

## Tips for Grown Ups Supporting Autistic LGBTIQ+ Youth

*Understanding and acceptance is key to developing trust and positive mental health trajectories in Autistic LGBTIQ+ youth. These tips are based on surveys and consultations we have undertaken with young people, along with input from Autistic LGBTIQ+ adults, service providers, and families across Australia. To learn more about the services and support we provide, please check out our [website](#), which also includes related tips/resources for Autistic LGBTIQ+ young people and for service providers. This resource was funded by the Victorian Government through the Healthy Equal Youth program and its grant to I CAN Network Ltd.*

- **You and your young person are not alone:** There is a significant overlap between the Autistic and LGBTIQ+ ('queer') communities. There are many other people - young and old - who can relate to what your young person might be feeling or experiencing from their own lived experience. For instance, I CAN Network offers safe, supportive spaces for Autistic LGBTIQ+ young people through our [online group mentoring](#). Likewise, there are respectful parent/carer communities and resources where you can find information and support (see resources below).
- **Be kind to your young person:** Coming out as queer can be a daunting experience for a young person so it's very important that grown ups respond first with kindness. It's okay if you have a lot of feelings to process yourself. You can still offer a willingness to listen to them and learn, even as you work through your own questions and feelings. Reacting negatively towards your young person can cause hurt that is difficult to heal, and may lead them to think they can't be themselves around you. Young people must know that they will be respected whatever they find out about themselves, and their judgement should be trusted.
- **Give them a safe space:** Your young person's journey of exploring their gender and/or sexuality can lead to all kinds of feelings. It can be; liberating, terrifying, thrilling, confusing, overwhelming, depressing, or many others. Your young person needs to be able to express these feelings safely in order to work through them. If you are not yet able to provide this space, you can help them to find one through the resources listed below.
- **Respect processing time:** Autistic people will often have a different processing time to what is expected. Autistic young people might have a really thorough and in-depth understanding of gender and sexuality and what it all means, or they

may struggle to come to terms with the concepts. Meet the young person where they're at, and work with them as you both learn together.

- **Let them lead the way:** Your young person might know what feels 'wrong', but they might not know what feels 'right' yet. That's okay. Other young people will have a very sure idea about what their gender or sexuality is from a young age, that is also okay! Let the young person take the lead, and you can offer support and encouragement along the way.
- **Embrace difference:** Be aware that sensory differences or just a unique perspective on life can affect how a young person expresses their gender identity. Let your young person choose their own labels and respect them, even if it doesn't match your understanding of those labels.
- **Foster a positive identity:** It is important to foster a positive sense of identity in young people. Grown ups can do so by listening to and supporting the decisions a young person makes as they explore various facets of their identity.
- **Practice new names and pronouns:** Some young people will choose to use a different name or pronouns than what you are used to, this is okay; it can be a huge part of identity development. One of the most important things grown ups can do to support queer young people (Autistic and non Autistic) is to respect their name and pronouns and use them comfortably. This could include common pronouns like he/she/they, or uncommon pronouns known as neopronouns.
- **Listen and breathe:** When in doubt of how to respond, don't. Breathe, and listen to what your young person is communicating. Let them know that you are listening by repeating back what you hear. Validate their emotions, let them know that you are there for them. They might just need someone they can safely talk through their feelings with. You do not have to have all (or any of) the answers, but you can offer unconditional love and support.
- **Do your research:** There are many different ways that someone can express their gender or sexuality identity, or their Autistic identity, and many different ways you can affirm them. The best way you can learn is to *listen to the voices of those with lived experience*. Refer to resources that are Autistic and/or queer-led (such as this tip sheet and the resources below), because they will provide the most authentic insights into what your young person might be going through. Ask your young person what resources they have found helpful, then read and watch what they share with you.
- **Learn the terminology:** Your young person may use terminology which is unfamiliar to you. You can ask them to explain terms, or you can seek them out

yourself; Google is your friend. There are many more gender identities than transgender or non-binary, and many more sexualities than hetero- or homo-sexual. Some other gender identities are genderqueer, demigirl or agender. Use your search engine to look up new terms you hear, and prioritise LGBTIQ+ specific websites for the most up to date information.

- **Acceptance makes a difference:** Our world can still be an unwelcoming place for people who identify as Autistic, queer, or both. Your young person is likely to come up against misunderstanding, discrimination and intolerance. Unfortunately, they might also internalise that negativity over time. The acceptance and unconditional support of trusted grown ups can serve as a powerful protective factor that will help them navigate the world from a place of greater strength.

## RESOURCES

- [Minus18 resources for parents video series](#) (2-3 minute videos)
- [Ygender, Trans101 video series](#) (7-9 minute videos)
- [Genderbread person](#) (2 minute read)
- [Beyond Blue: Families like mine, supporting LGBTIQ+ family members](#) (56 page booklet)
- [Five non-binary people talk about being non-binary](#) (2 minute read)

Understanding pronouns:

- [Pronouns: A guide to correct use](#) (3 minute read)
- [Pronouns 101: What, why and how to nail them](#) (3 minute read)

Autism-specific resources:

- [Neuroqueer's written piece 'What is Autism'](#) (3 minute read)
- [Amythest Schaber's 'Ask An Autistic' YouTube series](#) (10-15 minute videos)
- [Nurturing self-esteem and pride in Autistic young people](#) I CAN team (3 minute read)
- [Why everything you know about autism is wrong](#) Jac den Houting TEDx talk (13 min video)

- When your child comes to you and says... Anna Cristina (17 minute video - for parents/carers of Autistic/LGBTIQA+ young people)

Organisations:

- I CAN Network (including Autistic-led group mentoring for Autistic LGBTIQA+ teens and other resources)
- Rainbow Families
- Parents of Gender Diverse Children
- Transcend
- TARA (including an Autistic-led, intersectional support space for parents/carers of Autistic young people)
- Reframing Autism
- Qlife