

Jeffrey is a 55-year-old man with a moderate learning disability and a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. When he is feeling up, or elated, he prefers to wear female clothes as he feels that they soothe him and make him feel pretty and grounded. When his mood is flatter he wears only male clothes, albeit sometimes more flamboyant ones. He does not mind, however, that he sometimes wears female clothes, he just prefers not to when he is not elated.

He has recently moved into a new supported accommodation block, but the residents have complained that they have seen him wearing female clothing and that this consists of very short skirts which expose his underwear, fishnet stockings and high heels.

Think about:

- Where is the problem situated – with Jeffrey, with his choice of clothing, with the residents?
- Does the fact that the clothing is a marker for his mood changes mean the clothing itself is a problem?
- What interventions could be put in place to assist the situation?
- What does the idea of “home” mean to Jeffrey (and to you)? Does it have notions of freedom to act as one wishes to associated with it?
- Would you feel more comfortable if Jeffrey was younger, better dressed and/or more “convincing”?

As well as addressing Jeffrey’s underlying mood issues, it may be useful to educate him about appropriate, non-sexualised clothing that is acceptable to wear in public and the possible repercussion of wearing very sexualised clothing. It is worth bearing in mind that many portrayals of women are highly sexualised and that people who have not been socialised as women may take these as their base from which to work. Consequently, a little assistance from a female friend or carer may be useful to ground these notions in mundane reality.

It may also be useful to educate the residents about the rights and responsibilities of the tenants and about men wearing ‘female’ clothes, and indeed about changing fashions more generally. In the 1900s a woman wearing trousers would cause a furore, whereas this is not the case today.

It may also be worth assisting Jeffrey with any low mood associated with his experiences with his neighbours. Confidence building and discussions about self-determination, choices and all the things that go with those may also be useful.