transgender?

A Transgender person is a person who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that differs from the one which corresponds to the person's sex at birth. Transgender people also include people who identify as "genderqueer", gender neutral, and/or gender free—people who may not identify as either male or female.

A Transsexual is a person who psychologically identifies with the opposite sex and may seek to live as a member of this sex especially by undergoing surgery and hormone therapy to obtain the necessary physical appearance (as by changing the external sex organs).

Cross-dressers are people who like to wear the clothes of another gender but they don't call themselves as the other gender.

You may find yourself identified with one or more of these definitions pretty strongly or with none of them at all. There is no need to label yourself really quickly now or ever, and some people choose different labels that express more clearly how they see themselves.

How do I know if I'm Transgender?

When I was a child I liked to do what the other girls my age did like play with dolls. As I got older I realized I was a bit different to other boys my age and I started reading up online and found out that I fit into this 'Transgender' category. That's what made me realize.
Mouksha, age 21

Since I was very young I was a tom boy. I only liked to dress in shorts and shirts and other boys clothes. As I grew older I began to feel very uncomfortable in my body because in my head I thought of myself as a boy. Soon, I began to realize I was very different and I had many problems at home because of the way I behaved which was like a boy. I am now going through the sexual reassignment to become a man.
Shenu, age 26

You may feel that you are more at ease visualizing and imagining yourself as a gender other than the gender you were born or given at birth. This gender might be the "opposite" of the gender you were born or assigned.

Intersex persons, in many cases have their gender assigned to them after they are born, by doctors and/or parents in the misguided conclusion that the baby will grow up happier with an assigned gender or it might be neither male nor female but something else entirely!

You may feel highly uncomfortable with the specific parts of your body. For example, you may have breasts and prefer not to have them. Or, you might not feel uncomfortable with your gender-specific body parts and, at the same time, feel a deep need to have other body parts.

You may feel more at ease being with people who notice you as the gender you see yourself. You may simply feel you would be more truly yourself in another gender. People who are Transgender may feel any or all of these emotions.

Am I Normal?

At first I thought I was abnormal, but now since I have educated myself I live my life like a normal person. Do what a real woman would do... develop and further improve myself to be a genuine lady! So yes, I think I am normal. I do what other people do like eat, breath and I try my best to live my life as normally as I could!

Shani, age 22

I went on the internet and spoke many times with the local LGBT organisation and got a lot of information about Trans people. Since then I have realized I am just as normal as everyone else. I am now living as a man, openly and I feel very comfortable doing this.

So, yes, I feel I am normal.

Rohana, age 24



Being Transgender is completely normal as being alive. Throughout history people have felt they were Transgender. Transgender people are everywhere. They are teachers, doctors, construction workers and waiters etc. They attend schools, universities, and enjoy careers.

You may come across other Transgender people every day and not know it! Certainly, being Transgender is not "typical," and you may encounter many people who do not understand you or who feel uncomfortable or even discriminate against you. However, you are certainly very normal.

What is it like to be young and Transgender?

Wonderful! I try to make the very best of my life. Everything is fine for now although I have small issues with my family; I don't dwell on it much.

Maresh, age 22

It's so much easier now. I'm able to express myself freely and I am who I am supposed to be now. I can do what I want with my life now and that's such a great feeling!

Himali, age 25

Being Transgender in this country is so hard. I cannot enjoy being young and free like other people. I'm scared all the time, especially when I have to use the men's toilets. But I am still happy about who I am and don't wish to be a woman, no matter what.

Shenuka, age 25

Some young people who are Transgender feel a great relief that they have discovered how they are most comfortable expressing themselves. Other youth feel bad and depressed at being discriminated against or because they aren't yet able to transition.

Still other young people find that being Transgender is just one part of who they are and that they mostly think about all the things that many youth think about- school, having a boyfriend/girlfriend, work and family. There are many ways to be young and Transgender as there are ways to be young.

Who should I tell?

I just told my best friend, my soul mate what I am going through in my life. I was blessed to get someone like her. She is someone like me so there was no problem to open up to her.
Jehan, age 26

No one really, I kept it most to myself. But it is better if you can have at least one best friend who you can share what you are going through in life with. I do get advice from doctors though.
Mouksha, age 21

There is no obligation to tell anyone about your identity. However, many people find it very important to share who they are with others, especially if they plan to transition publicly. If you decide to share your identity, first tell people with whom you are comfortable with and that you feel will understand you. They might include a trusted teacher, counsellor, sister, brother, parent, friend or people at a youth group for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Questioning persons (LGBTIQ).

Some young people stop there and choose to transition more fully later in life, but other youth choose to begin to live full-time as their identified gender. If you choose to do this, you may need to come out to many different people. You should look for support when going through this process, from a therapist, a youth group, friends, and others.

What will happen when I come out?

It took me a long time to get the courage up to tell my parents. We live in a small village near Kandy and I have 3 other sisters. When I eventually told my parents, they were very understanding and now accept me as the son they never had. I am very happy now.
Kalum, age 26

It is so hard to tell my parents. They just don't accept me the way I am because they are conservative and keep trying to marry me off to a woman. I told my best friend and she understood me. I am scared to say anything to others though. I am so sad all the time because I cannot be myself and I am scared my parents will not love me if I tell them the truth.
Ayesha, age 20

Some people feel relieved and happy when they come out. Others feel as if they are thrown into a lion's den, with challenges from parents, friends, and family. You will most likely experience a bit of both. Some Transgender youth may face violence at school or in their home.

Please, make sure you have people you can talk to before you come out publicly, just for this reason. As you come out, you may find EQUAL GROUND a useful resource. To make coming out easier, surround yourself with as much information, knowledge, and support as possible. EQUAL GROUND does operate a counselling line with trained Transgender counsellors who can talk to you in English, Sinhala and Tamil. EQUAL GROUND also operates a Transgender network which brings together Trans persons from all over the country on a regular basis. Additionally workshops are held regularly to educate young Transgender persons on their gender identity and other issues.

A hotline dedicated to Trans persons is also available and is 'manned' by trained Transgender counsellors : **+94-11-5748705**.

What does it mean to Transition? Should I do it?



I was losing my mind over whether or not I could transition. Then I was told about this lady doctor who had transitioned so many years ago and her picture was in the newspapers even. I contacted her and she helped me find a good psychiatrist who has helped me understand myself and who I am. I am happy now that I have made the decision to go through the process.

Malinga, age 20

I am very confused about whether or not I should transition. But I cannot continue life as a male. I am depressed by my appearance and my genitals all the time. And everyone in my home town looks at me as if I am mad, a freak. I think if I am operated and become a woman, everyone will accept me better.

Nimmi, age 22

Some people who come out as Transgender are comfortable telling a close circle of friends. Other people choose to change their name, their pronouns, their style of dress and their appearance to be consistent with their gender identity. Still others choose to take hormones and have surgery to medically alter their appearance.

As you decide which, if any, steps to take, it can help to talk about these feelings with others, such as a mental health professional who is competent with gender identity issues, friends and family members you trust and other Transgender people. You should express yourself the way you feel most comfortable, without pressure from others.

Medical transition, the taking of hormones and having one or more surgeries, is a big step. For some, it is absolutely necessary. Most people who choose to transition medically strongly need identity and body to match. They want to be seen all the time and without question, as the gender they feel they are. To medically transition, you must first see a therapist and in most cases be diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder. In Sri Lanka, if you are under 19, you will need a parent's permission to undertake medical transition.

If you plan to pursue medical transition, it is important that your transition be supervised by a medical professional. ***Undertaking transition without professional medical guidance can have severe health risks.***

What does Transgender mean about my **sexual orientation?** Am I **gay, straight** or **what?**

I am not sure any more...I thought I was only attracted to women and that I was a lesbian. Once I realized I was a Transman I was initially attracted to women but I now find myself drawn to men as well. Maybe I am gay, maybe I am Bi....I'm not sure."

Reshan, age 20

I love guys aney! I really like to be with a guy and fall in love with him and be married to him!

Nimali, age 25

Being Transgender has to do with gender identity: how you feel about who you are. It has nothing to do with sexual orientation, which is about who attracts you. Some Transgender people are attracted to women, some to men, some to other Transgender people and some to people regardless of their gender.

People may define themselves with different labels, depending on who attracts them. For example, some Transgender women who are attracted to men define themselves as straight, because they are attracted to the opposite gender.

What about **sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and pregnancy?**



Remember that not having sex is the surest way to avoid unintended pregnancy as well as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In fact, many young persons choose to show affection through activities such as hugging, kissing, talking and texting. If you choose to have sex, be responsible and talk with your partner about methods of protection for both of you. It is your responsibility and your partner's to protect both from unwanted outcomes.

Transgender people can have a hard time finding safer sex information that speaks in language that reflects how they feel about their body. Because many may feel that their biological body doesn't match their gender identity, they may use different terms for their body parts. Finding information that corresponds to an internal/emotional body concept can be difficult.

No matter how young Transgender persons label sexual body parts, some or all of the following apply to each:

- For vaginal intercourse where there is a risk of pregnancy, use latex or polyurethane condoms and also another effective method of contraception, such as birth control pills.
- When touching someone else's genitals with your hands, use a latex or polyurethane barrier, such as surgical gloves.
- For oral sex, regardless of the genital area that the mouth touches, use a condom, a dental dam, or plastic wrap.
- For anal intercourse, always use a latex or polyurethane condom with non-petroleum based lubrication.
- When sharing sex toys, always use a latex or polyurethane condom with non-petroleum based lubrication



Two important tips

- **Lubrication:** Do not use petroleum - or oil-based lubrications with latex condoms because such lubricants weaken and or destroy the latex. Use only water-based lubrications.
- Remember that blood-to-blood contact is the surest way to get infected with HIV. Sharing drug paraphernalia or needles - whether for piercing or tattooing the body, taking medications, or using drugs - is highly dangerous, since blood left on the used equipment or needle will come into contact with your blood as soon as you use the equipment or needle. Avoid sharing needles, razors, or other such paraphernalia, for any purpose.

How do I learn to like Myself?



I love myself a lot now because I'm aware of whom I am. I should have done this much earlier but now I spend my life with as much joy as I could get from the world.
Ajantha, age 27

I used to have huge problems accepting myself and it didn't help that my family thought I was crazy. One day I found some people who were just like me. They suggested I call the EQUAL GROUND counselling line and speak to someone. That really opened up a new world for me. Now I am happy about whom I am.
Kasu, age 20

If you have just discovered or recognized that you are Transgender, remember that you are normal and you are likeable, just as you are. With big discoveries come big life changes, and it is normal to feel nervous, apprehensive and upset about the days ahead. Remember too that discovering something this important about yourself can be a truly amazing experience. You are one step ahead on the journey of discovering who you truly are and with that journey, the world becomes full of possibilities as well as challenges. You are getting to know another part of yourself and this is truly a wonderful opportunity!

What **resources** exist for Transgender **youth**?

Remember that you are not alone, and there is help out there. The internet is a great source of learning if used properly. The following websites are helpful:

www.youthresource.com is a website for youth who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender. It has some great information for Transgender youth, as well as online boards where you can talk with other young people who are facing the same or similar issues.

Talking to others who face the same issues can help you learn to like yourself while, at the same time, giving you opportunities to help others.

EQUAL GROUND has a Counselling line operated by Transgenders for Transgenders. Additionally it also has a team of professionals that can assist Transgenders. The team consists of Psychiatrists, Endocrinologists, Plastic Surgeons, and Lawyers.

Please call or email EQUAL GROUND for more information.

Material adapted from the original by Rosanna Flamer-Caldera
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Edited by Rosanna Flamer-Caldera

Illustrations by Isuri of Art of Isuri

Production, Layout and Artwork by Media & Communications
Unit of EQUAL GROUND

Printed by Samayawardhana Printers

Original text provided by Advocates for Youth, U.S.A.

Published: 2014

EQUAL GROUND WISHES TO THANK:

Advocates for Youth, U.S.A. for allowing us to reproduce
materials from their publications.

This publication is supported by
KIOS (The Finnish NGO Foundation For Human Rights)

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