

CHECKLIST OF GOOD PRACTICES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS WORKING WITH AUTISTIC LGBTIQA+ YOUNG PEOPLE



Having access to support services that understand and embrace Autism, neurodiversity and LGBTIQA+ identity is a crucial aspect of young people having positive mental wellbeing. Through extensive input from LGBTIQA+ and/or Autistic young people across Australia, we've developed this checklist of signals that a service provider is inclusive and accepting. For related resources specifically for young people and for the adults in their lives, please see our website. This resource was funded by the Victorian Government through the Healthy Equal Youth program and its grant to I CAN Network Ltd.

- Forms have a space for individuals to write their gender identity, name (make explicit that it doesn't have to be a legal name), pronouns, and any accommodations needed. The information shared on this form should be used by staff.
- Interactions such as email and introductions give permission for the sharing of pronouns, eg. staff share their own pronouns, giving permission for young people to share theirs.
- Staff ask the young person about their preferred language around identity, labels, etc.
- Staff check with the young person before and at their initial appointment whether they need any sensory accommodations. Many Autistic people have sensory processing differences, and may find lights, sounds, smells, etc overwhelming. It is important that staff take sensory needs seriously (see resources below).
- The organisation displays visual cues to being an LGBTIQA+ inclusive space (e.g. rainbow flags, posters, lanyards, brochures, artwork, or queer-specific resources) and avoids symbols which are offensive to many in the Autistic community (e.g. puzzle pieces).
- Staff do not make assumptions about a young person's gender or sexuality.
- Young people feel listened to and not judged for disclosing aspects of their identity (including disability status)
- Staff let young people know what they can do and where they can go if they need a break (somewhere quiet and sensory friendly).

- Staff are familiar with the concepts of neurodiversity, the Social Model of Disability, Autistic Pride, and the importance of identity-first language to many in the Autistic community (see resources below).
- Staff understand that Autism is not a mental health condition; it is a neurological difference. They recognise that mental health is connected to, but is not defined by, Autistic neurotype.
- Staff trust and respect young people's judgement of their own identity.
- Waiting room and consulting rooms have a selection of sensory tools which are free to use.
- The environment (waiting area and rooms) seeks to be sensory friendly. Some Autistic people can be prone to sensory overload if the sensory environment (sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations) becomes unbearable. The environment can be easily adjusted to accommodate specific, disclosed sensory needs, e.g. calming music is turned on for 'sensory seekers' or lights, sounds, etc are turned down for 'sensory avoiders'.
- Offer a quiet room, or a space where young people can go to cool off before, during, or after a session if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- Provide multiple options for communication and reminders and respect preferences (e.g. phone calls, texts, emails).
- Have informational posters, brochures of related services, research, opportunities and support groups in the waiting area.
- Provide affordable services; Provide clear guidance on how to categorise that service under schemes such as the NDIS or how to obtain rebates (e.g. Mental Health Treatment Plan).

RESOURCES

RESOURCES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO AUTISTIC LGBTIQA+ YOUNG PEOPLE, INCLUDING A WEBINAR CREATED BY YOUNG ADULTS FOR OUR YOUNGER PEERS, CAN BE FOUND ON THE I CAN NETWORK WEBSITE. THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES (NOT EXHAUSTIVE) ARE ALSO VALUABLE:

LGBTIQA+:

- [Ygender, Trans101 video series](#) (7-9 min videos)
- [Genderbread person](#) infographic on gender, sexuality, sex, and romantic attraction (2 min read)
- [LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Language Guide](#)
- [Common LGBTIQA+ Terminology](#) - Australian Institute of Family Studies
- [Trans & Gender Diverse Young People \(Resources for Mental Health Professionals\)](#) - Orygen

AUTISM AND NEURODIVERSITY:

- [What is Autism - Neuroqueer](#) (3 min read)
- ['Ask An Autistic' YouTube series by Amythest Schaber](#) (10-15 min videos)
- [Why everything you know about autism is wrong](#) - Jac den Houting TEDx Talk (13 min video)
- [What's the Social Model of Disability? - People with Disability Australia](#) (1 min read)
- [Neurodiversity is the new normal - Siena Castellon \(young person\)](#) (1 min read)
- [Nurturing self-esteem & pride in Autistic young people](#) - I CAN Network (3 min read)
- [Double Empathy: Why Autistic people are often understood](#) (8 min read)
- [Communication is a two-way street: Reframing autism & neurodivergence as a difference, rather than a disorder](#) (6 min read)
- [Autism and sensory diets - Neurodivergent Rebel](#) (13 min video)
- [Sensory sensitivities are not preferences, they're needs - Autistic Science Person](#) (5 min read)
- [Interoception and sensory processing issues: What you need to know](#) (3 min read)
- [Identity first v person first language - People with Disability Australia](#) (2 min read)
- [Key articles on identity first language - Autistic on Wheels](#) (1 min read)
- [Why it is important for Autism-positive spaces to avoid using the 'puzzle piece' symbol](#) (5 min read)



SUGGESTED ACADEMIC ARTICLES:

George, R., & Stokes, M. A. (2018a). A Quantitative Analysis of Mental Health Among Sexual and Gender Minority Groups in ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48(6), 2052–2063.

George, R., & Stokes, M. A. (2018b). Sexual Orientation in Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Autism Research*, 11(1), 133–141.

Heylens, G., Aspeslagh, L., Dierickx, J., Baetens, K., Van Hoorde, B., De Cuypere, G., & Elaut, E. (2018). The Co-occurrence of Gender Dysphoria and Autism Spectrum Disorder in Adults: An Analysis of Cross-Sectional and Clinical Chart Data. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48(6), 2217–2223.

Hill, A. O., Lyons, A., Jones, J., McGowan, I., Carman, M., Parsons, M., Power, J., & Bourne, A. (2021). Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ young people in Australia (National Report monograph series number 124; p. 188). Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1198945/Writing-Themselves-In-4-National-report.pdf

Hillier, A., Gallop, N., Mendes, E., Tellez, D., Buckingham, A., Nizami, A., & O’Toole, D. (2020). LGBTQ+ and autism spectrum disorder: Experiences and challenges. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 21(1), 98–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2019.1594484>

Pecora, L. A., Hancock, G. I., Hooley, M., Demmer, D. H., Attwood, T., Mesibov, G. B., & Stokes, M. A. (2020). Gender identity, sexual orientation and adverse sexual experiences in autistic females. *Molecular Autism*, 11, Article 57.

Sala, G., Hooley, M., & Stokes, M. A. (2020). Romantic Intimacy in Autism: A Qualitative Analysis. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50, 4133–4147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04377-8>



SUGGESTED ACADEMIC ARTICLES CONTINUED:

Sedgewick, F., Crane, L., Hill, V., & Pellicano, E. (2019). Friends and Lovers: The Relationships of Autistic and Neurotypical Women. *Autism in Adulthood*, 1(2), 112–123.

Strang, J. F., Kenworthy, L., Dominska, A., Sokoloff, J., Kenealy, L. E., Berl, M., Walsh, L., Menivielle, E., Slesaransky-Poe, G., Kim, K.-E., Luong-Tran, C., Meagher, H., & Wallace, G. L. (2014). Increased gender variance in autism spectrum disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *Archives of Sexual Behaviours*, 43(8), 1525–1533.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0285-3>

Strang, J. F., Klomp, S. E., Caplan, R., Griffin, A. D., Anthony, L. G., Harris, M. C., Graham, E. K., Knauss, M., & van der Miesen, A. I. R. (2019). Community-Based Participatory Design for Research That Impacts the Lives of Transgender and/or Gender-Diverse Autistic and/or Neurodiverse People. *Clinical Practice in Pediatric Psychology*, 7(4), 396–404.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cpp0000310>

Strang, J. F., Powers, M. D., Knauss, M., Sibarium, E., Leibowitz, S. F., Kenworthy, L., Sadikova, E., Wyss, S., Willing, L., Caplan, R., Pervez, N., Nowak, J., Gohari, D., Gomez-Lobo, V., Call, D., & Anthony, L. G. (2018). “They Thought It Was an Obsession”: Trajectories and Perspectives of Autistic Transgender and Gender-Diverse Adolescents. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48, 4039–4055.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3723-6>

Telfer, M., Tollit, M., Pace, C., & Pang, K. (2018). Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines for trans and gender diverse children and adolescents Version 1.1 (p. 36). The Royal Children’s Hospital.

Warrier, V., Greenberg, D. M., Weir, E., Buckingham, C., Smith, P., Meng-Chuan, L., Allison, C., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2020). Elevated rates of autism, other neurodevelopmental and psychiatric diagnoses, and autistic traits in transgender and gender-diverse individuals. *Nature Communications*, 11. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-020-17794-1>