



Transgender and Non-Binary Young People in Digital Spaces

A guide for professionals to consider terminology, risk assessment
and safety planning in reference to online exploitation

**The
Children's
Society**

Glossary of terms

- **Trans or Transgender** - People may use the term 'trans' to describe themselves if their own sense of gender (their gender identity) does not match or sit easily with the gender they were assumed to have based on the sex they were assigned at birth. In this resource, we will be using the term 'trans' as an umbrella term to cover many identities, including non-binary ones.
- **Non-binary** - one of a number of terms people might use to describe the experience of having a gender that is neither male nor female, both male and female and/or between, beyond or unrelated to the binary categories of man and woman. Some people use it as an umbrella term, encompassing a spectrum of experiences such as those described under gender fluid and agender.
- **Cis or cisgender** - one of a number of terms people might use to describe the experience of having a gender that matches their sex assigned at birth. In other words, a man assigned male at birth, or a woman assigned female at birth.
- **Pronoun** - a word that stands in for a name. In English, some 'third person' pronouns are commonly associated with gender ('he', 'she'), whereas first person ('I') and second person ('you') pronouns are gender neutral. Singular 'they' is an example of a third person gender-neutral alternative. Some other commonly used gender neutral pronouns are: ze/hir and xe/xem. But this list is not exhaustive – there are so many pronouns that we cannot capture a full reflection of them in this document.

In this glossary, we are adhering to definitions as defined by specialist organisation Gendered Intelligence. This is a condensed glossary, and we acknowledge that there are many other identities and experiences of gender.

For more information on language in relation to this subject, please see Gendered Intelligence's [Trans Inclusion at Work Policy Glossary](#) | [Gendered Intelligence](#)

Why produce this resource?

In our continued commitment to equity and inclusion at the Prevention Programme, we have an ambition to equip professionals with the best tools to prevent child exploitation, and to improve their responses when young people are at risk of being exploited.

Although we still lack data on the exploitation risks posed to young trans people, we do understand that there are particular aspects of their unique life experiences that may exacerbate the risks experienced by all young people in digital spaces.

This resource aims to provide professionals with a wider understanding of the experiences of trans and non-binary young people in digital spaces.

Key Statistics



The Brook trust's 2017 Digital Romance Report found that:

- Only **33% of trans and non-binary young people** (compared to 63% of cisgendered young people) feel that **face-to-face is the best way for someone to flirt with them**
- **More non-binary young people (55%) had met someone online** who they started seeing compared to cisgender girls (37%) and cisgender boys (38%)
- **LGBTQ+ young people were more likely** than cisgender and heterosexual peers to have **asked someone out online** and to have **dated someone they had met online**

What young people are telling us...

When consulted on this resource, LGBTQ+ young people told us that they wanted to emphasise that no professional or adult needs to feel the pressure to 'get it right'. Instead, they should remember that each young person's experience is unique, and that we will never truly be able to know how it feels to be them. We should simply be open to learning, listening and showing empathy.

Searching for acceptance



All young people need a sense of belonging from a community in order to grow, develop and reach their full authentic self-identity. A common thread in trans young people's experiences refers to a yearning for spaces that feel safe: to express their gender identity freely, without fear of discrimination, undermining or intimidation. Research by trans specialist organisations has demonstrated the impact which transphobia can have on children's lives.

There can be devastating consequences for trans young people's wellbeing if we neglect to provide safe spaces that are free of transphobia. Some research has indicated that in the UK trans children were twice as likely to have self-harmed than cis-gendered lesbian, gay and bisexual children, who already have higher rates of self-harm and suicide. Transphobia and being unable to talk to anyone about their identity were key factors for such young people.

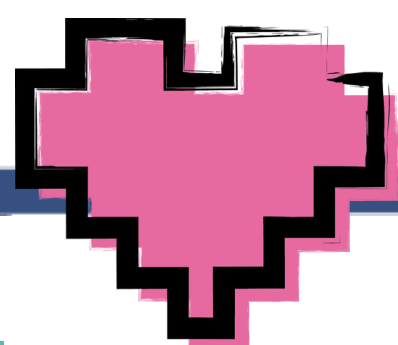
It is unsurprising that if young people are experiencing forms of hatred from wider society, and at times from their own families and carers, they are likely to seek out that acceptance from other spaces. For some trans young people, online spaces may provide an opportunity to be themselves and feel accepted by a community that shares similar experiences. Online spaces are especially important to some LGBTQ+ young people as a way of meeting and getting to know others away from local peer, family or faith groups, where they may experience less acceptance from others in the 'real' world.

Gender-affirming experiences

Young people who are trans may seek out relationships, support networks, forums, and communities wherein they can have gender-affirming experiences. A gender affirming experience refers to an encounter that validated, enhanced, or supported a young person's gender identity and led to positive thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviours relating to their gender. Gender-affirming experiences can lead to a sense of gender euphoria, wherein trans and non-binary people feel a sense of happiness, confidence and joy from being affirmed and accepted in their gender identity.

At the Prevention Programme, we have been seeking out expert knowledge and experience from specialist services that support trans and non-binary young people. While consulting specialist frontline support services, we heard about the ways in which trans young people seeking acceptance online can be targeted by perpetrators to groom these young people into exploitative dynamics. These services shared that trans young people can sometimes feel that they are inherently unattractive (due to the negative messaging they may have been fed about their own identities) and they may be groomed by perpetrators that wish to exploit the child's desire to be seen as romantically appealing.

It is absolutely vital that you **use the right pronouns** when you are addressing a young person, but also when you are discussing them in meetings, or writing up notes in relation to the young person (unless they have asked for you to keep their gender identity private). The best way to ensure you are getting this right is to **simply ask the young person what their pronouns are**. When in multi-agency settings, ensure that all partners are making a record of the young person's pronouns to avoid confusion and inefficient safeguarding responses.

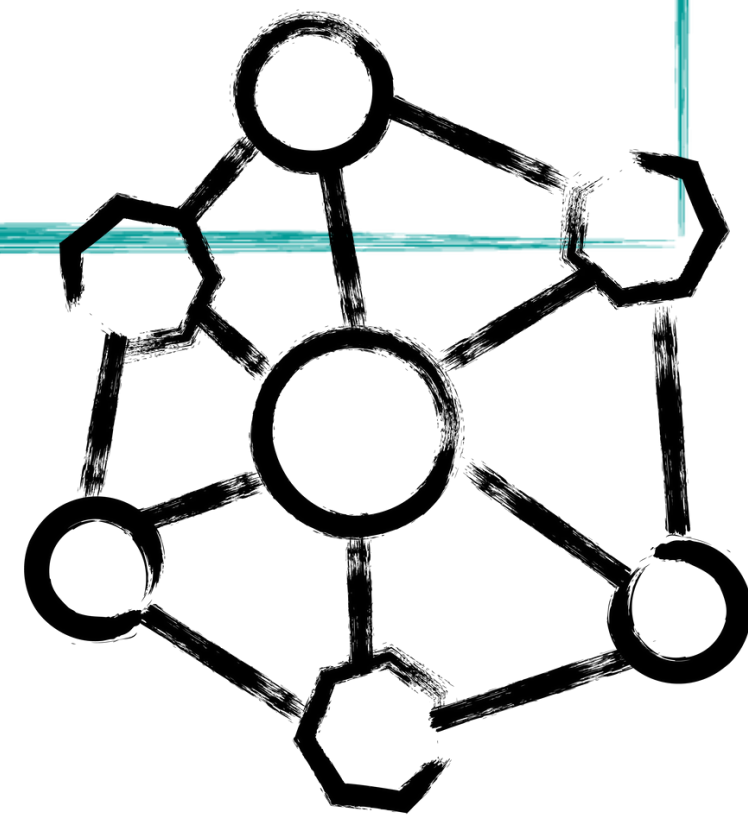


**The
Children's
Society**



Safety Planning

Just because a young person identifies as trans or non-binary, this does not mean that they are inherently at risk in online spaces. However, if you do believe that a trans young person is at risk of harm, abuse or exploitation in an online context, you may want to consider how you approach safety planning for them. If they are accessing a space that benefits their emotional and mental well-being, it may be detrimental to the child to decide to limit their access to these spaces by either removing a device or limiting their access to safe LGBTQ+ forums. It is best to take a holistic view of the risks and benefits presented to trans young people online. In the [Tackling Child Exploitation Practice Principles](#), we are reminded to take a strengths-based approach when we are responding to potential exploitation. In order to take this strengths-based approach, we want to clearly consider the benefits of the online spaces that a young person is accessing, and how it may be providing them with a sense of safety. To ensure you can understand it from the young person's perspective, safety planning for online spaces should be co-authored with the young person, so that we are fully grasping the benefits of their use of online spaces, and how any risks can be mitigated.



What kinds of online spaces does the young person access?

In each individual online space, are there any in-built privacy or safety mechanisms that the young person is using?

Do they have access to real-life spaces where they can express their gender identity safely and freely?

Do they have access to specialist support services for LGBTQ+ Youth?

How regularly do they access these spaces?

How safe does the young person feel in their education setting?

What would make me concerned about a young person in those digital spaces?

Do they feel supported and accepted by their caregivers?

Do they have peer friendships where they are accepted and supported in their gender identity?

What is the young person's home life like?

Is the young person 'out' to their caregivers, family or support network?

If they have shared their gender identity, how was this received?

Questions to consider

Terminology

This section of the resource will provide you with a list of words that young people may use in relation to gender identity, gaming, subcultures, and online spaces. However, these are not all-encompassing, and terminology moves on quickly and can shift in meaning and commonality.

When we consulted LGBTQ+ young people on this resource, they highlighted that being knowledgeable about various mental health conditions such as [Body Dysmorphia](#) would be valuable. You can learn about other mental health conditions [here](#).

Sexuality and Gender

- **Ally** - An ally is someone who actively supports and stands up for members of the LGBTQ+ community and equality. This is often a heterosexual person, but they may also be a member of the LGBTQ+ community who stands up for another member of the LGBTQ+ community
- **AFAB** – assigned female at birth
- **AMAB** – assigned male at birth
- **Baby Gay** - A gay, lesbian or bisexual person who has recently come to identify as such, or is newly out
- **Beard** – A person of a different sex who is used by a gay person as a fake heterosexual partner to hide their sexuality
- **Binding** – Tight wrapping of the chest with special clothes or tape to minimize the size or appearance of breasts
- **Birth gender** – sometimes used by transgender people to refer to their gender prior to transitioning
- **Bottom surgery** – gender confirmation surgery relating to the bottom of the body, specifically the genitals
- **Closet/Closeted** – a person who has not yet come out publicly as LGBTQ+, often used offensively
- **Coming out** - When an LGBTQ+ person either identifies or comes to accept their own sexual orientation or gender identity, or the process of telling other people about their orientation or identity. Contrast with outing
- **Deadname** – the birth name of a transgender person who has changed their name, using this name is highly offensive
- **Enby** – another name for non-binary
- **FTM or F2M** – an outdated term for transgender people who have transitioned from female to male, sometimes considered offensive
- **Gender fluid** - one of a number of terms people might use to describe the experience of having a gender that varies. This may be variation over time, or in another way, for example according to different environments / settings
- **Gender-neutral** – suitable for all genders, male, female or other. Can refer to words and expressions but also items and services or spaces
- **Gender Dysphoria** - The discomfort felt when a person's assigned sex does not match with their gender identity. A diagnosis of gender dysphoria is often required before a trans person can access any form of medical transition. Also known as Gender Identity Disorder, previously known as transexualism or transgenderism
- **Gender non-conforming or GNC** – a person or act that defies traditional expectations of their gender or assigned sex
- **Gender X** – a term used to refer to a gender other than male or female
- **Genderqueer** - An identity that does not feature the gender binary, involving combinations of masculinity or femininity
- **LGBTQIA+** - An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex and Asexual, and + (meaning anyone who is not listed in the acronym but still identifies as part of the community)
- **Misgendering** – the act of referring to someone as the wrong gender, often by using the wrong pronouns
- **MTF or M2F** – an outdated term for transgender people who have transitioned from male to female, sometimes considered offensive
- **Passing** – a transgender person's ability to be considered at a glance to be either a cisgender man or a cisgender woman, and the privilege they experience from this
- **Skoliosexual** – a person who is sexually or romantically attracted to non-binary people, or those who do not identify as cisgender
- **Social transition** - The part of a transgender person's transition seen by the people around them. This can feature coming out, changing a gender expression, name and pronouns
- **TERF** – stands for trans-exclusionary radical feminist, meaning a feminist who does not believe that trans women are women
- **Top surgery** – gender confirmation surgery relating to the top half of the body
- **Transitioning** – the process of a transgender person presenting themselves as their gender identity
- **Tucking** - The practise of concealing a penis and testicles, practised by some trans women who have not undergone gender confirmation surgery as well as drag artists
- **Two Spirited** - a pan-Indigenous, unifying term that has been adopted by some Indigenous people from North American communities to describe people who identify as having both masculine and feminine traits

Subcultures

- **Furries** - fans of media that features anthropomorphic animals—that is, animals who walk, talk, and do otherwise human things. 12.2% of furries self-identify as transgender or non-binary, a number more than 20 times higher than that typically observed in the general population
- **Fursona** - a furry-themed avatar used to interact with other members of the furry fandom. Individual furries are free to create representations of themselves unbounded by reality. As such, they can reconceptualize themselves with regard to age, gender, personality, or physical characteristics
- **Incel Culture** – short for ‘involuntarily celibate’, meaning people (mostly men) who define themselves as unable to have a romantic or sexual partner despite desiring one. This subculture is a part of the ‘manosphere’ that is associated with extreme misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, biphobia, rape culture and expressions and acts of violence. Those that associate this culture sometimes refer to themselves as having taken the ‘red pill’ (a reference to The Matrix film series) and are influenced by social media personalities such as Andrew Tate. Those from the LGBTQ+ community can experience extreme hatred and violence from individuals that participate in this subculture.
- **Quadrobics** – a type of physical activity that involves moving on all fours, mimicking the gait and movements of quadrupedal animals
- **Therian or Therianthropy** - A person who experiences being and identifies as a non-human animal on an integral, personal level

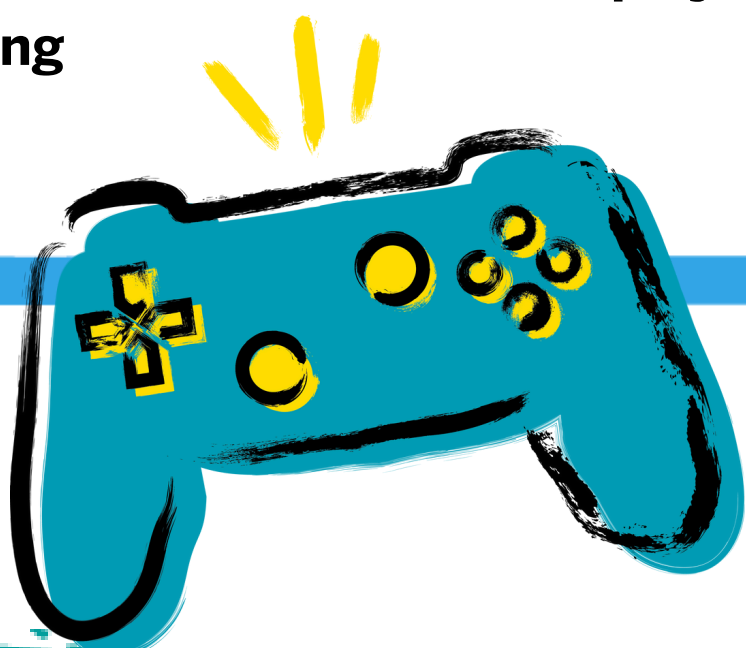


Terminology
changes all
the time



Gaming

- **Avatar** – The player’s representation in the game world
- **Discord** – a social media app for communities around common interests and is often used by gamers
- **Loot** or **Lootboxes** – Typically refers to in-game rewards granted to the player for completing certain tasks and is often associated with a certain amount of chance, but can also be purchased
- **Noob** - Often stylised as 'n00b', 'neek', 'newb' or 'newbie', 'noob' is a shorthand for 'newcomer' and is often used as a derogatory term to mock inexperienced players, often in a multiplayer setting



Text Acronyms and Slang

- **Body count** – the number of people someone has had sex with (within a gaming context, this can mean the amount of kills made by the player)
- **Chad** – a hyper-sexual young man (usually said in a derogatory way)
- **KMS** – Kill myself
- **KYS** – Kill yourself
- **LMIRL** – Let’s meet in real life
- **No cap** – used to indicate that someone is not lying (also the cap emoji)
- **Noob** - Often stylised as 'n00b', 'neek', 'newb' or 'newbie', 'noob' is a shorthand for 'newcomer' and is often used as a derogatory term to mock inexperienced players, often in a multiplayer setting
- **Plug** – sometimes, this term is used to refer to someone who can ‘connect’ you with drugs; a drug dealer
- **PM** – Private Message
- **PMOYS** – acronym that stands for ‘put me on your snapchat’, a request to add someone on the Snapchat app
- **POC** – Person of Colour
- **QTIPOC** – an acronym for queer and trans people of colour
- **SH** – Self-harm
- **Simp** – somebody who tries very hard and does a lot for their crush
- **SMH** – shaking my head (disapproval)
- **Stan** – an ardent fan of a particular celebrity
- **WTTP** – want to trade photos?

Conversation Starters



This section is intended to support professionals to open a non-judgemental, empathic conversation with a young person about their digital life. It's important to remember to engage your sense of professional curiosity and ask open-ended questions to avoid leading the young person to believe that they are going to be blamed for any harm, abuse or exploitation they may have experienced online. Remember, the response a young person gives will depend entirely on how safe and comfortable they feel with the person asking them.

Tell me what you like about...

Do you think you'll go on... again?

Have you learnt anything new on....

Why do you want to go on....

Tell me how you heard about....

Who tends to use...

Have you seen anything on.... that surprised you?

How did you access....

Have there been times when... made you uncomfortable?

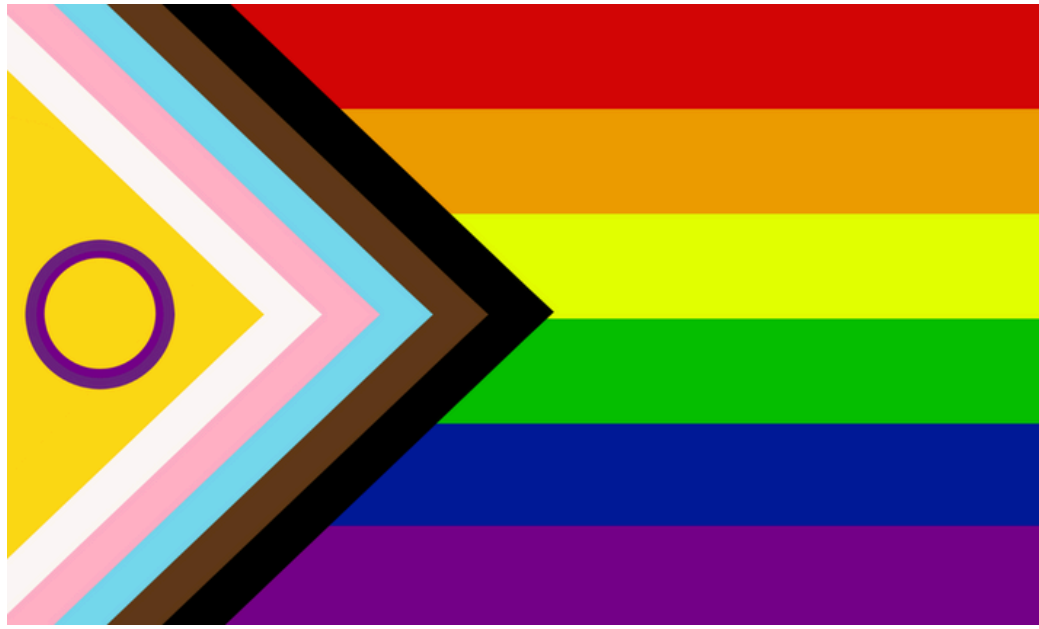


How do you feel when you access....



Additional Resources & Further Reading

Progress Pride Flag



The young people who were consulted on this resource were keen for us to include the progress pride flag - click [here](#) to find out more about different flags and their symbolism

Abraham Maslow - Hierarchy of Needs: A Theory of Human Motivation (1943)

Bragg, S; Thomson, R; O'Riordan, K; (2021) Digital Intimacies and LGBT+ Youth: Celebration, Equity and Safety. University of Sussex: Brighton, UK.

The Brook Trust's report - Digital Romance: A research project exploring young people's use of technology in their romantic relationships and love lives

TransActual's Trans lives survey 2021: Enduring the UK's hostile environment

What works for Children's social care - LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of residential social care in England (2022).

McDermott, E. S., Hughes, E., & Rawlings, V. E. (2016, Jun 30). Queer Future Final Report: Understanding lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) adolescents' suicide, self-harm and help-seeking behaviour

Furscience - Research Findings on Sex, Gender and Gender Identity

Piloting this resource *Important Information*

Please note that this is a draft resource, and is yet to be finalised, completed, and published. This resource has been developed by the Prevention Programme at The Children's Society, and will be piloted for use across the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership for three months following September 18th 2024. Any and all feedback will be gratefully received. If you wish to discuss the resource, or the work of the Prevention Programme further, please send all queries to phoebe.bond@childrenssociety.org.uk

**The
Children's
Society**