

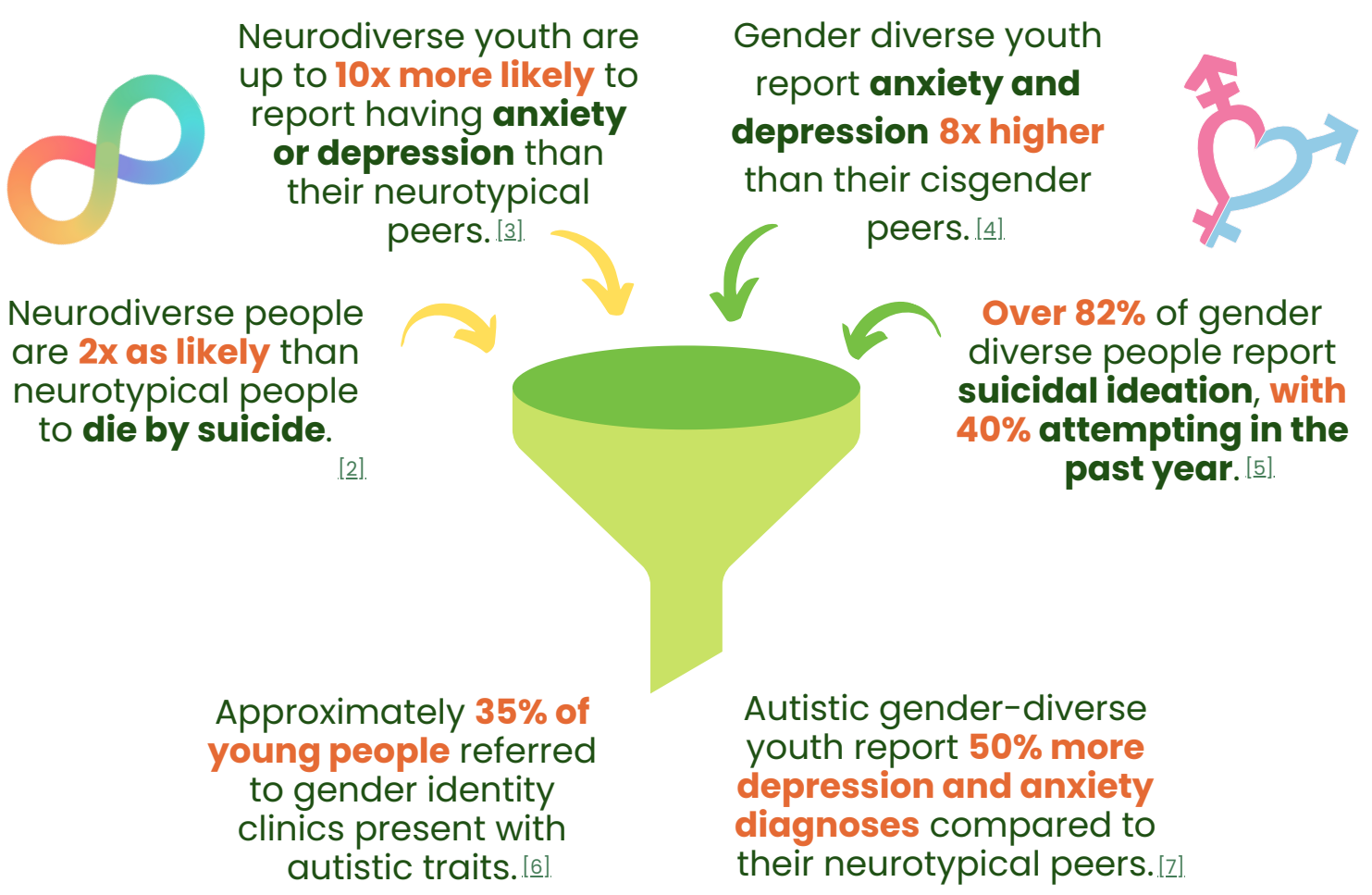
Supporting Neuro- and Gender-Diverse Youth



Practical insights from youth participants in **AutoNoME** and other published research.

Neurodiversity describes ways of thinking (e.g., autism) that are marginalized by an epistemically dominant and normative neurotypical society. Research indicates a substantial intersection between neurodiversity and gender diversity. The umbrella term '**neuroqueer**' broadly refers to these experiences. [1]

Neuro- and Gender-Diverse Youth: Key Facts



Things to Do

Appreciate Strengths

While neuroqueer youth may be vulnerable, it is important to **utilize strengths-based approaches** that emphasize and leverage resilience.

In supporting neuroqueer youth, explore how their intersecting neuro- and gender-diverse identities can be **sources of strength and pride**. [8]

Access Digital Communities

Research **online community-based supports** that meet the needs of neuroqueer youth. [9]

Neuroqueer youth note that online spaces are particularly affirming for them: **"I think it's a bit it's safer to disclose aspects of your identity if you have less of your corporeal identity attached to it... places where you can sort of be an online presence, essence, I feel like... I can just be myself."** - Nari, AutoNoME participant

Recognize Gender Fluidity

Some neuroqueer youth struggle with abstract concepts like gender, so it is important to **validate** conflicting feelings about gender identity and **recognize** that gender can be expressed as 'fluid' (i.e., changing).

Expose neuroqueer youth to gender-diverse role models to affirm their gender journeys and encourage exploration and self-discovery **without having to commit to labels** or prescribed ways of expressing masculinity and femininity. [10]

Navigate Systems

Neuroqueer youth may experience challenges in **advocating for gender affirming interventions, navigating healthcare systems, and adhering to treatment**. You can support them by referring to and sharing **resource lists curated by neuroqueer people**. [11]

You can also improve these services by **highlighting affirming providers, proposing neuroqueer-inclusive programs, and supporting neuroqueer youth in sharing their service-use experiences**.

Enable Exploration

Having a positive regard towards one's neuroqueer identity improves mental health and self-esteem. [12]

Digital technologies are highly enabling of identity exploration: **"I've done all the mind-blowing work on considering my gender experience. And to come across a post online that described that somebody, almost in my own words, describes their gender and labelled it as 'autigender'. I was absolutely blown away. That was a really, really key moment for me."** - Dario, AutoNoME participant.

Affirm neuroqueer youth by **voicing your support** of them exploring their gender identity, expression, and presentation.

Avoid Assumptions

The intersection of neurodiversity and queerness intertwines two vulnerable and misunderstood identities: **"Autistic people inherently perform gender in a way that's different from neurotypical people. That just culminated in a sense of, maybe this is a lot more complicated than I was thinking."** - Logan, AutoNoME participant.

In a qualitative study with 22 autistic gender-diverse youth, nearly **70% say they need medical gender-affirming care** but 32% say that their gender identity and capacity to make decisions about their gender have been questioned because of their autism diagnosis. [13]

Don't dismiss a youth's gender diversity as a "symptom" of autism.

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