

## GUIDANCE

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# how homeless services can be more inclusive and support young trans people

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briefing written by

**akt**



homeless link



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## introduction

Trans young people, like other young people, may find themselves experiencing homelessness for a multitude of reasons. However, while trans young people may have similar experiences to their cis-gendered counterparts, they will also have needs specific to their identities.

The discrimination young trans people face due to their identity is often tied to their homelessness. The most visible form of this within the homelessness sector is where gender identity intersects with family abuse, leading young people to lose their homes and be excluded from the communities they grew up in. When supporting young trans people it is also essential to recognise how discrimination due to gender identity affects access to

healthcare, financial assistance and welfare, education and employment. Intersections of gender identity, race and class should also be recognised.

Experiences of discrimination across different sectors affects young people's resilience and ability to access support and exit homelessness. This briefing has been written to raise awareness about the experiences of young trans people, and support services to reflect on and adapt their current practice to create more inclusive environments.

We cover:

- Understanding young trans people's journeys into and experiences of homelessness
- Impact of homelessness and discrimination
- How services can improve the support they provide to young trans people

In this document, we use 'trans' as 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. Further information and definitions of terms can be found in the [Glossary](#) section of this document.

# pathways into homelessness

The most common cause of young trans people's homelessness is family abuse and rejection. Young trans people's exclusion from their family home is usually related to their gender identity: most trans young people cite this exclusion because of coming out or being outed.

In akt's lgbtq+ youth homelessness report:

- 74 per cent of trans young people said their family members repeatedly belittled them to the extent that they felt worthless before they became homeless.
- One in seven trans young people had abusive content published online by family members before becoming homeless.
- Nearly two-thirds of trans young people said they were stopped from expressing their LGBTQ+ identity by their family.
- One quarter stated that they were threatened to be outed by family members before becoming homeless.
- 17 per cent of trans young people reported being forced to do sexual acts by their family members against their will. In addition, some

of these young people will have experienced so-called 'conversion therapy'.

Many young trans people will have attempted to suppress their gender identity or expression due to fear of rejection, eviction and fear of bullying and abuse. This goes beyond the family home, with young trans people suppressing their gender identity in school, college, and work. The prolonged experience of suppressing gender identity is distressing, overwhelming, and can negatively impact well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, and anger.

Moreover, young trans people may have limited support networks. They may already have been isolated and excluded from their wider networks and communities or fear they will become so if they make their gender identity known.

This means that young trans people have often experienced extended periods of abuse within and outside the family home at the point of becoming homeless. It's important to recognise that while young people may leave their family home, this abuse often does not end. In akt's recent research 48 per cent of young trans people reported that they felt frightened or threatened by their family members when they were homeless.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> akt (2021) the lgbtq+ youth homelessness report, <https://www.akt.org.uk/report>

# barriers to accessing support and exiting homelessness



## awareness of support

Low awareness of support services and limited access to information when homeless both make accessing support difficult for young trans people. For instance, only 29 per cent of trans people were aware of benefit and welfare support, 27 per cent were aware of sexual health services, 13 per cent were aware of money advice services, and 8 per cent of young trans people were aware of substance misuse services.

## local authority support and gatekeeping

When young trans people present to their local authority, they are often asked for 'evidence' that their families have kicked them out. This

can exacerbate distress and often be unsafe. For example, families may state they have not asked them to leave to continue to control a young person's gender identity or deny the abuse they perpetrate. Young people are then likely to be classed as having made themselves intentionally homeless.

## discrimination and harassment

"being trans is such a taboo with housing associations, within housing units and local authorities. there's such a gap between housing officers and the people who walk through the door." **Mahan (he/him)**

A cis-normative bias within statutory and support services can often prevent trans young people from



getting support. Low awareness about services available is compounded with experiences of harassment and discrimination when young trans people eventually access support services, leading to further isolation, exclusion, and associated risks such as exploitation.

‘Gender policing’ when trying to access emergency housing is often reported amongst trans people, who feel they must ‘present’ themselves as the sex that has been assigned to them at birth because of fears surrounding their safety.<sup>2</sup>

- One in five young trans people stated they faced discrimination when accessing support because they were trans, and the same number had experienced misgendering or dead-naming while accessing services.

The discrimination and harassment trans people experience extends to the workplace, making it difficult for trans people to secure and maintain employment.

### In 2018, Stonewall research found

- One in eight trans employees had been physically attacked by colleagues or customers they worked with.
- One in four trans people said they were encouraged to hide or disguise that they are trans by a work colleague.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Lyons, T., Krüsi, A., Pierre, L., Smith, A., Small, W., & Shannon, K. (2016). Experiences of trans women and two-spirit persons accessing women-specific health and housing services in a downtown neighbourhood of Vancouver, Canada. *LGBT Health*, 3(5), 373–378

<sup>3</sup> Stonewall, (2017), *LGBT in Britain- Trans report*.

# impact of homelessness and discrimination



## risk of hidden homeless and further abuse and exploitation

The gatekeeping young trans people experience will usually lead them to return home, sleep rough or fall into 'hidden homelessness' situations. With limited financial assistance and family to turn to, young trans people can be more vulnerable to risky sex or survival sex to find somewhere to stay.<sup>4</sup>

Homelessness, alongside discrimination within the workplace, also means young people can struggle to access and maintain employment, making them more financially vulnerable.

- 17 per cent of LGBTQ+ young people felt like they had to have casual sex to find somewhere to stay while they were homeless.

- 16 per cent of LGBTQ+ young people engaged in sex work as a direct impact of their homelessness.
- Nearly half (46 per cent) of trans young people said that being homeless had a negative impact on them staying in their job or searching for a job.

## poor health and social exclusion

These experiences can exacerbate existing trauma leading to poorer physical and mental health.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Survival sex can also put young trans people at increased risk of HIV, STIs and physical violence.<sup>8</sup>

akt's report found that:

- Almost two-thirds of trans young people said that being homeless



had a negative impact on their physical health

- Over two-thirds of trans young people said that homelessness made it hard to establish or maintain new relationships, including friendships.

“it’s difficult to be the queer person and also the homeless person.”  
**fran (he/them/sometimes she)**  
– *the lgbtq+ youth homelessness report, akt 2021*

### a mistrust in services

akt often find that young trans people do not present to their local authority in the first instance due to fear around potential treatment, fear that staff will not understand why they became homeless and prior experiences of transphobia in statutory services

akt’s report found that:

- Only 31 per cent of trans young people who did access support whilst experiencing homelessness felt that staff understood the reasons for why they became homeless.
- 43 per cent of young trans people who accessed support from a local authority or charity when homeless said they had experienced discrimination or harassment due to being transgender.

### multiple intersecting needs exacerbated

Experiences of prolonged trauma will often mean young people will have intersecting, unmet needs. Young trans people often face significant waiting times when attempting to access mental health services, often being told their needs are ‘complex’ and that services cannot support them.

Even getting the first appointment at a GIC (Gender Identity Clinic) can be an additional challenge for those who transition and need medical and psychological support. The lack of familial support, social exclusion, low awareness of the support available, gatekeeping and negative experiences when accessing services can prolong homelessness and make young trans people more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness again

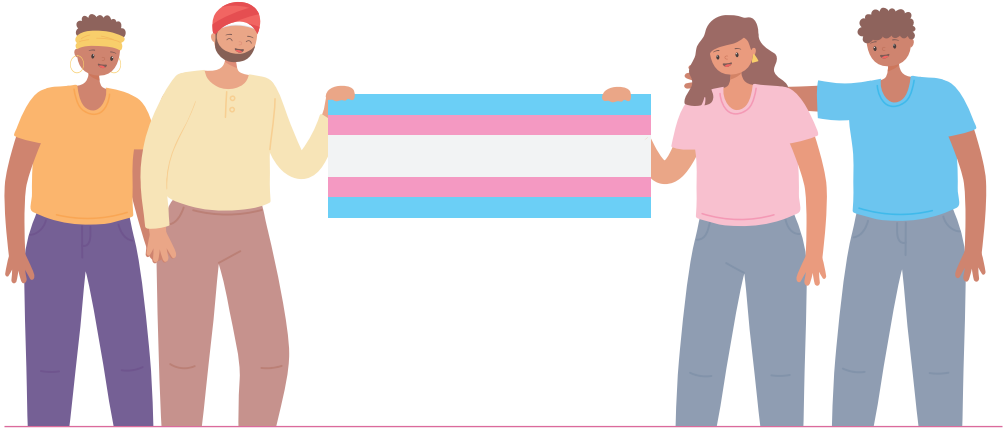
<sup>5</sup> Kattari, S. K., & Begun, S. (2016). On the margins of marginalised: Transgender homelessness and survival sex. *Affilia*, 32(1), 92–103

<sup>6</sup> Lyons, T., Krüsi, A., Pierre, L., Smith, A., Small, W., & Shannon, K. (2016). Experiences of trans women and two-spirit persons accessing women-specific health and housing services in a downtown neighbourhood of Vancouver. *Canada. LGBT Health*, 3(5), 373–378

<sup>7</sup> Mokonogho, J., Mittal, S., & Quitangon, G. (2010). Treating the trans-gender homeless population: Experiences during residency training. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 14(4), 346–354. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19359705.2010.504422>

<sup>8</sup> Reback, C.J., Fletcher, J.B., (2014), HIV Prevalence, Substance Use, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among Transgender Women Recruited Through Outreach. *AIDS Behavior* 18, 1359–1367 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-013-0657-z>

# how services can improve the support they provide to young trans people



**The proper support from the right services goes a long way. Below we have listed actions services can take to help better support young trans people.**

## actions for staff

### creating a safe and inclusive environment

#### names and pronouns

Staff should use inclusive language, not making assumptions about the gender identity of any young person accessing the service. Young people should be asked what their pronouns are when they first access a service. If the wrong name or pronoun is used, staff should apologise, correct themselves and move forward.

Staff should also challenge others when they are not using a young person's preferred name and pronoun. For example, a professional from another service may use incorrect pronouns for a young person in email correspondence. Staff can respond and reinstate a young person's name and the pronouns they use.

#### visual cues and inclusive communication

Learning from research on psychologically informed environments and practice highlights the role the physical environment has on our ability to engage with others and build relationships.<sup>9</sup> Organisations should adopt visual cues such as representative posters and the inclusive pride flag. These

cues can indicate that a space is LGBTQ+ inclusive, and create a sense of physical and emotional safety for young trans people. A young person may not feel ready to talk about their gender identity when they initially access a service, visual cues can indicate that the service is a space where they can speak openly about their gender identity when they are ready. Our [further information and support](#) section has more information and guidance on creating psychologically informed environments.

### challenging transphobia

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Staff should challenge any transphobic, homophobic, and biphobic language used by staff and clients. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to protect young trans people from discrimination; however, you can still try to correct and challenge transphobic language.

### confidentiality

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Some young people might not be comfortable talking in detail about their gender identity, even if they've chosen to speak about it to staff in an organisation. It is important to respect someone's right to confidentiality around their identity, and understand the laws around information sharing. For more information see Galop's fact sheet on Trans Privacy Law<sup>10</sup>

When working with a young person staff should ask how and with whom



## why are pronouns important?

Asking young people for their preferred name and pronouns helps them feel safe, heard and supported. It can help affirm a young person's identity, particularly when they may have experienced misgendering or deadnaming in the past. Using the correct pronouns and a preferred name can help young people feel more comfortable with who they are.

they would like their name and pronoun to be shared. It is important to build young people's confidence so that they are comfortable to share with others if that is what they want.

As discussed, it is not always possible to protect young trans people from discrimination; staff should speak to young people about this potential, and the support they can access if they experience transphobic abuse.

<sup>10</sup> galop.org.uk



## providing support and advocacy

### anticipating young people's needs

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Staff should familiarise themselves with the services young people may need to access, and the processes involved in accessing these services so they are able to talk through these systems with young people and prepare them for what they can expect. An example is understanding the process of changing your name by deed poll.

Accessing appropriate healthcare is challenging to say the least. NHS Gender Identity Clinics currently have long waiting lists even to receive an initial appointment/assessment. Gender identity clinics operate in different ways locally, and you can find your closest gender identity clinic [here](#). Local providers will often give further information about the services available in the region on their websites.

### raising awareness and educating other young people

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By committing to delivering an inclusive service and adopting things like visual cues such as the inclusive pride flag, you set an example to young people, and raise awareness of LGBTQ+ identities. Staff should create a culture where homophobic, biphobic or transphobic remarks or bullying are not tolerated, challenging any remarks or behaviour straightaway. Staff should challenge and educate young people who make transphobic

comments; they may simply not have the knowledge or awareness. For example, staff could deliver group-based work that focuses on LGBTQ+ identities or looks at the effects of harassment or LGBT-phobic bullying on an LGBTQ+ young person- see our [further information and support section](#) for education resources that can be used with young people.

### recognising intersecting identities

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It is crucial to acknowledge that trans people's experiences are not uniform. Staff should educate themselves on different trans identities and consider the additional barriers that further marginalised groups may face, such as trans people of colour and those with disabilities.

### signposting

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Staff should connect young trans people with LGBTQ+ specialist services to provide them with specialist support if needed. Staff should build partnerships with local LGBTQ+ groups and services and referral pathways, so young people can easily be connected with these services. Organisations can also create LGBTQ+ spaces and groups for young people if they do not exist (see case studies below).

## actions for managers/ organisations

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### review internal paperwork and processes

#### monitoring

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Data on LGBTQ+ youth homelessness is limited, particularly on trans youth homelessness. akt found that only one third (35 per cent) of LGBTQ+ young people recall “being asked to provide information about [their] gender identity and sexual orientation”. As a result, the needs, and experiences of trans young people aren’t captured and are often missing from the homelessness narrative.

Services should ensure that their monitoring of sexual orientation and gender identity is inclusive (see [further information and support section](#) for monitoring resources). Respect the right to privacy/non-disclosure and ensure that young people understand why this information is being asked.

#### referrals

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Organisations should review the information they collect for referrals and consider whether all paperwork is essential. For example, holding birth certificates/passports on file can be distressing to young people, as they are often a record of their dead-name. Consider whether these documents are necessary or if there is another way for the relevant information to be captured.

### policies, procedures and the workforce

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Review all HR policies to ensure they are trans-inclusive, for example, ensuring family and leave policies explicitly say they apply to all employees regardless of gender identity and expression. See the [further information and support section](#) for more information on trans-inclusive HR policies.

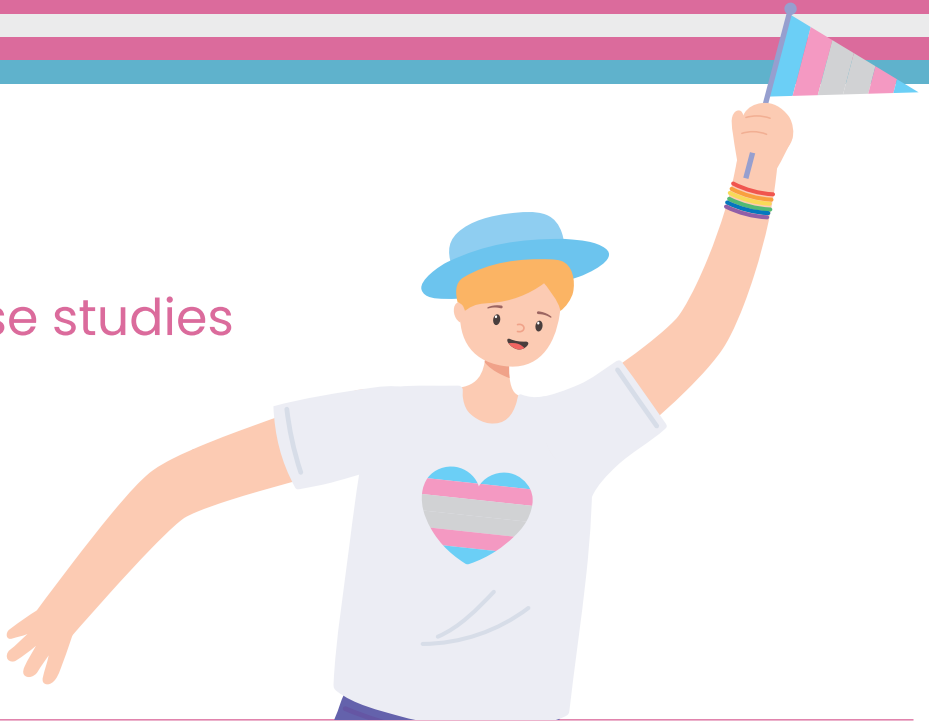
Seek out and listen to feedback from trans staff and be mindful that all trans people’s experiences are not homogenous. Signpost staff to organisations that support trans people and ensure resources are readily available. Enable staff to explore setting up an LGBTQ+ Network group, or if one already exists, look at what they are doing to support trans inclusion in the workplace.

#### staff development and support

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Staff should be comfortable in supporting young trans people, and have the skills and confidence to respond to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language every time they hear it. Consider conducting an audit on areas of your service that could be improved to be more trans-inclusive, including training and skills needs to understand where specific training and development may be needed. In addition to training, ensure that staff can access and are aware of resources and guidance on how to support young trans people. A good starting point are resources listed in the [further information and support section](#) of this briefing.

## case studies



### SHAID

SHAID is a charity organisation in Durham that provides a range of housing advice, support and related services to help young people make the difficult transition to living independently in the community. They have taken a number of steps to improve their support to trans young people over the past few years.

#### freedom zone project: the lgbtq+ youth group

Mainly run by volunteers, the Freedom youth group is a space for LGBTQ+ young people to come together to be themselves, share their stories and access support and advice. The group was created after young people identified there were not enough spaces for LGBTQ+ people in the region.

#### lgbtq+ champion

The LGBTQ+ champion works with other members of staff to improve their practice when working with young LGBTQ+ people. They work with staff across the organisation to raise awareness around barriers young trans people may face, and their support needs, so staff are prepared to support young people at different stages of their journey. The champion also offers specialist information advice and guidance to the LGBTQ+ young people who need it. Supporting young people to access different services.

#### forms and paperwork

SHAID reviewed their paperwork to ensure that it captured different identities and was more inclusive. They also look at how eligibility criteria and paperwork can be flexible in order to

support young trans people accessing other services. SHAID work with the organisation DurhamWorks, who have a system in place where you can use a form to certify the young person without the need for ID, so young people do not need to provide their birth certificate or passport, and their dead-names are not used to access the service.

[www.shaid.org.uk](http://www.shaid.org.uk)

### tÿ pride

“The principle of Tÿ Pride is to offer a haven where LGBTQ+ identities are understood, valued and celebrated. This helps to heal traumas and address some of the harms visited upon the young people because of who they are.”

Tÿ Pride is a specialist LGBTQ+ accommodation and support project in Denbighshire, Wales. It is run as a partnership between Denbighshire Council, Llamau, a youth homelessness organisation and Viva LGBTQ+, a specialist team from the charity West Rhyl Young People’s Project.

Staffed 24 hours a day, the project supports LGBTQ+ young people community who were experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. It contains 3 units of accommodation, a ‘step-down’ flat, and floating support in the community. The young people living

within the project are provided with 24/7 psychologically informed support, access to one-to-one counselling, as well as individual and group support and social activities, to help build a sense of community and belonging through interacting with peers.

Tÿ Pride considered how they could make the project more inclusive. They have all-gender toilets, and also have a library which has history books and personal stories and journeys on all identities within the LGBTQ+ community, so that young people can learn more about themselves, their peers and their history. Personal budgets for each young person provide them with the means to overcome some previously insurmountable barriers e.g. by meeting transport costs associated with appointments at a Gender Identity Clinic.

[www.llamau.org.uk](http://www.llamau.org.uk)  
[rhylyouth.co.uk](http://rhylyouth.co.uk)



# further information and support

## **resources for young people** (click to visit)

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**akt:** online live chat support for young people

**akt:** online community hub with resources for young people

**akt:** mental health support for young trans people, including links to specialist services

**SEEN** - a zine curated by young people in partnership with akt and 42nd street

## **service directories** (click to visit)

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**proud trust:** directory of trans youth groups

**stonewall:** directory of LGBTQ+ services and community groups

**Mermaids:** Guidance on supporting children and young people with their gender identity

## **resources for frontline staff** (click to visit)

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**young stonewall** guidance for setting up an lgbtq+ youth group

**stonewall:** comprehensive glossary of terms related to LGBTQ+ identities

**homeless link** guidance on psychologically informed environments and trauma informed care

## **education resources** (click to visit)

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**stonewall:** guidance on tackling homophobic biphobic and transphobic language





**phse association:** secondary schools resource pack developed by barnardos including group work session plans

**gender identity research and education society:** resources on gender development specifically designed for educators, including legal and good practice factsheets

**developing internal policies and procedures**  
(click to visit)

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**stonewall:** guidance on capturing data on sexual orientation and gender identity

**stonewall:** guidance on creating a trans inclusive workplace

**stonewall:** diversity champions programme which helps employers create lgbtq+ inclusive working environments

**stonewall** digital workshops on LGBTQ+ inclusion, include introductory and advanced workshops

**research reports**  
(click to visit)

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**akt.** (2021) the lgbtq+ youth homelessness report

**government equalities office.** (2018) the national lgbt survey

**house of commons women and equalities committee.** (2019) lgbt health and social care and lgbt communities

**stonewall.** (2018) lgbt in britain home and communities

**stonewall.** (2018) lgbt in britain work report

**world habitat report.** (2018) left out: why many lgbtq+ people aren't accessing their right to housing in the UK

# glossary

**Ally:** A (typically) straight and/or cis person who supports members of the LGBT+ community.

**A person with a trans history:** this is someone who identifies as male or female or a man or woman but was assigned the opposite sex at birth. People increasingly use this term to acknowledge a trans past.

**Cisgender or Cis** refers to someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Cis-normative bias,** i.e. the assumption that service users are cis-gendered, i.e. identify as the sex registered to them at birth

**Deadnaming:** referring to a trans person by the name they were assigned at birth

**Gender** is often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity; gender is mostly culturally determined and assumed from the sex assigned at birth.

**Gender dysphoria** is a term used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because of 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:** this is how a person outwardly chooses to express their gender within the context of societal expectations of gender.

**Gender identity** refers to a person's innate sense of gender, male, female or something else like non-binary. This may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

**Gender policing:** this refers to the act of enforcing societal expectations of gender.

**LGBT-Phobic Bullying:** bullying targeted towards people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. It can include physical abuse, verbal abuse or cyber-bullying. In addition, people who are perceived as being LGBTQ+ or may not have fully 'come out' yet can also be the target of this form of bullying.

**Misgendering:** referring to someone as a gender that they do not identify with.

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

**Outed:** when a trans, lesbian, gay, bisexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed to someone else without their consent.

**Passing** refers to someone who is seen/ regarded as a cisgender man or cisgender woman at first glance.

**Pronouns:** these are the words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation, i.e. 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender-neutral language and use pronouns like they/their and ze/zir.

**Queer:** this is a term used by those who want to reject specific labels of gender identity, sexual orientation, or romantic orientation. It also can be a way of rejecting perceived norms of the LGBT community ( ableism, sizeism, racism etc.). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 90s by the queer community who have embraced it.

**Questioning:** this is the process of exploring your own gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

**Sex** is assigned to a person based on their primary sex characteristics ( genitalia) and reproductive functions.

**So-called 'conversion therapy':** abusive practices like corrective rape driven by transphobic, homophobic and biphobic attitudes.

**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 in multiple ways, including transgender, transexual, gender-queer (QC), non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, transmasculine, transfeminine, neutrois, gender fluid etc.

**Transgender man:** this term describes someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This can

be shortened to trans man, or FTM, which is an abbreviation for female-to-male.

**Transgender woman:** this term describes someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This can be shortened to a transwoman, or MTF, which is an abbreviation for female-to-male.

**Transitioning:** the steps a trans person may take to live in the gender they identify with. Each person's transition may be different and involve different things. For example, for some, their transition may involve medical interventions like surgeries and hormone therapy. However, some trans people may not want or can do this. Transitioning can also involve dressing differently, changing official documents, telling family and friends.

**Transphobia** is the fear or dislike of someone because they are trans, including refusing to accept their gender identity or denying it.

**Transsexual** was more commonly used in the past and is more of a medical term, referring to someone whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Some people still use this term, although many people prefer the term trans or transgender.

**akt**

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