



Information for Parents of Transgender and Intersex Children

When a child, regardless of age, tells parents and loved ones they are in the wrong body, it can be quite confronting initially. But this doesn't mean we can't be supportive.

Below are concerns many parents experience whether the child is adult or still prepubescent. We are a group of parents who have already travelled this path with our children. We understand these feelings and concerns and assure you that these will lessen over time.

Also included are some tips that will help parents and loved ones understand and be supportive.

Acceptance and gaining information on how to support your child may take a while but it is important to let them know you love them. Gathering information is so important it will help you, the parent, understand and address concerns and fears.

Parental love should be unconditional and important for our children to know we love them just as they are. Their life will not always be easy but parental support makes so much of a difference.

Young children

Parents need to understand that the awareness their child now has about being in the wrong body can be just as confusing and confronting for them as it is for parents.

Parents need to take the lead from their child with this issue and decision. If you have a child, regardless of age, who is saying they are a girl when you see them as a boy ask questions, talk to them about why this is so. Do not assume they are confused or going through a phase.

Seek support from those who can provide names of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) health practitioners who can help you make the correct decision for the child and with the child. This doesn't mean they encourage the child in any one direction, it only means they have dealt with gender confusion or dysphoria before and offer relevant advice.

If you have a child who is insisting they are in the wrong body, has a new name selected or refuses to wear the appropriate clothes for their gender, it is pointless and unhelpful arguing with him/her and dismissing the actions as silly.

Not surprisingly, this can be more confusing for the parents than the child. Young children don't understand or care about the perceived rights or wrongs.

As parents we often believe the child is:

- Attention seeking
- Confused
- Role playing

As parents we may also fear that we have:

- Been lacking in parental guidance
- Provided wrong toys
- Been poor role models
- Not encouraged team sport etc
- Guided our children in the wrong direction

What we can do to make things easier for them and us:

- Build a team of friends and family who are supportive
- Include the staff at the child's school if possible
- Make sure your GP is LGBTI friendly
- Speak to a psychologist (again LGBTI friendly) to give you support and tips on how to help your child
- Access the internet for supportive sites to provide more information
- Help your child with changing his/her MTF or FTM image if they want
- Avoid being overly protective of your child, let them live their lives simply and as ordinarily as possible.
- Use their new name and refer to your child (regardless of age) as the gender in which they are dressing.

Adult Children

For many parents, the admission by adult children is quite confronting, confusing and for some, a distressing shock, at least temporarily. Parents wonder 'How can this have gone unnoticed?' Some may wonder if their child is gay.

Often when parents start talking to their adult children about transitioning, many learn of the anguish, possible suicidal ideation and inner turmoil their child has gone through. Parents should be in no doubt that the decision to transition hasn't been taken lightly.

Parents also learn how even though their child may now be adult the child has always known he/she was in the wrong body from a very young age. Parents also come to know of their child's personal struggle to get to where they are presently.

Some parents learn their child has been living the life of a transperson for a while, while for others the adult child is just about to start transition and can no longer keep the secret. Transition can mean taking hormones or changing into the new way of dressing.

If they are adult, it is important to establish what input they want/need from us as parents:

- Do they want us to help access medical assistance?
- How much personal support do they want?
- Do they want help to dress appropriately for their new honest self?

None of us suggest it will be an easy time but as parents it's our role to love our children unconditionally and keep them safe.

For many parents their concerns are:

- Seeing their child in what they perceive as the wrong clothes
- Calling their child by the "wrong" name or refusing to call them by the new name
- Calling them he instead of she and vice versa – generating unnecessary friction
- What or whether to tell family and friends
- Being judged as bad parents
- Hearing negative comments about the child
- Wondering if mental health issues are involved
- Grieving process

If you're seeking support but don't know where to start, below are numbers to call in your state. AIDS Councils these days can either provide support or provide names and phone numbers of places that will offer information and lead you in the right direction. These contacts will help you to understand what is happening with your child and help you understand, support and feel comfortable with assisting your child to make their transition as easy as possible. AIDS Councils these days primarily are about education and support.

PFLAG Groups are in most States of Australia. You will find the contact details on this website. The aim of all groups is to support parents with transgender, intersex, lesbian, gay and bisexual sons and daughters.

Queensland

Transgender Support (ATSAQ) 07 3843 5024
QAHC 07 30171777

NSW AIDS Council 02 9206 2000
Gender Centre 02 9569 2366

South Australia AIDS Council 08 8362 0306
Transgender Support 0409 091 663

Victoria AIDS Council 03 9865 6700
Transgender Support (voicemail) 03 9517 6613

Tasmanian AIDS Council 03 6224 1242

Western Australia AIDS Council 08 9482 0000

Northern Territory AIDS Council 08 8944 7777

Seek LGBTI friendly medical practitioners – again these can be resourced by contacting the AIDS Council in your State.

Some more websites for information:

<http://www.ftmaustralia.org/>

<http://www.truecolours.org.au/>

<http://www.headspace.org.au/parents-and-carers>

Helpful books:

The Boy who was born a Girl: One Mother's unconditional love for her child by Jon Edwards and Luisa Edwards

The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper

The term **FTM** is an abbreviation of "female to male"

The term **MTF** is an abbreviation of "male to female"