

Inconsistent and conflicting parental support impacting quality of life for trans and gender diverse youth: Study

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Dr Beth Jones. Credit: Nottingham Trent University

Quality of life for young trans and gender diverse (TGD) people is being impacted by inconsistent and conflicting parental support, according to

research led by Nottingham Trent University (NTU) with the University of Brighton.

Created in partnership with the charity Mermaids, the [study](#) questioned 140 young TGD people on their experiences of [parental support](#), as well as assessing their happiness in different areas of their lives—such as home, school and work—and their overall life satisfaction.

The findings showed a [positive relationship](#) between parental support and quality of life, but consistent family support was seen to be rare.

Many of the participants described how support from their parents could feel conflicting, confusing, and inconsistent, leaving them feeling unworthy and isolated.

The young people gave examples of partial support, such as parents who were relaxed about their gender identity in the home, but not in public; those who believed it was something they would grow out of; or those who were aware of their child's gender identity but did not acknowledge or validate it. Many of them also felt as if their [gender identity](#) was influenced and controlled by their parents.

Nevertheless, participants also acknowledged that their parents made unintentional mistakes when it came to demonstrating their support and accepted this as part of the journey for their parents. These mistakes were often seen to be a result of misinformation and a lack of education and knowledge about gender issues.

Many accepted that the views of their parents were a "work in progress" and persevered with positive outcomes—finding that their parents changed their opinion and became more accepting once they were educated about gender diversity.

The study was carried out by Dr. Beth Jones, senior lecturer in Health and Social Psychology at NTU's School of Social Sciences, with Dr. Abby Barras, critical social scientist within the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Brighton. The research is [published](#) in the *International Journal of Transgender Health*.

Dr. Jones said, "Quality of life was much better for young people whose parents demonstrated solidarity—they felt happy, secure and empowered. However, we also found that parental support was not always black and white, rather it was conditional, inconsistent and not always obvious. This means that young people find themselves avoiding rejection and having to choose which aspects of support are of most value to them in order to remain living at home.

"Education can be transformative but we saw that parents needed to be ready and open to change for it to be effective. This requires patience and perseverance from young people, which can be very isolating and impact on their feelings of worthiness."

Dr. Barras added, "Our findings suggest that there needs to be more support in place to prepare TGD youth for the complexities of these challenging relationships and to help them navigate their way through confusing or conflicting support.

"Organizations offering support to young TGD people and their families should ensure information and resources are easily available online, evidence-based and affirmative."

Lauren Stoner, Mermaids CEO, said, "Mermaids knows firsthand from our service users how vital it is that home is a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment for trans young people, where their pronouns are respected, and they are able to explore their identity.

"We understand how important it is that parents and professionals working with young people feel empowered with the right education and tools to support them on their journey, especially in the midst of an increasingly transphobic social and political U.K. landscape.

"Mermaids is proud to support research which reinforces the importance in parental support in securing [positive outcomes](#) for trans [young people](#)."

More information: Abby Barras et al, "[He] can be supportive, but at times I feel he is ashamed of me": understanding the relationship between parental support and quality of life amongst trans and gender diverse youth in the UK, *International Journal of Transgender Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/26895269.2023.2286269](https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2023.2286269)

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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