



National Centre of Excellence
for Complex Trauma

DYLAN

Dylan is a shorter, soft spoken, transgender man from Brisbane. His family are originally from India.

He has been coming to therapy every week for three months, paid for by his Aunt, who is the only member of his family who has anything to do with him, as his mother and sisters are not allowed to contact him. He suspects she is paying for it to cure him of being trans.

He shifts position in the chair, wears glasses and constantly pushes them up his nose. When he feels particularly unsafe he wears a baseball cap with the peak pulled low. One leg often jiggles and it is sometimes hard for him to make eye contact, although he has better skills now of regulating back into the 'window of tolerance,' which is a concept that works well for him.

"I was raised as a girl, but it never fit. When I cut my hair and started dressing differently, people didn't know what to do."

When he was 15, Dylan asked his teachers and classmates to change his gender pronoun—to refer to him as "he" instead of "she." For the final two years of high school, a small group of students made his life a living hell, trolling him on social media, catcalling him, and threatening him physically while he'd walk with his head down in the hallways, particularly one older male student who on one occasion, egged on by three other boys, cornered him in the bathrooms, punched him in the chest multiple times, pushed his groin into Dylan's and threatened to rape him if he saw him in there again.

"By the end of a school week I could hardly take it anymore. Sometimes I didn't know if I was going to make it."

Thankfully, he did. Four years ago he moved away from Sydney to Brisbane and loves his current life. He has surrounded himself with a supportive community he feels safe with, and has a dog, Milo, who is a steadfast companion.

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Dylan first came to therapy because meditation, which had once been a place of peace for him had become a place of torment. He grew up meditating, but after he came out as trans it became a distressing experience of being inundated by the voices of his father and classmates, so he stopped.

When he tried it again a few months ago he found that his attention was impossible to control. He would see his father yelling at him, hear the taunting of his classmates again and imagine pictures of trans people murdered from news stories he'd been reading, even when he closed his eyes at night to sleep.

In general, Dylan says he often feels uncomfortable in his skin—the sense that he's been born into a body that doesn't feel congruent with his gender, and that being on hormones and having chest surgery have helped that. But he still sometimes feels a churning in his stomach, and at other times a tingling on the back of his neck—a sensation that makes it feel like someone is about to strike him. Sometimes he freezes during this intensity and is unable to move.

“I'm so pissed these bullies are still inside my head, I moved to get away from it, but it's still with me. I feel like some part of me was taken, and I want it back.”

Dylan's father is anti-trans, particularly anti Hijra people (legally a 'third sex' in India) who he sees as low caste, and therefore people who shouldn't have any rights. He will 'not tolerate any child of his being associated with them in any way' and was disparaging and hurtful to Dylan through his teens. They are now estranged.

Dylan has responded well to the therapeutic work of feeling safer in his body and in the world and last session brought up his uncle. He hinted at having suffered violence, possibly sexual violence, but then completely shut down and stopped speaking.

After regulation and safety were focused on and regained he said he wanted to talk about it more, but was scared it might make the nightmares come back again.

The therapist working with Dylan wonders whether it is time to move into some phase 2 work of 'processing trauma' or whether it's too soon.

Inspired by a case study in David Treleavens 'Trauma sensitive mindfulness' (2018).

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