

# A Brief Guide: **Dealing with Anti-Trans Disinformation and Intimidation**

---



**PATHSA**

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH  
SOUTH AFRICA

# Trans and gender-diverse people, clinicians providing services, therapists, parents, allies and activists are facing a growing and organised resistance to trans and gender-diverse identities, rights and services<sup>\*</sup>

---

Science and evidence are being weaponised and the goalposts of “sufficient evidence” (for example, evidence of positive outcomes for recipients of puberty-pausing drugs) are constantly being shifted or made unattainable. Organisations and clinicians are feeling rattled and intimidation tactics have scared people in the field of gender-affirming care. While South Africa’s Constitution and rights framework are robust, anti-trans activists are also scrutinising our laws for legal loopholes and threatening legal action towards individuals and organisations.



Commons Library: [The Anti-Trans Movement](#)

Health Liberation Now! [A New Era: Key Actors Behind Anti-Trans Conversion Therapy](#)

GATE: [Resilience Against Hate](#)

Reach Out: [How to Cope with Transphobia](#)

Ingrid Lynch: [Countering Anti-Gender Movements in South Africa](#)

UNRISD: [The International Anti-Gender Movement](#)



### **In this climate we have observed the following:**

- Anti-trans rhetoric often frames itself as "protecting women and children," a tactic to provoke emotional responses while undermining trans rights and creating division within advocacy groups.
- Organised anti-trans movements often rely on misinformation, misrepresenting scientific evidence or the consensus of medical and psychological organisations.
- Social media and online platforms are often weaponised to amplify anti-trans narratives, with co-ordinated campaigns targeting individuals and organisations that support trans rights.
- Anti-trans harassment can have a chilling effect on healthcare providers, leading to a reduction in accessible, affirming services for trans and gender-diverse individuals.
- Efforts to "debate" trans and gender-diverse identities often attempt to frame their existence as a matter of opinion rather than a recognition of human rights, further dehumanising trans and gender-diverse people.
- Anti-trans movements often align with broader anti-LGBTQ+ agendas, aiming to roll back rights and protections for queer communities as a whole.

**In the face of this we offer a brief guide for trans and gender-diverse people, as well as clinicians providing services, therapists, parents, allies and activists. While it is not definitive, it does give tips and hints for dealing with anti-trans disinformation and intimidation.**

---



## Things to remember:

- While harassment can be aimed at individual providers, anti-trans intimidation is less of a spontaneous concern about an individual provider, rather it is organised and co-ordinated (for example providers across Canada who have experienced anti-trans harassment have consistently reported almost identical experiences).
- The goal of this harassment is to intimidate providers and make them question the legitimacy of trans and gender diverse experiences.
- Anti-trans organisers intentionally present themselves as more supported and numerous than they are.
- Anti-trans organisers claim to speak for large groups of people in order to maintain the illusion that their goals have widespread approval – this can increase the fear and intimidation of those targeted.
- Some anti-trans harassment intentionally disguises itself as general inquiry or well-intentioned concern.

## Things to do:

**Trust your instincts:** If something feels weird or strange, listen to your instincts. It is okay to take a step back, do some research, or reach out for support if you are not sure about a request or an interaction. In other countries there have been reports of “fake patients” who try to gather incriminating information or create conflicts. These individuals often ask unusual, strange, unreasonable or provocative questions, such as whether the clinic performs surgeries on children. Staff members should be trained to recognise these red flags and handle the situations with caution. Also, seek legal advice for malicious reporting of providers.



# IDEAS FOR TRANS AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE, ALLIES AND ACTIVISTS FACING TRANSPHOBIA AND HARASSMENT



## Things to remember:

**Be prepared:** When confronted with direct harassment, it is normal to feel fear, anger, and defensiveness. However, responding to harassment with these emotions can escalate the situation. It can be difficult, but it's important to remain calm. Preparing for possible harassment in advance is a key strategy for mitigating its potential harm. Preparation can help everyone to feel confident about how harassment will be managed if it occurs.

**Prioritise your safety:** When you are experiencing transphobia, you can feel at risk, especially if it is accompanied by violence or threatening actions. In the moment, it's important to put your safety first and remove yourself from the situation if possible. This could look like leaving an area to seek a safe space and support person, or stepping away from your device and deleting and reporting comments, posts and messages (for example as hate speech, noting that if you are using any of these as evidence in a hate speech case, it is important to save screenshots).

## Things to do:

**Ask for support:** You don't have to go through transphobic situations alone. It's okay to ask for support from your friends, family, organisations and trans communities. Talking with someone you trust, especially someone who can relate to you, gives you the space to vent or cry or be angry. You can talk about how you feel, or just ask them for support. If you don't feel comfortable going to someone you know or you'd just prefer privacy, try accessing online or phone support. And speaking with a professional like a psychologist or a peer worker can help you work through your emotions in a safe space and share how the experience has impacted your mental health and wellbeing.



**Responding directly to transphobia:** If it's safe and appropriate this can be empowering and can educate people who weren't aware of how their actions were impacting others. But it can also be really tough, exhausting and dangerous.

**If you choose to respond directly, you can:**

- respond in the moment by standing up for yourself or others and trying to educate the person/s responsible for the behaviour
- ask another trusted person to respond on your behalf
- report the behaviour and follow reporting processes (see Resources section)
- speak about the incident online on your social accounts or in queer spaces
- let someone you trust know what you have done so they support you
- consider being trained in how to engage with all forms of media.

**Look after your wellbeing:** It's generally easier to cope if you take care of your psychological, physical, social and spiritual wellbeing. Return to (or start) a daily practice of self-care such as sports/exercise, journalling or meditating, listening to music or celebrating trans joy!



**Reach Out:** [How to Cope with Transphobia](#)

See also the **Southern Africa Litigation Centre's** [Laws and Policies Affecting Transgender Persons in South Africa](#)  
Support networks, community and groups: see [Be True 2 Me Org](#) and [Gender Dynamix](#)



The internet can be a harsh place. Mainstream media often misrepresents trans experiences; and trans and gender diverse people, allies and providers can be harassed and subjected to doxing (revealing private information).

Here are some practical steps for online safety (noting that providers inevitably have an online footprint for professional reasons):

- **Be social media savvy:** Limit your online presence to platforms that prioritise user privacy. Consider creating separate accounts for personal and professional interactions.
- **Check your privacy settings:** Check the privacy settings on all your social media accounts. Restrict who can see your profile, posts, and friend lists, and make comments.
- **Location, location, location:** Disable location services on your devices. Don't share your address or any details that could pinpoint your location online.
- **Manage digital footprints:** Be mindful of the information you share online. Avoid using your real name or birthdate on forums or discussion threads.
- **Take control:** Create content or a page where you have power over what is shared, by providing information to the other social media users disinformation can be countered; remove yourself from lists that are created to be targeted by anti-trans bots.
- **Don't feed the trolls:** Not everyone is engaging in good faith. Some people are just looking to provoke a reaction and knowing when to disengage can help protect your energy and focus efforts where they matter. This can be linked to using platform features like hiding, blocking and reporting comments.



*And further possibilities:*

- **Virtual Private Networks (VPNs):** A VPN encrypts your internet traffic, making it virtually impossible for anyone to track your location or online activity.
- **Secure Email Services:** Choose services with a strong focus on privacy and security.
- **Strong passwords and password managers:** Use unique, complex passwords for every online account, and consider using a password manager to keep track of them securely.
- **Two-Factor Authentication (2FA):** Enable 2FA on all your accounts to add an extra layer of security.

## MANAGE YOUR MEDIA DIET



As trans rights and identities have taken up more social media space, there has been pushback and hate. If you are a trans or gender diverse person, or even as an ally or provider, this can be exhausting and emotionally draining. When necessary take breaks from engaging with the media or the politics around trans and gender diverse identities.

### **Here are some things you can do to help you disconnect:**

- Do a social media cleanse and unfollow (or take breaks from) people and publications who are spreading transphobia or harmful posts.
- Start your day with something calming like a meditation, rather than jumping straight online or on your phone.
- Let your friends know when you need to disconnect, so that they don't bring it up with you.
- Watch some wholesome content or switch from streaming to self-care.
- Report and block, or take breaks from, people who are making transphobic content and comments





WhatsApp is widely used in South Africa and many of us belong to multiple groups, sometimes work-related and often as part of our friendship, family and community groups. The following factors can contribute to a lack of safety (of course not only on WhatsApp) for trans and gender-diverse people, allies and providers:

- **Harassment and Discrimination:** We might experience direct or indirect harassment, discrimination, or derogatory comments about our identity.
- **Lack of Representation and Inclusion:** We may not see others like us in some groups in the group, making us feel isolated, excluded or uncomfortable.
- **Microaggressions:** Subtle, often unintended, discriminatory comments or actions can also contribute to a feeling of insecurity and vulnerability.
- **Fear of Retaliation:** We might be hesitant to express our thoughts, ideas, or concerns due to fear of backlash, ridicule, or further isolation.
- **Privacy Concerns:** We may worry about privacy, with fears that messages could be screen shotted and shared without consent, potentially leading to further discrimination or harm.
- **Lack of Supportive Policies and Guidelines:** If the group doesn't have clear guidelines or norms for respectful communication, or if such policies exist but aren't enforced, this can further undermine psychological safety.

## Some tips:

- For large groups, establish clear rules or guidelines.
- Agree on who is a group administrator who maintains rules and order (and membership)
- Be aware that information shared on WhatsApp does not always stay within groups
- Be aware that the "other" side also uses WhatsApp
- See [here](#) for more useful tips from WhatsApp.



# BUILD CREDIBILITY WITH YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE | Q

And finally, if you do want to create more positive narratives about trans and gender-diverse people, and even directly challenge disinformation and misinformation, you can:

## OPTIMISE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES FOR ADVOCACY & PROFESSIONALISM

- **A well populated profile** can reinforce professional credibility and make it easier to connect with like-minded individuals and organisations.
- To strengthen your presence: use a clear, professional photo and impactful bio that reflects your professional expertise, advocacy work, and values.

## SHARE EVIDENCE BASED CONTENT

**Misinformation** is a key tool used in anti-trans narratives. Combat this by prioritising peer-reviewed, fact-checked sources in your posts.

- Where possible: Reference professional medical and psychological organisations that support trans healthcare.
- Share articles and studies that provide accurate, research backed perspectives.

## ENGAGE THOUGHTFULLY WITH COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

**Social media engagement** extends beyond direct interactions, it influences bystanders, silent readers, and overall discourse.

- When responding to comments: Consider the broader impact of your response, especially in public comment sections.
- Avoid reactive engagement, if a comment is inflammatory, it may be better to hide, ignore, or report it rather than respond.

## AMPLIFY TRANS POSITIVE NARRATIVES & VOICES

**Social media algorithms** prioritise engagement, meaning that amplifying affirming, positive content can increase visibility of trans and gender-diverse perspectives.

- To maximise impact: Share and engage with authentic stories, lived experiences, and trans led initiatives.

## LEVERAGE AWARENESS DAYS FOR VISIBILITY

Strategic use of **Trans Awareness Week, Pride Month**, and similar events can help amplify trans positive narratives and show allyship when visibility is naturally higher.



Discrimination, hatred and bigotry towards trans and gender-diverse people, and allies, activists and providers appears to be increasing and this is a global phenomenon. We believe that the situation will improve and as a result we need to be organised, prepared and confident. South Africa's Constitution is robust and provides an important framework for the protection of trans and gender-diverse people. But it is important to be vigilant and alert, and ready for attacks on this Constitution, and the rights in it.

This guide has focussed on the needs of trans and gender-diverse people, as well as allies and activists. It has also explored ideas to support providers of gender-affirming care, who are also under attack. We have offered some ideas for you to action personally, but we encourage everyone to reach out to allies and like-minded people and organisations for support and community.

**You are NOT alone and we WILL get through this difficult time, together.**

**JOIN PATHSA!!**



**PATHSA**

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH  
SOUTH AFRICA

**[Global Resistance to Anti-Gender Opposition:](#)** This report covers activism in five countries, bringing to light how anti-gender governments and policies manifest in all parts of the world

**GATE:**

- **[Knowledge Portal on Anti-gender Movements](#)**
- **[Turning the Tide](#)** toolkit on responding to extremism
- **[Crisis Communication Training:](#)** Responding to anti-gender extremism (Youtube)
- **[Recognizing, Documenting and Addressing Anti-Gender Opposition](#)**

**[The Alt-Right Playbook:](#)** This YouTube video explains right wing tactics

The **[Trans Safety Network](#)**

US-based **[Southern Poverty Law Center's](#)** website on monitoring anti-LGBTQ+ hate

- The **South African Human Rights Commission** - **[Hate Speech Information Sheet:](#)** To report hate speech in terms of the PEPUA Act, as a civil matter
- For criminal cases, **The Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Act**, while assented to, is not yet active. This would make reporting a police matter. Here is a brief explainer on **[The Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Speech Bill](#)**

See also the **[Embracing Diversity, Upholding Rights: A South African Position Statement on Evidence-Based Care for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Young People](#)**





# PATHSA

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH  
SOUTH AFRICA

We are a registered interdisciplinary association for health professionals dedicated to promoting the health, well-being, and self-actualisation of trans and gender-diverse people. Our mission is to foster supportive environments, advocate for best practices, and drive systemic change that empowers healthcare providers working with trans and gender-diverse individuals across South Africa. [www.pathsa.org.za](http://www.pathsa.org.za)