



HAPPY AND HEALTHY:

**A GUIDE FOR GENDER
DIVERSE CHILDREN
AND YOUTH**



EVERYBODY DESERVES THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND FEEL SAFE.

Transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse youth are often faced with unique challenges as they grow up. If you're starting to question your gender identity, you might be worried about whether your family and friends will accept you for who you are – but you're not alone. In Allegheny County, there are free resources available to help you and laws designed to protect you.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Non-binary: A person who doesn't identify exclusively as female or male.

Gender-diverse: Gender behavior or expression that differs from traditional expectations of female or male.

COMING OUT

How should I come out?

Start by coming out to yourself, and then move on to somebody close to you. Meet in a safe place and say you want to talk about something important. If you are too afraid to say the words, you might want to write a letter. People come out in many different ways. For more ideas, you can search for coming out videos online. Remember: there's no one right way or right time to come out. Coming out only needs to happen when you feel ready to share this part of yourself with a person you trust.

Who should I come out to first?

Who do you trust with your other important secrets? Many people start by telling a close friend. Some may start with their therapist or doctor. You might want to tell your sibling, cousin, aunt or uncle. It may help to find somebody that is already out as transgender, non-binary or gender-diverse – they can probably relate to some of the feelings you're experiencing.

Should I come out to my caregivers?

Only if you want to, and only when you're ready and feel safe doing so. Don't come out just because someone else thinks you should. If you think your caregivers may hurt you or kick you out because of your identity, make sure you have a support network in place before taking that risk. You may want to have a supportive person with you to help, such as a friend or a therapist. **If you want to come out to your caregivers, or already have, and think they may need more information and help to fully support you, we have a program that can help!** Steps2Connect is for parents, caregivers, relatives (really any adult you want to build or maintain a relationship with) who need extra help learning how to fully recognize, affirm and love all of you. To find out more, contact us at DHS-LGBTQ@AlleghenyCounty.US or call or text 412-973-5053.

Will people accept me after I come out?

Some people will accept you and some may not. You can estimate how well things will go by looking at the experiences of other LGBTQ+ people in your school or community. You can also test the waters by asking your friends and family how they feel about transgender celebrities like Laverne Cox or MJ Rodriguez.

How will my religious friends, family and clergy react?

Some people have strong religious beliefs against LGBTQ+ identities. However, these feelings sometimes change after a loved one comes out. There are lots of free online resources for people struggling with these issues, including the PFLAG booklet *Faith in Our Families*. There are also many congregations in our area that openly accept transgender members. Check pflagpgh.org/spiritual-directory.html for a list.

Where will I find transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse friends?

Everywhere! You may already have some and not even know it. Once you come out, your friends may feel safer sharing that information with you. You can join or start a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at your school - the GLSEN Network has free resources to help you start one. There are free LGBTQ+ youth groups and social events you can attend at Project Silk and True T Pgh. You can also join Dreams of Hope, a local group of LGBTQ+ and allied youth who come together to create and share art. There are also online resources that you will find at the back of this guide. But remember, if you try to find friends online, please stay safe and avoid giving out personal information. **In addition, the Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation offers a free program called Youth AFFIRM**

that connects you to other LGBTQ+ youth your age, offers important life skills, and you can even get a gift card after completion! For more information about Youth AFFIRM, call or text 412-973-5053. To find contact information for all of these resources and more, flip to the back of this guide.

I feel so alone. Are there people I can talk to?

You are not alone. Even if the people close to you are not accepting, there are people out there who are ready to help. Finding a therapist that works for you can make a world of difference. If you have any thoughts of self-harm, please see the back of this booklet for a list of free helpline numbers that you can call or text at any time. Remember to call from a secure line if you are afraid of your caregivers finding out.

*I'm not ready to tell anybody yet.
How else can I express my feelings?*

Art can be a great form of self-expression and self-care. You can try painting, sculpting, making music, dancing, acting or writing. If you're feeling stressed try yoga, meditation or deep breathing. You can also de-stress by playing sports or exercising on your own.

TRANSGENDER HEALTH

Hormones: Beginning hormone replacement therapy can create permanent, lifelong changes to your body. Before starting hormone replacement therapy, you should take ample time to think about the decision and talk it over with people you trust as well as a therapist. Never take hormones from a friend or anybody else without seeing a doctor first, as this can be dangerous. One option for youth who are questioning their gender identity are puberty blockers – medicines that can pause the puberty process by blocking the hormones testosterone and estrogen. Puberty blockers do not cause any permanent changes in your body and can give you more time to think about how you'd like to move forward. And remember, not wanting or not being able to access hormones doesn't make your gender identity any less valid.

Binding and tucking: If you want to start binding your chest to reduce the appearance of breasts, do your research on safe binding techniques. Unsafe binding can prevent proper breathing, cause permanent damage to your lungs or even crack your ribs. Find a real binder in your correct size. Never bind with ACE bandages. Never keep a binder on for over 8 hours and always take it off when you are sleeping or exercising. Similar risks are involved with tucking – use specialty undergarments, such as a gaffe, if you can, and never use duct tape!

Water: Reports have shown transgender students passing out in school from dehydration. Even mild dehydration can cause headaches, fatigue and skin issues. Stay hydrated – never avoid water because you're afraid of using the restrooms at school. If you'd like more privacy, ask your principal for access to a private restroom.

Sexual Health: Transgender people are at an especially high risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. Remember to get tested regularly – Allies for Health and Wellbeing (formerly Pittsburgh AIDS Task Force) and PERSAD Center offer free testing. It's also important for transgender people with internal reproductive organs to continue regular gynecology screenings for preventative care.

Mental Health: You deserve access to quality, affirming mental healthcare. In Allegheny County, lack of insurance cannot prevent a child from accessing mental health services. Youth over the age of 14 have the right to obtain mental healthcare without a parent's permission and to withhold mental health records from their parents. If you don't know how to find a therapist, you can start by talking to your school social worker or calling Re:solve Crisis Network. Places like PERSAD Center and UPMC Children's Center for Adolescent and Young Adult Health offer therapy that is specifically trans-inclusive and affirming



HARASSMENT AND ABUSE

Transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse youth are at high risks of harassment and abuse from adults, peers and sexual or romantic partners.



Home: Regardless of your gender identity, you deserve a home that feels safe. Your family or foster family should not hurt you, threaten you or try to change you. If you are experiencing abuse at home, talk to an adult you trust and contact PA ChildLine for help.

School: Your school is obligated to protect you, whether people are physically hurting you, sexually harassing you, calling you names or bullying you online. If you're being harassed or threatened, go to the principal or another official right away. Keep detailed notes with dates of all incidents, and let the school know that it has to protect you. If nothing changes, contact your local ACLU chapter for help.

Dating: If a partner is calling you names, cutting you off from family or friends, threatening to reveal private information like your gender identity or birth name or pressuring you into sexual acts you aren't comfortable with, you may be experiencing abuse. Abuse can also come in the form of a partner fetishizing you or being hateful towards you because of your gender identity or race – they should never make fun of you for being “not feminine enough” or “not man enough.” A good resource for what healthy LGBTQ+ relationships can look like is Adagio Health's “Safe Dates” program. If you have experienced physical or emotional abuse, you can get help from [LoveIsRespect.org](https://loveisrespect.org) via online chat, text or phone call.



COMMUNITY AND LEGAL RESOURCES

ACLU OF PENNSYLVANIA – GREATER PITTSBURGH CHAPTER

A civil rights organization that can provide legal information and help you file discrimination complaints.

Call 1-877-744-2258

aclupa.org/chapters/greaterpittsburgh

ALLEGHENY COUNTY DHS LGBTQ RESOURCES

A collection of websites, articles, and resources on LGBTQ+ health, civil rights and other issues. There is a page specifically for LGBTQ+ youth.

alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/LGBTQ.aspx

HUGH LANE WELLNESS FOUNDATION

Hugh Lane Wellness Foundation works to improve the wellness of LGBTQ+ communities in the region utilizing evidence-based practices and methods of intervention, training, consultation, and coaching to achieve positive movement toward stability, acceptance and reduction of health disparities impacting LGBTQ+ individuals.

hughlane.org

LGBT NATIONAL YOUTH TALKLINE

A non-crisis line where you can talk about coming out and other issues.

Call 1-800-246-7743

PFLAG

A support group for family members of LGBTQ+ youth. Website includes free resources for talking with family members.

pflagpgh.org | pflag.org

PITTSBURGH EQUALITY CENTER (FORMERLY GLCC)

A place with resources and events for Pittsburgh's LGBTQ+ community and free drop-in nights for youth. 5840 Ellsworth Ave, Suite #100, Pittsburgh, PA 15232

pghequalitycenter.org | facebook.com/glccpgh

PROJECT SILK

A drop-in space centering Black and Latinx young gay men and transgender youth of color. Wood Street Commons, Mezzanine Level, 304 Wood St, Pittsburgh, PA 15222

chscorp.org/service-area/program/project-silk

SISTERS PGH

A transgender centered drop-in space, resource provider and shelter transitioning program offering outreach, education and advocacy.

2014 Monongahela Ave, Pittsburgh PA, 15218

sisterspgh.org

TRANSPRIDE

TransPride organizes events and services for trans-identified individuals and allies in the Pittsburgh area.

transpridepgh@gmail.com

facebook.com/transpridepgh

TRUE T ENTERTAINMENT

True T Entertainment serves as a community platform for LGBTQ resource sharing, queer arts, activism, and entertainment. Through community outreach and safe space making, we provide meaningful resources while giving back to our community.

truettpgh.com | facebook.com/TrueTpgh

HEALTH RESOURCES

ADAGIO HEALTH

An organization providing quality health and wellness services with a focus on women and their families, youth and individuals of LGBTQIA+ experiences.

603 Stanwix St, Two Gateway Center, Suite 500,
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

adagiohealth.org

CENTRAL OUTREACH WELLNESS CENTER

A holistic, multicultural health organization serving LGBTQIA, HIV+, and Hep C-positive patients.

Timber Court Building, Suite 100, 127 Anderson St,
Pittsburgh, PA 15212

centraloutreach.com

PERSAD CENTER

An LGBTQ+ center with social events as well as mental health counseling and free HIV testing.

5301 Butler Street, Suite #100, Pittsburgh, PA 15201

persadcenter.org

persadcenter.org/pages/youth-programs

PLANNED PARENTHOOD OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Planned Parenthood provides comprehensive healthcare to all, regardless of insurance or ability to pay. Planned Parenthood is an excellent resource for quality, LGBTQIA+ specific sex education as well as access to contraceptives, STD testing, routine screenings, PrEP and more.

933 Liberty Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222

plannedparenthood.org

UPMC CHILDREN'S CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT HEALTH

UPMC CAYAH offers LGBTQIA+ affirming primary care services, hormone therapy, mental health support, case management, gynecological care and STD testing for children and youth up to age 26. CAYAH provides comprehensive transgender care services.

UPMC University Center, Mezzanine Floor, Suite M060,
120 Lytton Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

chp.edu/our-services/aya-medicine/gender-development

EDUCATION RESOURCES

DREAMS OF HOPE

An organization that helps Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ youth express themselves by creating art.

dreamsofhope.org

facebook.com/dreamsofhopeorg

GSLEN (GAY STRAIGHT LESBIAN EDUCATORS NETWORK)

A national nonprofit with resources to help schools become more LGBTQ+ inclusive.

glsen.org

CRISIS RESOURCES

LOVEISRESPECT.ORG

A hotline to get help for teen dating violence.

Call 1-866-331-9474

Text “loveis” to 22522 or chat online

loveisrespect.org

NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE

A hotline that can help if you are thinking about or have already ran away from home.

Call 1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929) or chat online

1800runaway.org

PENNSYLVANIA CHILDLINE

A hotline to call if you think you are being abused by an adult.

Call 1-800-932-0313

RE:SOLVE CRISIS NETWORK

A network of trained crisis counselors that will travel to you, anywhere in Allegheny County, if you are thinking of suicide or experiencing mental health issues.

Call 1-888-7-YOU CAN (1-888-796-8226)

THE TREVOR PROJECT

A hotline with trained mental health crisis counselors for LGBTQ+ youth.

Call 1-866-488-7386

Text “Trevor” to 1-202-304-1200 or chat online

thetrevorproject.org

TRANS LIFELINE

A hotline staffed by transgender people for transgender people.

Call 1-877-565-8860



NOTES



Developed by the Allegheny County
Department of Human Services
May 2020

The National Quality Improvement Center on Tailored Services, Placement Stability and Permanency for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Two-Spirit Children and Youth in Foster Care (QIC-LGBTQ2S) is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, grant #90CW1145. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This information is in the public domain. Readers are encouraged to copy and share it.