

**How do Parents in the Process of Transitioning  
Explain their Transformation  
to their Children?**



**Shelley Argent OAM**

## **Introduction:**

PFLAG is predominantly a support group for parents who have children with sexuality and gender diversity. However, we do have people seeking support in so many other ways including couples whose partners disclose their diversity. And couples with children who need to be told and supported.

Initially, this can be confusing for some children and distressing for others. Much of the long term outcome depends on how the children are told, how the parents behave towards each other and if there is any negative behavior and manipulation .of the child to reject the parent who is either transitioning or disclosing their sexuality

This booklet only provides tips and suggestions plus some stories from parents and their personal experiences with their children and partners.

I would like to say thank you to those who contributed to this booklet. I really do appreciate your input.

## **Mixed Emotions:**

When most marriages break down there is usually a mix of emotions including grief, anger, feelings of failure and blame just to name a few.. However when the reason is disclosure of sexual diversity or the partner decided to transition can certainly bring a huge upheaval, innumerable questions and accusations.

Family can take comfort in the knowledge that research shows both gender and gender conformity are irrelevant to a child's happiness and development which is very positive.

However, the real concern for the long term emotional welfare and stability for children is if family relationships stay loving and supportive. Nobody gains if there is animosity between the parents, or if parents or people generally expect the child to take sides. Worse still if derogatory conversation is had in front of the child or to the child.

People need to remember, it's important the child not be expected to take sides or choose between the parents. People need to keep in mind that the child is also confused, struggling and confused about what is happening to his/her family and his/her world is suddenly in turmoil.

Given the opportunity, children will adapt better to a parents transition as long as both parents are genuinely concerned about the child and work together to minimize long term anxiety, behavioural issues or feelings of abandonment to name a few.

## **How can I help my child with my transition?**

Choose your timing, if you can.

The younger the child sometimes the easier it can be

Children who are reaching puberty may have more difficult questions and possibly query themselves, so reassurance is helpful.

Keep your explanation age appropriate

Be honest and answer the child's questions

Try to find resources for the child and someone for the child to talk about how they feel. It doesn't have to be a counselor, just a trusted person.

Find someone that you can debrief with, especially when things aren't going well.

Tread lightly and be patient if you feel the child is not accepting as quickly as you hoped

Ask the child what they think, how they feel, and are they OK?

Let your child you may have changed in some ways; however you are still the same person and your love for them will never change

be ready for questions.

### **Young children will wonder what it means to them**

Will you still love me?

Have I done something wrong?

Will you still live with us?

What does being Trans mean?

What does being lesbian or gay mean?

Will I be Trans or lesbian/gay when I grow up?

Sometimes a simple answer is enough. For example, Daddy will love you just as much as a woman as he did/does as a man,

Problems can be more of an issue with older children. There can be great confusion if a child is approaching puberty, they will be experiencing sexual feelings of their own and being in the process of wondering where they fit in the world.

### **Be prepared for:**

Why are you transitioning/coming out now?

How long have you known?

What about Mum/Dad?

What do we tell our friends?

Why did you marry Mum/Dad?

For many children its best to keep them in contact with all family members and it's important for children to know that you are never sorry that you married Mum/Dad and you having them, your children. But what you do regret is the pain you have caused

### **How to maintain a relationship with your children**

Be aware of their day to date routine and discuss how their day has gone

be sure to remember birthdays and special events and strive to be part of these days

Ring at regular times. This means they have something to look forward to and they can be there ready to take the call. If you say you will ring at a certain time, be sure you do. Otherwise you will risk the children losing faith in you and they will never take you seriously.

Discuss homework, sports, friends and whatever else they have been doing since the last time you chatted.

Ask them what is the best and worst thing that has happened since you last spoke.

Talk generally about what you have been doing

Listen to them talk, without always trying to solve problems. Sometimes they just like to be heard.

Send them emails, SMS, cards or notes; these are little bonuses that let them know you are thinking about them.

When you have one on one time with the children, ask them what they would like to do, but don't try to outdo the other parent with treats and entertainment.

## **Conclusion**

It's important to keep in mind that you the person transitioning took time before you felt confident enough to let it be known to family and friends that you are transitioning and so it will take time for others to understand, be supportive and accepting of you. Additionally, a married person who transitions has a partner, in-laws and children to navigate, not just parents if they were single.

And, as most know, a family break up regardless of the reason is always difficult for everyone involved. Realistically, there is anger, confusion and grief and so often words spoken that are best left unsaid. Meanwhile the children have their own confusion and concerns that need to be addressed. So, it's important for parents to make themselves available to their children...

## **Story One:**

I am a trans woman and mother

### **What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?**

My sons were aged 10 years old and 5 years old

### **How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?**

I did this in a funny manner, when they were 3 and 7. We had a fancy dress party to gently introduce my presentation change, then not long after I started presenting feminine at home most of the time. When I told them I was going to transition to be a woman, I explained this would make me happier in who I am. Plus, I showed them a picture of my friend who had transitioned so they had a better idea of what was happening.

### **How did they handle your disclosure?**

The boys were happy with my explanation and have been a normal part of their lives since then.

**Were they told straightaway or did you wait awhile?**

We eased the boys into the knowledge that I was trans

**What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?**

There were some issues when I was still called dad by my kids because my eldest would get friends ask if I was his mum.

**How did you get around these issues?**

But we have since changed my title to mum also. My kids are quite happy to talk about my transition and never told them not to talk about it because

**What would you like others to know who are just beginning their transition?**

I felt that if I made it a secret then it would seem like something about which they should be ashamed. My son has since met trans kids his own age so is happy to say that his mum is also trans.

**What would you like others to know who are just beginning their transition?**

My best advice is never let anyone push you out of your kids life. My Mother and my ex wife initially wanted me to slip out of the kids life and I was adamant that this was never an option

**What is the most important thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed and your transition is normalised as much as possible.**

Never allow your transitioning to be a source of shame. Tell your children, without limits on how and who they can talk. Always keep in mind; your personal pride in yourself becomes their pride as well.

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**A message from a parent:**

Most people who transition only look at the process from their own perspective. When a person transitions they are taking away a father or a mother, a sister or a brother, a son or a daughter, a husband or a wife.

My older son seemed comfortable with my transition but suddenly became upset. He wanted me to explain why I no longer wished to be his dad. He could not understand what horrible thing he had done to make me no longer love him and no longer wanted to be his dad.

Basically, my advice is to tell them young. You don't have to justify yourself or argue your truth. The truth will always be the truth. **Teach your children the importance of being yourself**

**Story Two:**

**A trans mother**

**What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?**

9 years old and 6 years old

**How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?**

We kept it simple, matter of fact, open, honest and age appropriate. Plus we were open to answer any questions they had.

**How did they handle your disclosure?**

As if it was just new information they didn't know before "Oh, so that's a thing? Ok cool"

**Were they told straightaway or did you wait awhile?**

I waited until I had to tell them. My wish to be open with the children was not shared with the other parent.

**What were your main concerns about telling them?**

Your mother is going to kill me, but she is wrong to asks me go be deceptive. Plus, bullying and the school community may go into meltdown. A fear that was unfounded.

**What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?**

Their mother was initially amicable but later tried to make things difficult. The kids and my bond were too strong to break fortunately. There was some indirect bullying and exclusion from my household but not from important people or friends. The school was not a problem even though a couple of people clearly hid their discomfort.

**How did you get around these issues?**

I was proactive with current and past teachers, leadership and a few parents I was familiar with to talk about the change.

**What were the benefits, and what were the pit falls of the children being aware of your transitioning?**

Benefits were many. Freedom and truth and teaching my children and the world around me what is really true is the most empowering experience of my and I dare say my kids lives.

Divorce was a pitfall and hard on everyone. But the loss of people who will not understand are really not a loss. At least it doesn't seem like it from here.

**Were your children accepting?**

Hell, yes and easily, I raised good feminists.

**What were their concerns?**

Losing Daddy was tough. They quickly realised I wasn't their father anymore even though I was still there for them. Including, holding their hands every step of the way, just the same as any mum or dad would do.

**How is your relationship with your children now?**

Six years on and we are still good. Week about custody continues. My teenagers still love and admire me. Not everyone gets to say that no matter the circumstances.

**What is the essential thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed and your transition is normalised as much as possible.**

There is an assumption that all of our children are scarred. Treat your children like people not mushrooms. Do you want them to grow up ignorant? Your first responsibility as a parent is honesty.

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**Parent Three:**

**What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?**

8 years old and 12 years old

**How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?**

The children were told with anger and fear

**How did they handle your disclosure?**

Anger and fear

**What were your main concerns about telling them?**

How it would impact on their futures

**What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?**

Teasing at school

**How did you get around these issues?**

I taught the children resilience

**What were the benefits and pit falls of the children being aware of your transitioning?**

The benefits were the opening of their eyes to discrimination against minorities. The pitfalls were the distrust of their own ability to form lasting relationships. Plus, ongoing shame and anger.

**Were your children accepting?**

Not really

**What were their concerns?**

(a) The desire to see both of their parents reunited and (b) did I still love them because they are male?

**How is your relationship with your children?**

I now have a loving relationship with both, but it's been a massive struggle.

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#### **Story four:**

##### **What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?**

10 and 11

##### **How were they told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?**

I told them each, separately. I had already talked about being androgynous and I had had top surgery. A few months after surgery I said that I was trans.

I also wrote them a note I left with them, anticipating I might not get a chance to say everything I wanted to say. In that I told them I loved them, I will always be their mum, and the same person.

##### **How did they handle your disclosure?**

It was horrific. Each cried, was angry, walked away/shut themselves in their room and refused to talk about it.

One said she didn't want two dads.

The other said why did I have to do it at this time, when she had so much else going on? (she was just starting year 7)

However months later I found the note I'd written one of them scrunched up in her room. She'd written on the back in orange fluro, "Mum, I will always love you no matter what you look like."

##### **Were they told straight away, or did you wait a while?**

They were getting used to me wearing male clothes and discussing androgyny before I said I was trans. They also knew I identified as gay/a lesbian before that.

##### **What were your primary concerns about telling them?**

That they'd feel they weren't like other kids. That wouldn't have someone they can call 'mum'. That they'd get teased at school. That they wouldn't accept me.

##### **What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?**

Still going! We don't talk about it, and things go along easily (it's been 18 months). I know they don't want to talk about it, which is hard because I'd like to know if they are ok. And also to discuss what will happen when I am more regularly read as male in public, and they are still calling me mum. I'd like to talk about what our options are, but don't feel I can.



Also, initially their father (my ex husband) was not at all helpful and I couldn't rely on him to support them or give them shared messages to support them. He is ok with it now but I still don't feel I could ask him to give supporting statements or have talks with them. The only times he has done so in the last year, he's told me that both girls are still very unsettled or upset by my transition.

**How did you get around these issues?**

Ignoring them all! I am usually a very upfront person, talking issues through. It is very challenging having this one sit under the surface.

**What were the benefits and what were the pitfalls of the children being aware of your transition?**

Benefits, I could be open and, more or less, be 'me'. Pitfalls, feeling like I've hurt them, scarred their childhood, potentially meant they would be teased or bullied, generally make their lives harder not easier.

**Were your children accepting?**

Not initially, but accept me as their mum now. I am not sure if they 'accept' my transition as much as put up with it.

**What were their concerns?**

Not being like other kids. Being teased. Losing a mum. But we don't talk about it so I don't know what else, or if those fears have reduced. Maybe fearing that I would change – become a different person?

**How is your relationship with your children now?**

'Normal'. I nag them to do chores, they push boundaries, and we tell each other we love each other.

**What would you change about the process of how you told your children if anything?**

Oh god, I don't know. It was literally the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. I don't know what could have made it easier, except perhaps having their dad more on board and even telling them with him, so they saw another adult the love being accepting and supportive. But I really don't know. I think if they were more versed in Trans culture (they met a Trans woman friend of mine once, and liked her) they might have been more accepting?

**What would you like others to know about being a parent who is just beginning their transition?**

Don't freak out at the first reaction - it changes, they get used to it. Mostly if you continue as you were, they see nothing much has changed and relax.

Every stage of parenting is fleeting or at least transitory. Their reactions to your transition is the same.

**What is the essential thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed, and your transition is normalised as much as possible?**

I wish I knew – I needed help but there was nothing, not for someone my age and in my circumstances anyway.

But, probably, tell them you love them. Tell them you are and will be the same person, just happier. And the real you. And to ask questions – lots, any – and that it is ok to be scared and worried but that there is actually nothing to fear. And perhaps direct them to supports.

Have more stuff on transitioning in the general public, and maybe even on social media that kids use, normalizing it – both parents who transition as well as kids.

It depends on their ages – mine are both girls, going into puberty, which I think threw up all sorts of issues younger kids wouldn't have. I think the problem is every family, kid, parent is different so general advice doesn't work

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**Story Five:**

My daughter was 10 years of we explained to her both me and my partner what it meant and it makes me feel if I was referred to as a boy and that I was a girl and my name was Elizabeth. Now having her never previously know pre HRT probably helped but she took to it easily, calling me Liz and mum and doesn't even see me as a boy at all because in her mind the way I cat and dress are all feminine so she accepts it that way. My daughter had no concerns although she would on occasion voice questions in relation to my transness. My concerns were the she'd be teased and bullied for not just having two mums but one that is Trans.

I would change anything at all and honestly I would advise all parents to be use open informative communication methods to explain being transgender to their kids, they are so much smarter than

many give them credit for (my own daughter called out and educated her friends on my transness on sports day at school)

If I could say one thing it that our kids will always love you was their parent teenagers may be a bit more volatile but they will still ultimately accept you and love you and support the change.

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Parent Three:

What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?

How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?

How did they handle your disclosure?

Were they told straightaway or did you wait awhile?

What were your main concerns about telling them?

What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?

How did you get around these issues?

What were the benefits and what was the pit falls of the children being aware of your transitioning?

Were your children accepting?

What were their concerns?

How is your relationship with your children now?

What would you change about the process of how you told your children, if anything?

What would you like others to know who are just beginning their transition?

What is the most important thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed and your transition is normalised as much as possible.

Parent Four:

What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?  
How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?  
How did they handle your disclosure?  
Were they told straightaway or did you wait awhile?  
What were your main concerns about telling them?  
What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?  
How did you get around these issues?  
What were the benefits and what was the pit falls of the children being aware of your transitioning?  
Were your children accepting?  
What were their concerns?  
How is your relationship with your children now?  
What would you change about the process of how you told your children, if anything?  
What would you like others to know who are just beginning their transition?  
What is the most important thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed and your transition is normalised as much as possible.

Parent Five:

What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?  
How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?  
How did they handle your disclosure?  
Were they told straightaway or did you wait awhile?  
What were your main concerns about telling them?  
What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?  
How did you get around these issues?  
What were the benefits and what were the pit falls of the children being aware of your transitioning?  
Were your children accepting?

What were their concerns?

How is your relationship with your children now?

What would you change about the process of how you told your children, if anything?

What would you like others to know who are just beginning their transition?

What is the most important thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed and your transition is normalised as much as possible.

Parent Six:

What was the age of your children when told about your gender diversity?

How they were told or (b) why have you decided not to tell them and why?

How did they handle your disclosure?

Were they told straightaway or did you wait awhile?

What were your main concerns about telling them?

What were the ongoing issues regarding your transition and your children?

How did you get around these issues?

What were the benefits and what was the pit falls of the children being aware of your transitioning?

Were your children accepting?

What were their concerns?

How is your relationship with your children now?

What would you change about the process of how you told your children, if anything?

What would you like others to know who are just beginning their transition?

What is the most important thing a transitioning parent can do or say to ensure their child/children understand and remain unscathed and your transition is normalised as much as possible.