

## ***Gender identity Development Service***

Changes in attitudes in our society have raised awareness of the problems that an increasing number of people experience in the area of gender identity.

As adult gender identity has its roots in infancy, childhood and adolescence, it is advisable that awareness of problems at an early stage is promoted and help provided.

Many adults with gender identity problems describe difficulties in childhood. Often they complain of having been unhappy children and teenagers and that their suffering had not been understood early enough by parents and professionals.

### **GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICE**

The specialist service is staffed by a multi-disciplinary group with contributions from child and adolescent psychiatry, psychology, social work, psychotherapy and paediatrics. The staff work closely together in order to make the most of different team members' expertise and skills.

### **WHO WE TRY TO HELP**

We see children and adolescents (up to the age of 18) and their families who are experiencing difficulties in the development of gender identity. This may include children who are unhappy about their own biological sex and wish to belong to the other one

Some may be boys who prefer to play the role of girls and vice versa: others may have a compulsion to play with toys mostly used by the other sex, for instance, a boy who predominantly plays with dolls.

Some children may feel comfortable only when playing with peers of the other sex, or may crossdress from time to time. Some adolescents and their families may experience a crisis over a problem of sexual identity leading to considerable concern and distress.

Children with intersex and other endocrine conditions can be referred if there are concerns about their gender development.

The service also offers counselling to children of parents with transsexualism or other gender identity problems. Assessment and advice are provided to the Courts at their request.

Sometimes, although people may be experiencing difficulties in this area, they may not feel ready to accept help from the service directly if their attendance is impractical. In these cases, we would be available to consult with any professionals already involved, such as the General Practitioner, Mental Health Professionals, Health Visitor, Teachers, Social Workers etc.

## HOW WE LOOK AT PROBLEMS

We consider difficulties of gender identity in the context of developmental processes. The aims of the service are to understand the nature of the obstacles or adverse factors in the development of gender identity and to try to minimise their negative influence. We think that relationships are as important as other factors in contributing to the child's difficulties. Therefore we pay attention in our work to what is happening within the child's / adolescent's relationships with the family, school and other social agencies.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Great care is taken in assuring the confidentiality of the client's contact with the service. We think that it is important, but only with the family's consent, to liaise with other professionals when appropriate.

## HOW CAN WE BE REACHED?

The service accepts referrals from other professionals in Health, Social Services and education departments who are encouraged to discuss the referral with the family and seek their agreement. The service also accepts self-referrals of families or of adolescents beyond the age of 16. There is no catchment area.

Written referrals should be addressed to  
Dr Domenico Di Ceglie  
Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist  
Director, Gender Identity Development Service  
Portman Clinic, 8 Fitzjohns Avenue,  
London NW3 5NA  
Telephone 020 7794 8262

The Gender Identity Development Service is associated with the Department of Paediatric Endocrinology at The Middlesex Hospital, University College London Hospitals