

# Who I Am



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Made possible by a Mable Community Grant  mable

[whoiamfilm.com](http://whoiamfilm.com)



*Above: Aether and his mother Anthea.*

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Who I Am is a 23-minute documentary following a transgender teen who is also Autistic. Research shows that people who are neurodivergent are more likely to be trans or gender diverse. Autism is one of the ways of being that comes under the umbrella term ‘neurodivergent’. Neurodiversity<sup>1</sup> means that some people’s brains handle information differently from others. This leads to differences in the way that people learn, manage their emotions and get along with others.

After being bullied at school, 14-year-old Charlie (pronouns he/him/it) finally comes out to his mum, setting him on a path of navigating the first steps of his transition – the social transition – and ultimately settling into his identity with a new name Aether. Meanwhile his mum Anthea goes on her own journey to embracing her child for all that he is.

The story is told through observational moments, intimate reflections from the whole family, and Aether’s own original animated characters, The Fallens, coming to life.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-202111232645>

# KEY MESSAGES FROM THE FILM:

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## **RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ACCEPTED BY OTHERS.**

- Acceptance means people trust that you are being authentic, and take you at face value, and let you have control over how you choose to be.
- Acceptance is not just important in our family and friendship circles, but also in broader circles such as at school, in our neighbourhoods, and in the media (news, books, movies, music, etc.).
- Even when we are supported by people close to us, feelings of isolation and stigma can still be strongly felt.
- Acceptance from people close to us becomes even more important when we are going through periods of change in our lives, including changing our gender expression. Having people to rely on for support can help to ease the stress of change.
- Acceptance can open the door for a more open and deeper relationship, and provides space for a person to feel comfortable in themselves and relax enough to grow.

## **LETTING PEOPLE LEAD THEIR OWN LIVES THE WAY THEY CHOOSE IS IMPORTANT.**

- People need to have a sense of control and autonomy over their own lives and life decisions. This can help us to feel fulfilled and satisfied with our lives.
- Self-determination is when a person is able to make decisions about who they are and how they want to express themselves without fear. It means that we determine the kind of person that we want to be.
- Having pride in our identities can help us to grow more easily, having shame can block identity from growing. Giving people choice

over their own lives, and not putting pressure on them to live in a particular way, is important.

- There is a big intersection between the Autistic and LGBTIQ+ communities, but there is not a lot of understanding in the general population. This can make it difficult for Autistic/LGBTIQ+ individuals to access things such as healthcare, education, work, sports, and social groups. Having greater acceptance means that Autistic/LGBTIQ+ individuals can feel more comfortable engaging in all aspects of life.

## **OUR IDENTITIES ARE ALWAYS GROWING.**

- Gender identity is fluid, meaning that changes what it looks and feels like as we get older. Our various identities (gender, neurology, culture, class etc.) mix together in different ways and lead us to grow a deeper sense of who we are.
- Having an outlet to express our sense of who we are (such as through drawing or speaking) can help us to think about ourselves in new and different ways.
- You don't have to know a person entirely in order to accept them, you don't have to understand something to show your support, and you don't have to be fully grown in order to be accepted. It is important to accept that everyone is on their own journey and is growing in their own ways.
- Being supported in our identities helps us to grow and develop them further. When we feel accepted, we feel less pressure to explain and justify who we are. We can spend our energy on living our identities rather than feeling like we need to protect them from harm.

# DISCUSSION PROMPTS

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1. What are some ways that Aether communicates his inner world to others?
2. Aether confided in his friends about his gender identity before their family. Why might that be?
3. Who are some people in Aether's support network? How did they help Aether to feel more comfortable? Think about both direct and indirect support.
4. What helps Aether to explore and learn more about his gender identity?
5. How is gender identity different from gender expression? Think of some examples seen in the documentary. How does your own gender expression relate to your identity?
6. How does Aether's understanding of his gender identity grow over the course of the documentary?
7. *Autism is defined by having different sensory experiences and communication styles.* What are some ways that autism might impact how we communicate our identity to others?
8. *People can experience sensory differences, with sights, sounds, smells/tastes, touch, balance, or body awareness being different for everyone. Sensory experiences can change how a person feels comfortable in different environments, and this impacts how they interact with the world and others around them.* How might someone's sensory differences impact their self-expression?
9. *Labels are often something that are used as a quick way to describe how someone might feel on the inside. Towards the end of the documentary, Aether says, "I just don't know what label fits me right now".* Why might it be hard to choose a label that fits, even if we have a good understanding of ourselves on the inside?
10. What's something you learned from watching Who I Am? Is there anything you learned that you would like to share with others?
11. How can you show your support for trans, gender diverse, non-binary, and neurodivergent young people?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://theconversation.com/transgender-and-gender-diverse-people-up-to-six-times-more-likely-to-be-autistic-new-study-144085>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/brain-behaviour/trans-pathwayreport-web.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Gender\\_dysphoria/](https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Gender_dysphoria/)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/uploads/documents/Fact%20Sheets/Aspect-Research-mental-health-wellbeing.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.autismcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/resources/SASLA\\_Supporting-mental-health\\_Resource.pdf](https://www.autismcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/resources/SASLA_Supporting-mental-health_Resource.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://equalityaustralia.org.au/overwhelming-support-on-trans-equality/>



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Autistic people are 3-6 times more likely to identify as trans or gender diverse than non-Autistic people.<sup>2</sup>
- In Australia, 22.5% of trans and gender diverse youth have an autism diagnosis.<sup>3</sup>
- About 1.2% of Australian school children are thought to identify as transgender (that's 45,000 Australian school children).<sup>4</sup>
- Due to a range of factors, including peer rejection, issues at school and work, bullying, discrimination, and difficulty accessing appropriate services, Autistic people and trans people are more likely to experience mental health conditions.<sup>5,2</sup>
- When a young trans or gender diverse person is supported by their parents, family, friends, school, and community, and they are affirmed in their gender identity, their mental health outcomes are greatly improved.<sup>2</sup>
- The same is true for Autistic people; meaningful social support is a buffer against depression.<sup>6</sup>
- 78% of Australians believe that transgender people deserve rights, and that number increases to 93% when Australians know a trans person.<sup>7</sup>

# TAKE ACTION NOW

Visit [www.whoiamfilm.com](http://www.whoiamfilm.com) to learn about ways you can take action to support trans, gender diverse, non-binary, and neurodivergent young people.

This discussion guide was written by Sam Rose, a non-binary, Autistic advocate and support worker, and co-author of *The Awesome Autistic Guide for Trans Teens (2022)*. It has been reviewed by Amaze and is based on the *Who I Am - Teaching and Learning Guide* which was written by Quadrant Media Education and contributed to by Amaze and Dr Ken Pang of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

