

# I Think I Might Be Transgender

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An information booklet for young people

QUEER VOICES OF BHUTAN



### **Disclaimer:**

This material is developed as an informative booklet and may contain basic information on safe sex and condom use. This material may only be appropriate for individuals who are at least 13 years and above.

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# What does it mean to be Transgender?



A Transgender person is a person who identifies with a gender identity that differs from the one which corresponds to their sex at birth.

The term transsexual comes under the umbrella term “transgender” and is often used for people who may undergo surgery and hormone therapy to obtain the necessary physical appearances of the sex/gender they identify as.

Transgender people also include people who identify as gender queer, gender-neutral, and/or gender free (people who may not identify as either male or female).



## How do I know I am TRANSGENDER?

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“As a child, when I was more into women’s accessories. This made me realise I’m not a boy. My emotions were more dominant of female than those of male. I was more comfortable with female friends.”

Mama Yangki, 24

You may find that you are more at ease visualizing yourself as a gender other than the gender you were assigned at birth.

You may feel highly uncomfortable or disconnected from specific parts of your body. For example, you may have breasts and prefer not to have them. You might feel uncomfortable with gender-specific body parts (such as penis, breast, vagina, mustache, etc.) and, at the same time, feel a deep need to be the opposite gender.

You may develop a close bond with people who recognize you for the gender you identified for yourself. You may feel that your true self is part of the opposite sex and gender. People who are transgender may feel any or all of these emotions.

## Am I Normal?

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“The moment you try to hide your true self, you are lying to yourself. Trying to be who you are is not a waste. Embrace yourself, it’s totally normal.”

Karma Tenzin, 26

Being Transgender is normal. We have so many transgender people in our country and around the world. These people are daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, and an integral part of our families and societies.

You may encounter many people in your life who do not understand you, act uncomfortable around you, make fun of you or even discriminate against you. This is no reason for you to doubt your identity and validity. What you feel is still authentic and true. You shouldn’t allow these experiences to demoralise you.



## WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE YOUNG AND TRANSGENDER?

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“The good thing is, I bring a smile to people’s faces. I’m the center of attraction in a crowd. The bad thing is people discriminate and tease in the same setting.”

Mama Yangki, 24

Some young transgender people feel great relief that they have found themselves and their true gender identity and expression. Others may feel sad and depressed for being discriminated against. It is likely that the latter aren’t able to start the process of transitioning yet.

Being Transgender is just one part of who they are and like other young people, they also think about school, college, being in love and relationships, work, hanging out with friends and family.



## Who Should I TELL?

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There is no obligation to tell anyone about your gender identity. However, you can choose to share it with people in your close circle if you are planning to transition publicly. If you decide to share your identity, first tell people with whom you are comfortable and those who understand you. This might include a trusted teacher, siblings, parent, and friend. You may alternatively reach out to entities who are working for the LGBTIQ cause.

Some young people may choose to transition later in life, while others may choose to begin to live full-time as their identified gender. If you choose to transition now, you may have to come out to many different people. You should seek support when going through this process, from a therapist, youth groups, and LGBTIQ groups.



## What Will Happen When I come out?

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“First I came out as a feminine gay boy but deep inside I knew I was transgender. It was like I was building up the courage to face society. When I knew the time was right, I came out as a transgender woman. People’s reactions were a mix of support and rejection. I got trolled and bullied on social media. However, my family was happy with my decision. As a transgender woman, I face a lot of problems but I’ve learned that the freedom to own your gender is a gift.”

Tshering Poko, 22

You will feel relieved and happy when you come out. Sometimes it may be challenging for you, especially if your parents, friends, and family do not fully understand. You will most likely experience a bit of both type of reactions. Some transgender youth may experience stigma and discrimination at home, schools, colleges.

Please make sure you have people you can talk to and get support from before you come out publicly.



## What does it mean to TRANSITION?

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“I wore Kira secretly for the first time at the age of 10 and openly at 23 in a public event. People discriminated and my family refused to accept me. But it didn’t deter me from doing what helped me be who I was.”

Ugyen Yangchen Lhamo, 32

## Should I do it?

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“Taking female hormones helped me attain more feminine features, but the side effects were huge. I gained weight and suffered from mood swings. Hormone pills work but they pose risks and are expensive, many can’t afford them. Some even switch to i-pills without proper prescriptions from doctors.”

Ugyen Yangchen Lhamo, 32



Some people who come out as Transgender are comfortable telling only a close circle of friends. Some may choose to change their name, their pronouns, their style of dressing, and their appearance to be consistent with their gender identity. Others may choose to take hormones and have surgery to medically alter their appearance. Our country currently doesn't have the options to start medical transition (Access to hormones and surgery).

As you decide which, if any, steps to take, it can help to talk about these feelings with others, such as a mental health professional who is competent with gender identity issues, friends and family members you trust, and other Transgender people. You should express yourself the way you feel most comfortable, without pressure from others.

Medical transition, the taking of hormones, and having one or more surgeries, is a big step. For some, it is absolutely necessary. Most people who choose to transition medically, have a strong need for their identity and body to match. If you plan to pursue a medical transition, it is important that your transition be supervised by a medical professional.

*Undertaking transition without professional medical guidance can have severe health risks.*

## What does **TRANSGENDER** mean about my **SEXUAL ORIENTATION**?

### Am I **GAY, STRAIGHT, or WHAT?**

“I identify as a straight person but I know there are other transgender men and women who can be gay, bi, or asexual. Trans Men could be attracted to other men and transwomen can also be attracted to other women.”

Dechen Selden, 28

Being Transgender has nothing to do with sexual orientation. Some Transgender people are attracted to women, some to men, some to other Transgender people, and some to people regardless of their gender.

People may define themselves with different labels, depending on who attracts them. For example, some Transgender women who are attracted to men define themselves as straight, because they are attracted to the opposite gender.



## What about Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV and Pregnancy?

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“Transgender women compared to the cis-gender woman are at more risk of HIV and other STIs since they mostly practice anal sex. As a transgender woman, it is important for me to understand this and practice safe sex. I get tested for HIV and other STIs every three months and also encourage my partners and friends to do the same.”

Dechen Selden, 28

Remember that not having sex is the surest way to avoid unintended pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In fact, many young persons choose to show affection through activities such as hugging, kissing, talking, and texting. If you choose to have sex, be responsible and talk with your partner about methods of protection for both of you.

Transgender people can have a hard time finding safer sex information that speaks in a language that reflects how they feel about their bodies. Because many may feel that their biological body doesn't match their gender identity, they may use different terms for their body parts. Finding information that corresponds to an internal/emotional body concept can be difficult.

No matter how young Transgender persons label sexual body parts, some or all of the following apply to each:

For vaginal intercourse where there is a risk of pregnancy, use latex or polyurethane condoms and also another effective method of contraception, such as birth control pills.

When touching someone else's genitals with your hands, use a latex or polyurethane barrier, such as surgical gloves. For oral sex, regardless of the genital area that the mouth touches, use a condom, a dental dam, or plastic wrap.

For anal intercourse, always use a latex or polyurethane condom with non-petroleum-based lubrication. When sharing sex toys, always use a latex or polyurethane condom with non-petroleum based lubrication.

### TWO IMPORTANT TIPS:



1. Do not use petroleum or oil-based lubricants with latex condoms because such lubricants weaken and/or destroy the latex. Use only water-based lubrication.
2. Remember that blood-to-blood contact has a higher risk of getting infected with HIV. Sharing drug or needles - whether for piercing or tattooing the body, taking medications, or using drugs - is highly dangerous, since blood left on the used equipment or needle will come into contact with your blood as soon as you use the equipment or needle. Avoid sharing needles, razors, or other such paraphernalia, for any purpose.

## How do I learn to Like MYSELF?

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“I fully realized my gender identity in class 8. I started coming out to people but many couldn’t accept it. Years later, it dawned upon me that others not liking me was not as important. I struggled for a long time to like myself fully and be immune to criticism from others.”

Aum Penjore, 45.

If you have just discovered or recognized that you are Transgender, remember that you are normal and you are likeable, just as you are. With big discoveries come big life changes, and it is normal to feel nervous, apprehensive, and upset about the days ahead.

Remember that discovering something this important about yourself can be a truly amazing experience. You are one step ahead on the journey of discovering who you truly are and with that journey, the world becomes full of possibilities. You are getting to know another part of yourself and this is truly a wonderful opportunity!



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