

You Can Ask That.

Niina Marni – g'day howyagoin?

First let's acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional Country of the Kurna people and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Thank you for asking me to speak today, I feel exceptionally privileged and honoured. The questions from you are absolutely fantastic!! I'm proud of you all, and proud of the school.

Before I address the questions I want to say two things:

I'm trans myself, but I'm no expert. YOU are the experts on your own lives.

Secondly we need to be on the same page with meanings: *cis-gender* people are aligned in their sex assigned at birth and their feelings of gender identity; *trans-gender* people's feelings of gender identity are different in some way from their sex assigned at birth.

Now your Questions:

1) Should I be proud that I am Trans?

Trans Pathways – Australian study of 859 trans and gender diverse young people, and 194 parents and guardians of trans young people 14-25y

(see: <http://www.telethonkids.org.au/transpathways>)

[Non-binary/androgynous, 19]

We're beautiful people with guts of steel and hearts of gold. We stand up for our people, we take others under our wing, we don't forget our history, and we fight to change it.

[Agender, 22]

Oh my gosh YAAS! There are so many aspects of our culture that I can understand that outsiders can't, I don't feel restricted by the "binary gender" view. I get the experience of gender euphoria which doesn't seem to exist with cis people!

[Genderfluid/non-binary, 17]

Personally I feel that being trans and experiencing the struggles that come with it have made me more tolerant and caring to others overall; including those who are not gender diverse but experience other hardships in life.

2) How should I start a conversation with my family about my identity and orientation?

There is no 'should' in this world. There are only possible options, each with its own set of risks and consequences for you and your family.

It depends on your cultural background and individual circumstances.

It's always a hard job, perhaps the biggest job you will ever have to do. There's no easy way, no magic formula. And no matter how understanding your parents are, they will feel a sense of loss. Be kind and patient with them.

If you're feeling unsure, you could ask your counsellor to be there with you when you talk about it with your parents. You would have some adult support, and there would be some psycho-education a counsellor could offer that helps your parents come to terms with what you're telling them.

3) What health supports are out there for LGBTQ people?

Most health services for LGBTIQ people are available in Adelaide. However so-called, sex reassignment surgery is no longer available here, but is available interstate.

Shine SA offers a comprehensive list of health supports for LGBTIQ people on their website, and it is continually updated as things change.

www.shinesa.org.au/community-information/sexual-gender-diversity/gender-wellbeing-resources/

Also check out **Trans Health SA**:

<http://www.transhealthsa.com/> - all sorts of health resources in Adelaide for gender-diverse

<http://www.transhealthsa.com/gender-diverse-support-and-social-groups/> - support groups

4) Why do we even celebrate IDAHOBIT day?

IDAHOBIT stands for the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia.

The day itself, 17th of the 5th, started out in Germany as "Gay Day," in line with Paragraph 175 of their Penal Code, which outlawed homosexuality (so gays were called "one hundred and seventy-fivers"). The date was preserved, as it grew to include LGBTIQ communities with IDAHOBIT.

The point of it is to recognise and raise awareness of the violence, abuse and discrimination suffered by these people throughout the world through history and to this day.

No, it is not a party to celebrate what a good time LGBTIQ people are having. Let's celebrate what these people contribute to our society, let's make it safe for them, welcome them, and remember with tears those who have suffered because of their identity and sexual preferences.

5) Why is saying "That's So Gay" bad? What are some other sayings to use instead of "That's So Gay"?

A friend of mine I used to cycle with could never stop making bad jokes at the expense of anyone he could think of, especially gays. Our little cycle group would chuckle nervously, at our coffee stop. When I came out as transgender I started to see how these jokes were hurtful to gays, disrespectful, and I stopped laughing with them. In the end it made me so mad at him, not on my behalf, but on behalf of all gay people.

So my message is, don't try and make people laugh at the expense of anyone, whoever they are. It's weak. Be strong. Think of another more authentic way of making people laugh.

6) How can I make someone feel more included in my group?

Do the same as you would do with anyone. Treat them with respect. Be honestly curious. Learn what makes them tick. Make them feel good about themselves. And they will reward you by making you feel good about yourself.

But take care to use their preferred name and pronouns. Stand up for them if they are bullied by other students or teachers, just as you would with any other friend.

Oh, and make sure they are comfortable with being 'out' to everyone, or if it is privileged information for you and your group.

7) What things can the school do to support me (or other LGBTQI people)?

I love the idea of this Gay-Straight Alliance that was operating here previously. I would like to see that get up and running again. And you can help make it happen by talking with keen staff members who are willing to help.

And if your friend is LGBTQI, and you're not, why not show your support and join the group?

In essence, it helps to have a community. Anything the school can do to foster a LGBTQI community has got to be good.

Secondly, the school needs to be proactive about resourcing themselves with educational material available online from places like Shine SA, and make people aware of all the good stuff that's out there.

Thirdly the school needs to be consultative with the LGBTQI student body to come up with best possible policies, procedures, activities and resources that will help you feel safe and supported.

8) Is there anywhere I can hang out with more people like me in and out of school?

First off, check out <http://www.transhealthsa.com/gender-diverse-support-and-social-groups/>
- which gives links to LGBTIQ support groups

Also, you might like to start your own group, if there isn't one around. Use Facebook or other social media, have meetings in cool places, do cool stuff together, and welcome newcomers.

9) How do I talk to my friends if I feel this way?

Be honest and authentic – they'll appreciate that in you. By doing that you will offer them the gift and privilege of being taken into your confidence and trust.

10) Do I have to behave a certain way if I tell people I am queer?

No no and no. Just be yourself. It's a struggle to find who that self is, but that's the point of life – struggle and find your identity. There are no rules.