



**GENDER  
IS NOT  
UNIFORM**

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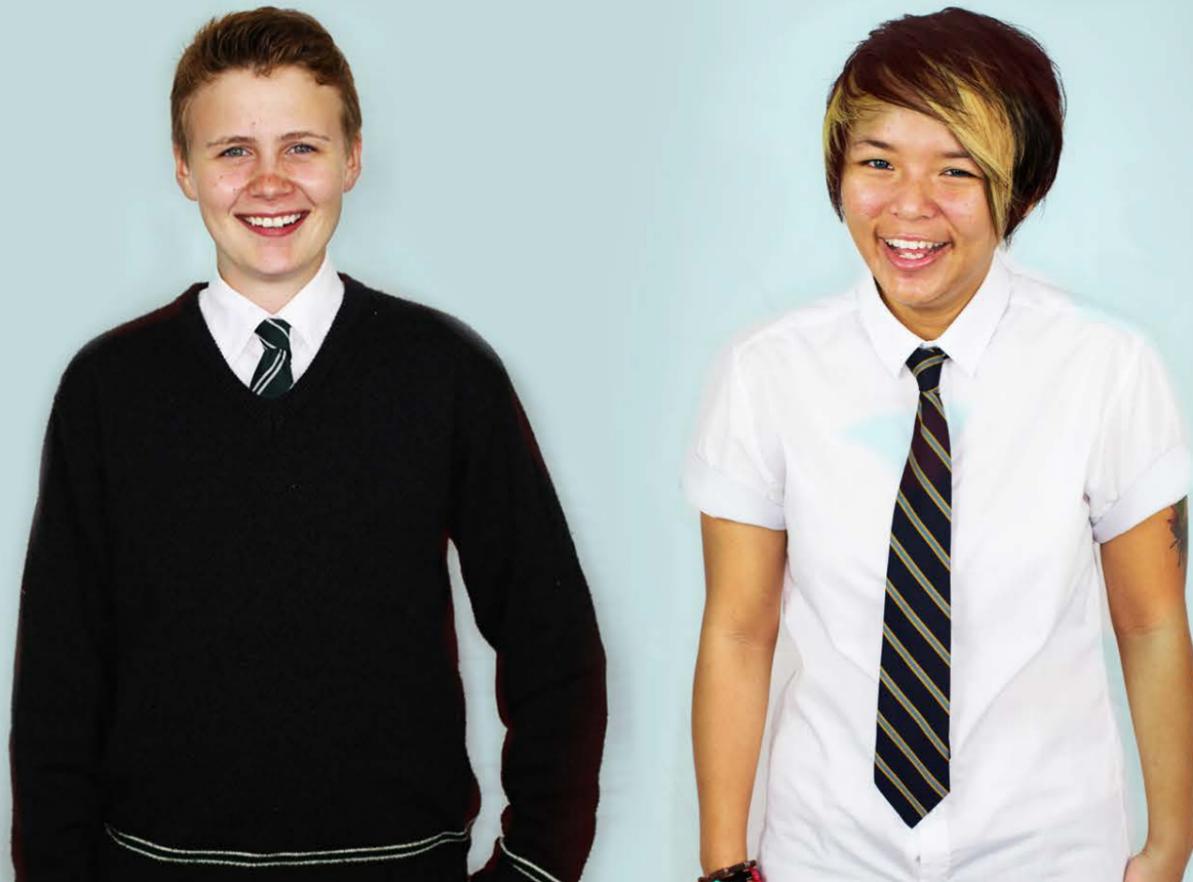
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### Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge that this resource was developed on the land of the Kulin nation and to pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and to acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

We would like to give a big thank you to Sim Kennedy and members of YGender who generously gave up their time to tell us about their experiences of being transgender and/or gender diverse in schools. We would also like to thank Louise Cooper for kick starting the Gender is Not Uniform project.

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While most students will have never considered their own gender identity, there are a growing number of young people taking steps to express gender identity in ways that may differ from the sex they were assigned at birth, or traditional gender categories.

These students, who may be known as gender diverse and/or transgender, often find school a difficult place to be themselves. High levels of discrimination and bullying, negative attitudes, and discriminatory school policies may mean that a student's ability to express their gender is restricted. These barriers can seriously affect the physical health, mental health, and wellbeing of students, as well as their ability to be meaningfully engaged at school.

This guide is part of 'Gender is Not Uniform', a campaign aimed at supporting gender diversity in schools. Safe Schools Coalition Victoria has produced a model school uniform policy as a simple step to make your school more inclusive. The coalition can also provide free professional development, as well as resources for students, staff and parents to challenge discrimination and create more inclusive schools.

**This resource aims to give you further information and ideas about how you can better support gender diverse and transgender students at your school.**

[SSCV.ORG.AU](http://SSCV.ORG.AU)

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**DON'T EVER BE AFRAID TO BE YOURSELF, I MEAN I WAS, AND IT'S JUST THE WORST EXPERIENCE, JUST FEEL IT, JUST LIVE IT, BE YOU.**

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## GLOSSARY

*Language in the gender diverse community is constantly changing. All terms mean something unique and specific to the person using them. There are also a large number of culturally distinct terms that are used and should be respected. Generally speaking, it is useful to ask which terms students may prefer and respect their choices.*

### Cultural terms

Many cultural groups have specific identities and a place in their community for gender diverse people. For example the term Sistergirl is used in some Aboriginal cultures to describe people assigned male at birth who grow up to identify as female and hold feminine cultural roles. Brotherboy is used to describe Aboriginal people assigned female at birth who grow up to identify with masculine cultural roles.

### Gender identity

An individual's internal sense of being female, male, or something else.

### Gender expression

The way in which someone chooses to physically express their gender, through name, pronoun, clothing, haircut, mannerisms etc. This is not the same as gender identity, which is our internal sense of our own gender.

### Gender diverse

Not all individuals who identify as a gender different to that assigned at birth necessary identify as strictly male or female. Gender diverse acknowledges the many different ways people may identify their gender. Eg. genderqueer, non-binary, agender and gender fluid.

### Intersex

Intersex people are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male.

### Same sex attracted

An individual who is attracted to people of the same sex. This is a sexual orientation, not a gender identity.

### Sex

Refers to the physical sex characteristics of an individual's body, including hormones and chromosomes.

### Transgender

Someone whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth (e.g. a baby is assigned male at birth but grows up to identify as a woman).

### Transition

The process by which a gender diverse person affirms their gender, whether through name change, clothing or medical support etc. Some people may do all or none of these things, for a range of reasons. It is important to remember that gender is an internal sense of self. There is no right or wrong way to transition.

### Transphobia

Fear or hatred towards people who are transgender and/or gender diverse that often leads to discriminatory behavior or abuse. Transphobia is distinct from homophobia, although transgender people may also experience homophobia on the basis of their appearance, or their sexuality.

## RESEARCH

### How many people are transgender and/or gender diverse and why does this matter?

It is currently very difficult to know exactly how many transgender and/or gender diverse young people there are in Australia.

We do know that being able to be yourself at school is a vital factor in student success and wellbeing. Schools should work towards safe and inclusive environments for all students. We also know that safe schools do better (see page 11).

A study conducted by La Trobe University in 2010 called 'Writing Themselves In' found that for young gender diverse people, school was the place where they faced the highest levels of verbal and physical abuse and bullying.

### This research shows that Gender diverse young people are:

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just as likely to be attracted to the same sex as other young people

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less likely to find support from adults or professionals

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more likely to have dropped out of school, have had difficulties concentrating, or hid at recess and lunchtime

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more likely to experience homelessness, physical abuse, self harm and suicide due to discrimination

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more likely to feel pride in their diversity and twice as likely to get involved in activism

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## RESEARCH SUGGESTS

**at least 15 in 1000 people**  
are gender diverse and/or transgender

**at least 17 in 1000 people**  
are intersex

# HOW YOU CAN BE MORE INCLUSIVE

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## BE PREPARED

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- **Get informed!** There is a lot of literature and a range of agencies and resources available about gender diversity and transgender issues.
- **Take the opportunity to engage** in the free professional development sessions for staff and tailored support that are offered by Safe Schools Coalition Victoria.
- **Check your policies** – do you have a plan for supporting students to transition, as well as clear anti-bullying policies that include homophobia and transphobia?
- **Think about** whether staff, students and families know about the policies you already have.
- **Update your uniform policy** to make sure it is inclusive of gender diversity.

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## INCREASE VISIBILITY

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- **Ask gender diverse students** about which pronouns (e.g., he, she etc.) they would prefer and respect the answer you receive by making an effort to get it right.
- **Put up posters,** distribute information booklets, and make sure there are books and resources available to students in the library and other communal areas (book lists and resources are available through Safe Schools Coalition Victoria).
- **Make sure** all of your sexuality education is inclusive and that positive discussions are facilitated about gender diversity.
- **Don't assume** that you know the gender identity of all your students.



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FOR ME PERSONALLY,  
WHAT HAPPENED WAS  
MY GRADES WENT  
A LITTLE BIT DOWN,  
ESPECIALLY IN MY  
FAVOURITE SUBJECT  
WHICH IS SCIENCE...  
I COULDN'T  
EVEN LISTEN

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## GET ACTIVE

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- **Don't wait** for students to talk about being gender diverse, or choosing to transition at your school, get active now!
- **Challenge all transphobic and homophobic language and behavior.** Make sure this is happening across the school.
- **Run workshops** or classes for students on diversity, which include discussions of gender diversity.
- **Sign up to Safe Schools Coalition Victoria's** inclusive uniform policy and make all uniform choices available to everyone, not just upon request.
- **Allow students to access a unisex toilet** or the toilet of their choice.

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## MAKE IT SUSTAINABLE

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- **Support any student led activities** such as the formation of a 'Stand Out' diversity group. (For more info check out the Minus18 and SSCV 'Stand Out' guide.)
- **Make sure all new staff are given a proper induction** to school policies and procedures in relation to gender and sexual diversity.
- **Keep a program of regular training** for school staff to make sure everyone is up to date on issues and that new staff have been included.
- **Make sure all students continue to learn** about, and are given opportunities to discuss, transgender and gender diverse issues.
- **Build in a regular review of your diversity policies** and your school's procedures.



## COMMON QUESTIONS

### Should we try and identify transgender or gender diverse students?

No, but make sure you are as open as possible to those students. Take your lead from students who have socially transitioned or who are gender diverse in your school, and make changes to create more inclusive environments in which transgender and/or gender diverse students can feel comfortable being themselves.

### Should we wait until someone tells us they are transgender or gender diverse before we do anything?

No. Taking all the steps outlined here will help create a much safer space for all students. It could be unlawful to assume that you do not know of or have any gender diverse or transgender students at your school. Gender diverse students will not necessarily be visible, and may not want to be described or identified with these terms.

### Are same sex attracted and gender diverse the same?

No, gender identity is not related to sexual attraction. Within the transgender and gender diverse population there is the same range of sexualities as within the general population. The same is true for intersex students.

Same sex attracted and gender diverse students each have a unique set of needs, health outcomes and challenges within both schools and social settings.

### What about single sex schools?

Single sex schools are just as likely to have students who are gender diverse or transgender. It is still important if you work in one of these schools that you think through all of the issues above, and consider a policy for a student who wishes to transition at school. Many single sex schools have successfully supported a transitioning student to stay at the school, which is great!

### What about schools without uniform?

Strict gender roles can still be enforced in schools that don't require uniforms. Think about other areas where you could be more supportive to gender diverse students, and make sure that any transphobic or homophobic or behaviour is challenged.

### What about religious schools?

Every school has a duty of care towards its students. Whatever religious beliefs may be taught or practiced in your school, they will include respecting other people, and making sure everyone feels happy and healthy. This means that transphobia is not acceptable, and that support must be given to students to be themselves when being anything else would make them feel unhappy or unhealthy.

## THE LAW

Several pieces of legislation apply to the inclusion and non-discrimination of transgender and/or gender diverse young people in Victoria. It is worth knowing your legal obligations as a school, and also as a way to respond to questions or concerns from within the school community about any actions you might take in this area. Some private and religious schools have exemptions that mean transgender and gender diverse students are not given all the protections outlined below.

### Sex Discrimination act 1984 amendment effective August 1st 2013

Gender identity is protected under federal law. It is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and/or intersex status. This can include discrimination and bullying in places of work and study. Federal laws put strong obligations on organisations to respond to the needs of all gender diverse people who they come into contact with.

Public schools maintaining restrictive policies in the areas of uniform, personal records and access to bathroom facilities could be deemed unlawful. The increase in legal protections that occurred in 2013 fills gaps in previous protection provided under the Victorian Equal Opportunity act (2010). For example, students no longer need to provide documentation to 'prove' their gender identity.

### Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender

The Australian Government recognises that individuals may identify and be recognised within the community as a gender other than the sex they were assigned at birth or as an indeterminate sex and/or gender, and this should be recognised and reflected in their personal records held by Australian Government departments and agencies. These guidelines provide support for organisations who may be improving the way students can amend personal records.

### Positive duty

Services and schools in Victoria have a 'positive duty' under the Equal Opportunities Act to support gender diverse students and to ensure they do not face discrimination on the basis of their gender identity. This means that it is not enough to simply respond to incidents of discrimination, but that schools need to be able to demonstrate their active support of gender diverse students. Not taking steps to prevent systemic and individual discrimination could be unlawful.

# RESOURCES

## Ygender

[ygender.com](http://ygender.com) soon to be [ygender.org.au](http://ygender.org.au)

Ygender is a peer led social support and advocacy group based in Melbourne. Ygender arranges general weekly events as well as a range of projects and activities based on the needs of the community as well as the interests of young people attending. Ygender aims to see a Victoria where the gender diverse community has equitable access to all that life has to offer. This includes respectful access to school and other community spaces and the opportunity to interact with a range of services including but not exclusive to direct medical intervention.

## Zoe Belle Gender Centre

[gendercentre.com](http://gendercentre.com)

Currently being established, Zoe Belle Gender Centre Inc. (ZBGC) will be a centre to support and improve the health and wellbeing of Victoria's sex and gender diverse (SGD) population. We also run a youth project with works with youth service providers to improve service delivery to the community.

## Transgender Victoria

[transgendervictoria.com](http://transgendervictoria.com)

Transgender Victoria (TGV) is an Australian organisation dedicated to achieving justice, equity and quality health and community service provision for transgender people, their partners, families and friends.

## Safe Schools Coalition Victoria

[sscv.org.au](http://sscv.org.au)

Working with schools to reduce homophobia and transphobia and to create inclusive learning environments where every student can learn, every teacher can teach and every family can belong. We support schools to ensure that the needs of students who transition gender are met, as well as providing free professional development to school staff on gender diversity and sexual diversity.

## Rainbow Network

[rainbownetwork.com.au](http://rainbownetwork.com.au)

Rainbow Network is the Victoria-wide capacity building and support service for anyone working with same sex attracted, intersex, trans\* and gender diverse young people.

## PFLAG

[pflagvictoria.org.au](http://pflagvictoria.org.au)

Parents, Family, Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) provides information and support to parents and family members of GLBTI people.

## Genderqueer Australia

[genderqueer.org.au](http://genderqueer.org.au)

Genderqueer Australia (GQA) supports gender questioning and genderqueer people, their family, friends and professionals who they go to for help.

## Minus18

[minus18.org.au](http://minus18.org.au)

Minus18 is Australia's largest youth-led charity for LGBT youth, supporting more than 100,000 young people each year through social events, resources and online networking.

## Transcend

[transcendsupport.com.au](http://transcendsupport.com.au)

Transcend is a grassroots support network for parents of transgender children. It aims to assist parents access services as close to home as possible, as well as provide peer support.

## Peninsula Pride (headspace)

[facebook.com/peninsulapride/info](https://facebook.com/peninsulapride/info)

Peninsula Pride is Queer Straight Alliance youth project. We provide social groups, support groups, camps and events.

## Way Out

[wayout.org.au](http://wayout.org.au)

WayOut promotes inclusive communities in rural Victoria for Same Sex Attracted, Intersex and Gender Diverse young people by challenging discrimination based on sexuality and gender. WayOut is a program of Cobaw Community Health.

## Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby

[vglrl.org.au](http://vglrl.org.au)

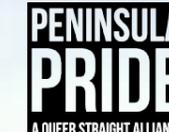
The Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby works with and for members of the LGBTIQ community towards equality and social justice. We are a community based lobby group and achieve our goals through representation, media advocacy and policy work. We work with, and for the community, along with non profit, human rights and health organisations and government agencies to advance the rights of LGBTI people through law reform and policy development.

## Vic SRC

[vicsrc.org.au](http://vicsrc.org.au)

The Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) is a network of secondary school students across the state. The VicSRC is auspiced by the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, and funded through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria.

# SUPPORTED BY



## Safe Schools Do Better

Taking active steps to make your school safer and more inclusive to transgender and/or gender diverse students will not only help those students to feel better and engage more, it will help all students feel more comfortable at school. There will also be students who have family members or friends, as well as teachers who are transgender and/or gender diverse who will feel more included within the school community as a result of these actions. You may never know exactly how much positive impact you are having for these young people in your school, but you should congratulate yourself on making a big difference and helping your school do better.

[sscv.org.au](http://sscv.org.au)

