



## Psychosocial guidance

Psychosocial support can have multiple objectives and must always be tailored to the specific questions and needs of the individual. The number of sessions can therefore never be fixed. The following elements may be present in psychosocial sessions:

- offering support and help in dealing with stigma, finding a more comfortable gender expression, exploring different possibilities for gender expression, facilitating coming-out and possibly a change in gender role and support before, during and after both the social and medical transition;
- thorough education about gender-affirming interventions and making well-informed choices possible.

### How do I introduce the theme in my psychosocial support session?

- Introduce the possibility that not everyone's assigned gender has to fit with one's gender identity.
- State explicitly that conversation about gender expression, feelings of gender dysphoria, etc. is possible, and/or that you are willing to help find specialised help for this.
- It is not up to clients to train psychosocial professionals, train yourself in time. You may want to join professional networks such as EPATH and WPATH.

### Are being trans and/or having feelings of gender dysphoria symptoms of other underlying difficulties?

- Care providers often look for the meaning and function of a certain behaviour, symptom or complaint. In the context of being trans and/or having feelings of gender dysphoria, respect for the perception of the individual must also be central. It is usually not appropriate to 'psychologize' gender identity and dysphoria too much.
- The exploration into the "causes" of the trans experience or gender identity and the possible feelings of gender dysphoria should be guided by the needs of the person. This need to find an answer can be related to a lack of acceptance and reassurance. Clients should be supported to come to terms with their gender identity. Detailed answers about the causes of people's gender identity (including trans people) cannot be provided at this point as they are complex processes.
- When clients present with several mental health difficulties, alongside a trans experience or gender identity, or the possible feelings of gender dysphoria, it is advisable to take all these issues seriously, and not treat the gender aspect as merely a symptom of the other issues presented.

- Starting psychotherapy to change a person's gender identity in both minors and adults is considered unethical and constitutes a criminal offence according to Maltese law.

## Why might trans people need psycho-social support after/without social or medical transition?

- Some trans people might experience difficulties in their life due to the lack of social acceptance in their close circles or professional life. This might impact their mental well-being to a large extent. Losses in social relationships, a feeling of a lost youth, ... are issues to take care of.
- A common misconception is that surgery, hormones, or social transition will be a "magic pill" for the psychosocial issues faced by trans people; this is not the case, and it is vital that trans people and providers understand that seeking support after these interventions is both possible and ok.

## When should I refer to the Gender Wellbeing Clinic?

- If the request for help relates to the desire for gender-affirming medical interventions, psychosocial support and assessment preferably takes place within a specialised setting in which these interventions can be offered through multidisciplinary collaboration.

## How does the psychosocial support of the Gender Wellbeing Clinic work?

- Following referral to the Gender Wellbeing Clinic an initial appointment is set with the nurse coordinator and/or social worker. This initial meeting serves to gather background information, determine the client's wants and needs and to determine the individual's care pathway.
- If a need for further psycho-social support is identified and agreed with the client, they will be referred to the psycho-social professional.