

Below is a parent's story with a child of 16 who is in the process of transitioning from female to male (MTF). The family are members of the support group PFLAG have for parents with trans and intersex children. We hope that you gain some benefit from reading about the family's experience. Every family has a different story and all are important.

Shelley Argent
President PFLAG

Our child identified as trans* at an early age – but we failed to recognise the signs.

When our young child asked if it was possible to change sex, we dismissed this question as not possible. It is fair to say that we sought help from many health practitioners for dyspraxia, dysphasia and general challenges around behaviour. Everyone said there was nothing wrong (and in hindsight treated us as though we were a little paranoid).

We didn't know anything about transgender issues, and we didn't even consider that this could be a serious request. It wasn't denial that led us to rule it out, it was ignorance. Our child was angry and frustrated a lot of the time.

Our child did not fit in with peers of the perceived gender and we felt that our child had social issues and therefore was socially isolated at quite an early age. We later found out that our child was bullied but never shared this with us. We were quite pleased when we got a diagnosis of Asperger's during the early teen years when the challenges with social interaction had become quite difficult to observe.

A diagnosis helped explain a lot, but since then we have come to the belief that Asperger's behaviour can be an early symptom of other more complex problems with transgender issues. Since transitioning most signs of Asperger's have disappeared. Levels of anger and frustration are much more in line with typical teenage behaviour. Looking back, we did everything we could do at the time with the knowledge we had – but if we could have had access to information and professionals with the right expertise then we could have approached our journey in a different, informed manner.

This would have made a crucial difference when seeking out puberty blockers for instance instead of our child having to endure going through the trauma of puberty. I think that there is so much more information available now, compared to when our child was an infant. My advice to anyone who is approached by a child however young asking to be a different sex is to take them seriously.

Understand that they may have challenges around communicating problems to you or not be able to articulate what the problems are. Observe them, and most importantly get help from knowledgeable professionals. This will give you a head start in helping your child to transition and hopefully help cushion the journey.