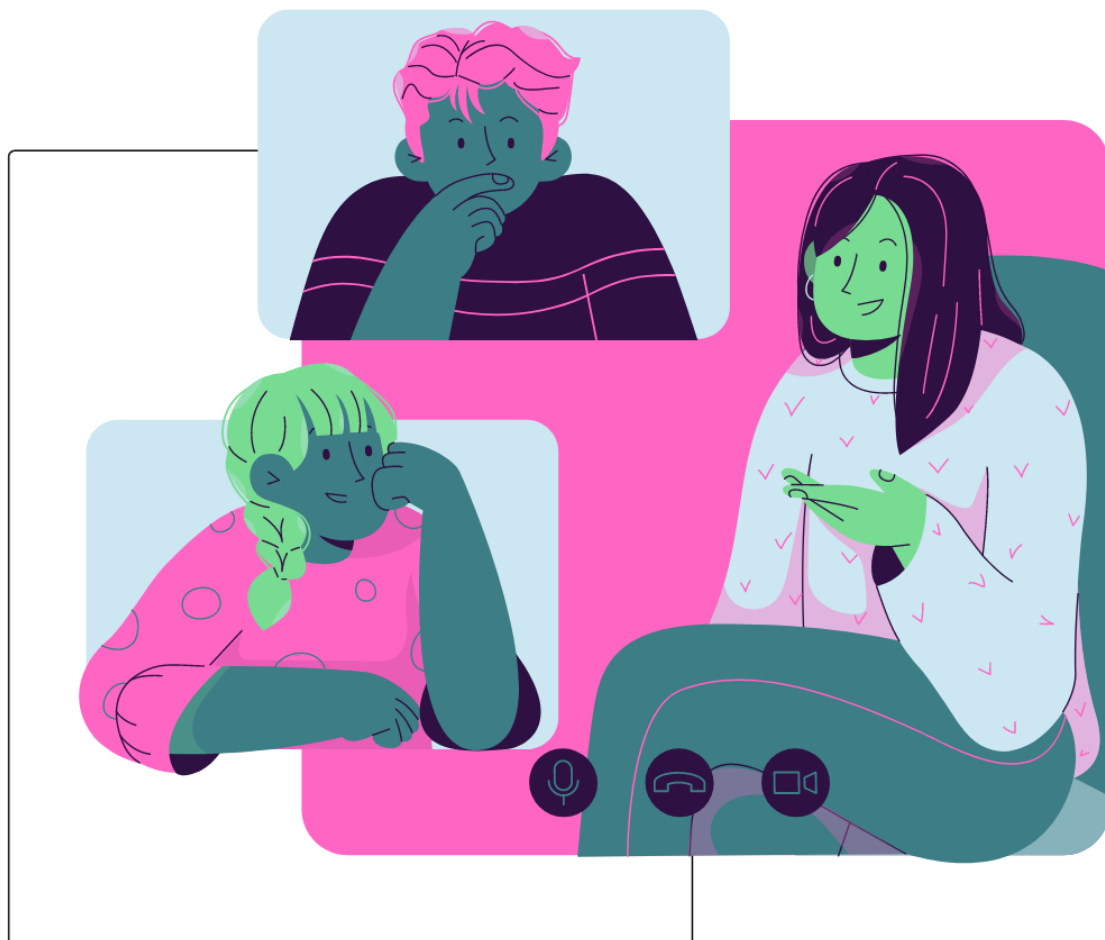


# ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

## GUIDE 2: GENDER AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH



## INTRODUCTION

Growing up means we move from being babies, to being children, to the tween years and then that awkward stage of moving from being a teenager to becoming a young adult. At each stage, there are things we need to learn and different challenges to overcome so that we can move onto the next stage.

Our teenage years are about exploring and navigating who we are, how we see ourselves and how we relate to others. How we see ourselves and how we express our gender as well as our sexual preferences can form a big part of this exploration and our identity. It is also the phase when we go through puberty, which means our bodies are also changing. Our relationships may also be changing - who we hang out with and what kinds of friendships and relationships we enter into may be shifting. Things may also change at school and we can face academic stress and peer pressure. So many different changes are taking place at this time.

How we experience this time can have an impact on our mental health and wellbeing. These changes can bring up questions and different feelings. It can feel exciting. It can also feel confusing or scary. We all know that it is normal to feel nervous or even overwhelmed when things around us and inside us are changing. What is important to recognise is that adolescence is a time of change. It is also important to remember that all the changes that are happening and the different feelings we are having, are completely normal. We are not alone in this, our friends are experiencing these changes too!

## DEFINITIONS

**Sex:** At birth, people are classified as male, female or intersex based on their anatomy. In South Africa, people can only be assigned male or female at birth.

**Gender:** refers to the socially constructed ideas about human behaviour, actions and roles in relation to ideas of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' ([Brook](#)).

**Gender Identity** refers to a person's internal feelings about their gender. This can be the same or different to the gender they were assigned at birth ([Brook](#)).

**Gender expression:** refers to how someone expresses gender. This can be through how people dress, their behaviour and their interests ([Pocket Queerpedia](#)).

**Puberty:** refers to the changes that happen when your body changes from a child to a young adult. Puberty in female bodies can start as early as age 8 and as late as 13 or 14. Puberty in male bodies can start as early as age 9 and as late as 15, but eventually everyone goes through it.

**Sexual preference or sexuality** is a way of describing who you are attracted to. For example, as a woman, you may be attracted to another person who identifies as a female (homosexual or lesbian) or you may be attracted to someone who identifies as male (heterosexual or straight) or you might be attracted to both people who identify as male and people who identify as female (bisexual) or you may be attracted to any person, regardless of that person's gender, sex, or sexual preference (pansexual).

**Trans-gender:** refers to someone whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned at their birth (Healthline).

**Cis-gender:** refers to someone identifying as the same sex and gender they were assigned at birth ([Pocket Queerpedia](#)).

**Queer:** Some people prefer this term as an umbrella or all-inclusive term for people who belong to the LGBTQIA+ spectrum ([Pocket Queerpedia](#)).

**Gender norms and stereotypes:** refer to the behaviours, mannerisms, personality traits and likes/dislikes that society expects men and women to have, to be and to do. Gender roles are often presented as 'natural' or 'normal' ways that men and women should behave, but these roles have become the 'norm' because society is structured in a way that reinforces these beliefs. Stereotyping gender roles means that we make generalisations, thinking all men and women are expected to behave the same and to be interested in the same things ([Brook](#)).

## GENDER AND MENTAL HEALTH

Gender norms and stereotypes impact our everyday lives as young people. These unhealthy beliefs contribute to gender inequality. Gender inequality means that people are treated differently based on their gender. The impact of this on young women can mean that girls and young women have less access to economic and other opportunities, which might mean that they struggle to study further and to get the same jobs as young men. This will mean they are less able to earn an income and support themselves and their families. Gender inequality can also lead to a power imbalance between people of different genders. For young women, this can mean that boys and young men have an upper hand in different situations, giving them more access to opportunities and spaces where they are included. Another way that this manifests is in girls and young women being expected to accept unwanted sexual advances from men and finding themselves in situations where they may struggle to negotiate safer sex practices to protect themselves, for example insisting on using condoms. These dynamics place girls and young women at a higher risk of falling pregnant before they are ready or contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Also, international research shows that there is a gap between mental health outcomes for young men and young women, with adolescent

girls having poorer average mental health than adolescent boys ([The gender Gap in Adolescent Mental Health](#)).

Patriarchal gender roles and the stereotypes society has about how men and young boys should behave are damaging for boys and young men too. Many young men and boys grow up in homes where domestic violence is present and in communities where violence is prevalent. This consistent exposure to violent behaviour has a strong impact on them. Research shows that many boys who are exposed to violence as children, can behave more violently as teens and adults. From a young age, boys are expected to show what it means to be a man. Young men and boys are encouraged to act violently to demonstrate their masculinity. This aggressive and violent behaviour is referred to as toxic masculinity. The expectation that boys must be strong and not show their emotions also leads to them not seeking help. A lot of boys and young men struggle with managing their emotions, making it harder to ask for help when they are struggling.

In any relationship where there is an unhealthy power imbalance, one person will overpower the other, making it difficult for the other person, who may feel like they have less power, to ask for what they need. As young people, this can make it hard to protect ourselves and say no when something does not feel safe or okay. In intimate relationships, this can lead to emotional abuse and traumatic experiences that include physical and sexual violence. These experiences are not limited to heterosexual relationships and happen also in same sex relationships. Sexual assault or violence at any age can lead to depression and anxiety disorders, which is why gender-based violence often leads to mental health problems.

How we think about gender in the first place also needs to be challenged. Many of us have been taught that there are only two genders, male and female, and that there are particular ways that each should behave. Many people only think of the words 'male' and 'female' when they think of gender, but the reality is that gender as a concept is much broader than that ([Pocket Queerpedia](#)). As young people, many of us may find that we don't fit within the binary gender-based definitions for who we should be. We may also not identify with how we are expected to express our gender. How we choose to dress and how we choose to act may be different from the norm. The gender binary is the belief that there are only two genders, male and female. To tackle gender inequality, we need to broaden our view and look beyond this limited way of understanding gender. Expanding our understanding of gender can help us to see that it is not only girls who are discriminated against, but anyone whose gender identity is seen as a challenge to patriarchy and the status quo.

Even though in South Africa, LGBTQI people are equal before the law, there are a horrifically high number of cases of hate crimes and gender-based violence perpetuated against people because of their gender and sexual preference. The LGBTQI community faces a lot of stigma and discrimination, and this along with the fear of violence, rejection by family members and other communities, coupled with a general sense of lack of safety

can lead to high levels of mental health challenges. Young people facing stigma and discrimination are more likely to feel depressed and suicidal, with an even greater risk of depression and suicide for young people who are LGBTQI.

Rigid social norms and gender-based discrimination can make us as young people feel like we don't have control over our lives and their futures. This can have lasting effects on our mental health and overall well-being. It is so important for us to overcome and tackle gender-based discrimination so that no one is made to feel uncomfortable for who they are.

We want to live in a society where all people are valued equally, regardless of their gender or sexual preference. As young people, we want to be able to take care of our mental and physical health and to have relationships where we feel safe and respected. We want to have relationships and friendships that encourage us to be our best selves! That's why we are creating this show, to make sure that we as young people have a space to talk about all this and to get the support that we need.

### **Feedback from the workshop highlighted how boys and girls face different challenges:**

*“Even though the services are there, it's usually the girls who go out and say 'I have a problem' and then the boys keep their emotions more to themselves meaning they're not ready to speak it out to everybody about their problem or use the facilities and services that are there, so I think it's mainly the girls [who access services], but there are services for both boys and girls.”*

*“We experience peer pressure in our community. It is a big issue because friends always make you feel like you need to do things you do not want to do in order to fit in with them. Gangsterism is one of the stressful things. It especially puts stress on boys, because they need to provide for their families and if the boys do not do it, then they are seen as weak by their friends.”*

*“Stress is the same for girls and boys in some ways. There are similar situations that are stressful for both genders, but the one gender does not know what happens with another gender. For instance, saying a man cannot walk at a certain place or a woman cannot walk at a certain place, it sounds the same, but the reasons for that might be different. When they say a man can't walk in a certain place, it is mostly because of gang violence where they live and certain places they are not allowed to be in because of how they are labelled. But when they say a woman can't walk in a certain place, it won't only be because of gang violence, but because women are targets for men and can easily become victims of rape or abuse.”*

*“If a boy is stressed, he wouldn’t find it easy to speak to someone, because it will make him look like less of a man as a lot of boys do not like to cry and we as girls, find it easy to trust someone and open up about stress, so I say we do [have some of the same stresses] but we deal with the stress differently.”*



## DID YOU KNOW?

**9% of all deaths** among teenagers in South Africa **are due to suicide.**



**Girls and young women** are also up to three times more likely than boys to have **depressive disorders** and to attempt **self-harm.**



(WHO)

Internationally, **nearly 30% of adolescent girls age 15–19 report lifetime physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner** (WHO) and, in many countries, girls are several times as likely as boys to become infected with HIV.

PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
REPORTED BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER

**30%****GIRLS AGE 15-19**

(SADAG)

**The Triangle Project produced a report based on experiences of the LGBTIQ community in 2016 that found that:**

- 41% of the people who participated knew someone who had been murdered because they were LGBTIQ or were suspected to be
- 1 in 5 were threatened with violence because of their LGBTIQ status in the past 2 years
- 56% experienced discrimination in school
- 39% had been verbally assaulted in the past 24 months because of their identity



## MYTH BUSTERS

MYTH	FACT
<p>Gender-based violence only affects girls and women.</p>	<p>People of all genders can be victims of gender-based violence</p>
<p>LGBTQI people can be identified by certain mannerisms, clothing or physical characteristics.</p>	<p>It is not always possible to tell whether someone is LGBTI just by looking at them. LGBTQI people express themselves and live in many different ways. People should not be defined by the clothes they wear or how they behave.</p>
<p>Homosexuality is an illness and can be cured.</p>	<p>LGBTIQ people are not ill, so there is nothing in them that needs to be cured. Whether a person is lesbian, gay or bisexual, it is not possible to change their sexual orientation – it is a natural and normal part of who they are. Likewise, a transgender or intersex person is not suffering from an illness.</p>
<p>It is un-African to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer.</p>	<p>LGBTQI people exist in all cultures including African cultures. In fact, there is a rich history of sexual and gender diversity in a number of African traditions.</p>





## THE CHANGES THAT COME DURING ADOLESCENCE

The changes we move through during adolescence can feel different for each person depending on their gender. It can be a challenging time emotionally, physically and socially. The quotes below are from the workshop where participants discussed the challenges faced during adolescence.

*“Girls go through more pain than boys go through. We go through periods, pregnancy and body shaming. This makes us stronger and builds our confidence, because we know how to deal with it. From a cultural perspective, we as young Muslim women, we are told to cover ourselves and get arranged marriage, which most of us do not want to do and we cannot talk about it. Also violence against women is another issue we face. Men need to speak about their issues more than to hit a woman. We think girls are stronger than boys.”*

### **Changes in relation to our bodies**

Everybody goes through puberty at their own pace. Hormones (the body’s chemical signals) tell your body to begin changing. There are no set changes that happen for everyone. Some girls begin with growth spurts when they start to grow taller. For others, their breasts begin to grow or hair starts to grow on their arms and in their pubic area. During puberty, girls will also start to menstruate.

It is not only girls who experience these bodily changes, boys do too! Boys can also have a growth spurt and grow taller, they can get facial hair and their voice changes to be deeper. Boys will also have wet dreams and erections.

As our bodies change, we may feel more insecure, especially if people are teasing or making fun of us. Our mental health can be affected by all this. We can experience feelings of shame and low self-esteem because of these changes. It is important to know that the changes you are going through are all totally normal! It is also important to know that your body will go through puberty at the exact right time for you - there’s no way to speed it up or slow it down.

For those of us who come from homes that are under financial pressure, getting our periods may be stressful. If our families are struggling to buy basics, how much more so if we can’t afford to get sanitary pads or tampons. Talking about periods is not always easy, and many girls skip school when they are on their period. This has a negative impact on our education. Falling behind in school because of this can have a negative impact on our mental health.

*“Girls stress about sanitary towels - how are they going to buy them if they don’t have enough money”.*

*“Talking about body image... when you see your friend developing physically, you begin to envy them, especially if your body isn’t developing as quickly. So, you take drugs like steroids that can damage you. Boys want pimples. I want pimples. That is what it’s like to be a teenager.”*

## CHANGES IN OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OURSELVES AND TO OTHERS

For many of us, adolescence is a time where our most important relationships are with our friends. We might find it hard to talk to our parents or caregivers about the challenges we are facing. The friends we choose can have a big impact on our mental health - they influence how we feel about ourselves and impact the choices we make. We all want to belong and feel included, and because of this, we may feel pressured to do certain things to fit in. During our teenage years, we may also start having feelings for people and wanting to get into different kinds of relationships where we explore sexual intimacy. We may feel pressured to get into certain relationships or to experiment sexually before we feel ready.

*“We experience peer pressure in our community. It is a big issue because friends always make you feel like you need to do things you do not want to do in order to fit in with them. Gangsterism is one of the stressful things, it especially puts stress on boys because they need to provide for their families and if the boys do not do it, then they are seen as weak by their friends”.*

*“With girls, they find it difficult to communicate with their parents especially their mothers because they may be stricter so they feel like they can’t talk to them about the emotional challenges that they are facing and they land up going to their friends and getting the wrong kind of advice that they should be getting from their parents”*

*“Especially during menstruation period when you become emotion-full and you want to talk to a mother figure about these changes and you want to be educated, some mothers say don’t sleep with boys you will get pregnant... but actually menstruation period is just a normal stage that we have to accept.”*

It is important to acknowledge that all of these changes can bring up different emotions and potentially create difficulties within friendships, relationships and families. What is important is that we find spaces where we can express ourselves, so that as we navigate these questions we have about ourselves, we have access to the support that we need.

## TOOLS AND RESOURCES

The **Genderbreadperson** is a tool that was designed by the Triangle Project, an organisation based in Cape Town. You can use this tool to map where you find yourself in terms of your own gender identity. This tool can help to understand gender beyond the binary of 'male' and 'female' and better understand the terms gender identity, gender expression, sexual preference and sex. Wanna give it a go?

### PLACES TO GO FOR SUPPORT

- **Planned Parenthood SA** (Cape Town) - 021 762 0700
- **Marie Stopes** (Cape Town) - 021 422 4660 / 0800 11 77 85
- **Loveline Call Centre** - 0800 121 900
- **Gender Dynamix** (Cape Town) - 021 447 4797
- **Triangle Project** (Cape Town) - 021 712 6699
- **Sonke Gender Justice** (Cape Town) - 021 423 7088
- **Mankind Project** - Kholekile Dlakiya (Cape Town Centre Director) - 078 478 8883

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- **PocketQueerpedia\_EnglishDigital.pdf**
- **outLoud Radio - Home**
- **Top Signs Girls are in Puberty**
- **Sad and Happy: Feelings Happen**
- **All About Getting Your Period**
- **Puberty, Body Odor and Other Changes for Boys**
- **In Their Own Words**
- **Youth Capital - Home**
- **Remembering and Celebrating South Africa's Iconic LGBTQI+ Women**

# ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE 2: ADOLESCENCE AND GENDER

## RADIO PRODUCTION GUIDE

### ANGLES

Different ways to talk about “**Gender and mental health and wellbeing**”.

- Do young men and young women face different challenges during adolescence?
- How do different young people cope with the challenges that come during adolescence differently depending on their gender?
- Do you feel young men and young women need different kinds of support for their mental health?
- How do gender stereotypes impact on mental health and wellbeing?

### CHOOSE AN ANGLE

Different ways to talk about “**How do gender stereotypes impact on mental health and wellbeing?**”

These are some of the things we can do to support our mental wellbeing.

Practical things we can do: get a good night's sleep, exercise, eat as well as we can.

Strengthen relationships: make an effort to build strong connections with friends and family, so that we have people to turn to when we are struggling.



## FORMATS



### Vox Pops



#### Vox pop aim

To get many opinions on one topic.



#### Who do you talk to?

Young people from the community, young people from the focus groups and young people who are active in different youth projects.



#### Question

What can we as young people do to fight gender inequality?

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### Audio commentary



#### Audio commentary aim

To get people's opinion about a topic that they care deeply about, in this case, to ask young people to share perspectives on ways to challenge gender stereotypes.



#### Who do you talk to?

A young person, a teacher or a parent.

### Questions for your interview with a young person:

- Do you think boys and girls are treated differently at home and at school?
- How do you think this impacts on their mental health and wellbeing?
- Do you think that your gender impacts on how you respond to the challenges you face as an adolescent?
- What have you noticed about how we talk about gender in our community?
- How are people treated when they do not fit into the gender norms of how people are expected to behave, speak and dress?
- Are people in your family, school and community comfortable talking to young people about gender, sex and sexuality?
- How do you think the taboo about talking about these issues impacts young people?
- Why do you think young people need safe spaces to discuss these issues?



## Public Service Announcement (PSA)



The aim of a PSA

To create a public awareness message. Create a PSA that encourages people to save water.

**Voice 1:** Have you noticed that when Thabo speaks, people pay attention, and when I speak, it feels like no one pays attention, do you think it is because I am a girl?

**Voice 2:** I have noticed that Thabo and the other guys always feel free to speak first and the other girls in the group can sometimes get shut down. I am sorry that you feel no one is listening to you, that is not cool.

**Voice 1:** Ya, it makes me wonder why people ask for my opinion, if they aren't really interested in what I have to say. It makes me feel like there is no point even being in this group.

**Voice 2:** It is really not okay. I think I am going to raise it with our facilitator. I think everyone's voices should be equally important in our group, no matter what your gender.

**Voice 1:** Me too. Thank you for listening. Talking to you has given me the courage to raise my concerns.

**Slogan: All voices matter! Speak up and speak out against gender inequality.**



## Audio profile



### Audio profile aim

To get a first person account of someone's experience, passion or journey. Audio profiles often aim to inspire.



Who do you talk to?

Speak to someone who has broken the mould when it comes to gender norms (for example, a young woman in a career that most people think should only be for men, a man who is working in a field that is usually reserved for women).



### Questions

- How does gender discrimination impact on young people?
- How did it feel to be one of the only men / women in your field?
- What gave you the courage to follow your dream?
- Did you face obstacles along the way? What supported you to keep going?
- What would you say to other young people who are wanting to follow a path that society says is reserved for people of another gender?

Please see interview questions in "How to present your show"

## HOW TO PRESENT YOUR SHOW



Use your produced radio features, your research and the suggested script and questions to write your own script.

[INTRO:]

**Host 1:** It's just gone [TIME] and you're just in time for the [NAME OF SHOW] on [RADIO STATION]. My name is [NAME].

**Host 2:** And my name is [NAME], and today's show is about gender and mental health.

**Host 1:** I am so looking forward to talking about this. As young people, we all know that we have different experiences as young men and young women. These experiences can have a big impact on our lives. It can mean that we have access to opportunities, or it can mean that some opportunities are closed to us, for example. From what I can see, boys and girls also seem to cope differently with the challenges they face, would you agree?

**Host 2:** Let's see what our listeners have to say.

**Host 1:** There is so much to talk about, so let's get started!

[PRESENT WHO IS BEING INTERVIEWED]  
[PLAY THE INTERVIEW]

[OUTRO:]

**Host 1:** Today, we've had a really interesting conversation about gender norms and what impact these beliefs have on young people.

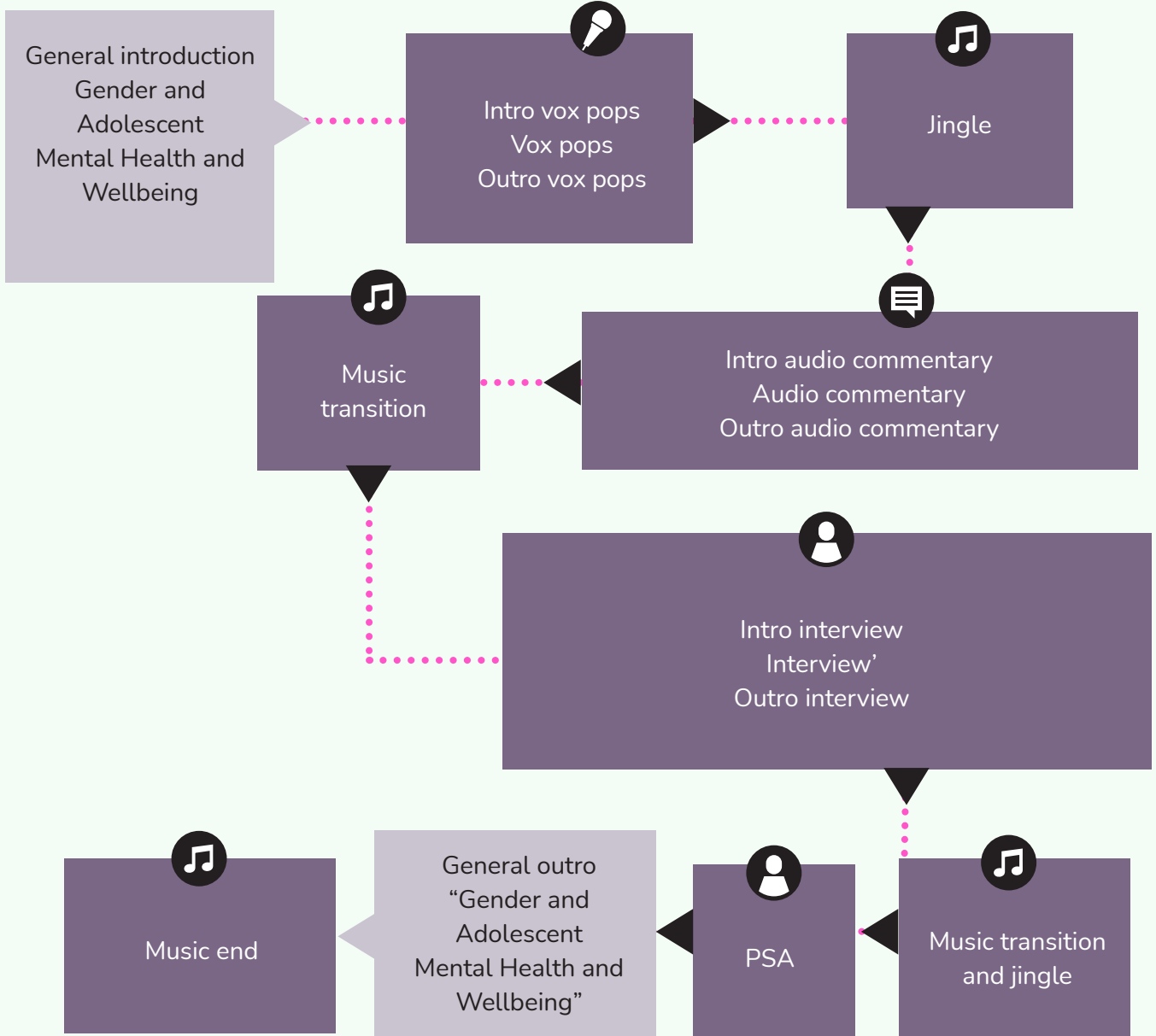
**Host 2:** It is clear that as young people we need to take care of our mental health. It is also clear that we need to take a stand against discrimination of any kind, as we can see how this discrimination impacts on our brothers and sisters and our friends. I hope that those who are listening have found today's show interesting and posed some new questions to think about.

**Host 1:** Yes, very interesting show. Thanks for listening. Next week on [DAY] at [TIME] we'll continue the conversation about youth and mental health and wellbeing, this time, talking about the different issues that affect young people. Until then, it's bye from us!





SHOW OUTLINE



**ETHICS AND CONSENT**

This may be a sensitive topic for some, so make sure you inform your audience to respect those who share personal stories in the space.