

# Autistic Patients & Gender Affirming Healthcare

Autistic individuals may present in atypical ways. There is no right or wrong way to be transgender.

Difficulty with communication, or style of communication, may be misinterpreted as not understanding. The te reo Māori word for autism is *takiwātanga* – meaning '*in our own space and time*'. Give autistic people the space and time to communicate in ways that work for the individual, and be responsive to what they are communicating. Autistic patients know their gender just as well as non-autistic patients.

Gender identity may be explained in unusually complex or vague terms – non-binary identities are common for autistic trans people, and should not prevent diagnosis and gender affirming healthcare treatment.

Gender expression may be atypical – for example 'butch' transgender women may wear trousers, no makeup, and prefer short hair. 'Femme' transgender men may not present in stereotypically masculine ways.

Gender expression, sexual orientation, and relationship structure should not be a factor in diagnosing or providing gender affirming healthcare treatments.

Gender dysphoria is not a prerequisite for a gender incongruence diagnosis. Some autistic trans people enjoy their body overall, but still need to make some changes.

Anxiety, depression, sensory processing disorders, PTSD, and other health conditions are common for autistic trans people. Hormone replacement therapy and other gender affirming healthcare treatments are not contraindicated by these conditions.

Autistic people are more likely to struggle with communication if they feel highly stressed and anxious. Letting them know that you use an "informed consent" model and will respect their health decisions can make it easier for them to relax. Treating them as though they don't understand will not.

Autistic people tend toward accuracy and fairness, and will usually notice inconsistency or discrimination.

Some autistic people may not "seem autistic", and may work very hard to hide their autistic characteristics, especially when under stress or feeling unsafe. This is sometimes called "masking".

Likewise, they may have successfully masked being transgender, so parents may report surprise that their child is transgender "all of a sudden".

Masking is a very common and constant survival strategy for many autistic people, and is related to experiences of prejudice, discrimination, and violence from non-autistic people. Masking takes a lot of effort and can be extremely tiring.