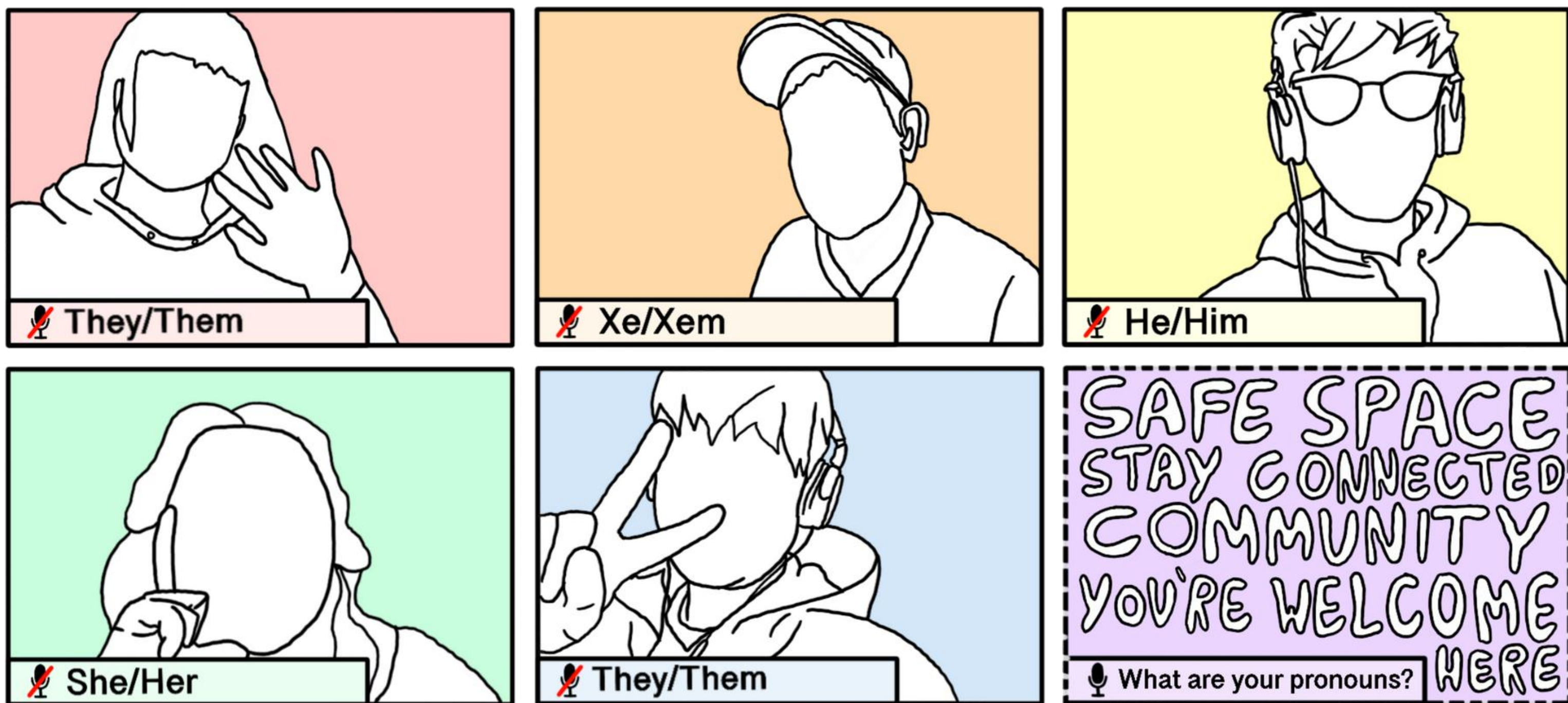


Managing Gender Dysphoria

Version 2, January 2021



A resource for trans and gender-
exploring young people by young
people, staff & volunteers at
Allsorts Youth Project

Illustration by Luan

What is 'Gender Dysphoria'?

Gender dysphoria is the term used to describe the discomfort that trans people feel in relation to the sex they were **assigned at birth** (born as).



The NHS describes gender dysphoria as;

‘Gender dysphoria is a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity.’

Most trans people will experience gender dysphoria (often just called dysphoria) in some way or another and to greater or lesser extents.

The feeling can be quite hard to pin down and describe. However, dysphoria can generally be separated into **two different types...**

Social Dysphoria

Where an individual feels uncomfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth in relation to how other people treat or see them.

Perhaps people use the wrong name when addressing you, use pronouns that don't feel comfortable for you or the sex marker on your passport (the little M or F) doesn't feel right for you.

You might feel obliged or pressured to conform to certain gender norms or stereotypes based on the sex you were assigned at birth. This isn't the same as experiencing issues that relate to sexism or misogyny, which many people experience regardless as to whether they are trans or not.

Social dysphoria is a term that encapsulates all the difficulties and discomforts a trans person might face that **aren't** about their feelings towards their body.



Physical Dysphoria

Where an individual feels a pronounced discomfort with or disconnect between their sense of their own gender and the sex they were assigned at birth. **Physical dysphoria** can manifest in many different ways, such as a discomfort around your body shape or height, the presence or lack of body or facial hair, the pitch of your voice or the shape of your face.

Maybe you can't even pin this feeling down to any particular thing. You might just feel out of place or wrong and uncomfortable in yourself. Some days you may not feel dysphoric at all and other days you might feel it a lot.

As a trans person, feelings of dysphoria can be extremely distressing and uncomfortable and can have a negative impact on mental health. It's important to develop a tool box of ways to cope and **stay safe if dysphoria is getting you down.**

And of course it's not uncommon for people who aren't trans to feel uncomfortable with their bodies, but gender dysphoria is specific to the experience of being transgender.

If you think you are experiencing gender dysphoria or issues relating to self-esteem or mental health, it's really important that you **speak to someone that you trust**, like a therapist, guardian or youth worker, who will be able to help you or put you in touch with support.

Ok, so you get it. **Dysphoria is rubbish** but it need not be the master of you. In this resource we aim to give you some practical, impractical and occasionally downright silly and fanciful tips to help you manage dysphoria from trans and non-binary young people at Allsorts Youth Project.

So, where to start?

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that there are five simple steps you can take to boost your mood and help you feel happier and more positive. The NHS refers to these steps as

'The Five Ways to Wellbeing'. It is those five steps on which we will be basing our own ideas on how to manage dysphoria.





1) Connect

Connect with people around you. Talk to people who respect your name/pronouns, talk to other trans people in real life and online. Watch trans YouTubers. Look for youth groups in your area. Find online spaces which feel safe. Practice connecting to people. Advocate for trans rights/awareness, but remember self-care. Maybe a break from social media might be a good idea for a while if you're starting to feel burnt out- we can't pour from an empty cup!



2) Be Active

You don't have to go for a run. You can start small... get out of bed (even if you get up late!). Look after your body with a shower and crack open that fancy soap you've been saving. Shave if you want to. If your body is making you feel gross, then maybe a bubble bath so you can hide under the bubbles. You may have complicated feelings towards your body, but it's yours and it deserves some care.

Maybe go for a run or ride a bike or skateboard. If being in a public gym or changing room makes you feel icky then walk around the block. You can wear baggy clothes, comfy clothes or even your favourite outfit if that helps you get outside into the sunshine.



You don't have to be physical to be active. You can read, watch TV or draw, join a club. Rediscover a hobby. Remember things that you used to do which you haven't done for a while!

3) Take Notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment when you are walking to the bus stop, eating lunch or talking to a friend. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Feel the wind on your face or stare at the waves at the beach. Reflecting on the little things might help you appreciate what matters to you.

If you are going through medical transition you might notice changes in your body. It's ok to celebrate the ones which make you feel good but remember that patience is key. It's called transition because it is a change and change takes time.



4) Keep Learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a new responsibility at work. Fix your bike or learn to play an instrument. Start a band or write a poem. Learn to cook your favourite food. Set yourself a challenge that you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun. Learn about trans history and find comfort in the words of those people who have gone before you. There is more wisdom and beauty in works of art, writing and music by trans people than there is in any TV documentary.

5) Give

Do something nice for a friend. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Give someone a compliment. Look outwards as well as inwards. Seeing yourself and your happiness as linked to your wider community can be really rewarding and creates connections with people around you.

Sometimes it might feel easier to look after friends rather than yourself. This can be nice but remember self-care.



Some more ideas for you or someone you know struggling with dysphoria...

Listen to Music



Listening to your favourite songs can transport you to a calmer place. Perhaps you want to relax with some chilled out beats or maybe you want to turn it up real loud and rock out. Dance and throw your arms around, your body belongs to you and you can let music make you feel good!

Distraction

Find something to take your mind off your dysphoria. Slip into a fantasy world of dragons and adventures by reading or playing a video game. Some people like to do crosswords or number puzzles or paint and draw. Perhaps get a mindful colouring book.

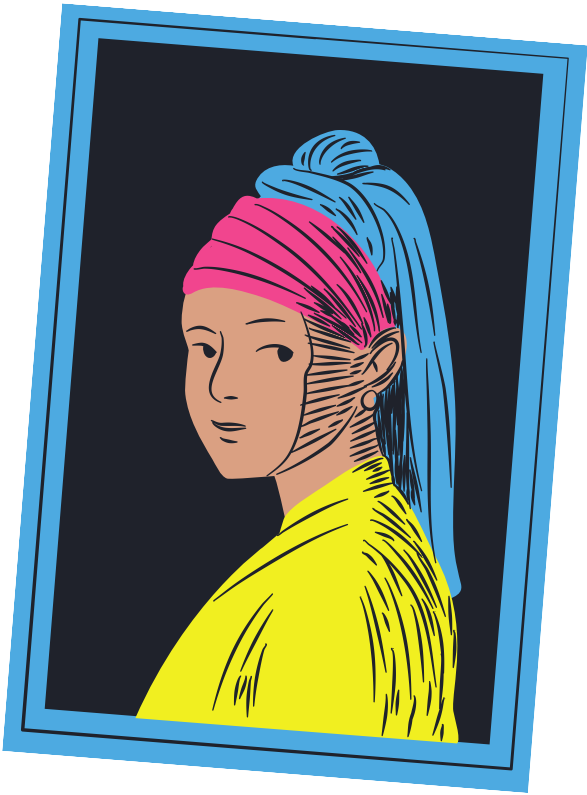


Talk to People



That's right- tell your trusted people that you feel bad. Ask your friends to look after you. They might not understand exactly how you feel but even just getting your feelings out there in the open might help to take away some of its power.

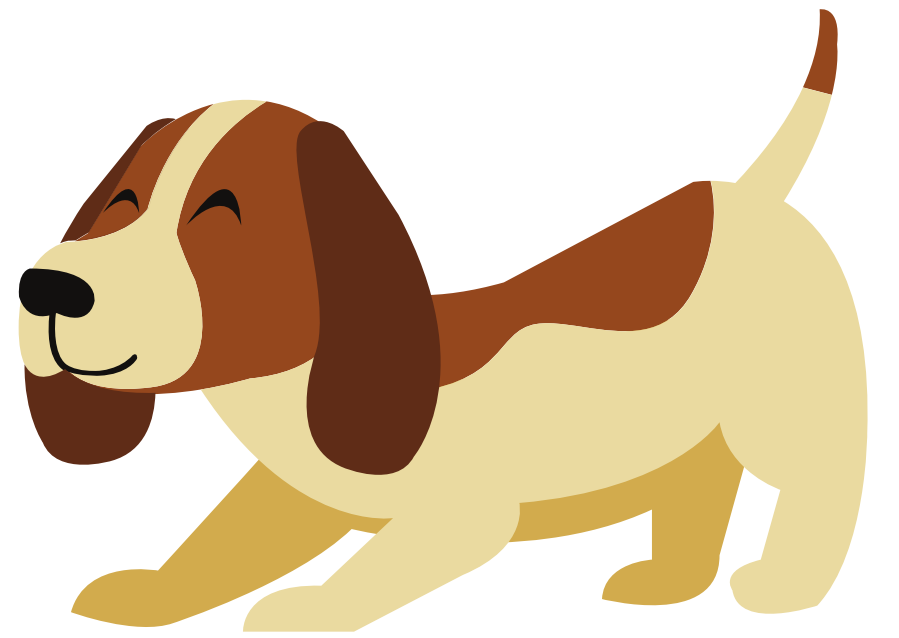
Treat Yourself



Go get a coffee or find a new top in a charity shop. You need not spend much, or maybe don't spend any money at all! Go window shopping or find a free gallery or museum. Give yourself a treat because you deserve one.

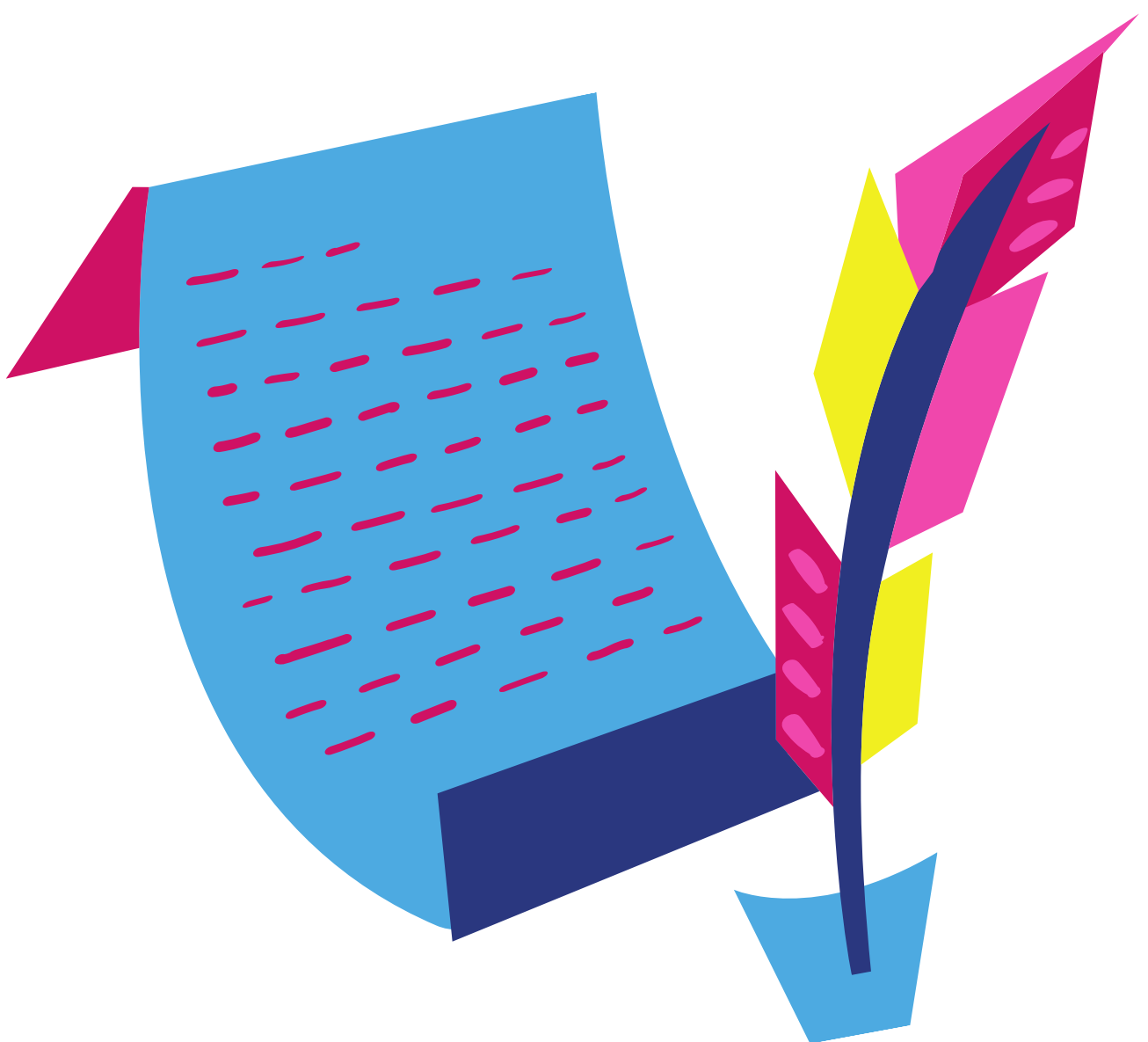
Play with Animals

Perhaps you have a pet or know someone who does. You could walk a dog or maybe even just go to watch dogs play in the park. Animals will never judge you on your appearance and probably don't have much of a grasp of gender anyway. If you can't find any animals to play with then you can YouTube some funny cat videos instead!



Writing

You don't need to be the next Agatha Christie or Bell Hooks to write a short story. You don't have to show anyone to write your feelings down and let them out of your head and heart. Maybe if you feel sad you can write a sad poem and put it somewhere safe or rip it up and throw it away!





Let Yourself Feel Dysphoric

There's nothing wrong with just letting yourself be in the moment. Stay in bed all day if that's what you need to do. Take a break from the world. Close the curtains and switch your phone off.

Be Kind to Yourself

Try to be nice to yourself when you are feeling delicate. Dysphoria often ebbs and flows, and riding the wave will get you back to dry land eventually.



The most important thing is that you **keep yourself as safe as possible** when you feel dysphoric and that means reaching out if you find yourself in a crisis. There is some contact information in the back of this resource that you could put in your phone in case you ever need it and planning for the bad days when you're feeling well is a good idea too. You will learn how to best help yourself with practice and a special tool box of tricks. Above all, remember that the way you feel is not your fault and you are absolutely not a lesser human in any way for being trans.

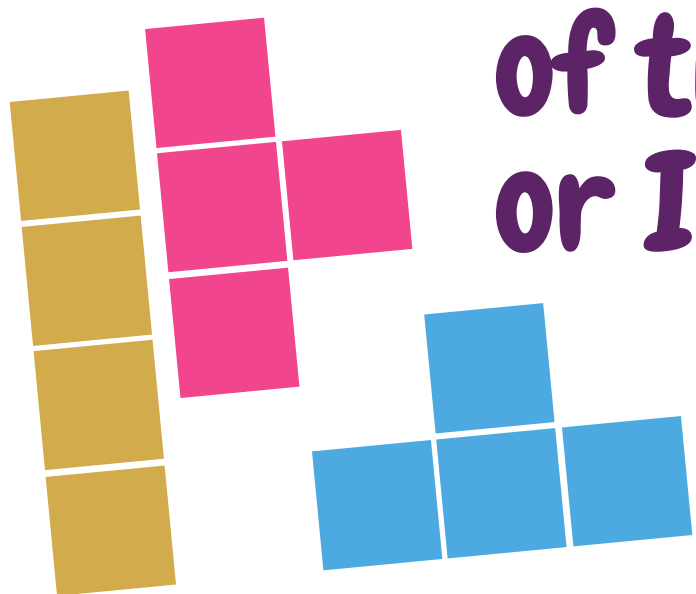
Top Tips from Colin

 Hello! My name is Colin, I take they/them pronouns, and I'd describe myself as trans /non-binary / fluid / multi-transitional / whatever. I'm an art student and I'm really into Emmerdale, One Direction, and the concept of time.



The most consistent physical dysphoria throughout my life has been in my chest, but my gender can also be rather fluid so sometimes I get caught off guard by something making me suddenly dysphoric out of nowhere!

When dysphoria is affecting me, I either try to distract myself or process it head on. When it comes to distractions, I often try to watch videos of things that I really love (like 1D edits) or I try to learn a new skill, I'm currently trying to train myself to be a Classic Tetris World Champion!



As for processing it head on, I make art. I listen to the Mountain Goats and write a letter to my future self, or I work with my collaborator to make casts of my chest. I look directly at my body, I document it, and I let myself feel whatever I need to feel. 



Most importantly, I try to remind myself that whatever I am feeling isn't permanent. It won't feel so bad tomorrow, it won't feel so bad next year. If none of that works, I put on my favourite music and dance as badly and as freely as I can, flailing my limbs, letting everything jiggle, and getting all the pent up energy out.

I've no idea what other people can do really, I guess it's like supporting anyone going through anything, ask them what they need, give them space if they need, give them distractions if they need, let them vent if they need. I always feel best when I feel like I'm doing something productive about it, like I'll make some art about it and that will make me feel like I've done something about it.

I know dysphoria sucks real bad right now, but it won't always feel like this. In the long run, you will get what you need, whether that be medical intervention, or better coping mechanisms, or clothes that make you feel more confident, or friends that validate you, or literally anything else. Plus, this isn't all linear, you're allowed to feel dysphoric today and euphoric tomorrow and dysphoric the day after. Do whatever you need to do to get through to the next good day. 

Top Tips from Oakley



Hey my name is Oakley, I'm 24 years old, and I take he/they pronouns.

I'm very proud to say that I'm a panromantic trans man.

My hobbies include playing the drums, listening to all kinds of music, reading, going for walks around the park whilst listening to a good podcast! Oh and how could I forget about my love of animals!



The main types of dysphoria I have experienced have been around my chest, hair and voice.

When my dysphoria is bad I like to try a few different things: sometimes it helps me to totally change my surroundings: so going for a walk around my local park is a massive help for me. Other times I like to just do something nice for myself so I run myself a nice bubble bath... the bubbles help because then I don't have to look at my chest so much!

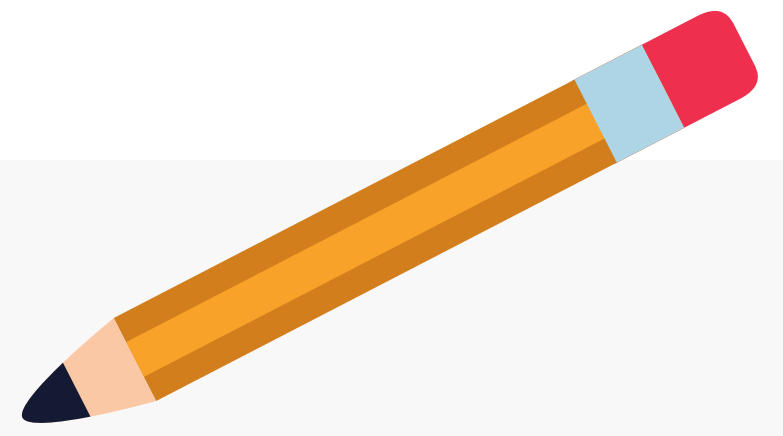


What I find useful from other people when my dysphoria is bad is them reassuring me that despite how bad I may feel it doesn't take away from the fact that I'm male.

My message to others who may be struggling with dysphoria is to keep going and don't give up! Don't let that nasty dysphoria win! Because you're stronger than you know!.



Space for your thoughts



Top Tips from Lucy



Hi! I'm Lucy! (she/her) I'm 21, a trans woman, and here to talk about my dysphoria!

Bits I like! (Thanks HRT!)

- Boobs: My chest looks how I feel it should now!
- Smoother face: Soft! Woo!
- General weight gain: Figure is coming in!
- Slight curves make me happy!
- Hair: Never had it this long before! I love it!
- Androgynous: Pink doesn't suit me, much prefer to be comfy than ultra feminine.

Bits I dislike!

- Beard: Scratchy and ew, stops face being smooth enough
- Voice: Too deep, feels gross
- Height: Too tall! Not supermodel, just depressed
- Hand and Feet: Hair on them looks like they belong to a werewolf
- Genitals: I have an outie where I should have an innie

What I do when I'm feeling down...



Distractions!

Do something that doesn't involve the dysphoric part! Play video games, watch a movie, go for a walk, listen to music, whatever helps.

Dress up!

Try on various femme clothes or outfits. Some will make me feel worse, but I'll soon find stuff that validates my gender, and I can spend time doing normal stuff, just in nice clothes.





Vent!

I'm lucky to have a lot of trans friends who are often up for listening to me rant about dysphoria. They get it, and it helps to know I'm not alone.



Journal!

For me this in the form of writing poetry and the like. Writing in a journal never worked for me, but putting my emotions into art makes a difference.

Tips for supporting trans peeps with dysphoria!

- Listen without judgement
- Ask before giving advice
- Let them speak without interruption
- Ask if there's any way you can help,
- they know what works better than you!



To Trans/Non-binary/unsure people reading this, your body is your gender, because it is yours. Those features you feel dysphoric about, they are features of your gender. Feeling uncomfortable is completely valid. This is not meant to disregard your feelings, and I hope you can use that discomfort to work toward your goals.

Even when you feel weird and gross, you are your gender. Remember that your experiences with transness are unique. What works for me, may not for you, and that's ok! If something doesn't work, take some time to process, think about why it didn't work, and use that to find the next thing to try. Being trans is tough. There's no sugar coating that.

Find the community. We're stronger together. 



Write or draw
something that
makes you feel
happy when
you are down



Write or draw
something that
makes you feel
happy when
you are anxious

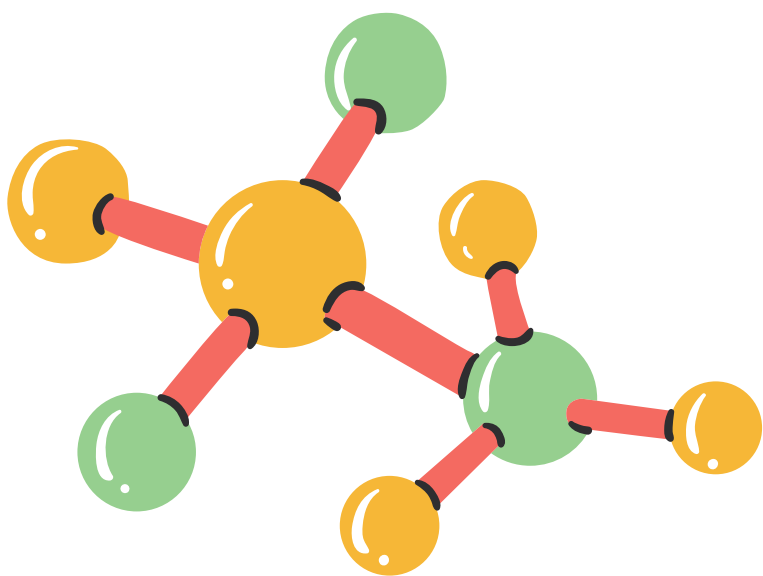
Top Tips from Alex



Hey, I'm Alex :)

I'm a trans guy who identifies as queer (I mean, I know I like girls, but guys are good too? And non-binary people are cool...who knows).

I love playing guitar and have adopted an otter- the best animals. I tend to deal with dysphoria by working out at the gym, punching things or having a shave. I also like shouting or listening to offensive music very loudly.



Sometimes I will focus on other things like making molymod sculptures of molecules and I'm in love with Rachel Riley so I also watch a lot of countdown.



Top Tips from Kai



I am Kai (he/him).

I am a drummer, snowboarder, beach enthusiast, vegan and a trans man. I love camping, live music and cats. I also have depression, anxiety, ADHD and am recovering from anorexia.

To manage my dysphoria and mental health I find it very helpful to be active. Snowboarding and doing sports helps me to concentrate on other things such as goals like landing a new trick or even my dream of going pro. Learning new things helps me remember I can do things. I also find putting my feelings into writing, songs or playing music helps me to get my feelings out in a way that isn't self destructive.

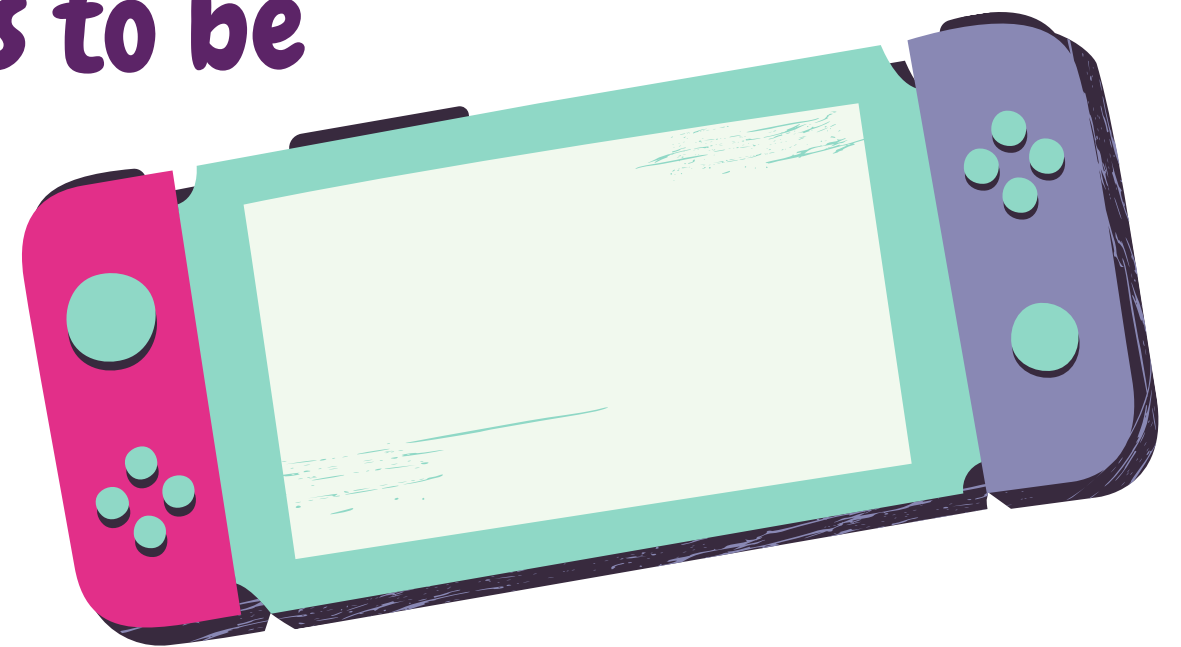


Top Tips from Robyn

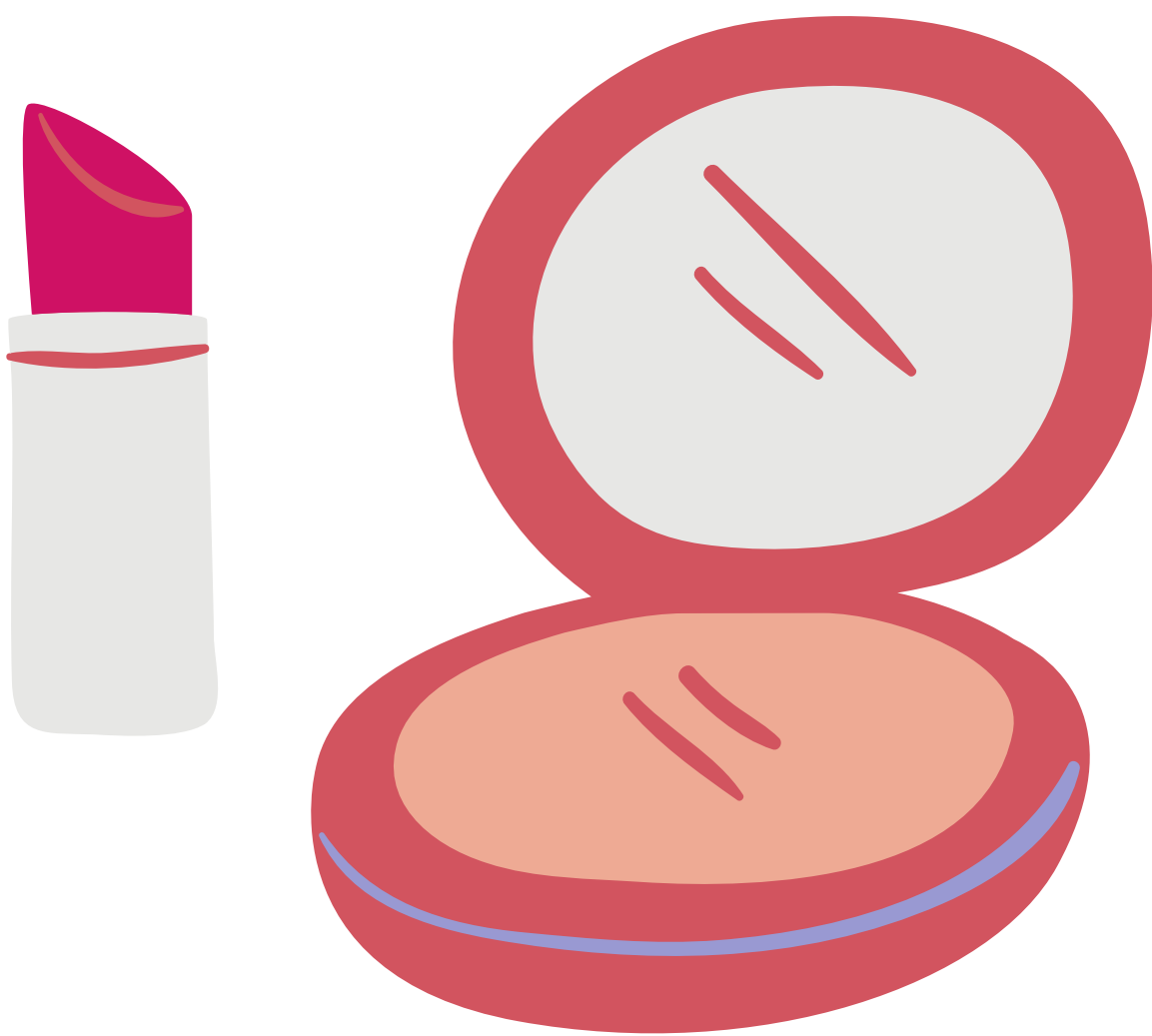


Hey, my name is Robyn. I'm a 24 year old transgender woman living in the wonderful city of Brighton and Hove.

I feel a lot of dysphoria around my bottom half and hope one day to get surgery to correct this. I find it very hard to heal with and often will just shut down for a while but one thing I like to do is to focus on things I enjoy. I find playing and reviewing video games to be very refreshing as I can engage with something without being clouded by depression, anxiety and dysphoria.



I find things so foggy and hard to enjoy when my dysphoria is bad so focusing on these where it's easy to be honest with both myself and anyone reading my content feels like a nice change of pace.

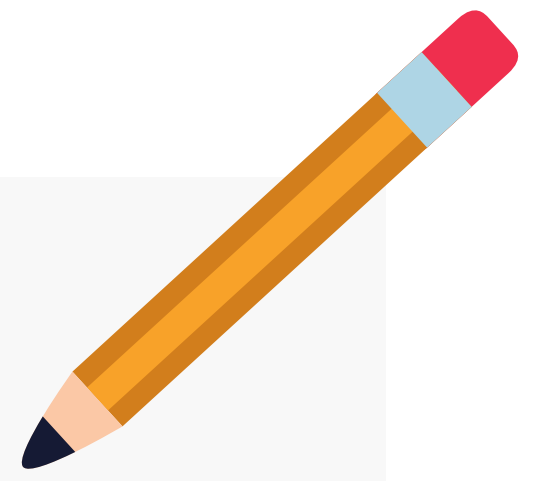


I also like to focus on my appearance, changing up my hair colour every year and using plenty of make-up and clothing to create a style I feel at home in. This helps because although I often find myself feeling out of place in my body I can make my fashion my own. I

might not be comfortable in my skin but I am in my clothing and for now that will have to do.



How could the '5 Ways' Help you if you are feeling dysphoric? write down your answers



1) Connect...

2) Be active...

3) Take Notice...

4) Keep Learning...

5) Give...

Top Tips from Effie

 Hi, I'm Effie! I am a 26 year old trans woman who also identifies as gender queer / non-binary.

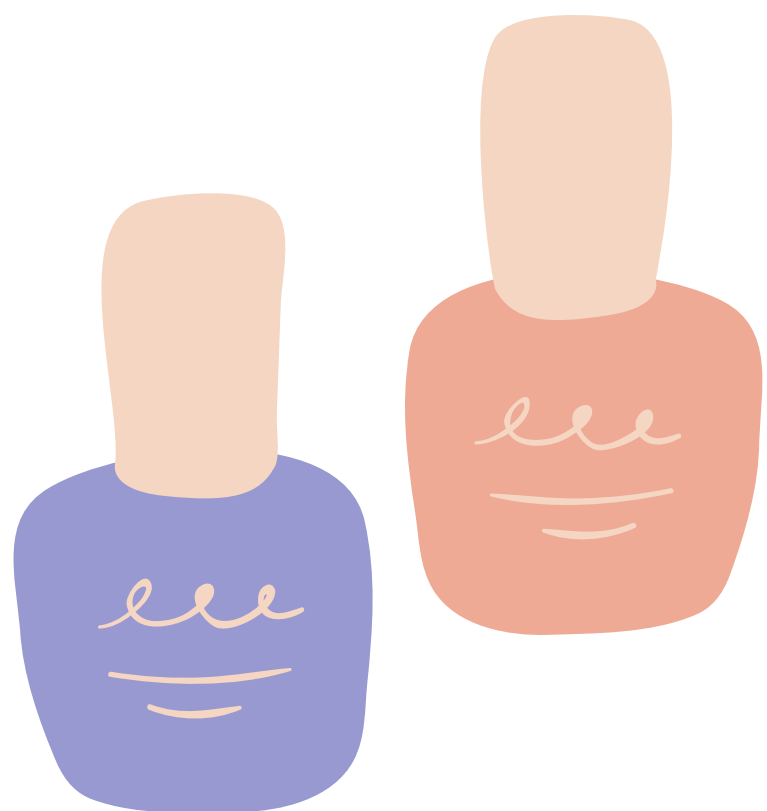
Over the years, my dysphoria has shifted and morphed. Sometimes my height bothers me, other times it's my deep voice. A lot of the time it's just an icky, uncomfortable feeling that makes me feel big like a sore thumb. I don't always know how to describe it, but these are some of the things that have helped me...

Talking to other trans folk. Whether it's to vent, ask for advice, or just to potter around town chatting, being with other trans people feels safe. I'm inspired by all the trans people I meet, and it always acts as a little reminder that 'hey, you must be pretty cool too if you're anything like these gorgeous people'.

Basketball. I love running around and throwing a ball about. Rushing through the air towards the hoop feels like flying. I feel light and free when I'm playing basketball, and it's a space where being a 6ft 5 woman feels awesome. Seeing cis women in the WNBA who have my body shape for the first time was also a big moment for me... 'I'm just like them!'



My final tip would be find the things that give you gender euphoria and hold on to them. Those moments you get all gushy and emotional because something just feels right. For me that's playing guitar with painted nails, washing my hair, pampering myself, or getting all dressed up to go nowhere - take a selfie, it'll last longer!



Never forget how special you are. In the words of Travis Alabanza, 'we are the gift'.

Dysphoria sucks, but being trans is awesome and it does get easier over time.

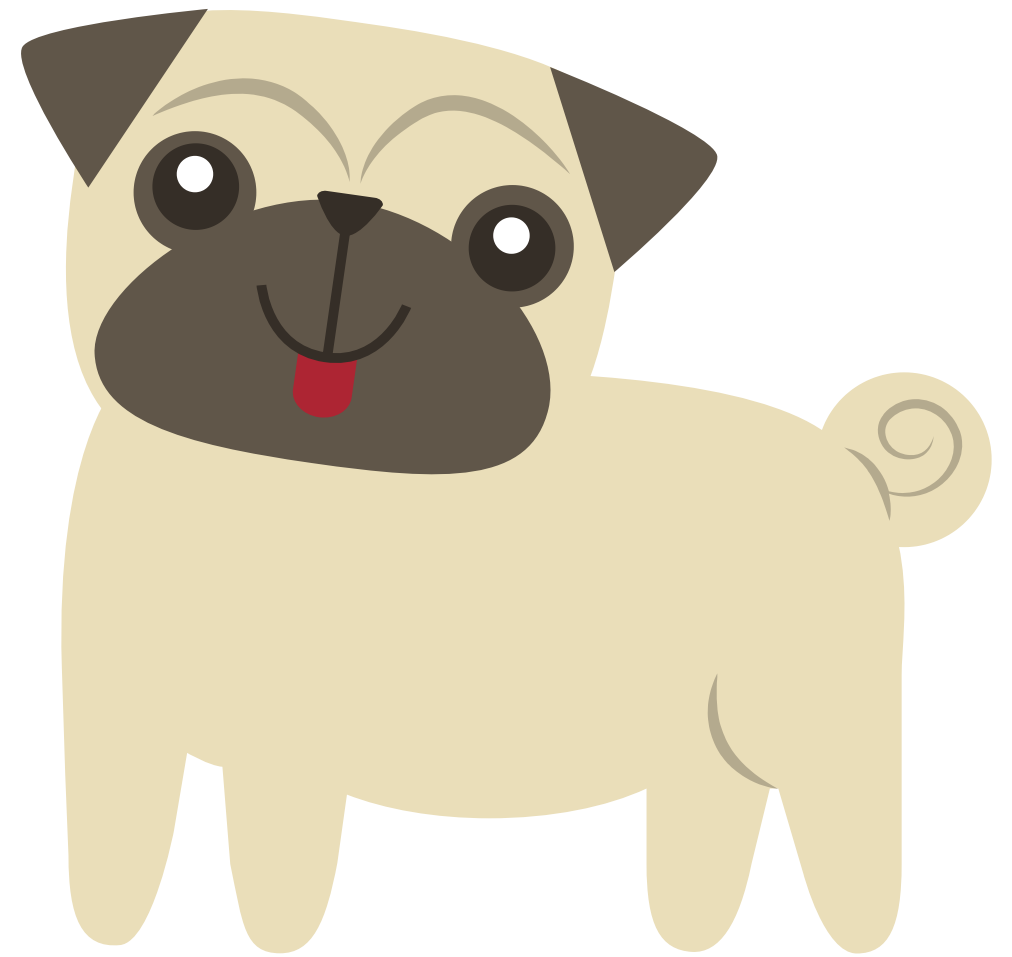


Top Tips from Atlas



I'm Atlas, I'm 18 years old, animal enthusiast, poet, youth leader, christian, transmasculine individual and asexual. I have autism, depression, social anxiety and OCD. I have a diploma in animal management and am a published poet.

I don't like mixing food or loud noises. Being active is something I try to do. It clears my mind and keeping busy keeps me away from falling into my depression and dysphoria. I love walking my dog Bandit and collecting resources for art projects, although sometimes doing anything is hard, especially if I think too much.



One of the most important parts of my life is connecting with others. I live with my church minister and his family, having been disowned by/escaped from my biological family, and my church friends and youth leaders are the closest and most supportive people in my life who make efforts to understand my mental health if not my gender identity, so I try to educate them and show them I am human just like them.

I also help other LGBT youth in church and help out at our youth group. It makes me get up on most days. I also go to a trans youth group which helps me feel accepted and more confident in myself. I love channeling everything inside of me into creativity, my imagination lets me shape myself into the man/ person I someday want to fully become.



Support Services

If you live in Sussex, are aged 5-25, LGBT+ or unsure, and in need of support, contact us via

youth@allsortsyouth.org.uk

or visit our website for more information;

www.allsortsyouth.org.uk

For organisations in other areas, visit;

stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/whats-my-area



Thank you to all of the Allsorts Young People who have contributed to this resource, with additional thanks to Luan for the incredible illustrations (front cover, embroidery graphics, hope candle, and pride flag flowers)