TRANSFORMING LIVES
Trans Mental Health AWARENESS

Heads Up:

TRANS GUIDE TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Transgender Equality Network Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

Heads Up: Trans Guide to Mental Health and Wellbeing is aimed at:

- Trans individuals (people who may act, feel, think, or look different from their sex assigned at birth).
- Those questioning their sense of whether they are a man, woman, something else, or neither (their gender identity).
- Family and friends of trans people.

Your mental health and wellbeing are as important to look after as your physical health. Mental health is something that means a lot of different things to different people. In this guide when we talk about mental health, we are talking about how we feel, how we relate to other people and how we do day-to-day things.

The LGBT Ireland Report showed that over 48% of trans participants had self-harmed and over 75% had considered taking their own life[i]. Transgender Equality Network Ireland's own study, *Speaking from the Margins*: *Trans Mental Health and Wellbeing in Ireland*[ii] found high levels of stress (83%), depression (82%), and anxiety (73%) among trans participants. These figures are much higher than in people who are not trans, so it is important that trans mental health and wellbeing is addressed. This guide will go some of the way to doing that.

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Tips

FOR MAINTAINING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

- **Everyone is different and that is what makes you special**
  You can only be yourself, so do what makes you most comfortable. As a trans person there can be extra pressure to be very feminine or very masculine. It can feel like the people around you want you to fit into a box. It can be difficult to feel comfortable in your identity and in yourself. Beginning to accept yourself as who you are is a big step toward more positive mental health.

- **Stay in contact**
  When you are not feeling good, it can be tempting to shut yourself away from the world. Is there a friend who you have lost touch with that you could say hi to? Getting in touch with friends and family can help, whether it is in person, by phone or online. Some towns and cities have trans peer support where you can go and talk about the things going on in your life. There are also social groups and activities (whether mainstream, LGBT or trans-specific), that can help you meet people.

- **Try something new**
  Is there something you have always wanted to try out? Having a creative outlet can relieve stress and help you feel happier. Whether you start singing, sculpting, painting or acting, these creative activities can capture your attention and provide a channel for your emotions. If one activity does not work, try something different. It can also be fun to join a group of people participating in the same activity, such as a knitting circle or a community choir. You may even find a talent you did not realise you had.

- **Pamper yourself**
  Do you find it hard to make time for yourself? Think of how you want others to treat themselves, and then treat your own body that way. Get exercise, eat healthily and try to get eight hours sleep at night. Find time to relax and be good to yourself. You deserve it, you are important!

- **Eat well**
  Aim for a balanced diet every day. Do not skip meals and try to eat foods from different food groups. This will help you feel better and have more energy for the rest of your day.

- **Drink less alcohol**
  Drinking too much is a common way people try to forget about their feelings. However, this can often leave you feeling worse the next day. Drinking too much can also lead to serious physical and mental health issues. So think about how much you drink and consider reducing the amount you have.

- **Talk about your feelings**
  Letting someone else know how you feel can be helpful. It means that someone else knows how you are getting on and can give you a new way of looking at things.

For more info please go to www.yourmentalhealth.ie

ACCEPTING YOURSELF AS TRANS

So you think you might be trans? Or maybe you are sure that you are?[iii]

The process of realising your identity can be really scary, lonely, exciting and overwhelming. The time before you tell anyone can be difficult but it can also be enlightening.

Some tips for when you realise/start questioning your gender identity:

- **Only you can define your own gender or lack thereof**. You might identify as a man or as a woman. You may not identify as either of, or both of, those genders (non-binary) or you may feel like you do not have a gender (agender). At this point you might not be sure how you identify. That is ok too. For more information about these terms and other possible gender identities, see the glossary at the end of this guide.
- **Confusion is normal and is ok.** Not everyone knows their gender identity, and you do not have to know it. In fact, there are even terms for genders that are difficult to describe – genderqueer being one of them. You do not have fit into society's boxes. You get to define your own identity.
- **Try things out.** Whether in private or in a public space, do what makes you feel comfortable. Try out different names, pronouns, clothes, walking, or talking. Whatever makes you feel comfortable is ok.
- **Take your time.** You do not have to be the 'best' trans person. You do not need to tick every box overnight, or at all. The trans community is diverse and there is no such thing as trans enough.
- **Transitioning is not necessarily medical.** Transitioning means changing the way that you present your identity to society. Transitioning can be social, legal or medical. There are ways of changing your appearance and voice without medically changing your body. In Ireland, it is also possible to legally transition without seeing any doctors. Socially transitioning is when you begin to live as your true self.
- **You are not alone.** Dealing with stigma and your own negative thoughts is hard. There are many supports out there for dealing with transitioning and coming to terms with your identity. We have a list at the back of this guide to get you started. Reach out and do not be afraid to ask for help.
- **Find other trans people.** Whether online or in person there are other trans people out there. There are other people questioning and there are spaces where you can be yourself. Online there are groups for all sorts of people, and regardless of who you are, there is definitely a group for trans people like you.

COMING OUT / TELLING OTHERS ABOUT YOUR GENDER IDENTITY

Coming out is a term to describe telling others about your gender identity, sexual orientation or romantic orientation. For trans people coming out can take many forms, depending on your identity and what makes you comfortable. It may include educating people about your identity and asking people to change the way they address you, such as what name and pronoun they use for you. Coming out can also include dressing differently or going through a medical transition to align your body with your identity.

"You don't need to have a clear answer to the question, 'what is your gender?' or even 'who are you?' Most of us don't. It's okay to not know and to still be figuring things out. Your identity is wonderful and it is the reason why people close to you love you, even if they don't yet know who you really are.

Being trans also doesn't need to be the most defining thing about who you are, but it is a part that makes you uniquely you."

Queer non-binary student activist

Feeling stress and fear about telling others about your gender identity is entirely normal. It is important that you look after your mental health while coming out. You may want to tell your doctor or counsellor prior to coming out, this will give you someone to speak to through what can be a very challenging time. This is especially advisable if you are unsure of the reaction of the people you are coming out to.

Most people who have gone through any sort of coming out process will tell you about the relief they felt when everyone became aware of their identity. However, it is important to also recognise that not everyone comes out to positive reactions. You cannot change other people's reactions, but remember that being trans is not something you can control or that you chose.

You deserve to be happy and if you are trans, coming out and being your authentic self can be a way to achieve that happiness. But there is no one way to be trans and you do not **need** to do **anything** to be trans. This includes coming out.

DEALING WITH TRANSPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

Being trans can be difficult. Transphobia or cissexism are terms to describe being discriminated against because of your gender identity or gender expression. This is where you are being picked on or treated differently because you are trans. This can happen anywhere in life.

It can be very tempting when you are in a situation where you are being discriminated against to cope by avoiding thinking about what is happening. But sometimes telling someone can help make you feel better and may improve your situation.

Violence can happen anywhere; it can be obvious but may not be so. Bullying in school and work is a form of violence and you have a right to deal with it as such. If you feel like someone is consistently using behaviour that makes you feel bad, this may be bullying.

If you are struggling to cope with discrimination, transphobia or bullying, you can talk to someone.

Start a conversation with a supportive friend or family member.

How to get help:

- **In work** you can speak to your manager or to HR about what is happening.
- **In school** you can speak to a teacher you trust or a counsellor.
- **In the street** you can speak to the Gardaí.
- You could also speak to a counsellor, mental health professional, doctor or someone else that you trust.
- If you do not know who to speak to, you can contact us here at TENI on (01) 873 3575.

Please look at the section under self-care for more coping mechanisms and look after yourself. Remember, you are not at fault.

If you have been the victim of violence or discrimination due to your trans identity, TENI has a way of reporting the incident. See www.teni.ie/stad for more details on the STAD campaign.

COPING WITH STRESS AND ANXIETY

Stress can be caused by many things; it may not always be a negative thing. It can add an extra boost of adrenalin that you may need to function correctly. But when stress is constant and impacting you on a day-to-day basis, it becomes unhealthy. As a trans person there may be times in your life where stress is at an increased level and where you will need to manage and reduce your stress. When stress gets out of hand, it becomes anxiety. Severe anxiety can be felt as a headache, difficulty sleeping, restlessness, over-tiredness or even panic attacks.

RECOGNISING ANXIETY

Different people experience anxiety in different ways. If you are experiencing some of the following, you may be experiencing anxiety:

- Difficulty concentrating.
- A sense of feeling constantly on edge.
- Physical sensations like headaches, butterflies in your stomach, sweaty hands, high blood pressure, dizziness, breathing heavily, feeling faint or sweating.
- Smoking or drinking more than usual.
- Eating too much or not eating enough.
- Feeling fidgety or rushing around nervously.
- Feeling run down, tired, having problems concentrating or problems sleeping at night.
- Feeling worried all the time.
- Feeling overwhelmed or panicked about even little things.
- Spending a lot of time thinking and often overthinking things.

THE FOLLOWING STEPS CAN HELP YOU MANAGE THE STRESS YOU ARE FEELING:

- **Recognise stress as a problem.** If you are feeling tired or ill, that could be a result of stress and pressure that you are feeling. Do not ignore physical warnings such as tense muscles, over-tiredness, headaches or migraines.
- **Identify what is causing your stress.** Can you do anything about it? Are there practical solutions to any of the things that are causing you stress? Also recognise that some stressful things will improve in time and others you have no control over. Although it can be difficult, letting go of things that you can't change or that will change themselves can give you relief from current pressures.
- **Review your lifestyle:**
  - Are you trying to hide your feelings to appear strong to everyone?
  - Are there things you are doing which could be handed over to someone else? Can you take a step back from some things while trying to improve your lifestyle?
  - Can you do things in a more leisurely way? Are you trying to change your entire life overnight?
  - You may need to prioritise things you are trying to achieve and reorganise your life so that you are not trying to do everything at once.[iv]

You can take a step back. You can find someone who you can speak to, whether that is a doctor or someone at the other end of the phone.

If you are experiencing a panic attack – which may manifest as a feeling of intense fear and anxiety, a shortness of breath and sometimes a feeling that you are about to pass out, try breathing in slowly for a count of three and out slowly for a count of seven. If you need extra help, ring a helpline or speak to your doctor or even a friend.

The Samaritans 116 123.
LGBT Helpline 1890 929 539.

SELF-CARE

Self-care is, quite simply, doing things that make you feel good and looking after yourself. You are important and worthwhile and caring for yourself is important. There are so many ways to practice self-care.

HERE ARE A COUPLE OF IDEAS FOR PRACTICING SELF-CARE

- **Are you very hard on yourself?** Do you find yourself thinking negatively about yourself? Give yourself a break, you can be positive about

yourself. It can help you be more productive and help your self-esteem. Adding a few positive things like, "I did that well", "I helped with…" and standing up for yourself in your mind can make a big difference.

> **"What's the best part of being me? My resilience and ability to survive and thrive no matter what challenges are put in my way."**
>
> *Heteronormative woman of transgender history*

- **Take some leisure time each day.** Whether that is going for a walk or playing a musical instrument, try to do an activity you enjoy.
- **Get some exercise.** Physical activity releases endorphins and will help to improve your mental health. That exercise can be trampolining or it could be going for a run, going hiking or getting into a new team sport. Try and exercise daily for at least half an hour at a time.
- **Choose optimism and take note of the little positive things that happen.** Often trans people can focus on the negatives in their lives because it can feel overwhelming. But if you can look at the small things that are happening it can really help your overall outlook.[v]
- **Take some time to be in the moment, even for just a minute each day.** Take a note of how you are feeling and be aware of yourself.
- **Spend time with people who "get it."** A lot of your day may be spent around people who do not understand what trans is or who you are (or perhaps another part of your identity or where you work). But take some time with people who get you each week. That may be online or in person but make sure there is a period during the week where you can be real.[vi]

- **Give yourself short term and realistic goals.** It can be easy to want everything to change immediately. Set yourself SMART Goals, these can give you small meaningful steps to work toward. They can be applied to all aspects of life and are really useful.
- **Make a plan.** At times if people get very stressed out about a certain circumstance it can be good to plan how you are going to face it. In other words, to try and, as far as possible, prepare for the situation and how you are going to deal with it.[vii]

Some, none or all of these may be useful to you but in the unlikely case that none of these work, self-care is about healthy ways of making yourself feel good. Whatever feels good to you is valid.

> The acronym SMART has several slightly different variations, which can be used to provide a more comprehensive definition of goal setting:
>
> **S** - specific, significant, stretching
>
> **M** - measurable, meaningful, motivational
>
> **A** - agreed upon, attainable, achievable, acceptable, action-oriented
>
> **R** - realistic, relevant, reasonable, rewarding, results-oriented
>
> **T** - time-based, time-bound, timely,

FEELING SAD/ DEPRESSION

When someone feels sad there is usually a reason behind it. But sometimes there is no apparent reason. The stress and hardships of coming out, transitioning and transphobia can cause trans people additional stress and hardship that cis (non-trans) people do not face on a daily basis. This extra hardship means that trans people are more likely to feel sad without it being connected to any single event. Going to your local trans support group might be a good way to deal with these sad feelings.

Sometimes it is possible to cope with these feelings with the support of family and friends but other times it might be necessary to speak to a doctor, counsellor or support organisation.

YOU MAY BE DEPRESSED OR EXPERIENCING SIGNS OF DEPRESSION, WHEN:

- The low mood or symptoms of depression last for two weeks or more.
- The symptoms interfere with your everyday life.

Common Symptoms of Depression include:

- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness.
- Lack of interest in daily activities and in the things you enjoy.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Lack of motivation.
- Sleeping too much, too little or having disturbed sleep.
- Comfort eating or loss of appetite.
- Tiredness or fatigue with no physical cause.

Any of us can experience low mood or depression at any stage in our lives. It can interfere with our enjoyment of life and our ability to do the things we want to do. Getting help for low mood or depression can really make a difference. There are many different things that can help - some that you can do yourself and some that involve getting support from others.

SUPPORT FOR DEPRESSION

When thinking about support, it is important to recognise that everyone experiences mental health problems in a unique way and therefore help, treatment and support also varies from person-to-person. What works for one person may not for another. It is useful to think about what you feel will help you, and not to feel you are beyond help if a certain type of treatment does not work out.[viii]

FEELING LONELY

Most of us experience feelings of loneliness at some point in our lives. It might be because we spend more time by ourselves than we want, or because we feel disconnected from the people around us.

Isolation is when we are separated (or feel separated) from the people and things around us. We may be isolated because we choose to be separated from others or because of a situation we cannot control (such as moving home or bereavement).

It is possible to feel lonely and isolated when surrounded by other people. All kinds of things can set you apart – your gender identity, your sexuality, your race/ethnicity, your height, your weight, your (dis)ability or just being different. You can also feel isolated because of how you think and feel, if you believe others do not feel or think the same.

STAY CONNECTED

If you are struggling with isolation, you might feel like just giving up and cutting yourself off from other people. This is likely to make the loneliness and isolation worse. Try to stay connected with your community or to find activities where you can meet people who have the same interests as you. Doing things with others can really help – the more things you get involved with and the more people you get to know, the less likely you are to feel isolated and alone.

If you have no family or friends living nearby or have lost touch over the years, this can be a source of isolation and loneliness. Why not take action to get in touch, even if it has been a long time. Pick up the phone, write a letter or send an email. The good news is that others may benefit from your call too!

If you are living away from the larger towns or cities, or if you have difficulties leaving the house, there are also ways to stay in touch with the online trans community. There are a variety of online support groups and information pages. See teni.ie/support for more information.

Everyone feels a bit lonely at some stage or other - you can change this by making the first move. The key is to not wait on others to get in touch.[ix]

THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE

Experiencing a lot of emotional pain or distress, and losing hope that things can improve, can lead to suicidal thoughts. There are a lot of different types of support available to help people who are experiencing emotional distress and it is important to find something that suits you and meets your particular needs. It can help to talk to someone you trust and to tell them you are going through a difficult time. You could ask if they can help you to find the support you need.

Did you know that there are Trans Peer Support Groups in many towns and cities across Ireland?

Some of them organise social activities and they can be really great places to meet people and to make friends.

If you are thinking about suicide, there are several ways to get help:

- **Talk to a GP**
  Contact a local family doctor (GP) or health centre by visiting the HSE.ie online service finder. If it's late in the evening, night time or the weekend, contact a GP Out of Hours Service. GPs are also listed under 'General Practitioners' in the Golden Pages. Find out how a GP can offer support for mental health problems.
- **Contact hospital services**
  Go to or contact the Emergency Department of your nearest general hospital if you are contemplating suicide or if you need help. Hospitals are listed on the HSE.ie online service finder. You can also contact the emergency services by calling 999 or 112 if you or someone else has harmed themselves or taken an overdose.
- **Make an appointment with HSE Mental health services**
  If you have been (or are currently) supported by a mental health team, go to the Emergency Department or contact the service you are attending and ask for an appointment as soon as possible.
- **Counselling**
  Pieta House offer support and counselling for people who have experienced suicidal thoughts.
- **Listening services**
  - Samaritans is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone struggling to cope or struggling with suicidal thoughts.
  - For confidential, non-judgemental support:
    - ★ Free call 116 123.
    - ★ Email jo@samaritans.org
    - ★ Visit www.samaritans.ie for details of the nearest branch.
  - The LGBT Helpline is available if you would like to speak to someone who is trained specifically in LGBT issues.
    - ★ Call 1890 929 539.
    - ★ Visit www.lgbt.ie for instant messaging and more details.
    - ★ LGBT Helpline Opening Hours:
      Monday to Wednesday, 6.30pm - 9pm.
      Thursday, 6.30pm - 10pm.
      Friday, 4pm - 9pm.
      Saturday & Sunday, 4pm - 6pm.

You might need to try a few options before you find appropriate support but do not give up trying – there is help available. If possible, ask someone to come along with you to the support service you contact.

When someone tells you they are thinking about suicide

When someone tells you they are thinking of taking their own life, it is frightening. There are practical things you can do right away:

- **Do your best to remove access**
  Remove access to any means of suicide or self-harm– such as medicines, a rope, etc.
- **Hospital emergency services**
  Go to or contact the Emergency Department of your nearest general hospital. Hospitals are listed on the HSE.ie online service finder. You can also contact the emergency services by calling 999 or 112 if someone has harmed themselves or taken an overdose.
- **Stay with them**
  Stay with them while you are making contact with the services listed above. Try not to leave them on their own.
- **Self-Care**
  Look after yourself during this time as well.
- **Go with them to get help**
  Once you have contacted the services, go with them to their appointment.[x]

HOW TO TELL SOMEONE YOU ARE THINKING OF SUICIDE

Research has shown that a number of people visit their GP in the week before they complete suicide but do not tell their doctor that they are feeling suicidal. It can be difficult to find the words to tell your health practitioner how you are feeling or to come out to them. The sentences below may help.

- "This is hard to talk about – I need to tell you that I have been thinking about ending my life."
- "There is something else I need to tell you; it may not be directly relevant but I want you to be aware that I am trans."
- "When I feel I can't cope I hurt myself to relieve the pain."
- "I have been feeling very down and the feelings do not go away."
- "There are a number of things going on for me and I want to tell you about all of them."

SELF-HARM

Self-harm means harming yourself as a way of dealing with emotional distress. Sometimes distressing problems may feel like they will never go away. It can seem that things will never get better. This can be a lonely place to be. Some people use self-harm as a way to try to escape from or deal with pain or stress that they find difficult to tolerate in their lives.

If self-harm is something you use as a way of dealing with emotional pain, there is support available to help you find other ways of coping.

If you have self-harmed or you are thinking of self-harming, you can get help from:

- **A GP**
  Locate a local family doctor (GP) or health centre by visiting the HSE.ie online service finder. Contact a GP Out of Hours Service if it's late in the evening, night time or the weekend. GPs are also listed under 'General Practitioners' in the Golden Pages. Find out how a GP can offer support for mental health problems.
- **Hospital services**
  Go to or contact the Emergency Department of your nearest general hospital if you have self-harmed and need medical attention. Hospitals are listed on the HSE.ie online service finder. You can also contact the emergency services by calling 999 or 112.
- **HSE Mental health services**
  If you have been (or are currently) supported by a mental health team, go to the Emergency Department or contact the service you are attending and ask for an appointment as soon as possible.
- **Counselling**
  Pieta House offer support and counselling. A GP can recommend counselling services in your area. These might include free, low cost or private options. Traveller Counselling Service, is also available as a service run by and for Travellers (See the support section for more information).

- **Listening service**
  - Samaritans is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone struggling to cope or struggling with suicidal thoughts.
  - For confidential, non-judgemental support:
    - ★ Free call 116 123.
    - ★ Email jo@samaritans.org
    - ★ Visit www.samaritans.ie for details of the nearest branch.
  - The LGBT Helpline is available if you would like to speak to someone who is trained specifically in LGBT issues.
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    - ★ Thursday, 6.30pm - 10pm.
    - ★ Friday, 4pm - 9pm.
    - ★ Saturday & Sunday, 4pm - 6pm.

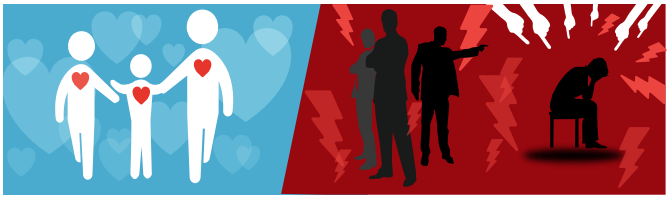
COPING WITH FAMILY DIFFICULTIES

There are supports out there for members of your family who are coming to terms with your identity or coping with your transition. TransParenCI is a support group for parents and family members of the trans community. It may take your family some time to come around to you being trans – this may be an entirely new concept to them and something that was not in their vision for your life. It can be difficult for parents to alter these plans that they have spent years making and although this is understandable, it is also important to look after yourself during this time. While they take this time it is useful to remember that you are just as entitled to comfort as them and that you can make provisions for your own comfort.

SOME TIPS FOR COPING WITH UN-AFFIRMING FAMILY & FRIENDS[xi]

If your family and friends are saying and doing damaging and problematic things, they may be doing things that feel un-affirming. It may be beneficial to follow these tips for your own comfort and safety:

- **Cultivate a Chosen Family.** Make sure you spend time with people who understand. Maybe these will be other members of the trans or LGBT+ communities. It is important that you ensure that you have somewhere to go if you are not finding the support you need at home.
- **Take a step away from damaging people.** It may be difficult but if somebody is making you feel bad and is negatively impacting the way you feel it may be necessary to put up boundaries in your life.
  - **Physical Boundaries:** This could be going home for less weekends or spending less time in family situations. Taking physical space while your loved ones are processing your identity or transition is important because you deserve to feel affirmed.
  - **Emotional Boundaries:** This could take the form of things that you do not talk about with certain people or maybe that you spend less time interacting with them for your own protection. It is ok to decide to reduce your time and investment in people and this can be a good way of maintaining your own mental wellbeing.
- **Create a strong support system.** When you feel like the people you usually turn to are not there it is important that you have a place to turn.
  - **Physical escape.** If you are living with un-affirming people it can be really beneficial to be able to get away from that space to somewhere more positive. This can be for a couple of hours or for a night every so often. This allows you a chance to emotionally recharge and be around people who are affirming.
  - **Emotional support.** This could be someone you chat to if you are having a hard time or even someone you text while having tough conversations. This is crucial when you are putting up new emotional boundaries.
- **Creative outlets.** Find a way to explore your emotions in a positive way. This can be writing, singing, painting or whatever suits you. It can be helpful to express the emotions that you are feeling in a positive way.
- **Write it down**. Write letters to the affirming people in your life, you do not have to send



them. You can also write down your feelings and express them openly on paper. Keeping a journal is one way of doing this.

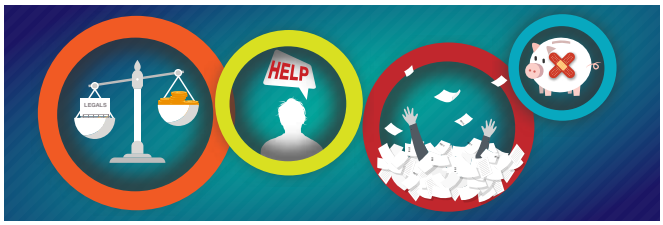
- **Engage in your feelings.** It can be hard to check in and actually notice how you are feeling. It is a really positive step to take. Also expressing your feelings to the un-affirming people in your life may lead to change in their behaviour. Talk about how their behaviour is making you feel and try to talk about your feelings without placing blame on the person, this can lead to a much more positive interaction.

COPING WITH FINANCIAL OR LEGAL DIFFICULTIES

The stress of money worries or legal problems has a different effect on each of us. It can sometimes affect our mental and physical health, but there are steps you can take to lessen the stress and worry.

You may be tempted to ignore what is going on because you are too scared to face it. However, this is unlikely to make the legal or money problems go away and in fact they may grow if you do not address them. There are some things listed below that can help.

- **Take it one day at a time.** Sometimes it all seems too much to take at once. Focus on now and trust that you will be able to cope with the future. Plan the day and you will feel like you have achieved something, regardless of how small.
- **Talk about it and ask for help.** Often when facing financial or legal difficulties, stigma prevents us from talking about things. Taking the time to share a problem often gives us perspective that we did not have before.
- **Get advice:**
  - Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) - 1890 283 438.
  - Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline - 0761 07 4050.
  - Mortgage advice – keepingyourhome.ie
  - Legal problems?
    - Talk to a solicitor.
    - If you cannot afford a solicitor, contact the Legal Aid Board.
    - Most Citizens Information Centres also have someone available at certain times to give legal advice, so they may also be able to help.



POSITIVE AGING

It is never too late to realise you are trans or to transition, but even if you transitioned years ago, aging as a trans person can be challenging. Here are some tips for positive aging:

- **Consider getting involved in something new.** There are so many options available. Here are just a few ways to be active while aging:
  - **Volunteer with a local community group.** You can meet some new people and learn some new skills. They will appreciate the help too.
  - **Get involved with a nearby Active Retirement group.** Go to www.activeirl.ie/ to find your nearest one.
  - **Take part in some form of exercise.** There are so many programmes out there for people of every ability. Getting moving is a great way to maintain positive mental health and improve your physical health. Exercise increases endorphins and can be a great way to improve your stress management and help you get more sleep.[xii]
- **Get to know people and aim to spend some time each day around other people.** If you are concerned about how people may react to you being trans, talk to the group leader about it and it may prompt the group into getting more education.

SUPPORTING YOUR TRANS CHILD

When your child tells you that they are trans, it can be extremely surprising and challenging. There are cases where your loved one may have been acting distant or struggling with their mental health and

this is a revelation as to what was on their mind. In all cases though this can be a turning point in your relationship with your loved one.

An important step that you can take while you are coming to terms with the identity of your young person is to maintain open communication. This may be a difficult time for both yourself and your child but by improving communication you can begin to address their needs and your own. Listening to them is also key to moving forward to a place of acceptance.[xiii]

However, it is also important to look after yourself, think about seeing a counsellor or finding your nearest TransParenCI support group for support from other people in a similar situation.

"Thinking back, I feel it was a huge validation of me as a parent when my child confided in me that they were trans. I really believe that keeping communication open between parents and young people makes family life much better. I would encourage parents to give themselves time to get used to the change because once you see your child is more comfortable in their skin you will never regret supporting them to be the person they are!"

- Father of Non-Binary Trans Person

To find out where your nearest TransParenCI group is go to www.teni.ie, or email transparencigroup@gmail.com

EATING, SLEEPING AND EXERCISE

Food, sleep and exercise are key components of physical and mental health. Whilst we all know this, do you actually eat well, sleep enough and get enough exercise? Making the effort to eat five portions of fruit & vegetables a day, reducing sweet things and doing three hours of moderate exercise a week is recommended for maintaining health.

Sleep allows your body to rest and energy levels to be restored but sleep is also an active state that affects both physical and mental wellbeing. Most people need about 7-8 hours of sleep a day. If your sleep patterns change and sleeping issues begin to affect your ability to carry out your everyday activities, then you should contact your GP or health practitioner.

TIPS FOR GETTING TO SLEEP

- Avoid the enemies of sleep before bedtime: Stimulants, complex thinking, worrying, TV or phone.
- Develop a regular sleep schedule.
- Develop a good sleeping environment such as a comfortable bed in a cool, dark room.
- Only use your bed for sleeping and sex.
- Manage stress and anxiety.
- Develop a 'going to bed' routine/ritual so your body knows you are about to sleep.
- Develop some relaxation techniques like deep breathing, muscle relaxation or visualisation.
- Take a warm bath with relaxing oils.
- Eat well and exercise during the day.

TIPS FOR STAYING ASLEEP

- Try to avoid things that will stress and annoy you in the hour before you try to sleep.
- Aim to relax the body rather than trying to sleep.
- If you are not asleep after about 20 minutes, get up but keep the lights low and engage in a non-stimulating activity such as reading or journaling.
- Avoid alcohol as initially it makes you sleepy but acts as a stimulant a few hours later and decreases the quality of sleep.

Remember – what works for some might not work for others. Stress affects falling asleep and staying asleep so improved stress management can significantly improve sleep.

TALKING TO HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Being trans is not a direct cause of any illness but it can have an indirect influence on your health. For example, trans people on hormones may be at increased risk for some illnesses such as cervical and breast cancer. Because of this indirect influence it is important that your GP or other healthcare professional knows your gender identity. If you cannot talk openly and honestly to your doctor when you need to, then it is important to find another doctor that you can be open with.

You should be aware that your relationships with your GP, health professionals, counsellors, mental health practitioners and social workers are confidential with respect to other members of your family.

There are ongoing initiatives to raise awareness of trans issues with health practitioners. TENI or your local LGBT centre/group will provide you with details of LGBT friendly health service providers.

*** You are entitled to good healthcare ***

POSITIVE MESSAGES

It is important to remember that you are not on your own. As a trans person you have a bigger support network than you will ever realise. We have included some positive messages for you here, use the rest of the lines to write your own or get your friends and family to write some.

"Ask for what you need. Don't isolate yourself completely from people who care. Don't reduce your world to just your problems. Do something, read something, watch something; give yourself something else to think about."

- Trans man

"There cannot be darkness without light. Hard times and good times work the same. Good times will always come around."

- Changing. Transgender. Female. Tomboy

"Being trans has given me access to this whole community, and as well feminism and equality have always been a big part of how I think about the world and in retrospect being agender helped me see through imposed gender expectations at a young age and it impacted who I am in a huge way."

- Agender, Queer, Autism Spectrum, Bogger, Introvert

"When you get to a point where you feel you have figured something out about yourself it's ok to be afraid, the sooner you accept it the closer to happiness you are, and there is TENI there to help you."

- Non binary trans girl

"The best part about being trans is meeting so many wonderful people and learning about and respecting different identities."

- Queer non binary trans guy who loves dogs

"When I'm having a bad day I talk to people in similar situations and we support each other, which helps a lot."

- Pansexual trans man, queer and proud

Write your own positive messages here or get a friend or family member to write in a message:

What would you say to a friend having a bad day?

SUPPORT AVAILABLE

HELPLINES

LGBT Helpline - Listening & information helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender (LGBT) individuals, their family & friends.

- Helpline: 1890 929 539.
- Email: info@lgbt.ie
- Web: www.lgbt.ie

The Samaritans - Confidential listening for anyone struggling to cope.

- Helpline: Freephone 116 123 (callers from Rep of Ireland).
- N Ireland Helpline: 08457 90 90 90 (callers from N. Ireland).
- Email: jo@samaritans.org (email response issues within 24 hours).
- Web: www.samaritans.org

ChildLine - Provides a free and confidential listening service to children and young people up to the age of 18.

- Helpline (24hr Freephone): 1800 66 66 66.
- Web: www.childline.ie

Gay Switchboard Dublin - Confidential helpline, parents supports, drop-in service.

- Helpline: (01) 872 1055 (Mon-Fri, 6:30-9pm/ Weekends & Bank Hols, 4-6pm).
- Drop-in: Saturdays 2-4pm in Outhouse, 105 Capel St, Dublin 1.
- Web: www.gayswitchboard.ie

Aware - Provides support to those affected by depression.

- Helpline (locall): 1890 303 302 (Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm).
- Email: supportmail@aware.ie (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm).
- Web: www.aware.ie

Pieta House - Provides support for those struggling with self-harm and thoughts of suicide. They also provide suicide bereavement support.

- Helpline (24hr): 1800 247 247.
- Web: www.pieta.ie

Rape Crisis Network Ireland - For those who are survivors of sexual violence and those seeking support for others.

- Helpline (24 Hr): 1800 778888.
- Email: info@rcni.ie
- Web: www.rapecrisishelp.ie

TRANS SUPPORTS

Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) Ireland's national trans organisation. TENI works to improve the lives of trans people and their families through information, education and advocacy. We also provide support to trans support organisations throughout the country.

- Phone: (01) 873 3575.
- Email: office@teni.ie
- Web: www.teni.ie

TransParenCI - Ireland's organisation to support the parents and family members of trans people. They provide support groups for parents and children.

- Email - transparencigroup@gmail.com

IndividualiTy (BeLonG To) - Social group for young trans people and those questioning their gender identity.

- Phone: (01) 670 6223.
- Email: info@belongto.org

Irish Trans Student Alliance (ITSA) - Peer-support group for students and young people (18-30) who are trans, gender variant, intersex, questioning or exploring their gender identity.

- Email: transtraining.itsa@gmail.com

SAIL NI - A support organisation for the families of transgender and gender variant people in Northern Ireland.

- Phone: (+44) 75 10 228 411.
- Email: sail@transgenderni.com
- Web: www.sailni.com

GenderJam NI - Supports the young transgender community in Northern Ireland directly by bringing young people together, producing resources and advocating for the rights of trans youth in the region.

- Phone: (+44) 28 90 996 819.
- Email: info@genderjam.org.uk
- Web: www.genderjam.org.uk

For the most up to date information, see: www.teni.ie/support

ONLINE SUPPORT

SpunOut: www.spunout.ie
Headstrong: www.headstrong.ie
Reachout: www.reachout.com

LGBT+ ORGANISATIONS

★ BeLong To Youth Services
Phone: (01) 670 6223.
Email: info@belongto.org

For a full list of LGBT youth supports around the country please see www.belongto.org

★ Gay Men's Health Service
Phone: (01) 669 9553.
Email: gmhsclinic@hse.ie

Provides STI testing for gay and bi men and trans people.

★ See www.lgbt.ie for more LGBT supports.

SERVICES FOR THOSE WITH INTERSECTING IDENTITIES & CIRCUMSTANCES

Intersecting identities are complex and mean additional stigma and different challenges for trans people.

There are many organisations that have training in trans identities and can provide support for people who have other identities and circumstances that may have specific needs.

Services for (dis)abled people

Inclusion Ireland

- Phone: (01) 855 9891.
- Email: info@inclusionireland.ie
- Web: www.inclusionireland.ie/

AsIAm

- Web: www.aisiam.ie

Migrant rights and anti-racism

Migrant Rights Campaign Ireland (MRCI)

- Phone: (01) 889 7570.
- Email: info@mrci.ie
- Web: www.mrci.ie/

Sex Workers

Sex Worker's Alliance of Ireland

- Phone: 085 8249 305.
- Email: info@swai.eu
- Web: sexworkersallianceireland.org/

Ruhama

- Phone: (01) 836 0292.
- Email: admin@ruhama.ie
- Web: www.ruhama.ie

Traveller and Roma Communities

Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre

- Phone: (01) 878 0255.
- Email: info@pavee.ie
- Web: www.paveepoint.ie

Traveller Counselling Service

- Phone: 086 308 1476.
- Email: travcounselling@gmail.com

Homeless Services

CrossCare

- Phone: (01) 836 0011.
- Web: www.crosscare.ie/

Young People in Care

EPIC – Empowering People In Care

- Phone: (01) 872 7661.
- Email: info@epiconline.ie
- Web: www.epiconline.ie

HIV+ and AIDS

HIV Ireland

- Phone: (01) 873 3799.
- Email: info@hivireland.ie
- Web: www.hivireland.ie/

GLOSSARY

Cisgender: A non-trans person (i.e. a person whose gender identity and gender expression is aligned with the sex assigned at birth).

Cissexism: The assumption that a cisgender identity is more authentic or natural than a trans identity. The belief that a person's sex assigned at birth always remains their real gender (e.g. suggesting that a trans woman is 'really a man' or a trans man is 'really a woman').

Coming out: The process of accepting and telling others about one's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Many trans people will 'come out' as a different gender to the sex assigned at birth and may begin a social or physical transition.

Crossdresser: In North America, the preferred term for transvestite is crossdresser. It is intended to sound less medicalised. It refers to a broad spectrum of experiences and there are numerous motivations for crossdressing such as a need to express femininity/masculinity, artistic expression, performance (e.g. drag queen/king), or erotic enjoyment (See also 'Transvestite').

Gender Expression: The external manifestation of a person's gender identity. Gender can be expressed through mannerisms, grooming, physical characteristics, social interactions and speech patterns.

Gender Fluid: Is a non-binary gender identity. Gender fluid individuals experience different gender identities at different times. A gender fluid person's gender identity can be multiple genders at once, then switch to none at all, or move between single gender identities. Some gender fluid people regularly move between only a few specific genders, perhaps as few as two.

Gender Identity: Refers to a person's deeply-felt identification as male, female, or some other gender. This may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender variant: People whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from traditional or stereotypical expectations of how a man or woman 'should' appear or behave.

Genderqueer: A person whose gender varies from the traditional 'norm' or who feels their gender identity is neither female nor male, both female and male, or a different gender identity altogether.

Non-binary: An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female or between or beyond genders. Similar to the usage of transgender, people under the non-binary umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms.

Sex: The designation of a person at birth as male or female based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones).

Sexual Orientation: Refers to a person's physical, emotional or romantic attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is distinct from sex, gender identity and gender expression. Transgender people may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, queer or asexual.

Trans man: A person who was assigned female at birth but who lives as a man or identifies as male. Some trans men make physical changes through hormones or surgery; others do not.

Trans or Transgender: Refers to a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities.

Trans woman: A person who was assigned male at birth but who lives as a woman or identifies as female. Some trans women make physical changes through hormones or surgery; others do not.

Transition: A process through which some transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

Transphobia: The fear, dislike or hatred of people who are trans or are perceived to challenge conventional gender categories or 'norms' of male or female. Transphobia can result in individual and institutional discrimination, prejudice and violence against trans or gender variant people.

Transsexual: A person whose gender identity is 'opposite' to the sex assigned to them at birth. The term connotes a binary view of gender, moving from one polar identity to the other. Transsexual people may or may not take hormones or have surgery.

Transvestite: A person who wears clothing, accessories, jewellery or make-up not traditionally or stereotypically associated with their assigned sex. This generally refers to a male to female transgender person who does not wish to transition or change their assigned sex but prefers to live "dual role".

This glossary is an abridged version, for a more complete glossary of trans terms please visit http://www.teni.ie/trans_terms.

Transgender Equality Network Ireland

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TRANSFORMING LIVES

Trans Mental Health AWARENESS