

Coping with gender dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is the experience of distress or discomfort with your body's sex characteristics or the gender role assigned to you. It's something that is experienced differently by everyone and can change over time. There's no one way to deal with dysphoria and different things work for different people.

Here are some ideas that could help trans/gender diverse/non binary people cope with dysphoria. Some are specific to gender dysphoria and some are more general coping strategies that may help. Try some out and make a list of ones that work for you. Remember, what works at one time may not be the same at another time, so trying out different strategies at different times can be useful too.

1. Express your feelings - share your feelings in a notebook or blog, or express how you feel through an art, craft or music project.
2. Talk to someone who understands - talk to a supportive friend, find an online trans community you feel connection with, or call Outline 0800 OUTLINE (688 5463) between 6pm – 9 pm to talk to a trained volunteer from the LGBTIQ+ community. If you have a counsellor or therapist you feel safe talking with about your gender dysphoria, make time to bring this up with them.
3. Listen to someone who has similar feelings to you - talk to friends who also experience dysphoria, or watch a Vlogger who you relate to.
4. Find/use items that aid in expressing your gender and makes you feel more confident in yourself - binders, packers, STPs (stand-to-pee devices), breast forms, panty girdles, padded underwear, makeup, clothes, shoes, accessories, hair removal items, hair styling products.
5. Affirm your identity - do small or big things that affirm your identity; whether it's wearing a small accessory that is affirmative for you, re-styling your hair, or emailing your teachers to tell them your preferred name and pronouns.
6. Make plans, research, or take small steps towards your long-term social, medical and/or legal transition goals.
7. Find ways to do everyday things that reduce your dysphoria - steam up or cover the bathroom mirrors, use a big sponge or loofah for bathing, cuddle a pillow to cover your chest when you sleep, or master makeup contouring.
8. Tell yourself, out loud, that your body does not define your gender.
9. Take a moment to point out a few positive things you love about your body more generally - things you are great at, or things you like about yourself.

10. Remember to be easy on yourself and on your personal image. Remind yourself of the diversity of all people's bodies and gender presentations to give yourself a reality check.
 11. Take time to explore what feels right for you when it comes to your identity and expressing yourself and your gender. Forget beauty standards and gender stereotypes: what expressions and identities feel right for YOU.
 12. Exercise – a healthy amount of exercise can improve your mood. Do what you like - dance your heart out in your bedroom, do some yoga, ride a bike, go to circus classes, use the local park gym equipment, or look up exercises that will shape your body in ways that could reduce your dysphoria.
 13. Remember that your trials and struggles in life can make you stronger. You've made it to this point. You should be proud of yourself.
 14. Stimulate your senses - smell something (perfume, a flower), taste something (something strong-flavoured or something you really like), listen to something (nature sounds or music), touch something (fabric, a furry pet, a teddy bear), stimulate your vision (by looking at a colour you like or pics of baby animals).
 15. Avoid spaces or people that will bring you down.
 16. Escape - to your favourite playlist, game, or show, or a long luxurious bath or shower.
 17. Pamper yourself – dress in your favourite gender-affirming clothes, or wear comfy clothes to help you relax/feel better, wear your favorite makeup, eat your favourite comfort food, get a haircut, moisturize your body.
 18. Connect with nature - go for a walk outside, do some gardening, watch the birds, trees or stars, care for an animal, wade in a river or ocean, bask in the sunshine.
 19. Take time out or stay busy - whichever works best for you at the time. Slow down and relax, or stay occupied and distracted.
 20. Go to bed early! Make sure you prepare to sleep by turning off devices, doing something relaxing, making the room quiet, clean and peaceful, and rest well.
 21. Eat the rainbow! Getting a balanced, nutritious diet with lots of fruit and vegetables will help your mind and body feel its best.
 22. Make time for pleasure - make sure you are doing things that make you feel good every day. Schedule it in if you have to!
 23. Switch off from social media and devices if they are bringing you down.
 24. Practice breathing, meditation or other relaxation or mindfulness techniques.
- If you are feeling really down or thinking about suicide it's important to get as much support as possible, including professional support.

You can contact:

1. Call 1737 anytime to speak to a trained counsellor
2. DHB Mental Health Crisis Team (CATT Team)
 - Auckland Central 0800 800 717
 - Counties Manukau South Auckland to Te Kauwhata 09 261 3700
 - West Auckland 09 822 8501. It will go to reception and they will put you through to the crisis team.
 - North Shore 09 487 1414 After hours 09 486 8900 - ask for North crisis team
3. OUTLine: call 0800 688 5463 between 6pm – 9pm to talk to a trained volunteer from the LGBTIQ+ community. Call (09) 972 0054 to talk to the counselling team.

Via the OUTLine website you can self-refer for support for the (free) Outline transgender peer Support Service.

4. Rainbow Youth: Self refer on the Rainbow Youth website for (free) support from the Rainbow Youth Transgender Peer Support Service.
5. Suicide Crisis Helpline, a free, nationwide service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is operated by highly trained and experienced telephone counsellors who have undergone advanced suicide prevention training. Call the Suicide Crisis Helpline for support 0508 828 865
6. Youthline: Free text 234. Call 0800 376 633 email talk@youthline.co.nz
7. Lifeline: Free text HELP (4357) Call 800 LIFELINE (543344)

This information sheet was adapted from Telethon Kids Institute (Australia) as part of the development of 'SPARX-T'; a serious game designed to prevent depression in trans and gender diverse young people.