

Gender Understanding, Identity, and Expression (GUIDE) Program for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth

Sexuality and sexual orientation are often challenging topics for youth and their parents. They are subjects that can be difficult to openly talk about and sometimes are actively avoided. Yet we know that children and teens who are (or are questioning whether they may be) gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender are at much greater risk of engaging in unhealthy behaviors and/or of being bullied or victimized. They are more likely than their peers to experience anxiety, depression, and other emotional symptoms and have a higher incidence of self-harm (including suicide). For these and many other reasons, physical and psychological health care are essential for these individuals and their families. Like their adult counterparts, however, LGBT youth may be hesitant to seek care due to fear of stigmatization or lack of understanding by healthcare providers.

Similarly, issues related to gender and gender identity are frequently sensitive subjects and parents as well as youth may be fearful of the response if such topics are raised to healthcare providers. Gender identity develops differently in every child and gender differences can present at almost any age, sometimes in early childhood, sometimes much later. “Gender non-conforming” and “transgender” (the “T” in LGBT) are terms used to describe individuals whose gender expression or gender identity do not conform to that typically associated with the gender they were assigned at birth. Being gender non-conforming is not a disorder, but many youth who demonstrate a consistent and persistent pattern over time that they wish to be (or “are”) the opposite gender experience very significant distress living with the body that they have. As such, specialized healthcare services can be an essential part of improving the overall health and well-being for transgender youth. These include affirmative and understanding support and education for youth and families as well as assistance in the process of transitioning to the preferred gender. Cleveland Clinic Children’s GUIDE program (Gender Understanding, Identity, and Expression) includes a multidisciplinary team of healthcare providers with expertise in helping transgender youth and their families as they consider the range of options available to them.

Cleveland Clinic Children’s provides a full array of healthcare services for LGBT youth and their families. All care is individualized, designed to meet the needs of each unique situation while at the same time complying with the standards and best practices for this population. Services available include:

- Pediatric providers with understanding of and sensitivity to the issues of LGBT youth
- Psychological services offered by LGBT affirmative providers (including specialized assessment related to referral for hormone consultation/treatment or other transgender services)
- Affirmative support and education for youth and families regarding LGBT issues and challenges
- GUIDE (specifically for transgender or gender non-conforming youth) provides education, support, psychological services, pediatric endocrinology services (for possible hormone suppression and/or hormone treatments), psychiatric consultation, and gynecology and urology services

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