



LGBTQI+ mental health

A resource to support the
mental health of lesbian,
gay, bisexual, trans and
intersex young people

Supported by



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families



NOMINET

“There is no question that the way we, as a society, respond to the sexuality or gender identity of others is often detrimental to their mental health. It is profoundly wrong that people we know and love fear rejection from their friends and families and feel vulnerable to abuse and fear violence, simply because of their sexual identity.

Being accepted is a human need. It is not a privilege to have that need met, but a basic right, one from which all other opportunities flow. When we can all assert our sexual and gender identity, and when we have the respect we need to feel proud of who we are, we will have a fairer society.”

Peter Fonagy,
Chief Executive, Anna Freud Centre

Team Anna Freud at London Pride March 2019.



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Background

This resource was developed by Matthew Doyle, Rosa Town and Thomas Osborn following a survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) young people from across the UK, workshops with the Centre's Young Champions, and feedback from the Centre's LGBTQI+, Anti-Racism and Accessibility Working Groups. View an infographic of this process [here](#).

This resource was updated in October 2022.

Introduction

Perhaps you have come to this page because you are already a member of the LGBTQI+ community, you are questioning your gender identity or sexual orientation, or you are wanting to learn more about LGBTQI+ young people and issues that are important to them and their community. Regardless, you are welcome here.

The intention of these pages is to clarify some important topics in relation to being a member of the LGBTQI+ community, and to provide advice for LGBTQI+ young people to get additional help and support for mental health problems, should they arise.

It's important that if you or someone you know needs help right now, you should, if possible, try to talk to a parent or carer or a trusted adult such as your GP.

If talking to an adult is not possible, you can find a list of organisations which offer 24 hour support by text, email and phone on our [Urgent help](#) webpage.

You will also find details of LGBTQI+ support services below alongside details of the [AFC Crisis Messenger](#) service which provides 24/7 crisis support for young people across the UK. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need support, you can text **AFC** to **85258**.



A note on our use of language

In this resource we discuss children and young people who identify as LGBTQI+ as a broad category, but we recognise there are difficulties with this umbrella term. Where possible, we have further specified the groups we are referring to by gender identity or sexual orientation. We have discussed as a Centre how to carefully and consciously use language in addressing issues relating to gender and sexuality. If you have any feedback on our use of language that would help us refine our approach, please get in touch at network@annafreud.org.

Being a member of the LGBTQI+ community

Research has shown that young people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or with another sexual identity were more than two-and-a-half times more likely to have a mental health problem as those who identify as heterosexual.¹ Being LGBTQI+ does not mean you will have a mental health problem - the majority do not and many LGBTQI+ people feel they can cope with the ups and downs of everyday life. However, identifying as LGBTQI+ can also lead to unique challenges in growing up and as an adult. These challenges may result from how people behave around you, coming out, disclosing your sexual orientation or gender identity, or living in a new place away from those you care about and who support you.

Sometimes, these challenges can be helpful in finding better ways to cope with adversity. They can have a positive impact on your mental health and may mean you feel better equipped in the future to deal with life's challenges.

These experiences can also be upsetting. You may worry about or face discrimination, prejudice, violence or harassment. This can have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if experienced over a long period of time.

Your sexual and gender identity is not a mental health problem. But the stress that you may experience from the discriminatory, non-supportive attitudes and behaviours of others may contribute to feelings of low mood, anxiety and self-harm and other forms of mental health difficulties.

These days, many people are accepting and welcoming to LGBTQI+ people. There is excellent support available within the LGBTQI+ community and allied groups. You can speak to LGBTQI+ people or get help from an allied organisation even if you are uncertain of or are questioning your sexual or gender identity.

Whatever you feel or think about where you are right now, there are several important topics to consider as an LGBTQI+ person. This resource will give you some information and advice on where to find further support.

"Consult reputable sources for help on defining labels (like [Stonewall](#)) and know that labels are for other people to understand you. In the same way it's no one's business and you don't owe anyone a label or have to come out to anyone (especially if it isn't safe to do so, even if it does suck). Sexuality and gender are fluid and can change and it's okay to not get it right the first time."

1. From [research](#) that looked at the relationship between young people's sexual identity and their mental health. This research doesn't tell us specifically about the experiences of young people who identify as transgender or non-binary.

Topic 1: coming out

How do LGBTQI+ people decide to come out?

Coming out is something many LGBTQI+ people experience in their life. When someone talks about coming out, they often mean telling someone else about their identity. This could be your sexual orientation (for example, bisexual, pansexual or asexual), your gender identity (for example, trans male or trans female) or both. It can also involve telling others your preferred gender pronouns (for example, she/her/hers).

This experience is different for everyone. Some people may not feel a need to come out. For others, coming out may be a one-off event. Coming out can also be a process over a long period of time, and it may happen multiple times as your identity evolves. This may be because you meet new people in your life, your identity changes as you get older, or the language you use to describe your identity changes. You may want to tell new people about yourself, or want to tell other people about the new way(s) in which you identify.

"Try to understand and come out to yourself before you come out to others."

"You get to define yourself. Use labels if they help you or don't use them at all. You may find that your labels change. Sexuality and gender is fluid and it is okay to change how you identify."

It is normal to have a range of thoughts and emotions about coming out to other people, particularly those you care about. Telling other people about something important can be nerve-racking, worrying or even scary. Although people often talk about coming out as a positive and affirming experience, it can also be a huge relief. What is important is that if or when you decide to come out, you do it when you feel ready and safe, and that you have support from the people you trust.



If you are thinking about coming out to other people and you are feeling nervous about it, it can be helpful to consider a few things.

- **Whether it is safe**
 - It's important to carefully consider whether you are in a safe situation to come out, even if you want to.
 - For example, are you confident it is safe to tell a particular person or group of people?
- **Who you speak to first**
 - Choosing to speak to someone who you are confident will support you can help you to build confidence and ensure you feel more supported when speaking to other people.
 - This person could be someone who identifies in a similar way to you, or someone who is a close friend you trust in a group of friends where other people have come out.
- **What else is going on in your life**
 - Are you stressed or overwhelmed about something in your life? It might be helpful to wait until things feel less stressful before you come out.

- **How and what you say**
 - Thinking about what you want to say can help if you're very nervous. You could write it down or record a voice note to help you prepare what you will say.
- **What time and where**
 - Try to choose a moment when you have plenty of time to tell the person and aren't going to be interrupted.

It can also be helpful to be part of a group of people who identify in a similar way to you before you come out to other people in your life, such as an LGBTQI+ youth group or online community. This can build your confidence and help you to feel more supported in coming out.

"Coming out to my friends and family really helped me as I had been so nervous and scared to tell them. Thankfully everyone has reacted well and now I can just be myself without worry. I feel I can be honest and open with those I care about and that feels great!"

"Tell someone. If you're afraid start with someone you trust and practice how you are going to bring it up."

What do I do if coming out goes badly?

It is important to remember not everyone will have a positive experience coming out. In extreme cases, you could be forced out of your home, or rejected by family members. If this is the case, there is help and support you can access:

- [If you need a safe space](#)
- [If you need to speak to someone](#)
- [If you're looking for local support groups](#)
- [If your family needs support](#)
- [AFC Crisis text messenger](#)



What advice do other LGBTQIA+ young people give about coming out?

"Accepting yourself is the first step to allow others to accept you"

"Be prepared to expect parents and carers to take a while to come to terms with what you have told them. They may go through a grieving stage. Speak to other LGBTQI+ people about it, it can be tough but your family love you for who you are!"

"For a long time I struggled to accept who I was and it was so mentally draining. Once I came out to my friends and family, I became much happier."

Where can I go for support in coming out?

- **Brook**
<https://www.brook.org.uk/your-life/advice-on-coming-out/>
- **Stonewall**
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/coming-out/coming-out-young-person>
- **childline**
<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/sexual-identity/coming-out/>

Topic 2: intersectionality

Intersectionality is a word that you might have heard before. However, it can be difficult to understand what it means, particularly as intersectionality means different things to different people.

Intersectionality recognises that some LGBTQI+ people may experience additional challenges because of who they are or because of their circumstances. For example, because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, class, where they live, their gender identity, their (dis)ability, their age, their religion or faith or whether they are neurodivergent.

Thinking about how these aspects of life overlap and connect can help you (or us) understand why life might be more challenging for some people. It may also mean there are more forms of support to draw on if you are struggling.



Intersectionality can be a helpful way to think about how you experience the world, as it considers the multiple identities you might hold, and where and who to get help from if you're struggling. While this can be a useful perspective, it is important not to make assumptions about what others are experiencing based on their background, or what you think someone else might be going through - even if you know them well.

If you are a member of the LGBTQI+ community and a member of another minoritised group, you may find it challenging to reconcile these aspects of yourself (for instance, if your faith or culture is homophobic). You may find there are fewer role models for you, or that people who look or identify like you are less represented in the media, in books, on TV, or in your everyday life.

You may also experience additional stress from different types of discrimination, such as racism or sexism, and this could have an impact on your mental health. You might even experience discrimination within the LGBTQI+ community, or from people close to you. If you are experiencing these issues or would like further information about some of the support available please see the list of LGBTQI+ specific help and support at the back of this booklet.

Topic 3: common challenges for LGBTQI+ people

While many LGBTQI+ people live fulfilled lives and feel well supported by those around them, some may experience challenges in their day-to-day life. These can include, but are not limited to, bullying, hate crimes, prejudice, misunderstanding or rejection of your gender identity, sexual orientation or both, lack of acceptance from friends and family, and difficulties accessing healthcare that meets your needs.

We know from research that LGBTQI+ young people are more likely to experience mental health difficulties including self-harm and suicide, depression or low mood, and are more likely to use drugs and alcohol to cope. It is important to find additional support to help with these challenges, and to do so as soon as you can if you are experiencing them.

You might also experience barriers to accessing support. It may be helpful to tell a trusted adult if you think you might need to speak to a healthcare professional. They can help you to gain access to the right help and can support you. This could be your parent or carer or another trusted adult. It is important to tell them as soon as you think you need help.

Some people choose not to access support due to fears of discrimination, misunderstanding, or breaches of confidentiality. Therapists and doctors are legally and professionally required to keep the information you share with them private or confidential, unless it is about you not being safe. Professionals who work regularly with LGBTQI+ young people may be better equipped to support you than those who do not. When you see a therapist or doctor, you should tell them what's important to you.

As you grow older, you may face challenges in relation to workplace discrimination, starting a family, marriage equality, adult mental or physical health care. You may face a continued lack of acceptance from friends, family, or members of the community. Despite these challenges, many LGBTQI+ young people and adults thrive. LGBTQI+ young people suggest speaking about your identity to those you trust and building a supportive community around you, if you can.

Self-care or self-management strategies, such as those listed on [On My Mind](#), can help. You could also join a LGBTQI+ youth or community group for LGBTQI+ people such as those listed by [Stonewall](#) or [The Proud Trust](#), or you could participate in [LGBTQI+ activism](#).

What advice do other LGBTQI+ young people give about common challenges?

"It's never going to be as easy but it will get better as the world is changing."

"Please keep yourself safe, but don't let that stifle your identity. Stay protected, but not hidden."

"Talk to someone you trust, whether that be a friend, family member or even a teacher or tutor. Also try to find something that helps your mental health calm down or helps you to get rid of any stress or anxiety. It could be an activity such as drawing or painting."



"You are not alone, not in your identity or the things you are struggling with. And you don't deserve to suffer alone."

"Know that there is nothing 'wrong' with you. You are valid and loved and should take up the space that belongs to you."

"It is totally and completely normal to feel down and alone, don't let anyone (including yourself) trick you into thinking you are broken. You will grow and change so many times in your life and needing help to adapt is nothing to be ashamed of. Reach out. You'd be surprised how many people reach back."

For more specialist mental health support from a service or charity specialising in LGBTQI+ young people's mental health, please see the [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#). The Youth Wellbeing Directory has over 1,500 free to access mental health services for those aged up to 25 across the UK.

Topic 4: trans and non-binary young people

What does it mean to be trans or gender diverse?

Trans young people are those whose gender is different from the sex they were assigned at birth, such as male or female. For instance, if your sexual organs when you were born looked like they aligned with the male biological sex, but you feel like a woman, you might identify as a trans woman. When your biological sex aligns with your gender identity, this is called 'cisgender'.



Trans' is not the only way to describe gender identity. You may also identify as transgender, non-binary, gender diverse, or genderqueer. There is no one right way to describe your gender identity, and your gender identity (and the words you use to describe it) may change over time.

Importantly, you may not identify as male or female or as a man or a woman, as being trans does not mean you will always identify with the opposite gender. For instance, you might identify as 'non-binary', which means that your gender identity doesn't fit with 'man' or 'woman' or 'male' or 'female'. Whatever your gender identity is, and however you choose to describe yourself, language is important. You deserve to be respected by others in the way that you wish to describe yourself. These words might involve your chosen gender pronouns or your preferred name.

Not every trans young person will want to medically transition to appear more like their gender identity. However, if you identify as trans or non-binary, you may need extra help or support in understanding your identity. You could experience 'gender dysphoria', which is a difficult and uncomfortable feeling arising from your gender identity being different from the sex you were assigned at birth. On page 18 you will find a list of support options and services which you may find helpful.

What challenges are faced by trans and non-binary young people?

There are many challenges faced by trans and gender diverse young people. These can make the coming out process even more complex or difficult and can affect your day-to-day life. They include, but are not limited to:

- coming out to friends and family members (which may happen multiple times as your identity evolves)
- not knowing what it means to be trans, or not knowing what support is out there
- understanding your identity without the usual support you might receive from friends, family, and school
- figuring out how to dress and present yourself in society
- deciding whether to medically transition and accessing health care for this process
- misinformation, stigma, and oversexualisation of trans and gender diverse young people, particularly online or on social media
- finding safe spaces to explore your gender identity and sexual orientation
- seeing the GP and accessing routine medical care where your unique needs are understood.



What are the social, legal, and medical issues which trans and gender diverse young people may face?

Legal rulings that negatively affect trans and gender diverse young people can be distressing or discouraging. The Anna Freud Centre have released [a statement on the gender clinic judicial review](#)

It is important to remember the situation in the UK and abroad is constantly changing, and to not feel too discouraged about government and legal decisions which are subject to change. Many people in the UK support the rights of trans and gender diverse young people, and there has generally been progress in this area over the last few decades.

Additionally, even within the LGBTQI+ community there can be discrimination toward trans and gender diverse young people, as well as from celebrities. Much of this takes place on social media, which can be difficult to navigate.

To learn more about managing your social media, you can view our [Managing Social Media booklet](#).



What additional support might trans and gender diverse young people need?

Trans and gender diverse young people might need additional support. This could include support with transitioning, coming out, accessing inclusive healthcare, social media interactions, and coping with mental health difficulties.

There are some excellent charities and NHS clinics who offer advice and support specific to trans and gender diverse young people. You will find a list of these organisations below with links to their webpages.

- [gendered intelligence](#)
- [LGBT Youth Scotland](#)
- [Mindline Trans+](#)

Topic 5: differences in sex development (DSD) and being intersex

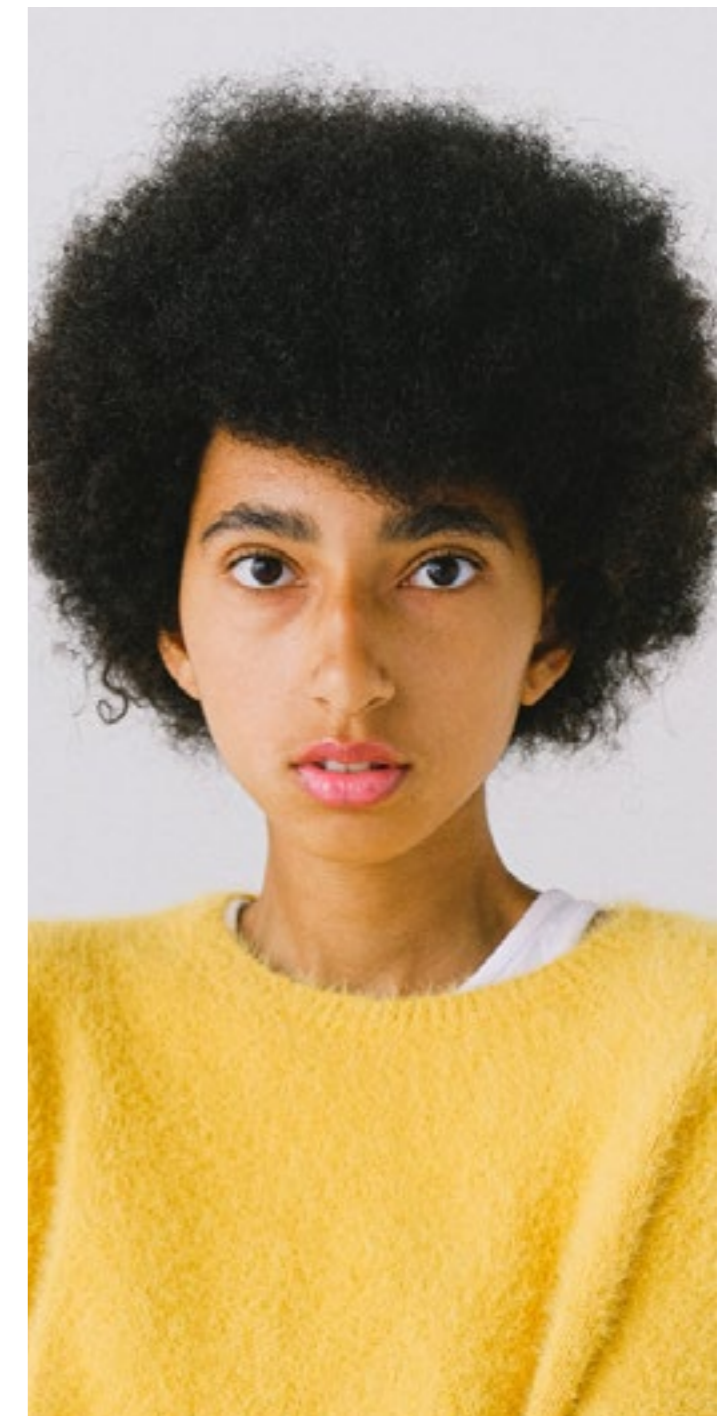
What does it mean to have intersex variation/DSD?

'Intersex' is a term for a broad range of genetic conditions that affect how sexual and reproductive organs develop. Some people prefer the terms 'differences in sex development' (DSD) or 'variations of sex development' to 'intersex' and many people prefer condition-specific language to any of these umbrella terms. Young people with these conditions can choose the term they feel most comfortable with.

People with intersex variations/DSD have biological characteristics (such as reproductive organs, hormone levels, or chromosomes) that differ from what is considered typical for males and females. This may present at birth with atypical genital appearance but often presents in the teen years when puberty doesn't happen as expected. A few examples are complete androgen insensitivity, partial androgen insensitivity, congenital adrenal hyperplasia, Swyer's Klinefelter's, and hypospadias. The [dsdteens website](#) provides lots of information about puberty and growing up, as well as lots

of information about the different types of intersex variations/DSD.

Having intersex variations/DSD is not a gender identity or a sexual orientation. Many people with intersex variation/DSD continue to live as their birth sex. Some will identify as non-binary or trans or may consider 'intersex' as an identity term. Young people who have intersex variation/DSD span the full spectrum of sexual orientations.



What challenges are faced by young people with intersex variations/DSD?

It is important to remember that all bodies differ and just like other parts of the body, the genitals and reproductive system can vary in shape, size and function - and this does not mean there is anything 'wrong' with you.

However, intersex variations/DSD can be associated with infertility, difficulty with sexual function and other medical complications, and this may mean that specialist advice and support is needed. You can learn more about this on the [interACT website](#) or by speaking to your GP or another qualified medical professional.

In previous generations, when intersex variations/DSD were identified at birth, surgical interventions to try and normalise the appearance of the genitals were common. In the UK, these surgeries are now far less common and there is a trend toward only recommending interventions when there is a medical need.

Some intersex activists believe that guidelines are not enough and want legislation to protect people with intersex variations/DSD from undergoing surgeries until they are able to decide for themselves. These groups include Intersex UK, IC4E, and interACT.

What additional support might be needed?

There is support and advice available for young people with intersex variations/DSD. You will find a list of these organisations below, with links to their webpages:

ICON UK, a charity offering peer support and a safe space for young people with intersex variations/DSD: <https://interconnecteduk.org>

A list of support groups for young people with intersex variations/DSD and gender diverse young people: <https://genderkit.org.uk/resources/local/>

A list of intersex organisations <https://www.intersexequality.com/>

A website created by and for young people with intersex variations/DSD: <https://www.dsdteens.org/>



Topic 5: LGBTQI+ specific help and support

What LGBTQI+ specific support is out there?

If you are experiencing a mental health difficulty (for example, feeling low, feeling anxious, harming yourself, or having repetitive thoughts), it may be necessary for you to seek additional help or support.

The NHS offers a range of support and help if you're experiencing a mental health problem. For example, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), is an NHS service that provides mental health treatment to young people and their families. There are also LGBTQI+ specific services within CAMHS. Find out more about support available to you by visiting [Receiving support](#) or search for LGBTQI+ mental health support services on the [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#).

"There are services out there with people who care. It's just a matter of finding it and taking one step at a time."

Some services allow you to self-refer, which means you can contact the service directly and ask for an appointment, whereas others require a referral from another professional such as a GP or a teacher. CAMHS teams allow you to self-refer, however there is usually a waiting list for an initial assessment which can sometimes be long, and the appointments that might be offered to you will depend on what is available in the service. To learn more about the referral process, you can visit [Understanding referrals](#).

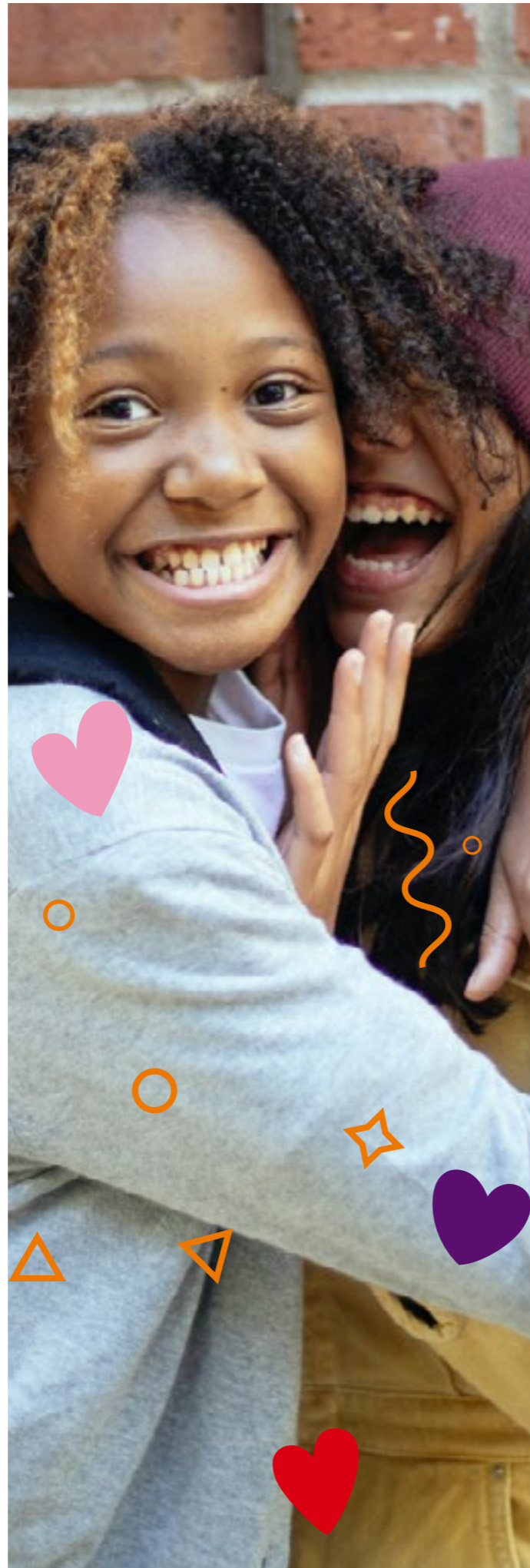
There are also many other forms of LGBTQI+ specific treatment, support, and advice across the UK.

These include (but are not limited to):

LGBTQI+ in-person, chat, and phone counselling and helplines

- [Switchboard](#)
- [LGBT Foundation helpline](#)
- [The Hub of Hope](#)
- [gendered intelligence support line](#)
- [The Proud Trust's Proud Connections messaging service](#)
- [Mindline Trans+ emotional support helpline and information signposting](#)

- **LGBTQI+ youth groups and youth communities**
- [Stonewall's list of youth groups and other services in your area](#)
- [The Proud Trust's list of youth groups near you](#)
- **Support within schools, colleges or universities**
- For secondary school or college students, speak to your SENCO or form tutor about support available for LGBTQI+ young people within your school or college
- For university students, your student union or the psychological counselling or wellbeing service may offer specific support for members of the LGBTQI+ community



"Look for different social groups around your area that provide a safe space for anyone who identifies as LGBTQI+. Lots of colleges and universities have these groups and can help connect you to others who may feel like you."

What about therapies which can be harmful to LGBTQI+ young people?

Some therapies, such as 'conversion therapy' (which we do not consider to be a valid form of therapy) can be harmful to LGBTQI+ young people. It is important that you speak to an unbiased, reputable, and evidence-informed professional or service in seeking help or support. If you feel uncomfortable or unsupported in the help or support you are receiving, you can seek help elsewhere without giving a reason.

"Seeking help does not make you weak. When your body is sick no one bats an eye, your mind and soul are no different. Don't change yourself to fit in for anybody - therapist, family, friends, significant other - long term it will be like a shoe that doesn't fit. A therapist should see it the same. Having mental problems doesn't make you weak or worthless. No matter what: you are valid."

"Finding a therapist that understands, validates your feelings, and gives you the support you need isn't easy, and you may need a few tries. That's okay, and within your rights. Don't stick with someone who makes you uncomfortable because you don't want to hurt them."

What advice do other LGBTQI+ young people give about help and support?

"Seeking support is the most important thing, you have the right to be healthy and well, and this is one of the best ways to do so. Something to keep in mind is that mental health providers are as varied as everyone is. You might have to 'shop around' a little to find the right match for you. Don't be discouraged if the first one you try isn't for you."

"You deserve help, you'll be able to find it. You can get better."

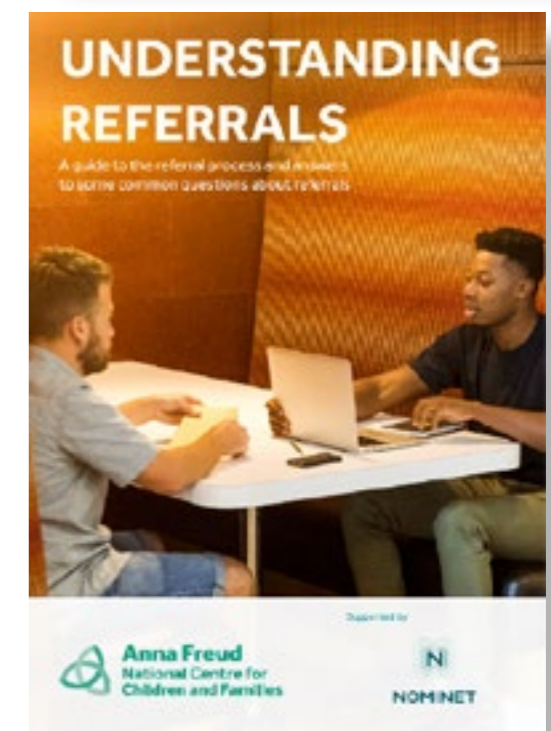
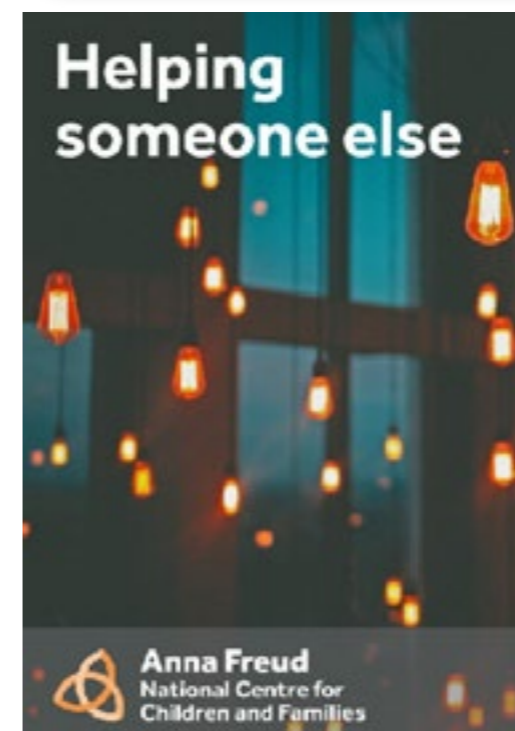
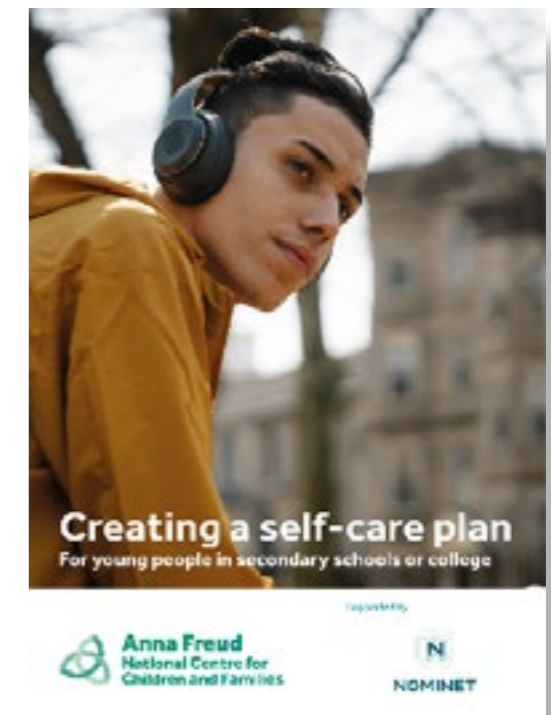
"You have a right to support don't give up until you get it."



List of support organisations

- [AKT](#) - support for LGBTQI+ young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness
- [AVEN](#) - support for asexual young people
- [Brook](#) - advice on coming out
- [Deaf Rainbow UK](#) - support for deaf LGBTQI+ people across the UK
- [Diverse Church](#) - support for LGBTQI+ Christians
- [dsdteens](#) - support for young people with intersex variation/DSD
- [FFLAG](#) - supporting families of LGBTQI+ people
- [galop](#) - supporting LGBTQI+ people who have experienced abuse and violence
- [gendered intelligence](#) - support for gender diverse and trans people
- [Hidayah UK](#) - support for LGBTQI+ Muslim people in the UK
- [Humanists UK](#) - support for non-religious LGBTQI+ people in the UK
- [Imaan](#) - support for LGBTQI+ Muslim young people in the UK
- [KeshetUK](#) - support for LGBTQI+ Jewish people in the UK
- [LGBT foundation](#) - helpline including mental health advice and support
- [LGBT Youth Scotland](#) - support for LGBTQI+ young people in Scotland
- [Matt and Naz Foundation](#) - Support for religious LGBTQI+ young people and their families
- [Mindline TRANS+](#) - helpline and support for those who identify as trans, non-binary or genderfluid
- [OneBodyOneFaith](#): support for LGBTQI+ Christians
- [Quest](#) - support for LGBTQI+ Catholics in the UK
- [Regard](#) - support for LGBTQI+ people who self-identify as disabled
- [Stonewall](#) - support for LGBTQI+ people including directory of LGBTQI+ community groups
- [Switchboard LGBTQI+ helpline](#) - support offered by phone, online chat and email
- [The Proud Trust](#) - support for LGBTQI+ young people across the UK including list of youth groups
- [The Rainbow Project](#) - support for LGBTQI+ young people and their families in Northern Ireland

Other resources for young people



View and download these for free either by clicking on the images above or by visiting: www.onmymind.info

Where can I find support?

If you or someone you know needs help right now, you should, if possible, try to talk to a parent or carer or a trusted adult such as your GP.

If talking to an adult is not possible, you can find a list of organisations which offer 24 hour support by text, email and phone on our [Urgent help](#) page or below:

Do you need help right now?

The [AFC Crisis Messenger](#) text service provides free, 24/7 crisis support for young people across the UK

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need support, you can text **AFC** to **85258**.



childline


Call: 0800 1111
[email](#) | [online chat](#)

SAMARITANS

Call: 116 123
[email](#) | [visit](#) | [write](#)

Emergency Services

Call: 999

 **Anna Freud**
National Centre for
Children and Families

shout
for support in a crisis

In crisis? Need support?

24
hours a day
7
days a week

Text AFC to 85258

Text the free, anonymous crisis textline

All texts are answered by trained volunteers,
with support from experienced clinical specialists