

Information for parents with Transgender Sons and Daughters

(Gender Dysphoria)



When a child regardless of age makes the announcement they are in the wrong body it can be quite confronting for parents. But it doesn't mean we can't be supportive even though we may not completely understand what this means.

The best thing to do for you and the child is find support and information that will help you support your child and you understand what is happening. And, by reading this booklet you have started your journey.

As a guide to finding the correct support, you need to find an individual or group that is supportive, listens to you and your child with the end result being a happier child and you with helpful skills and improved understanding of what is happening. However, don't be disheartened if this takes an awhile.

Seek support from those who can provide names of health practitioners who can help you make the correct decision for the child less than 18 years of age. Alternately, if your child is adult they may have already done this research.

Finally, in the booklet you will see the term gender dysphoria and transgender used. Please note that gender dysphoria is the medical term for transgender.

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Young Children

Parents need to understand their child has thought about how they are feeling about how they see themselves in the wrong body and it can be just as confusing and confronting for them as it is for a parent. Small children are very unlikely to know if they are straight or gay, but they do know if they are a boy or a girl.

Parents need to take the lead from their child with this issue and decision. If you have a child that is insisting they are in the wrong body, have selected a new name or refuses to wear the appropriate clothes for their gender there is no point scolding them and telling them to stop being silly.

Not surprisingly, this is generally confusing for the parents and the child. If the child is at school explain to the school what is happening and if they aren't supportive find another school that will listen and be helpful. If this isn't possible contact the Education Department in your State and if all else fails, contact a lawyer and see what your child's legal rights are, which may vary from State to State.

It is important to allow your child to dress as they feel is right for them and to be called by their chosen name. This may seem extreme to you at this minute, but there are schools that do support transgender children.

It is not uncommon for transgender children to suffer depression, become angry or to become anti social. Educators need to be aware that good mental health of the child is paramount.

As the child matures and moves towards puberty, anxiety can increase due to the usual bodily changes. I feel this must be a time that is terrifying for young people who have no control over what's happening to them. The main concern for many is their anxiety increases, anti social behaviours increase and depression becomes a serious issue.

At this time, it's most important to have the child under a doctor that is supportive and working towards the best treatment at this time which is usually, puberty blockers.

They halt hair growth, the voice from deepening etc in male to female (MTF). They also halt the growth of breasts and menstrual cycle in females to males (FTM) which will assist the teen transition into an adult with less frustration.

If you are concerned about giving your children puberty blockers, talk with doctors and get them to explain how they work. But presently the belief is (1) they are safe for the child to take (2) if the child decides they are no longer gender diverse and stop taking the medication, their body returns to normality (3) they should make the child feel better because the trauma of experiencing an unwanted transition to adulthood as the wrong gender is minimised.

As parents we often believe the young child is

Attention seeking

Confused

Role playing

And as parents we fear 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

Our Adult Children

This for many parents is quite confronting, confusing and for some parents too much to comprehend at least temporarily. Parents wonder how this issue has gone unnoticed.

Some may wonder if their child is just gay and wanting to wear women's clothes. Often times when parents start talking to their child about transitioning many learn of the anguish, possible suicidal ideation and inner turmoil their child has gone through for many years. So this should immediately let parents know the decision to transition hasn't been taken lightly.

Parents also learn how even though their child may now be adult they have always known they were in the wrong body from a very young age. And, parents slowly learn the child's personal struggle to get to where they are presently.

Some parents learn their child has been living the life of a transgender person for a while, while for others the adult child is about to start transitioning and can no longer keep the secret.

Transition can mean taking hormones or changing into their new way of dressing. Parents also need to be aware that transition can mean different things. Some feel the need for complete surgery and hormones. Some are happy to just live as the opposite sex. While others, may just want hormones and some surgery.

Transitioning is also a process. It's a time of seeing psychologists and a variety of medical specialists which can take years, even if finances aren't the issue. For male to female, there is the issue of feminizing which can be costly eg hair removal and perhaps some facial surgery to feminize the face.

If your transgender child is adult, ask

How much input would they like you to have?

Do they want help to access medical assistance?

How much personal support would they like?

Would they like help to dress appropriately for their new honest self?

How would they like you to help or support them?

Parents need to take care that they don't intrude. Sometimes it can seem like walking a fine line and not winning either way. If you're seeking support but don't know where to start, telephone the AIDS Council in your State. They will be able to offer support or provide names and phone numbers of places that will offer extra information.

This will lead you in the right direction to help you understand what is happening with your child, while helping you to assist your child and make their transition as easy as possible.

Being transgender is not a mental illness it is the name of a medical condition. The term is an accurate description of a condition related to the sense and expression of gender.

The term "transsexual" is a term never used because it has a sensational connotation. Being transgender has nothing to do with sex or sexuality. A person's sexual orientation doesn't change which means, if as a male they preferred female partners, the same will apply as a transgender female they will still prefer a woman as a partner.

I don't suggest it will be an easy time for parents. It's our role to love our children unconditionally and keep them safe if possible. Always keep in mind suicide is extremely high for transgender people, often because of a lack of understanding and little support both in the home and society generally. This is not because of a trait of being transgender, but the lack of understanding from the world around them.

A problem for many parents of adult transgender is by the time the parent is informed their child is well and truly ready to transition. So, parents are often in the middle of a medical whirl they don't understand, plus coming to terms with their child being transgender.

From the day the doctor announces the sex of the baby at birth, that is how the parents and family members see the child. Many parents never notice differences or if they do they are considered individualism or eccentricities.

Why would anyone suspect Gender Dysphoria?

What do we call you now?

This can sometimes be the hardest thing for parents. How do we suddenly start calling “Fred” “Freda” or vice versa? And then there is the issue of pronouns, how do we call our son, she?

For many parents it seems to be a time of mourning. My son is gone, my daughter is no longer! However we need to keep in mind that we still have the child. Yes, things have changed, but you still have your child.

Some parents feel that if they do call their child by their chosen name they are condoning attention seeking behaviour; however, this thinking is just plain wrong.

A time for patience by family and friends is when hormones are initially started. Some people can become very emotional which is due to the increase of new hormones flowing into the body. Keep in mind that the hormones will settle.

Sometimes due to the sensitivity of the person transitioning and if parents continue to use incorrect pronouns and name, they can lose their child because they will distance themselves from the family. Plus, it can be very embarrassing for everyone if the incorrect terminology is used in public.

One tip: If your child is dressed in female clothes, use feminine terms and name. If your child is in masculine clothes use male terms and name

For many parents, their concerns are

Seeing their child in what is perceived as the wrong clothes

Calling their child by the wrong name or refusing to call them by their new name

Calling them HIM instead of SHE and vice versa which can create a lot of friction

Telling family and friends

Being judged as bad parents

Hearing negative comments about their child

Wondering if it's a mental illness

What if their child should ever want children?

Will they ever have a partner?

Who will be their partner?

Fear of bullying

Surgery

Surgery is an option after much counseling and consideration by the experts and the person who is transgender, once they are over the age of 18 years old. It is also up to each person to decide on how much surgery they may want or need, to be how they see themselves.