



romantic partners supporting trans young people in aotearoa



Julia de Bres,
ia Morrison-Young,
and Tara Ravi

Massey University
Te Kunenga Ki
Pūrehuroa



introduction



Family support helps trans young people stay safe and well. Research often focuses on parents, but family also encompasses siblings, grandparents, extended family and chosen family, and varies across cultures. Romantic partners can play an important role in supporting trans young people.

our project



Project Village investigates what good family support looks like for trans young people of diverse cultural backgrounds in Aotearoa. We are interviewing Māori, Pacific, Asian and Pākehā trans young people aged 16-25 and their self-selected most supportive family members, asking them to draw and describe their experiences of receiving and providing family support.

trans people and romantic partners



There is little academic research on trans young people's romantic relationships, even though supportive romantic relationships can positively impact wellbeing. Extant research over-represents USA-based studies, lacks cultural diversity of participants, privileges cisgender partner perspectives, overlooks diversity within queer relationships, and focuses on the negative aspects of romantic relationships between trans and cis people. There is a marked need for more strengths-based research on how trans people, including young people, experience supportive romantic relationships, and the specific forms of support their partners provide.

romantic partners in our research



Most young people we interviewed included romantic partners as family members. This included relationships between trans young people (T4T relationships) and between trans and cisgender young people; straight and queer relationships; polyamorous and monogamous relationships; in-person and long-distance relationships; committed relationships and 'situationships'.

forms of support

Romantic partners were most likely to provide these forms of support:



emotional support

Loving the young person, encouraging them, showing physical affection

'She gives me a lot of physical affection. We cuddle all the time. I am basically always clinging to Jordan whenever she's here, because we are both comfortable in each other's arms'.

(Regina, Asian trans young woman)



problem-solving support

Listening to the young person, processing things together, making plans

'It's so much easier to deal with things. If I'm like, 'oh, I'm gonna tell him this later', I don't have to spiral. I can almost laugh about it with him.'

(Logan, Pākehā trans young man)

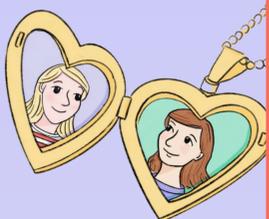


companionship support

Spending time with the young person, having fun together, being a constant presence over time

'We video call, play games, watch movies and anime together, and sometimes just chat'.

(Aurora, partner of Victoria, Pākehā trans young woman)



affirmation support

Using the young person's chosen name and pronouns, complimenting their appearance, supporting their gender presentation

'With other partners, I tended to feminise myself, let my hair grow long, and then I ended up kind of losing myself, but Timothy has literally offered to help me cut my hair.'

(René, Asian non-binary young person)

mutual identity support

Understanding the young person and expressing solidarity through shared life experiences

'T4T relationships are different in terms of our relating to one another, because we're both trans. I feel like that is a thing that makes our relationship really awesome and special.'

(Levi, partner of Logan, Pākehā trans young man)



conclusion

Romantic partners can play a significant role in trans young people's family support networks, providing distinct forms of support that may foster their wellbeing. Health promotion and support services often focus on how parents can support trans youth, but they would do well to extend their reach to other forms of family too.



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MARSDEN FUND
TE PŪTEA RANGAHAU
A MARSDEN



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