



Kindling Our Curiosity

A Trans Sexual Health Zine

Volume 2
Shame & Affirmation

Trans Care BC
Provincial Health Services Authority

Trans Care BC operates on the unceded lands of many Indigenous peoples. This zine was created on the unceded lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and we recognize their stewardship of this land for generations. We recognize and celebrate the contributions of Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer and trans Indigenous people within these communities, whose voices and experiences enrich our understandings of sexuality, gender and community care.

This zine was written and created by staff and contractors for Trans Care BC in 2024. Many subject matter experts contributed to the vision and content, and we are grateful for their trust, vulnerability and contributions to this work.

Themes and framing imagery in this zine were inspired by resources created by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and the game *Let the Fire Soothe* by Lyra Vega. Information and ideas were influenced by the book *Trans Sex* by Lucie Fielding, as well as the zines of Mira Bellwether, specifically *FTW: A Zine About the Sex Lives of Trans Women*, and the contributors to *Learning Good Consent*.



Content note

While this zine celebrates trans sexuality, it also discusses topics that may bring up complicated feelings, like body parts, and acknowledges the potential for difficult experiences that can lead to trauma. Some content may prompt unexpected emotions. We encourage you to prioritize self-care while reading.

Financial contribution:

Trans Care BC
Provincial Health Services Authority



Health
Canada

Santé
Canada

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of Health Canada.

This is not a safer sex guide.

What we won't be doing:

- Telling you what sex acts are “risky” and “safe”
- Describing how STIs are passed or when and how to get tested
- Discussing birth control and pregnancy

What we will be doing:

- Asking questions, like:
 - What does sexual health mean for you?
 - What experiences do you want to have?
 - What feelings do you want to experience?
 - How do you want to keep yourself safe?
- Providing resources that may help you with the above

As trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary people, it can be difficult to access any health care—let alone sexual health care. Decisions about sexual health may seem like a balancing act between safety and pleasure. We want to encourage you to prioritize both.

This zine discusses nuances of our sexual health and validates the difficult, exciting, and complex experiences trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary people have exploring our sexualities.

How to use this zine

- Print it, download it, screenshot sections of it
- Scribble on it, highlight it, make notes on it
- Cross out language or sections that don't feel relevant or useful
- Fill out activities on these pages, in a journal, or in a notes app
- Flip through it and take away one useful piece of information

There are some prompts and activities included.
They are optional. Pick and choose what you want to do.



2

Shame & Affirmation

Contents

Shame

- Medicine & shame
- Community support
- *Activity:* A letter to a younger you

Affirmation

- Navigating new experiences
- *Ideas:* Exploring sex
- When desire is difficult
- *Activity:* Practicing non-judgemental awareness



Shame

Medicine & shame

Trans health care has not always been based on facts. For much of the 20th century, “expert” opinion on trans health was a mixture of guesswork and unexamined cultural prejudice, and gender diversity wasn’t yet recognized as a healthy part of human diversity.

Healthcare systems and medical education weren’t designed with trans people in mind. This means that some intake forms and health record systems don’t yet include options for our gender, pronouns or correct names. Additionally, cisgender medical providers may be uninformed about the nuances of trans experiences.

When talking about hormone therapy or surgery, it’s common for providers to focus on function and risk, instead of prioritizing pleasure and affirmation. For example, they might talk about how hormone therapy can come with the risk of losing the ability to have physical arousal (erections) or having increased tenderness in our internal genitals. They may not realize that they should place equal focus on the opportunities for pleasure, connection and embodiment that can be possible as we move forward on our gender journey.

The legacy of this history is that trans people may not feel safe accessing health care, and we may experience shame in medical settings. We can be vulnerable to making decisions out of fear of regret, instead of understanding our care as a movement towards our own unique goals for affirmation and pleasure.

Medical shame has a [negative impact](#) on [all aspects of our health](#). It can make us nervous to engage with healthcare and interfere with our ability to have our needs met. Feeling stigmatized or ashamed can give us chronic stress, which can cause or worsen health issues.

The good news is that there are now more trans people in leadership, medical and research roles, and we have made big strides when it comes to making gender-affirming care more accessible. Many clinicians are supportive of trans people and want to provide us with good care. There are also many things that we can do to enhance our health and support one another.

Community support

[Research shows](#) that community support can make a huge difference in combatting the effects of stigma. Of course it does!

Of course we are healthier if we can ask community to help us find trans-friendly clinics and providers.

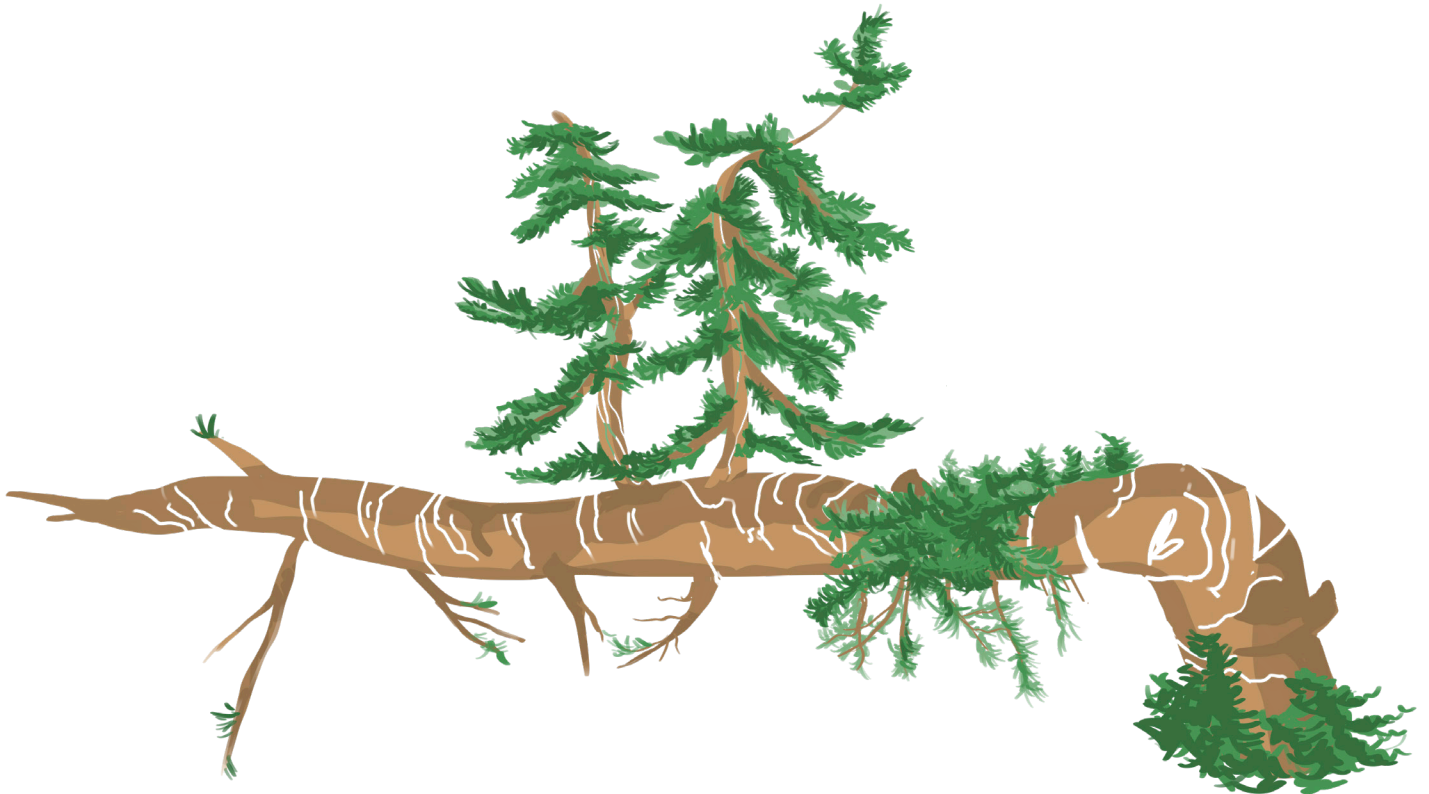
Of course we are healthier if we know people who can share safety tips and check on us.

Of course we are healthier if we can connect with people who are like us, who find us beautiful and worthy, and who love us for who we are.

It's tough out there. Sometimes, it feels like we're on the outside looking in, longing for a sense of belonging.

But—building community doesn't always mean finding a big group of people. Sometimes, it's about connecting with a few close connections, or even just one person who gets you. We can find community online when we read, watch, and listen to people who make us feel seen and valued.

Even if you haven't found a whole network of people, you can start by treating yourself with compassion, the same way you would treat a friend. When we lean in to being a more genuine version of ourselves, this can be a first step towards making connections with other people.



A letter to a younger you

Think of a time when you felt very vulnerable about your body, your desires, or both. It could have been years ago, or it could be now.

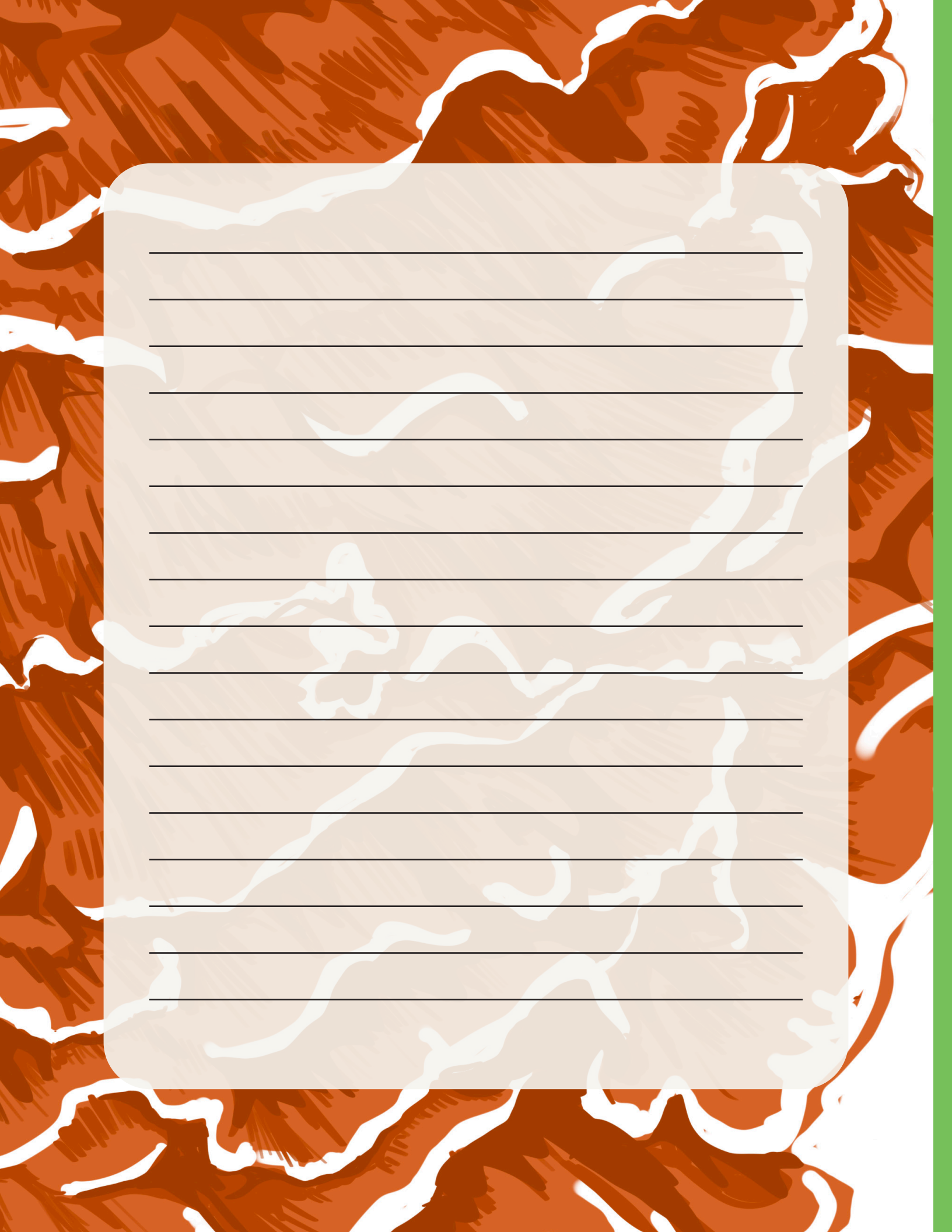
Here are some suggestions for what to write about:

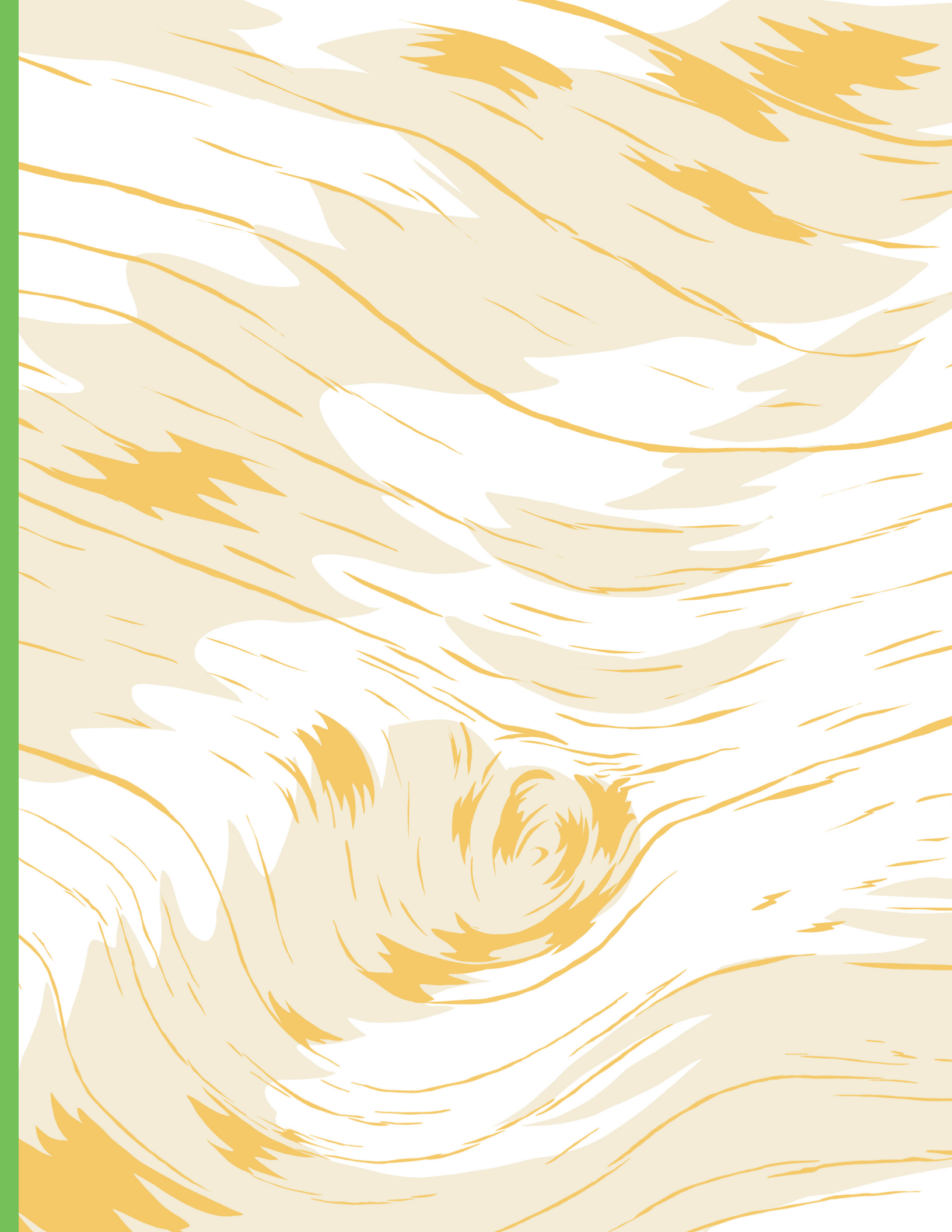
- Address your insecurities, and acknowledge things that feel really different
- Encourage your younger self to grant yourself and your body peace and ease, including the body parts or areas you might hope to say goodbye to, and ones you hope to welcome
- Affirm your feelings, experiences, and fantasies
- Grant yourself permission to seek out and enjoy pleasure and sexual connections

Here are some suggestions for what to do with your letter:

- Write your letter in the provided space, or on another piece of paper, or write or dictate it on a computer or phone
- Keep your letter and use it as a reminder for yourself in the future
 - Cherishing and gently holding your words might help you feel cherished and held
- Destroy your letter when you're done
 - Knowing your thoughts will be private may create the freedom to be totally honest
 - Allow yourself to let go of your words by scribbling over, burning, ripping, or deleting them

Be kind and speak to yourself the way you would a friend. Other than that, there is no right or wrong way to do this.







Affirmation

"The form of someone's body doesn't necessarily determine what that body means, how it works, or what it can do."

Mira Bellwether

Sex can be affirming and transformative.

Sex can help us feel good in our gender, explore new things, and learn about ourselves and others.

Sex is what you make it.

The journey of affirming or embodying our gender affects many parts of our lives, including how we understand and express our sexuality. As our self-understanding evolves, our desires may evolve, too. Gender-affirming surgery or hormone therapy can also lead to changes in our experiences of desire, or our ability or willingness to engage in specific sexual activities.

Some of us may feel more in tune with our bodies, while others might feel less so. We might find that we are interested in different kinds of sex and enjoy different parts of our body than before, and some things we used to want may no longer interest us.

Sex and intimacy can mean many things, and be experienced separately or together. We get to decide what aspects of sex and intimacy feel affirming for us.

Navigating new experiences

Many people find that joining new sexual networks, or exploring new sexual experiences with existing partners, is valuable to their gender journeys.

Sex can be an opportunity to find ways to engage with others and with yourself that feel affirming, exciting, and bring gender pleasure—a concept that sex therapist and writer Lucie Fielding [explains](#) is “the pleasure one can feel in one’s embodied experience of gender, whether that’s feeling affirmed in one’s gender within social, sexual, or intimate contexts—or just feeling yummy in one’s body at a given moment.”

What are some ways you’ve felt gender pleasure?

If you’re interested in exploring your sexuality with **new people**, this might look like exploring...

- Dating apps, nightlife and events
- Play parties, sex parties, or sex clubs
- Kink communities, such as those centered around rope, leather, impact play, etc.
- Different styles of non-monogamous relationships, such as polyamory, open relationships, or swinging

If you’re interested in exploring new sexual experiences with an **existing partner**, this might look like exploring...

- New activities or sexual practices
- Different words to describe each other, body parts, or sexual acts
- Different emotional states and feelings during sexual experiences
- Sensory play
- Kink dynamics and activities



Ideas: Exploring sex

You or a partner might want to explore new activities like [muffling](#), or using toys like [strokers](#) and strap-ons as extensions of your bodies.

What are some activities you'd like to try?

The words you use for each other and your body parts can be playful ways to affirm and explore gender.

- Maybe you're interested in in experimenting with different titles, words, or names
- Maybe you'd like to change the terminology you use for your genitals and other body parts

*What words do you like to use during sex for yourself?
For a partner? For your bodies?*

Sometimes the emotions we may aim to evoke during sex can be gendered. For some of us, this can be a way of experiencing gender pleasure.

- Are there any ways you've felt during sex in the past that feel distant or unwanted to you now?
 - *This could be an emotion, a role you played, a way you presented yourself, or something else.*

During sex, I want to feel...

A word cloud of adjectives describing a man. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with 'Loved' and 'Worshipped' being the most prominent at the top. Other words include 'Unbounded', 'Flustered', 'Whimsical', 'Debaucherous', 'Strong', 'Masculine', 'Big', 'Small', 'Trusted', 'Powerful', 'Cherished', and 'Feminine'.

Adjective	Relative Frequency (Size)
Loved	High
Worshipped	High
Unbounded	Medium-High
Flustered	Medium
Whimsical	Medium
Debaucherous	Medium
Strong	Medium
Masculine	Medium
Big	Medium
Small	Medium
Trusted	Medium
Powerful	Medium
Cherished	Medium
Feminine	Medium
Playful	Medium



When desire is difficult

Understanding our desires and experiencing desire physically can sometimes be challenging.

Feelings of shame may make our desires feel unspeakable. We might feel pressure to conform to gendered expectations in order to be desired by others, or else risk having no sexual or romantic partners at all.

Having few models for desire, especially when popular media mainly portrays cisgender and heterosexual experiences, can make it hard for us to understand our own wants.

Many of us have developed relationships of repression or dissociation with our bodies. This can take years to unlearn and adjust.

Difficult or painful experiences, including assault, abuse, a major accident, ongoing stress, a change in our health, or a combination of these, can impact our bodily autonomy and our ability to recognize desire. They may lead to a 'freeze' response to stimuli, or cause previously 'safe' signals to be interpreted as threats.

A helpful way to approach challenges with desire is to practice non-judgemental awareness: to intentionally focus on what is happening in the present moment, in your body, in a neutral way. Speaking with a trusted friend or accessing counseling can also help us move through these kinds of experiences.

Be gentle with yourself as you explore your desires, and allow yourself the time you need to navigate this journey.

A stylized illustration of a landscape. In the background, there is a dark blue lake. In the middle ground, there is a green forest with several dark green evergreen trees. In the foreground, there is a brown, rocky terrain with white outlines. A light blue body of water is on the left side, with white outlines representing waves or ripples. The overall style is flat and graphic.

Practicing non-judgemental awareness

Take one minute to focus on your breath—notice how it feels as you breathe in, and breathe out.

When your mind wanders, take note of it, and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

Practice this again and again, gradually increasing the duration. Eventually, it will become second nature to gently observe your thoughts without judgment, and choose where you want to focus your attention.

Resources & support

Resources

- [SmartSex Resource](#)
 - Information on [STIs](#) and [STI fact sheets](#), a [clinic finder](#) and sexual health services
- [Options for Sexual Health](#)
 - Information on [STIs](#), [birth control](#), [abortion](#), and [HIV](#)
 - Ask any sex-related question using the [Sex Sense](#) resource
- [Health Initiative for Men](#)
 - Resources for gay, bisexual and queer men and [gender diverse people](#) on [sexual health](#) (HIV PrEP & PEP), [mental health](#) and [substance use](#)
- [YouthCo](#)
 - Youth-led organization with programs and resources on sexual health & harm reduction
- [Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#)
 - Organization by and for Indigenous youth focused on sexual & reproductive health, rights and justice
- [reproductiveaccess.org](#)
 - Downloadable PDFs on [abortion](#), [contraception](#), and [miscarriage](#)
- [Trans Care BC](#)
 - Health information, peer support resources & help navigating care
- [Trans Rights BC](#)
 - Human rights information

Sexual health guides

- [Brazen 2.0: Trans Women's Safer Sex Guide](#), the 519
- [FTW: A Zine About the Sex Lives of Trans Women](#), Mira Bellwether
- [PRIM3D: A sexual health guide for queer trans men, transmasculine, and non-binary people](#), Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance
- [PUMP: Sexual Pleasure & Health Resource Guide for Transmen who have Sex with Men](#), Callen-Lorde
- [TransLash Guide to Trans Sex: T4T and Trans-Cis](#), TransLash
- [Safer sex for trans bodies](#), Human Rights Campaign

Support

- [Trans Lifeline](#)
 - Connects trans people to the support and resources we need to survive and thrive
 - Canada-wide toll-free line: 1-877-330-6366
- [Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre](#)
 - 24-Hour Crisis & Information Line:
 - Canada-wide toll-free line: 1-877-392-7583
 - Lower Mainland: 604-255-6344
- **Native Youth Sexual Health Network:** [Two-Spirit Mental Health Peer Support Manual](#)



