



## Research Points: Social Transition & Affirmation

Welcome to the *We Are Allies Research Points*. Here you will find research-based information about gender-affirming care and transgender, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary (TTNB) youth. These resources were developed to support the *We Are Allies project*.

In 2023, a team of researchers conducted an environmental scan to identify misinformation messages being shared online related to gender-affirming care for TTNB youth. The team reviewed published research to systematically gather accurate information that addresses common misinformation messages. These have been organized by topic and can be found in this series of Research Points. References are provided for people who would like to learn more.

If you have questions about accessing gender-affirming healthcare for yourself or a loved one, we encourage you to reach out to a trusted healthcare provider or organization.

## Introduction to Social Transition & Affirmation

Social transition and affirmation are terms used to describe non-medical changes during a person's gender journey.<sup>1,2</sup> Social transition and affirmation can include changing names, pronouns, and appearance.<sup>1,2</sup> This process is different for every person. For example, a person may or may not change their name or try out different pronouns. Appearance can be changed in many ways, including through clothing, accessories, hairstyle, hair removal, speech, mannerisms, binding, packing, tucking, and padding.

## Research about Social Transition & Affirmation

The following sections summarize research findings showing that social transition and affirmation help TTNB youth to better understand their genders and serve to support youth well-being. Following this summary, ideas are presented to support TTNB youth's social transition and affirmation.



## **Social transition and affirmation allow youth to live more fully in their genders**

**Social transition and affirmation support people to understand and experience their gender more fully.** Social transition and affirmation can be helpful for people who want to take steps to live more fully in their gender. Social transition and affirmation allow people to explore their genders and learn more about their identities.<sup>3-5</sup> For some people, this process may be helpful in deciding whether to access medical transition care, such as puberty blockers or hormone therapy.

**Steps taken toward social transition and affirmation are flexible and reversible.**<sup>3,6</sup> For example, a person who explores their gender through new names and pronouns may decide those changes are not right for them. They might begin using their previous name and pronouns again or explore different names and pronouns. There is no evidence that these experiences cause distress when youth are living in affirming, supportive environments.<sup>7</sup>

## **Social transition supports well-being**

**Affirmation of a person's gender by other people in their life is important for well-being.** Being addressed by correct names and pronouns (the names and pronouns the person goes by), having correct names on medical and school records, participating in affirming sports teams, and using certain washrooms may be part of social transition and affirmation. Youth who take steps around social transition or affirmation may or may not want or require gender-affirming medical care in the future. Research shows that youth can benefit from social transition and affirmation alone or in combination with gender-affirming medical care.<sup>8,9</sup>

**Social transition and affirmation can relieve anxiety, depression and gender-related distress.** Relief from anxiety and gender-related distress can be experienced immediately after a person begins to socially transition.<sup>10</sup> Research shows that youth who have socially transitioned have rates of depression and self-worth similar to cisgender youth.<sup>2</sup>

**Social transition and affirmation can improve mental health, happiness and self-confidence.** One of the main benefits of social transition is improved mental health.<sup>2,8-12</sup> Parents report that social transition improves their youth's happiness and self-confidence.<sup>13</sup> Youth and adults who were not able to transition before puberty have reported that many experiences of distress and discrimination would have been avoided if they had started transitioning sooner.<sup>14</sup>

**Support from families and peers during social transition improves well-being.** TTNB youth identify family support as an important factor throughout their gender journeys.<sup>15</sup> Those with accepting families and supportive peers are less likely to attempt suicide or report symptoms of depression and anxiety than those without social affirmation.<sup>8,16,17</sup> Parents of TTNB youth recognize

social transition and affirmation as important for supporting and protecting youth well-being.<sup>13</sup> Acceptance in other relationships is important too. Peer acceptance of youths' gender expression can support a positive sense of self-worth.<sup>18</sup>

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## **Ways to Support Social Transition and Affirmation may include:**

- Asking the youth what kind of support would be helpful
- Using correct names and pronouns
- Helping others practice and remember new names and pronouns at the youth's request
- Finding clothes that are affirming
- Finding hairstyles that are affirming
- Practicing using affirming make-up
- Helping youth access binders, bras, and other gender-affirming supplies
- Advocating for inclusion and safer spaces in school and community

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