

How does discrimination impact mental health?



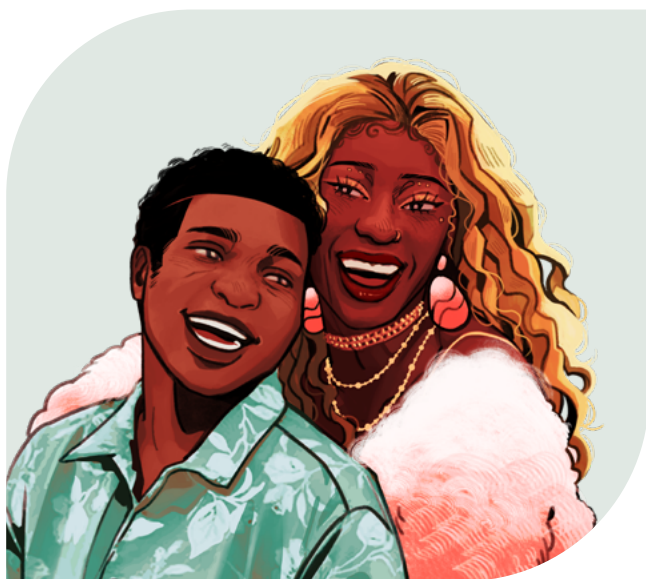
This tip sheet is for men who date trans women or trans feminine people who want to understand how discrimination can impact on their own or their partners mental health. It also provides some practical tips on how to look after yourself and how to get further support when you or your partner needs it.*

Summary

- Relationships with trans women can be fulfilling, fun, and loving.
- Harmful attitudes towards trans women mean they are often treated poorly. This is stressful and bad for their health and happiness.
- Ask what sort of support she needs during these difficult experiences.
- Standing up for your partner if she is treated badly can make her feel supported.
- Some men also feel judged or treated poorly because of their relationships. This can make them feel ashamed or confused and can impact mental health.

* "Men" in this resource refers to cisgender men. "Trans women" refers to trans women, trans feminine people, women who have a trans and gender diverse history or experience, but do not identify as transgender - and other trans feminine culturally-specific identities such as Sistergirls, Fa'afafine and Kinner.

Trans women are a fierce and strong group of people who come from a lot of different backgrounds. Sadly, many people judge them because they are transgender. This can lead to trans women being treated badly, hurt, or even attacked. This can be stressful, overwhelming and exhausting long-term, and can reduce health and happiness. As a partner of a trans woman, you may need to support her through these hard experiences. You may also feel judged or treated poorly because of your relationship.



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Some men may also start to believe these judgements. You might have feelings of shame or confusion, or you might unfairly blame or mistreat your partner in other ways. It is important you learn to notice and question these negative beliefs about trans women, both in society and in yourself. Men have an important role to play in challenging the harmful beliefs of their friends and family through open and honest conversations. When we promote understanding, kindness, and acceptance we create a better and more supportive world for everyone.

Here are some tips for knowing the warning signs of poor mental health, how to care for yourself, how to talk to your partner and how to get help.

Tip: Know the signs

Take some time to regularly check in with yourself and notice your thoughts and feelings. Notice any changes in your mood, behaviours, or routine. These might include:

- Feelings of shame or guilt
- Insomnia or oversleeping
- Nightmares
- Feeling very worried or stressed
- Changes in appetite
- Increased irritability and anger
- Withdrawal from friends or family
- Loss of interest in hobbies, work or activities you usually enjoy
- Feeling tired or unmotivated
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Taking more risks than usual
- Feeling hopeless or helpless
- Thoughts of suicide.

Tip: Care for yourself

Here are some simple ways you can look after your mental health. Pick the ones that work for you:

- Get more exercise
- Limit alcohol or drug use
- Spend time with supportive friends
- Get more sleep

- Watch movies or read books with positive stories about trans people
- Spend time with your hobbies or other special interests
- Talk to your partner
- Talk to supportive friends
- Speak to a trans-affirming counsellor or psychologist.

Tip: Talk to your partner

Healthy relationships have open communication. If you're struggling with your mental health and you're in a relationship, tell your partner. Here are some tips on how to talk to your partner about mental health:

- Be compassionate with yourself and your partner. It's important you both have space to acknowledge your struggles and challenges. Ask her questions about her own experiences.
- Respect her boundaries. Ask for her permission before discussing issues relating to discrimination, stigma, confusion or shame. These are sensitive topics and sharing them may affect her too. For more information, see our tip sheet "What does dating trans women mean for my sexuality?" on the Transfemme website.
- Don't just rely on your partner for support. It's important that you access professional help and create a positive support network in your life. If you don't feel like your current friendship circle is trans inclusive, it's important to take active steps to meet more inclusive people or to connect with the LGBTIQ+ community.

"I think it is really important when you're in a relationship to have outlets outside of your partner to share how you are feeling and if you are struggling. Of course you can talk with your partner and support them, but it's important for them to receive supports from their friends and family too." Hannah

Tip: Get help for yourself

"It's difficult to be there for someone else when you can't be there for yourself because of all the pressure in society. I wish there was more support for cis guys to be open about dating trans women. It would definitely help, knowing how to be supportive and becoming more confident and comfortable." David

Accessing individual counselling, relationship counselling or having supportive family, friends and community can all be part of a healthy relationship. Some men may struggle to support their partners if they haven't been able to address their own mental health needs.

Sometimes discrimination and the stigma around mental health can make it feel hard to get the help we need. When accessing a counsellor or psychologist, be sure to check that they are supportive of the trans community and understand trans issues. If you're using a service provided by an organisation, search their website for signs they are inclusive of trans people.

There are helplines all over the world that provide anonymous support for people who are worried, depressed or isolated. Some of these helplines specialise in supporting LGBTIQ+ people and their partners. You don't have to identify as LGBTIQ+ to call them.

Seeking out informal supports through friends and community who are trans inclusive can be a great way to support your wellbeing. Written resources like Transfemme are another way of feeling less isolated and helping you understand your experience.

Tip: Help your partner get support

“I’m married to a trans woman. It’s just like any other marriage... sticking with our relationship makes it worthwhile and we’re happy together. It’s other people and their perceptions that sometimes cause problems or challenges, but we’ve learnt to deal with them as a team.” Ben

If you’re worried about your partner’s mental health, talk to her. Open and compassionate communication will help both of you feel better. For many couples, facing challenges together can help make the relationship stronger.

Here are some tips on how to support your partner to get support:

- Understand that transphobia and living in an unsafe society can affect mental health. Always treat her experiences of stigma and discrimination as valid and show her empathy and kindness.
- Express your concerns and ask her how she is feeling. Take time to really listen to her answers. It’s important your partner feels safe to talk about her thoughts and feelings without feeling judged or misunderstood.
- Reassure her. It can be hard talking about your mental health. Let her know you are proud of her and you are there for her.
- Ask how she would like you to support her. Different people need different things. Don’t offer advice unless she welcomes it.
- Stand up for trans women. Discrimination and stigma are harmful to trans women’s mental health. By standing up for trans women you can help her feel safe and supported.
- Be patient. It can take time to find the right kind of help. Ask if she would like assistance finding professional supports that welcome the trans community.
- Look after your own mental health. It can be challenging to support someone who is having a tough time. Remember to get your own help too.

If you’re looking for support in Australia:

Qlife

National anonymous and confidential LGBTIQ+ peer support service (including partners)

Website: qlife.org.au

Phone: 1800 184 527

Opening hours: 3PM to midnight, every day

Telephone and web chat support service

Say It Out Loud

ACON’s sexual, domestic and family violence website *Say It Out Loud* provides information and guidance relating to sexual, family and intimate partner violence in the Australian LGBTQ+ community.

Website: sayitoutloud.org.au

Men’s Referral Service

A free, confidential telephone service for men

Phone: 1300 766 491

Open any time.

For men outside Australia looking for counselling support, try searching online for “trans friendly counselling in my local area”.