

Gender-Affirming Care Supporting Gender Diversity in Autism

What is Gender Affirming Care and What Does It Have to Do with Autism?

Gender-affirming care (GAC) represents a range of approaches, supported by evidence and research, intended to affirm a person's gender identity and allow them to live authentically as their true selves. GAC has been shown to improve the mental health outcomes of those who receive it – reducing feelings of depression and suicidality, while at the same time boosting self-esteem and quality of life (Tordoff et al., 2022). While GAC can include medical treatments when needed, it also involves social and legal actions a person can take to affirm their gender identity.

Research consistently shows that autistic individuals are more likely to identify with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth (Walsh et al., 2018). This makes it even more important to share information about GAC with autistic people who may want to explore or express their gender in different ways.



Legal GAC

Examples include:
legal name change,
updating personal
documents,
protections against
hate and
discrimination



Social GAC

Examples include:
using chosen name
and pronouns, voice
therapy, style of
dress, time spent with
supportive people,
therapy



Medical GAC

Examples include:
puberty blockers,
hormone therapy,
birth control, hair
plugs, laser hair
removal, surgery,
fertility preservation

Common Myths Regarding Gender-Affirming Care

- ◆ **MYTH:** GAC is only for trans people.
FACT: GAC is for everyone! Getting your eyebrows shaped, hair plugs, and elective plastic surgery are all common forms of GAC.
- ◆ **MYTH:** Youth under 18 are too young for GAC.
FACT: Many trans youth express a clear gender identity as early as 5 years old (Strang et al., 2018), and early supports promote positive outcomes.
- ◆ **MYTH:** GAC is only for adults.
FACT: There are forms of medical, social, and legal GAC that are safe, available, and appropriate for all ages.
- ◆ **MYTH:** Autistic people can't understand gender or identify as trans.
FACT: A key characteristic of Autism is thinking about and challenging social norms, including gender.

Resources for Support

- ◆ [Transgender Youth Clinic at SickKids Hospital](#)
- ◆ [Rainbow Health Ontario Trans Health Guide](#)
- ◆ [Let's Talk Hormones: Guide to Medical GAC in Ontario](#)
- ◆ [Government of Canada: How to Access Gender Affirming Care](#)

Additional Learning

- ◆ [International Journal of Transgender Health: Standards of Care for the Health of Transgender People](#)
- ◆ [Canadian Pediatric Society: An Affirming Approach to Caring for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Youth](#)
- ◆ [CBC Explains: How GAC for Kids Works in Canada](#)

Strang, J. F., Powers, M. D., Knauss, M., et al. (2018). "They Thought It Was an Obsession": Trajectories and Perspectives of Autistic Transgender and Gender-Diverse Adolescents. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 48(12), 4039–4055. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3723-6>

Tordoff, D. M., Wanta, J. W., Collin, A., et al. (2022). Mental health outcomes in transgender and nonbinary youths receiving gender-affirming care. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.0978>

Walsh, R. J., Krabbendam, L., Dewinter, J., et al. (2018). Brief Report: Gender Identity Differences in Autistic Adults: Associations with Perceptual and Socio-cognitive Profiles. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 48(12), 4070–4078. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3702-y>

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Resource Portal

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