



## INFORMATION FOR PARENTS OF TRANS CHILDREN

### INTRODUCTION:

Many people are asking “What is happening?” because we seem to have more young people identifying as transgender much earlier than their counterparts.

More parents are contacting PFLAG with concerns that their young children are saying they are in the wrong body or are very serious in wanting to be girls while their genitals clearly show they are male or vice versa.

Possibly this is because parenting is changing. We no longer have the strict role play of girls playing with dolls and helping Mum and boys having to play outside with trucks and digging in the dirt. This change is now giving children the awareness to speak honestly and innocently to parents about how they feel.

We, as a society no longer have strict roles. Years ago Mum stayed at home and Dad went to work. Times are changing and it isn't uncommon for both parents to be in full-time work and it isn't so unusual for Dads to be the primary Carer of the children and the house.

This of course doesn't mean there were no trans children before these times. It is just that they hid or were confused about how they felt because of the strict gender roles. It is much healthier for children to be honest about themselves and this issue even though, initially for parents, it can be quite confusing and confronting.

Having a trans child has nothing to do with trends, economics, education, good or bad parenting or pandering to the whim of a precocious child. It is most important to recognise that approximately 1 in 2000 identify as a trans person and this has always been throughout history.

Research shows there is a difference in the brain of a trans person and if the person is intersex (old term, hermaphrodite), there is a chromosomal difference. So both of these facts show that it clearly isn't a mental illness or attention seeking behaviours as some may believe.

There is information in cyber space stating that it is only a phase and trans children outgrow this feeling of being the wrong gender, but there is no real proof that this is true.

I have found many people use the same logic when discussing sexual orientation and parents then go through what I call "double grieving," because firstly they are often upset and looking for answers while hanging on to hope that the young person is just confused. Within a few years they realise nothing has changed as the child reaches adulthood and there can be the second wave of grief.

If by chance the child does outgrow it, I recommend parents see that as a bonus. But please don't hang on to false hope, it can be very damaging. For trans children it is not just a stage of being seen as a "tomboy" or "too gentle". It is real.

### **TRANS CHILDREN GENERALLY AND REGULARLY:**

- Insist they are the opposite sex;
- Insist on wearing opposite sex clothing;
- Want to be the opposite sex role in play;
- Have an intense desire to play opposite sex games;
- Want to play with opposite sex friends.

Most parents realise that if the child is made to wear the "correct" clothing, play with the "right" friends etc. they will become depressed, angry and closed within themselves and generally difficult to handle. This benefits no one. To the trans child it lowers their self esteem; it's embarrassing, demoralising and extremely stressful.

## **WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO SUPPORT THE YOUNG PERSON:**

Firstly, seek support for yourself and information to help your child so you can feel confident about how to handle the situation. Transgender Associations and PFLAG groups can help parents find the right people to be supportive and offer referrals for extra information. These associations are easily found on the internet or in phone books.

Then, if the child wants to be called by another name, do so. It isn't uncommon for children as young as 5-6 years old to choose another name for themselves, that they see as appropriate for their perceived gender.

Do not argue with the child that they are wrong. Many children become depressed and talk of wanting to die and come back as the opposite sex to what they are presently, which is distressing for them and their parents.

Allow them to dress as they feel appropriate, this will add to their general wellbeing and self esteem. There is a big difference between playing dress up and being a trans child wanting to be seen as their true self.

If parents want to help their child, help them to be how and who they see themselves as.

If the child is of school age, talk to the school about the child and get their support. If the school is unsupportive, keep going until finding a school that is and understands the needs of your child.

Some issues that may need to be sorted are issues around privacy which may include toilets and dressing sheds or change rooms. I would suggest parents be guided by the child and how they feel.

## **WILL THIS HARM THEM PSYCHOLOGICALLY?**

Parents cannot make a child gay, lesbian or trans by how they treat them, they are born, not made.

An excellent book called *“As Nature Made Him”* by John Colapinto tells a true story of a baby boy who had his penis burnt off during a “botched” circumcision. The doctor who believed “a baby is a clean slate” and could be moulded convinced the parents to raise their son as a daughter, which they tried to do. However, the doctor’s theory was extremely flawed and very wrong.

Finally, after many years of emotional torment for the child, the parents told her/him what had happened and the child reverted back to being male and then felt he was his real self. This is similar to how a trans person feels when they transition.

I have asked many, many trans people when they knew they were transgender and everyone stated when they were children, but didn’t know how to verbalise how they felt at the time.

Children also learn very quickly to modify their behaviour. They soon learn what is allowable either by the stern look they receive or the physical trouble they find themselves in from adults around them.

We are now learning that the sooner a trans child is supported and accepted the less mental health issues arise.

Suicide is a real issue for many. The stress as an adult of living a lie, the stress of being abandoned by family and the ridicule many receive from uninformed people in society is enough. However, many while all of this is happening need surgery reassignment and hormones to make their lives as they would hope, which is to become the opposite sex to how they were born.

People ask “how can a young child know?” We need to keep in mind that it isn’t about sex or sexual orientation, it’s about gender and this is learned very quickly and early in life. As parents we are very quick to teach our children that they are “girls or boys.”



Research shows that the younger a person is when transitioning, the less likely they will deal with long term mental health issues. This is something that needs to be discussed with experts in this area of medicine and health, particularly about when the right time is and what needs to be done to keep the young person stable until any real changes occur.

This is due to the fact that if the child is male to female (MTF) they won't develop strong facial hair, a deep voice or Adam's apple which makes life easier when transitioning to female.

### **PROBLEMS FOR THE PARENTS:**

#### **HOW TO TELL PEOPLE:**

It is best to be honest with people because they will soon ask question when they see the child dressed differently.

#### **DIFFICULTY IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEW NAME AND GENDER:**

This is particularly hurtful to the individual and difficult for parents to call the child by another name. It is also difficult for many parents to begin to acknowledge their child as the other gender.

#### **SHAME, BLAME, GUILT:**

These are very common feelings and sometimes hard to deal with. I would suggest parents speak to a health practitioner who specialises in transgender health and/or support.

#### **FEAR FOR THE CHILD:**

This again is very common as we all want to protect our children from insults and harm. The best way is to be supportive and if possible help them with their financial needs to make the changes when the time is right as this will help them on their path to normalcy and will minimise danger.

## **LOSS OF THE SON/DAUGHTER:**

For many the transition is a time of grieving. Parents soon realise they will never get that child back. They now have a different child standing in front of them. This can be especially difficult for those who may have had for example, one son and several daughters and the son transitions or vice versa.

## **SEEING THE CHILD IN DIFFERENT CLOTHES FOR THE FIRST TIME AND KNOWING THIS WILL BE PERMANENT:**

This can be very extremely confronting.

## **CONCERN OVER WILL THEY EVER GET A PARTNER:**

The answer to this is “yes, they will”.

Parents need to understand that because there is a difference in the brain for trans people and chromosomal differences for intersex people, that playing masculine games with boys, Dad spending more time with the son, encouraging masculine sport, removing female toys and games, suggesting that Mum wanted a girl instead of a boy, and Mothers who are over protective of their son will make absolutely no difference. Parents will still have a trans child.

How can it? These again are ill informed beliefs that were very common regarding lesbians and gays and we now know to be myths. Parents need to know they have done nothing wrong. The child has done nothing wrong and parents need to be supportive of their children as much as possible.

As parents and members of society, we need to understand that the depression, anxiety and personality disorders trans children and adults develop doesn't arise because of them being transgender, they arise because of the shame, embarrassment and feeling of being judged and ridiculed and trivialised when out in public by uninformed people.



Mental health conditions may also arise as they become adults because of lack of funds to pay for surgery or specialised health care. So as parents, if you want your trans child to remain mentally strong and emotionally happy the best thing you can do is to love them unconditionally and help them both financially and emotionally to be the gender they believe themselves to be.

**PFLAG Brisbane**

[www.pflagbrisbane.org.au](http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au)

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For further details & support, please visit [www.pflagbrisbane.org.au](http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au)