

For your team's wellbeing.
For Living



Supporting transgender individuals in the workplace.



The workforce is made up of a diverse group of individuals. If you're a people manager, knowing how best to support your team and their individual needs can be challenging. In this article we explain gender dysphoria and focus on how you can support transgender individuals in your workplace.

What does transgender mean?

If someone is transgender, it means that the gender they identify with doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, an individual assigned male might have a gender identity of girl/woman, or an individual assigned female might identify as a boy/man.

However, it's important to understand that gender identity isn't limited to the binary girl/woman and boy/man model. Some individuals may identify under the umbrella of non-binary. Their gender identity may fall between the binary model, or outside of it completely. They may identify as having no gender or an entirely different gender. An individual's gender identity might also be fixed, but can equally be fluid (ie it may change or develop with time).



What is gender dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria describes the distress and discomfort that this misalignment between gender identity and assigned sex causes. Living with this mismatch can be extremely damaging to an individual's mental health, leading to things like anxiety, depression, self-harm and even suicide. So it's important that these individuals get the help and support they need.

As an employer, you can make a real difference by providing an inclusive and comfortable environment. Your employees should feel able to embrace their gender identity (in whatever way they see fit) while feeling safe and supported to do so.



What you can do to help.



1. Understand

If you're a people manager, make it your mission to understand more about the transgender community. Every individual's experience is different, but by educating yourself, you put yourself in a better position to sympathise with, listen to and support your employees. Organisations like Stonewall and the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIREs) are great places to find information and resources. To help yourself better understand the lives and challenges faced by transgender individuals, take a look at the My Generation YouTube channel. This is a channel about transgender lives, created by transgender people.



2. Pronouns, pronouns, pronouns

Ask yourself, "How does this individual want me to refer to them?" For example, if you're asked, "Where's Ashley?" how will you respond - he's gone for lunch, she's in a meeting, they are on a conference call? Get into the habit of asking someone's preferred pronouns and then make sure you put them into practice. If you're unsure how to go about this, try introducing your pronouns first. For example, "Hi I'm Yasmeen, my preferred pronouns are she/her/hers. What are yours?"



3. Don't make assumptions

As well as using the correct pronouns, it's also important that you don't assume someone's gender identity based on their gender expression - these are two different things. Gender identity is an individual's innate sense of their gender, be it boy/man, girl/woman or something different. Gender expression is how someone presents their gender, for example through the clothes they wear, their hairstyle or mannerisms.

It's also important to understand that not every transgender individual will have gender reassignment surgery. For some individuals, hormone therapy or changing their gender presentation to best match their gender identity is enough to combat their gender dysphoria. Be aware and understanding of this. Don't assume and make sure you listen.





4. Protect personal data

When you apply for a job, you're asked to supply a whole host of information, from identity documents to your national insurance number and beyond. And it doesn't stop there. When in post, further information may be collected such as records of maternity leave, for example.

For transgender employees, this information is extremely sensitive and can risk outing them against their will if it's not used and stored correctly. As a manager it's important to work with your HR department to ensure this information is secure.

Tip: Remember to check your website for any information too. An outdated 'Meet the team' page or photo of an individual may cause distress and upset, so be sensitive and leave no stone unturned.



5. Culture is key

A culture that values inclusion and diversity not only allows for a safe and welcoming environment for employees, it also enables businesses to recruit and retain the best talent. So make sure the culture you foster is an inclusive one. Take time to also think about your policies and how you put these into practice. Assess the facilities you provide, such as toilets or changing rooms, and your company's dress code too. Are these inclusive?

You may also need to support your wider team to help them understand their colleagues better and act with kindness and sensitivity. Diversity and inclusion training led by a member of the transgender community may help.

Useful resources

Recruiting and retaining transgender staff: a guide for employers

Government Equalities Office www.gov.uk

Transgender inclusion in the workplace: A toolkit for employers

This is an American resource, but it contains useful information, most of which can be applied in the UK too.

Human Rights Campaign www.hrc.org

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