

# Information for parents with Transgender Sons & Daughters

(Gender Dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder)



by Shelley Argent

## **Information for parents with Transgender Sons and Daughters (Gender Dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder)**

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 you may not understand completely what this means.

The best thing you can do for yourself and child is find support and information that will help you support your child and help you understand what is happening. And, by reading this 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 a while.

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

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## Young Children

Parents need to understand their child has thought about how they are feeling about seeing 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 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.

If you have a child who is constantly, insisting they are in the wrong body, have a new name selected or refuses to where the appropriate clothes for their gender there is no point scolding him/her 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 a school that will listen and be supportive. If this isn't possible contact the Education in your State and if all else fails, contact a lawyer and see what your child's legal rights are, this may vary State by State.

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

It is not uncommon for these children to suffer depression, become angry or to become anti social. Educators need to be aware that the 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 it must be terrifying for some young people, they have no control over what is happening to them, their anxiety increases, again some may become anti social and depression may become 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, deepening voice etc in male to females (MTF). They also halt the growth of breasts and menstrual cycles in female to males (FTM) which will assist the teen to transition into an adult.

### **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

## **Adult Children**

This for many parents is quite confronting, confusing and for some too much to comprehend at least temporarily. Parents, wonder how has this issue 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 adult children 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 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 trans\* 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 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 just need to live as the opposite sex and some just want hormones and perhaps some surgery.

Transitioning is also a process. It's a time of seeing psychologists and a variety of medical specialists and can take a few years even if finances aren't an issue. And for male to female trans people there is the issue of "feminising" which can be costly eg hair removal and perhaps facial surgery to feminise the face.

### **If your trans\* child is adult, ask...**

How much input do they want you to have?

Do they want help to access medical assistance?

How much personal support do they want?

Do they want help to dress appropriately for their new honest self?

How they would like you to help or support them?

Parents need to take care that there is no intrusion. Sometimes it can seem like you are walking a fine line and not winning either way. 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 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. AIDS Councils these days primarily are about education and support.

Being a trans\* is not a mental illness. Gender Dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is the name of this medical condition. This term is an accurate description of a condition related to the sense and expression of gender.

We don't use the term "transsexual" because it sometimes has an emotional or sensational connotation. Being trans\* has nothing to do with sex or sexuality. A person's sexual orientation doesn't change, which means as a male they preferred women partners, the same will apply as a trans\* female,

they will still prefer a woman as a partner. I don't suggest it will be an easy time but as parents it's our role to love our children unconditionally and keep them safe if possible. Suicide is very high for trans\* and this is often because of lack of understanding and little support both in the home and society generally not because it's a trait of being a trans\*.

A problem for many parents of adult trans\* is by the time their child informs them they are trans\* the person is well and truly ready to begin to transition. And, so the parents are in the middle of a medical whirl they don't understand. Plus, coming to terms with having a trans\* child.

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 as 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 individuals can become emotional which is due to the increase of new hormones flowing in the body. Keep in mind that the hormones will settle.

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

*One tip: If your child is in female clothes, use feminine terms and name and if in male clothing use male terms and name.*

### **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 him instead of she and vice versa which can cause a lot of friction
- Telling family and friends
- Being judged as bad parents
- Hearing negative comments about child
- Wondering if its mental illness
- What if the transperson wants children?
- Will they ever have a partner?
- Who will their partner be?
- Fear of bullying

### **Surgery**

Surgery is an option after much counselling and consideration by the experts and individual once the person is over the age of eighteen. It is also for the individual to decide on how much surgery they want or need, to be how they see themselves.

Again, as a caring parent its important that we are as supportive as possible. It also shows skeptics just how serious and important this need to change bodily appearance is. It is most certainly not a whim or decision made lightly, it's very expensive and painful for many.

Sex reassignment surgery is only changing the physical. We need to be aware that the brain, sexual orientation and psychologically the person will never change. The person will still have the same likes and dislikes and interests.

Being a trans\* person is not an easy option. Living life as a trans\* person is neither cheap nor easy. It takes a great deal of inner strength to live the life honestly. Initially, there is the lengthy process of tests to rule out diseases, tumours plus more tests to eliminate any mental and/or physical problems.

To achieve this, they have to answer and endure the most personal and sometimes irrelevant questioning from psychiatrists for at least a year. Plus they need to see psychologists for further assessment and lead there life as a trans\* person for 2 years to show that this what they truly want.

They need to take hormones for the rest of their lives. For many trans\* people they realise from an early age that they are different, which can be most confusing. For those who do feel comfortable with their inner and outer self matching, very few of us would have any comprehension of how a trans\* person feels.

Then when they understand why they feel different, imagine having to come to terms with what is entailed to make them feel complete. As parents and society generally, we need to understand to be trans\* is not a choice, fad or phase.

Plus, as mentioned earlier it is not a mental illness. However,many do suffer differing forms of mental illness and depression due to the fact of how they are perceived by family and society as a whole.

If we were more supportive and understanding as a whole there would be less suicide in the trans\* community. But sadly people fear what they don't understand and don't like difference which is not helpful to a person in the process of transition.



## **Conclusion**

As parents its most important to let our child, regardless of age that we love and support them through their process of either "coming out" or transitioning.

Let them know that together we can come out on the other side as a stronger family unit. But you need to help each other and communicate honestly, without judgement and fear.

We know that to achieve this it wont all be plain sailing and sometimes it may feel like one step forward and two steps back. You will make mistakes and so will they but as parents we cant give up. Our love should be unconditional and if we the parents find supporting our child difficult imagine how they feel having to live the life.

PFLAG can help by providing support and referrals to assist with additional referrals to help you to help your child.

## **Places to seek support**

### **Queensland**

Transgender Support 07 3843 5024

Qld Assoc. Healthy Communities 07 30171777

PFLAG – 0400 767 832

### **New South Wales**

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

### **Tasmania**

AIDSCouncil 03 6224 1242

### **Western Australia**

AIDS Council 08 9482 0000

### **Northern Territory**

AIDS Council 08 8944 7777

## **Websites**

[www.ftmaustralia.org](http://www.ftmaustralia.org)

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

[www.atsaq.com](http://www.atsaq.com)

[www.headspace.org.au/parents-and-carers](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

"The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals" [Paperback] by Stephanie A. Brill (Author), Rachel Pepper (Author)

## **Need further information or additional resources?**

*PFLAG Brisbane has a wealth of information & resources available for free on our website at [www.pflagbrisbane.org.au](http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au)*

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