



SO, YOUR KID IS TRANS: PARENTS GUIDE

Chase Norris, M.S.Ed., LCPC, NCC

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SO, YOUR KID IS TRANS:

PARENTS GUIDE

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Clock, Inc is dedicated to creating a safe and supportive community center, offering vital resources, mental health programs, empowerment, and advocacy for the LGBT+ community to thrive without fear of discrimination.

In fulfilling this mission, Clock, Inc offers a variety of programs, groups, workshops, and activities both within its walls and in the community. Examples of undertakings done by Clock, Inc in house include multi-age and gender therapy groups, regular youth drop-ins that offer a safe space for LGBT+ youth to socialize with their peers, family friendly free and fundraising events. Through this work, Clock, Inc LGBT+ Community Center has promoted the education of youth, young adults, adults, and the wider community on issues involving the LGBT+ community both locally and nationally

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In 2014, I graduated from college and moved back to my hometown. Shortly after graduating I built up the confidence to tell a close friend of mine that I was transgender. I was tired of hiding my truth and I expressed "Chase" to my friends and family. During this time I began seeing a counselor to help process coming out again to my friends and family, but was not putting in the work that I needed to fully address my past with depression. On October 23, 2014, I began medically transitioning with an endocrinologist in Chicago, Illinois.

As time went on, my LGBT+ youth group was becoming more populated. As graduation was getting closer and my time with these kids was coming to end, I could not fathom the idea of "abandoning" them. In one of our remaining groups I asked the kids, "If you could have any resource available to you, what would you want?"

In unison, they replied, "Somewhere for us to go."

Around my third month on testosterone, I found depression creeping back into my daily activities. I began to fall back into those unhealthy coping skills, which would introduce my second suicide attempt. After another failed attempt, I began putting in the work with counseling and started making changes that would allow me to find my purpose. My counselor pushed me to address issues I had never properly processed and challenged me to begin the healing process.

MY JOURNEY

My name is Chase Norris and I grew up in a small town just outside of Peoria, Illinois that has very little to no LGBT+ diversity. I knew since the age of six that something wasn't "quite right" about myself. At this time, I had no idea how to process the thought of being born in the wrong body, let alone explaining that to anyone else. In 2012, I enrolled at Eastern Illinois University, where I would leave my home and be on my own for the first time. I knew throughout my life that I liked girls, but because of the lack of diversity in my hometown, I kept my sexual orientation to myself. Shortly after starting college I would come out as a lesbian to a few close friends.

While I was fortunate to have supportive friends, many of my family members struggled with my "big announcement." Thanksgiving 2012 would feature a family meeting that lasted three hours. The consensus of my family was "You are going to hell." My close relationship with my family members became distant and soon became nonexistent. As time went on, depression quickly began to control my thoughts and soon took over my life. I was unaware how to process and find true acceptance within myself. I developed severe unhealthy coping skills, which would eventually result in my first suicide attempt.



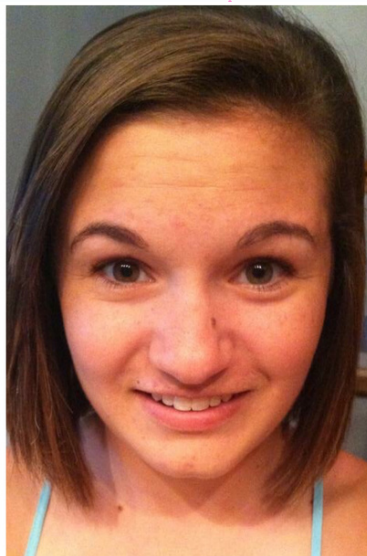
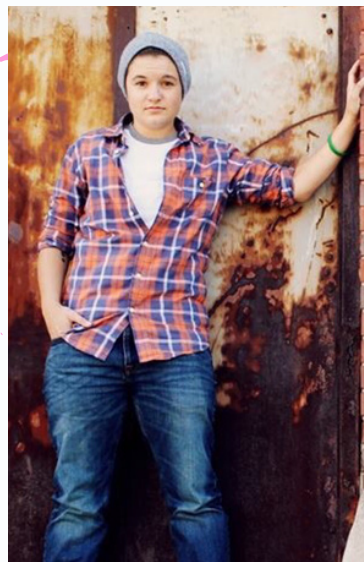
I was so impacted by my counselor that I knew that I wanted be that person for someone else. I had spent years surrounded by depression, suicidal ideation, and self-harming. I was unable to properly communicate what I was experiencing with my friends or family and those unhealthy coping skills lead to the destruction of my body and an my first suicide attempt. This experience was a driving force that made me realize that I wanted to help others just as my counselor had helped me.

In May 2015, I accepted a position at Western Illinois University in Moline, Illinois as a counselor education graduate student. I knew I could use my own experience to educate others, and I decided to make a documentary of my transition for my final independent study from the perspectives of my friends and family. As I began my internship as a future counselor, I started the very first LGBTQ+ youth group at my internship site in Rock Island, Illinois.

As graduation grew closer and my time with my group was coming to end, I could not fathom the idea of "abandoning" them. In one of our remaining groups I asked the kids, "If you could have any resource available to you, what would you want?" In unison, they replied, "Somewhere for us to go."

I began researching everything I could find on starting a nonprofit organization and at the next group meeting, I told the kids my plan and we spent the entire session talking about resources they would like to see offered at their center. To date, every idea, plan, event in my business plan was suggested by one of my group kids.

In December 2018, I graduated with my Masters in Counselor Education. After 111 days, I had opened Clock, Inc: LGBTQ+ Community Center in the Quad Cities. Just 23 days later, Clock, Inc became an official 501c3 nonprofit. I could never have made it this far in my journey without the love and support from my family and friends. Every day I am grateful that I have rebuilt the love with my family and I am so happy that our family has never been closer.



WORDS OF ADVICE FROM MY GRANDMOTHER

To all parents/family members/loved ones,

To be honest I didn't know anything about the transgender community. Sure, I had heard the term and celebrities that were in the news, but that was it. What I did know was I loved that girl. My granddaughter and I are best friends and we have always been close. But I could see that she was not happy. I was sad when she went away to college, which was the first time we did not live a mile apart. This was her time to go out and find herself and get away from our small-town criticism. I missed her so much. The day that my granddaughter told me she was gay I was not so much in shock because I had some of suspicions over the years. I have many friends who are gay, and they are wonderful people, so I had no issues with her identifying as gay.

Then two years later, she came home one day and told me she was a boy, transgender. While I was taken aback, I accepted and was behind him all the way. I realized that's why he was unhappy! For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. I understood that and my heart ached for how much pain my granddaughter was in living her life as a female. I began to think about all the things he went through that had caused him so much pain. All I wanted was for him to be happy. I wish you could have seen the smile on his handsome face when started testosterone and had his "top surgery."

Chase's story is unique, powerful and educational. He is living his truth and I am extremely proud of the man he has become. He has started Clock, Inc that is located in Rock Island, Illinois.



He has worked hard and has received several grants and donations to open Clock, Inc's doors (raised \$79,765 in 8 months). He has put so much sweat, tears, prayers and hard work into making Clock, Inc so successful and open to all LGBT+ individuals. If you have the chance, please visit the center and see for yourself.

My advice to parents and grandparents:

Please educate yourself. Read anything you can get your hands on. One book that I love and helped me tremendously is, "Becoming Nicole" by Amy Ellis Nutt. This book is about the transformation of an American family. It is a true story about infant male twins and tells the story of one of the twins coming out as transgender at a very young age. It explains their transformation and all of the pain that everybody in the family went through.

Go to seminars, workshops and trainings any chance you have. And the most important, talk to your child/loved one, ask questions, seek out counseling and EDUCATE yourself. You don't want to miss out on the incredible things that your child/loved one will do in their life!

My warmest regards,
Arlene "A proud grandmother"



TERMINOLOGY 101

Ally:

A person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBT+ people.

Assigned sex at birth:

The sex (male or female) assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child's external anatomy. Also referred to as birth sex, natal sex, biological sex, or sex.

Binding:

The process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts. This is achieved through use of "binder" designed to safely bind one's chest.

Bisexual:

A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender and people of other genders.

Cisgender:

A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth correspond (i.e., a person who is not transgender).

Coming out:

The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexual orientation or gender identity (to come out to oneself). Also the process by which one shares one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others (to come out to friends, etc.).

Gay:

A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender. It can be used regardless of gender identity, but is more commonly used to describe men.

Gender affirming surgery:

Surgeries used to modify one's body to be more congruent with one's gender identity. Also referred to as sex reassignment surgery (SRS) or gender confirming surgery (GCS).

Gender dysphoria:

Distress experienced by some individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their assigned sex at birth. Manifests itself as clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Gender expression:

The way a person acts, dresses, speaks, and behaves (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous). Gender expression does not necessarily correspond to assigned sex at birth or gender identity.

Gender identity:

A person's internal sense of being a man/male, woman/female, both, neither, or another gender.

Homophobia :

The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of lesbian or gay people or those who are perceived as such.

Intersex:

Group of rare conditions where the reproductive organs and genitals do not develop as expected. Some prefer to use the term disorders (or differences) of sex development.

Lesbian:

A sexual orientation that describes a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women.

Outing:

Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual orientation:

How a person characterizes their emotional and sexual attraction to others.

Trans man/transgender man/female-to-male:

A transgender person whose gender identity is male may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will just use the term man.

Trans woman/transgender woman/male-to-female (MTF):

A transgender person whose gender identity is female may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will just use the term woman.

Transgender:

Describes a person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth do not correspond. Also used as an umbrella term to include gender identities outside of male and female. Sometimes abbreviated as trans.

Transition:

For transgender people, this refers to the process of coming to recognize, accept, and express one's gender identity. Most often, this refers to the period when a person makes social, legal, and/or medical changes, such as changing their clothing, name, sex designation, and using medical interventions. Sometimes referred to as gender affirmation process.

Transphobia:

The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of transgender or gender non-conforming people or those who are perceived as such.

OUTDATED TERMS TO AVOID

Listed below are common terms. Some of these may be terms that you have heard over the years, but they may not be outdated and may be offensive because they could imply discrimination or disrespect. I have listed the proper terms to use to assist with properly educating yourself on the correct terminology.



OUTDATED TERMS	PROPER TERMS	WHY?
Transgendered/A transgender/ Tranny/Transsexual	Transgender	It's offensive to those who identify as transgender because when hearing "transgendered" it gives the impression that something has happened to someone, opposed to an identifies that someone is born with. Do you hear/say "gayed," or "lesbianed?" The term "tranny" is stigmatizing, and the appropriate term is "transgender."
Sex Change	Gender Affirmation Surgery	Referring to a "sex-change operation," or using terms such as "pre-operative" or "post-operative," inaccurately suggests that a person must have surgery in order to transition.
Transgenderism	Being Transgender	Refer to being transgender instead or refer to the transgender community. You can also refer to the movement for transgender equality and acceptance.
Hermaphrodite	Intersex	The word "hermaphrodite" is stigmatizing and there is movement to remove this term and replace with the term "Intersex." While there are individuals who identify as Intersex who proudly reclaim the identity "hermaphrodite," it is not the appropriate term for those who do not identify with this to use.
Sexual Preference	Sexual Orientation	The term "sexual preference" suggests that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured." Sexual orientation is the accurate description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, as well as straight men and women.

Hello
my pronouns are

he/him/his

PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words that we use when referring to others or the people who are currently talking. Gender pronouns specifically refer to people that you are talking about. Every day we frequently use pronouns without giving it much thought. These pronouns consist of:

She/her/hers - He/him/his - They/them/theirs

WHY ARE PRONOUNS IMPORTANT?

When we refer to our loved ones, we have trained our brain to call them by the same pronouns that we have been assigned at birth. Using someone's preferred/correct pronouns is a great way to show respect for their gender identity. Gender identity is very important to those in the transgender community. When you refer to someone by the wrong pronouns it is disrespectful to that individual and invalidates them. It is very important to NEVER assume you know someone's gender identity or their preferred pronouns. Referring or assuming someone's pronouns without asking for clarification first can send a harmful message.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT PRONOUNS TO USE?

If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, simply ask them.

- "What pronouns do you use?"

- "What pronouns should I use for you in this space?"*

- "My name is Chase, and my pronouns are he, him, his. What about you?"

It may feel weird to ask someone what their preferred pronouns, but asking for someone's pronouns can prevent them from experiencing emotional distress. It also shows them that you have respect for their identity.

TIPS

Here are some ways that you can incorporate gender pronouns in your everyday use:

- Edit your email signature to include your pronouns.
- Practice asking for individual's pronouns.
- Display your pronouns with a sticker on your work/school ID.
- Include or update your pronouns on your work/school directory.

A STARTING POINT

Before we explore these topics in depth, the most important thing I want you to remember at this moment is that you are not alone. All of your feelings, those burning questions, and your concerns are incredibly important and valid. Thousands of others have gone through or are going through a similar process and have experienced the same feelings that you're having now.

It is very important to remember that you and your child/loved one are not alone.

Let me start off by expressing that everyone's transition/journey is different. While they are unique themselves, so are their family, friends, peers, etc. There is no concrete path for someone who identifies as transgender to take. That being said, I can only express advice and opinions from my own personal experience.



"Accept - then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not against it. This will miraculously transform your whole life."

- Eckhart Tolle

GENDER IDENTITY, GENDER EXPRESSION AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

To begin, let's break down the difference between gender and sex.

"Sex" refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as the genitalia and genetic differences.

"Gender" is more difficult to define, but it can refer to the role of a male or female in society, known as a gender role, or an individual's concept of themselves, or gender identity.

When a child is born, the doctor uses the child's anatomy to determine their gender. However, hormones and chromosomes are also determining factors for individuals whose internal sense of being female or male matches their anatomy at birth is considered as "cisgender." To break this down a little bit more, if you were born a biological female and identify as a female, meaning your parts and identity match, you are a cisgender female. The same goes for cisgender males as well.

For others, their internal sense/gender identity does not always match their biological sex. Those individuals are transgender. For example, I was born a biological female, but I do not identify as a female. My gender is male, therefore I personally identify as transgender.

Everyone expresses themselves in different ways including gender identity. This expression often includes behavior, mannerisms, clothing, hairstyles and may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine. This is referred as gender expression.

It is very important to know that gender and sexual orientation are separate. As children get older, they begin to develop attraction for others. These attractions can be expressed as physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual feelings. This attraction describes someone's sexual orientation. To sum it up, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation are independent of each other. Each one is distinct, and we all have them!



HOW DO I KNOW MY CHILD/LOVED ONE IS TRANSGENDER?

No one can tell anyone how they feel or how they identify, only the individual knows themselves. There are two main indicators that your loved one is transgender. First, the discomfort that your child/loved one feels with certain aspects of their bodies is often due to their physical anatomy. Second, is their desire to be viewed/accepted by others as the gender they truly feel they are.

It's likely that your loved one has spent a long time struggling and thinking about identity, and if they've worked up the courage to tell you, they are probably sure! For myself, I knew at the age of 6 that something wasn't right, that my body did not match my gender. It was not until much later in my life that I was able to verbalize what I was experiencing. I still had several years to fully process and accept that I was female to male transgender.

It is very common that by the time your child/loved one comes out to their parents/families/loved ones, they feel impatient and want to physically transition as soon as possible. Those individuals have struggled internally and have been processing their identity for years and are not always aware that their parents/families/loved ones are just finding out and they need the time to process this news and find acceptance. For myself, I came out as transgender in July of 2014 and began my medical transition in October 2014. It took me some time to fully reflect on my transition to understand that while I had several years to process and dream about the person I was meant to be, my friends and family had only a few short months before I began my transition.

Your child/loved one may request some basic changes such as referring to them by different pronouns or changing their hair and clothing style. On the off chance it is a phase, all of these things are not permanent. This also includes taking hormones. If your child is going through a phase, supporting them during this process and respecting their identity is the most important part you can play. No harm is being done to your child/loved one while they are on their journey to discover themselves. Supporting their identity isn't harmful or detrimental to their development in any way. Rejecting them is and can trigger depression.



Some signs to be aware of can include low self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness, low energy, depressed mood and diminished interest or pleasure in activities.

MY CHILD/LOVED ONE IS TOO YOUNG

One's gender identity is inherent knowledge. This isn't a situation in which your child decides that they want to learn a new musical instrument one day and then changing their mind the next. For most individuals, identifying as transgender is a constant, disruptive reminder that their anatomy and gender are not syncing up. I hope that this knowledge will put your mind at ease about your child/loved one possibly going back-and-forth on their desire to transition, because they are "too young", or because you think that they are being rebellious or seeking attention.

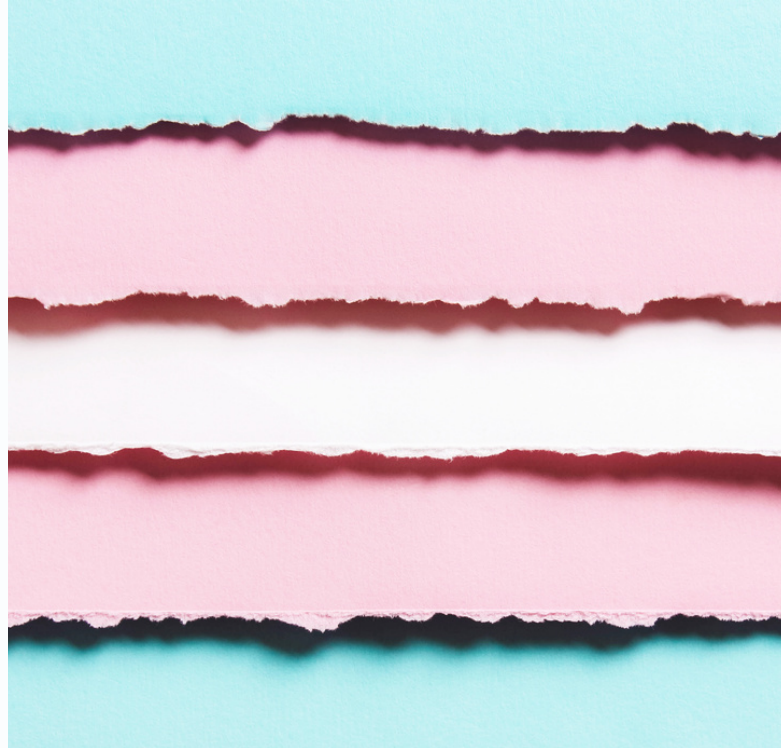
There is not a correct age where people comprehend their gender identity. Let me ask you, when did you know that you were a boy or a girl? This can occur at any age, whether that be as a child, during puberty, or as a teen or adult. Not every individual fully understands their gender identity or "shows signs" as a child. Please note that this doesn't make their identity or truth any less valid when they're older. Puberty is often a constant reminder that the feelings they are experiencing won't resolve themselves. During this time, your child/loved one may begin experiencing an array of emotions including depression, hopelessness, anger, disappointment, and fear, among others.

Let's try something. Imagine dressing up in a costume for Halloween! You are dressing up as your favorite TV or movie character. But here is the catch, at the end of the night you cannot take it off. You must wear this costume at all times for the rest of your life. This would make your life much more difficult and stressful pretending to be someone you're not. This is often how individuals who identify as transgender feel all the time.

By allowing and supporting your child/loved one to express themselves as their preferred gender it is likely they will become more at ease, more comfortable with themselves and overall happier with their lives. The internal distress and emotional disturbance that many transgender individuals feel about their bodies will start to resolve during their transition.

Allowing your child/loved one to transition, or simply express their true self at an early age will validate and allow them to begin living their life as they should. Some ways to show acceptance include referring to your child/loved one by their preferred name and pronouns, celebrate their strengths and refrain from passing judgement. If your child/loved one feels confident about their gender identity and how they express themselves they are able to focus more on their goals, instead of constantly thinking about their body/anatomy not matching.

When your child/loved one comes out as transgender it does not have to be a family dispute or crisis, it could be an illuminating, positive and even inspiring experience for both you and your child/loved one.



With your acceptance and support, your child/loved one can begin to build a solid foundation of confidence and self-worth. This is your opportunity to learn more about your child/loved one's gender and about our constantly changing world.

TIP

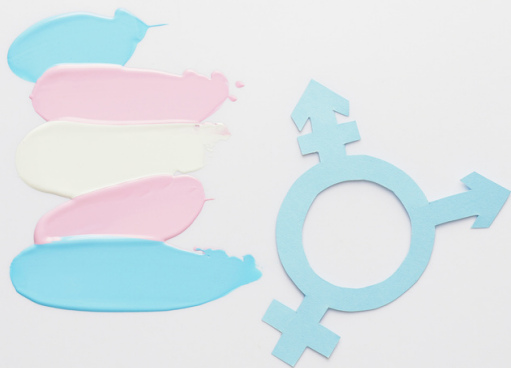
While it may be challenging, try not to make assumptions or decisions about who your child/loved one will become or how they will get there. This is their life and they get to decide.

THE COMING OUT PROCESS

As individuals accept/reconcile that they are transgender, they begin to think about sharing their identity with close friends and family. There is no set time frame in which they begin sharing this information with others. Some are more comfortable being open about their identity, while others may keep their identity to themselves for a long time.

Once an individual has accepted their identity, they begin to look for clues on how their friends, peers, parents and family will react to their gender identity. An example of this is asking others about current events surrounding the transgender community or about celebrities that are "out" about their transition publicly. This allows them to have an idea about how their family, friends, peers, etc. feels towards the transgender community. Examples of this may include talking about actress, Laverne Cox who stars in the Netflix series "Orange is The New Black." Laverne identifies and plays a transgender female. She uses her role to bring trans rights movement to the forefront.

With today's society and social media, more and more people are becoming educated about the LGBT+ community and becoming more open and accepting.



People are beginning to come out at earlier ages due to news, media, social media, etc. It is very common for individuals to come out to online transgender communities or peers who they perceive will be supportive and accepting before telling their family.

It takes courage and strength for someone to come out as transgender, especially for those who are unsure of how their families will respond. How one's family responds can completely rock a person's foundation and can have negative effects on their well-being and identity as a family member. Many may be unaware of how their coming out as transgender will be taken. Will their parents/families/loved ones be disappointed or angered? In some cases, some may fear being physically harmed or thrown out of their homes.

The coming out process is not always negative, it can be a liberating experience, especially for those individuals who are embraced by their parents/families/loved ones. When someone comes out as transgender, there is a chance that this is the first time they are saying their identity out loud. They may have spent years processing and thinking about their identity, but when they come out, they are physically saying/hearing those words for the first time.

INITIAL REACTION

When your child/loved one is born, most parents begin to set goals or dreams for their child. "They will grow up to be a good person, they will get an education, they will marry a man/woman and begin to start their own family..." The moment your child/loved one comes out to you as transgender, your vision for their life has just completely changed and this can seem like the death of those goals and dreams. It is important to remember that all of those goals and dreams are still possible, including finding someone to love/marry and having a family. Their journey just may not look exactly as you had initially expected.

When your child/loved one comes out to you, there may be several other worries/concerns that begin to consume your mind. One may be a fear of the harassment your child/loved one may face. While this may be a possibility it is important to know that if your child/loved one has support at home, this can help enhance their self-esteem and establish their confidence that will put them at ease. With a supportive household, this may help other students, parents, teachers, etc. at school to become more supportive and accepting.

There is a chance that you may be fearing the physical harm from others. Again, this may be a possibility, but consider the reality that your child/loved one who are unable to transition or express their preferred gender are at a much higher risk of depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation and substance abuse.

There is always the possibility you may not understand your child/loved one's identity. Gender is a spectrum and this can be confusing and may be a whole new concept for you. When your child/loved one comes out to you, it is not important that you understand everything right away. They have had years to process and accept their own identity and it is likely that you have only had a few minutes. What is important is that you listen, and trust that, with time, you will begin to understand how your child/loved one has come to know themselves and their truth.

It is important to know that amongst the many things that will begin to consume your mind, your initial thoughts and reactions will not last forever. One thing that will not help you or your family, spouse or child/loved one is to blame others. There have been cases where a parent begins to blame others for their child/loved one coming out as transgender. This can result in the individual becoming homeless. Your awareness of such possibilities can help prevent this from occurring.

If something like this does occur, let them know that there is support outside the family who may be able to assist with the initial shock of their child/loved one coming out as transgender.

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."



TIP

Try your best to alter your perspective and view it from your child/loved one's perspective. ALWAYS remember that ANYTHING is possible.

WHAT WILL OTHERS THINK?

After your initial reactions to your child/loved one coming out you may feel concerned about the reactions of your family and others you are connected with. It will benefit not only your child/loved one, but you as well when you process your own feelings and educate yourself before you discuss the identity of your child/loved one with others.

When you begin the conversation with others about your child/loved one's identity, it will be helpful to express that you had the same initial thoughts/reactions. However express to others that you are keeping an open mind and accepting your child/loved one. This can assist them as they begin to process their own thoughts and feelings as well. It is common that discomfort or negative thoughts about your child/loved one's transition may stem from society's views concerning the transgender community. You may be prompted to think that identifying as transgender is a form of an illness, or that transgender individuals are perverted. Properly educating yourself and focusing on the wellbeing of your child/loved one will allow you to be a positive, educated role model for those who have questions or concerns about the transgender community. What matters most is your child/loved one embracing their truth and finding acceptance within their support circle. As you watch your child/loved one begin to embrace their truth and find their path to happiness, you will begin to find your own happiness for them as well as yourself.

Many times, one willing parent/family member is accepting of their child/loved one, while the other parent/family member has no desire to change their negative views and just cannot accept their child/loved one's transition.

This is when it is very important to keep the lines of communication open and continue to do what you need to do in order to provide the acceptance that is best for your child/loved one. As time goes on, you will begin to see that your child/loved one is not the only one transitioning, but you are as well.

It is important to remember to love and accept your child/loved one as is. Anyone else's opinions are far less important than the emotional stability and overall wellness of your child/loved one.

Let's imagine that you told someone that your child/loved one wants to become a teacher. You say that your child/loved one wants to inspire the young minds of children and the person you just told responds in a negative manner, because they could not understand why someone would want to be a teacher. They point out that teachers make very little money, students may not do their work, and this job can be very draining. Would you allow this person's opinion or judgement to alter your love and acceptance for your child's passion? Career goals and gender identity are completely different, but odds are you wouldn't allow this person's opinion to change your views on their passion, would you? So why should their gender identity that is impacting their overall mental stability or their desire to continue living be any different?

FEELINGS OF LOSS

When your child/loved one comes out to you as transgender it is common to go through a grieving process. As you process you may begin to grieve for the loss of your former son or daughter. This is okay, to an extent. You have just been informed that all of your goals and dreams for your child/loved one will not be fulfilled in the way that you have always hoped. It is important that you take time to properly accept this loss. It is crucial that you be aware of yourself and engage in healthy coping skills and utilize your support system when going through the grieving process.

"Accept - then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as you had chosen it. Always with with it, not against it... This will miraculously transform your whole life."

- Eckhart Tolle

While grieving and getting used to change is fine, please do not focus too much on the loss of the dreams you had wished for your child/loved one, because while those dreams you had for them have died. Instead you have a child/loved one who is finally beginning to live their life and find their path to happiness and stability. Please do not lose sight that with love and acceptance you may be truly saving the actual life of your child/loved one.

Open communication is key, and it is okay to let your child know that you are experiencing feelings of loss or grief. However, remember do not make this experience about you or take away from the feelings or validation that your child/loved one is experiencing. This can help everyone understand that this may be a difficult adjustment period. After informing and expressing your thoughts and feelings please note that this is not your child/loved one's responsibility to help you process with this loss. There are several parents/families/loved ones who are experiencing similar situations are you and there are support groups for parents/families/loved ones that will be able to help you process the hard emotions and other concerns you may be experiencing.

You essentially have two options, you can believe that your world is ending because of your child/loved one coming out as transgender, or you can embrace the beginning of your child/loved one's true life. You may be shocked to discover that the life you and your child/loved one continues mostly the same and this change is not as "terrible" as you initially feared. Most of all, always remember that this is still your child/loved one, they are now just in different packaging. It's like if your favorite candy bar suddenly changed its wrapping to a brand-new look/style, it is still your favorite candy bar, but the outside may look a little different.



MOVING FORWARD

It is okay to not understand everything about the transgender community. If you have questions or want to understand something better, ask your child/loved one. It is likely that they have known that they were born into the wrong body for a while now and have waited to tell you for a numerous amount of reasons. There could be many factors as to why they have just told you about their true gender identity, but they may be sharing this with you now because they have been struggling internally and are finally ready to live their authentic self that has become too unbearable to hide.

While you are on this journey with your child/loved one, it is crucial to communicate with them and allow them to set the pace of their coming out publicly or their desire not to at this time. It is never okay to "out" anyone. While your child/loved one's transition affects you as well, it is not your story to share unless you have permission.

While society sends the message that seeking counseling or therapy is a sign of weakness, by engaging in counseling you will become more aware of your emotions and become more supportive of your own child/loved one. Speaking as a counselor, everyone should seek someone to talk to. It is a neutral 3rd party who passes no judgement or their opinions onto you. We assist you in finding where you are at in help you process everything you are feeling or experiencing in a positive and healthy manner. I mean who doesn't want to vent and freely express their thoughts in confidentiality? If you are processing and working towards being more confident with your child/loved one's transition you may enable them to enhance their own self-confidence and become more stable as they pursue their journey ahead.

AFFIRM YOUR CHILD/LOVED ONE'S IDENTITY

I can promise you that no one chooses to risk losing all of their friends/family, struggling to find the funds to replace all of their clothing to the opposing gender or the costs or risk of surgeries that will diminish their body dysphoria just because it's a "trendy" choice. NO ONE CHOOSES THIS.

As a parent/family member/loved one, your role is to educate yourself, accept, support and encourage your child/loved one to express their truth who they have always known themselves to be in this world.

Your child/loved one has already experienced the fear of rejection and how their lives may change after coming out. It's simple, listen to what they say that they need from you. Ask them what they want to be called. Ask them what pronouns they want you to use. Embrace how they want to look or express themselves. Encourage them to feel confident in their own skin by embracing how they want to look or express themselves. There are no rules.

I can tell you that it is never easy to ask others to stop addressing your child/loved by their previous pronouns (she/her/hers or he/him/his). While it is not easy to ask someone to refer to them as their new pronouns, it is not easy for others to change a very ingrained habit. I am going to let you all know now that it is going to be much easier to refer to your child/loved one by their chosen name than calling them by their correct pronouns.

While this portion of your child/loved one's transition is quite challenging, it is important to be aware of the potential damage that may be caused for your child/loved one by refusing to refer to them by their chosen name and pronouns (unless your child/loved one has chosen to keep their birth name). When you are faced with the decision to completely disregard your child/loved one's pronouns you are ultimately saying that you know them better than they know themselves. This lack of acceptance will likely further isolate your child/loved ones symptoms of depression.

Let's say you absolutely love French fries and someone else tells you, "no you don't. You love Brussel sprouts. Only I could know that, and you are wrong for thinking that you could love French fries."

This is absurd right? Because it doesn't make sense for someone else to tell you what types of food you love and don't love, so how could you possibly know someone else's gender better than they do?

The answer is, you can't and logically speaking, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Only that person can discover and express their gender because you are not living your child/loved one's life, and therefore, could not possibly know their identity better than they could. It is important to know that every time that you misgender your child/loved one, you are inflicting harm on them. It may not be physical harm, but the emotional damage that your child/loved one is enduring can be far more harmful than you may realize. The choice is yours, you can either hurt your child/loved or simply change the way that you are referring to them. If you choose to ignore what your child/loved one has expressed to you because it is difficult for you to make some changes, you are essentially making this experience about you and ignoring your child/loved ones needs. Again, remember it is not about you. It is about affirming your love and acceptance of your child/loved one.





Disregarding an individual's preferred pronouns says to your child/loved one, "I cannot accept you for who you truly are, because your true identity is a real inconvenience for me. I am not willing to change anything for your wellbeing. I'm willing to disregard the statistics of violence, suicide, homelessness, discrimination that are insanely high in the transgender community. It is a real inconvenience in this moment is that you are asking me to change the pronouns that I use when referring to you. Trust me, the internal struggle with coming out is difficult enough. Don't make it more challenging for me. The real tragedy here is that you are asking me to switch your pronouns."

Did you know that by using the incorrect name and pronouns of your child/loved one you are teaching everyone around you to do the same? Remember that inflicting harm we just talked about? That has now doubled or even tripled depending on the number of people present. I have personally witnessed that if everyone is putting in effort and are referring to your child/loved one by their preferred name and pronouns, others will do the same. Because no one wants to be that jerk in the room being the sole disrespectful individual that is deliberately choosing to disregard their child/loved one's identity.

Now I am not saying that slip ups will not occur, they most definitely will. It just takes effort and motivation to work on correcting themselves constantly and put in the effort to refer to your child/loved one by their preferred pronouns. This is why having open communication with your child/loved one and your family is important. For example, when I came out as transgender, my grandmother struggled with changing my pronouns from she/her to he/him. Because we had open communication, anytime that she would slip up and use the wrong pronoun, her boyfriend would politely and quietly tell her "he." This allowed my grandmother to be aware that she was using the wrong pronoun and to begin to correct herself. No one was rude about it and this proved to be very helpful for her to retrain her brain to use he/him pronouns moving forward.

It is proven that transgender individuals are forced to hide their true gender identity and/or if they experience a lack of support from friends/family/loved ones, they are at much higher risk for suicide. Statistics report that 41 percent of individuals identifying as transgender and gender non-conforming reported having attempted suicide at some time in their lives. Providing genuine love and acceptance for your child/loved one is the most important factor for enhancing their mental stability and overall well-being of your child/loved one.

It is really quite simple, you can either accept that your child/loved one will be making some serious changes with their transition and embrace them living their truth alive or don't. You can be apart of their life or be left out. If you don't accept them, there is that chance you may not have a child/loved one anymore. It is harsh, but this is always a possible outcome.

MY ADVICE

In this portion I am going to give some advice that may be helpful for you as you begin to process your child/loved one's new gender identity or with their transition.

"Sometimes it's not the people who change, it's the mask that falls off."

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Education and information is the missing piece. The more you know the fearful you will be. The majority of people in today's world have access to internet, whether on their phone, home, or even at their local library. The internet offers a plethora of information that can be very helpful in learning more about the transgender community. I warn you, not everything you read online is true, so be mindful of the source that the information you are reading is credible. At the end of this packet I have also attached helpful and credible sources of resources that may be helpful for you.

SUPPORT

It is super important to find support on this journey! I have good news for you, there are so many ways to seek the support, trust me you need it at this time! This can be done through online support groups ,for parents/families/loved ones who are going through a similar time in their life, find a local support group. There are many counselors who specialize in transgender work, workshops, conferences, support groups and find a properly educated health care providers that offer valid information and local resources.

BE OPEN

When your child/loved one comes out to you it will be very helpful to you during this time is to keep an unbiased attitude. It is okay to ask questions, try to express them in a nonjudgmental way. Majority of individuals who identify as transgender are able to determine that who is asking the "inappropriate" questions to become more educated and who is asking them to be a jerk or poke fun at them. If you are asking your child/loved one questions in a judgmental way you can expect that they will respond or react in a defensive and potentially stubborn manner. This may close off open communication with your child/loved one and they may begin to interpret that you are rejecting them. This often leads to feelings of being unaccepted as their authentic self.

DON'T PANIC

Please, please, please do not panic! While this news may shock or surprise you, be aware that,

1. Your child/loved one feels comfortable enough to share something very personal that has been weighing on their heart and mind with you.
2. You still have your child/loved one who is capable of working towards living a happy and successful life.
3. Your child/loved one wants you with them on their journey with them.

This can all be achieved provided you are there as a parent/family member/loved one to help support and assist them through this journey.



ADVOCATE

It is always important to advocate for your child/loved one. There will be times when you are faced with an encounter with someone who is not supportive of the transgender community. It will be crucial to stand up and advocate for your child/loved one. Odds are that the individuals who are not supportive of the transgender community are simply not properly educated or have never met someone who identifies as transgender. This is your chance to provide them with proper education and also a time for you to talk up how well your child/loved one is doing and how you have seen such a positive difference in your child/loved one since they come out and transitioned.

I have been very lucky in having the support of my grandmother since day one. She is my biggest supporter and advocate. Personally, I think she just loves to brag and "one up" her friends with stories about my transition. Over the years she has experienced several encounters with individuals who were unsupportive of the transgender community and she now embraces those encounters with the opportunity to share my journey and the changes that she has seen in me. Our stories educate and normalize being transgender. The more you know the less fearful and normal it becomes.

"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending."

- Maria Robinson

LISTEN

While it is common to experience a lot of thoughts and feelings during this time and there may be the desire to make the situation about you and what you are personally experiencing, I challenge you to refrain and listen to your child/loved one. When you listen in a way that others want to talk to you it opens the door for open communication with your child/loved one and I promise you, they will tell you what they are feeling/experiencing and what they need from you and others. It's simple, just listen to them. And remember, just because you listen to them, doesn't mean you have to respond, provide feedback or give your opinion. You are able to just listen.

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Here are some appropriate questions that can be helpful to you to ask your child/loved one or others who identify as transgender.

What name/pronouns would you like me to use when I am addressing you?

Why: This lets the other person know that you are supportive and working towards being respectful of how they are identifying.

What can I do to better support or help you at this time?

Why: This shows that you are making the other person feel validated and focusing on what you can do to support them more during their journey.

If someone asks me about how you identify or express yourself, how would you like me to respond?

Why: This demonstrates to the individual that you respect their privacy and potentially their safety and making sure that you are not "outing" them.



Is there anything you would like me to know, or would like me to read to become more informed?

Why: This shows that you are making the effort to become more properly educated about the transgender community and that you are supporting them during their journey.

FINAL THOUGHTS

While it is common to experience a lot of thoughts and feelings during this time and there may be the desire to make the situation about you and what you are personally experiencing, but I challenge you to refrain and listen to your child/loved one. When you listen in a way that others want to talk to you it opens the door for open communication with your child/loved one and I promise you, they will tell you what they are feeling/experiencing and what they need from you and others. It's simple, just listen to them. And remember, just because you listen to them, doesn't mean you have to respond, provide feedback or give your opinion. You are able to just listen.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What causes someone to be transgender?

Unfortunately, there is not a clear-cut answer to this question. I can tell you that while this may be new information for you, transgender individuals have been existing all over the world and all throughout history.

"It's not about being a new person, but becoming the person you were already meant to be."



What is transitioning?

The term "transitioning" is the process of moving towards and affirming one's gender identity. This can be done by altering one's clothing or hairstyle expression or beginning the medical process. There is no "correct" way for one to transition. Everyone's journey is different and based on an individual's preferences. Some individuals who identify as transgender never begin hormone replacement therapy or go through gender reassignment surgery.

What is gender dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria is the medical diagnosis for someone who experiences distress due to not presenting or expressing themselves as their true gender identity. When not addressed, gender dysphoria can lead to serious emotional distress that can ultimately affect their health, mental stability and their everyday lives. This can include dressing and expressing themselves in a way that displays who one knows they truly are, using their preferred name and/or pronouns, and, for some, beginning the medical steps to physically change their body to match their true gender identity.

What medical treatments do some transgender people seek when transitioning?

Hormones: Let me express again, that not every individual who identifies as transgender begins the medical process of their transition. For those who do this process can include hormone replacement therapy and individuals identifying as male to female transgender can begin taking estrogen while individuals identifying as female to male transgender can begin taking testosterone.

Surgery: Some individuals may still experience body dysphoria and desire to undergo gender reassignment surgery. There are various surgeries that individuals can choose to undergo. The most common for individuals identifying as male to female transgender are breast implants or "top surgery" and vaginoplasty or "bottom surgery."

For individuals identifying as female to male transgender the most common surgeries are chest reconstruction surgery or "top surgery," which is a double mastectomy with male contouring and Phalloplasty or "bottom surgery."

"Embrace the unique way your child is blooming -- even if it's not in the garden you imagined."





RESOURCES

BOOKS

"Helping your transgender teen"
A guide for parents by Irwin Krieger

"The transgender teen"
By Stephanie Brill & Lisa Kenney

"Beyond Magenta"
By Susan Kuklin

"Transgender Warriors"
By Leslie Feinberg

"This is how it always is"
By Laurie Frankel

"Becoming Nicole"
By Amy Ellis Nutt

DOCUMENTARIES

"FTM Transition Documentary: Chasing Myself"
by Chase Norris, M.S.Ed., LPC, NCC
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3vMloC0-2g&t=3s>

"Gonads Series"
Radiolab NYC Studios Podcast

ONLINE SOURCES

<https://www.glaad.org/transgender/resources>

<https://pflag.org/search?keys=transgender&type=resource>

https://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/trans-gender-identity/

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/resources-for-people-with-transgender-family-members>

<http://www.lgbtcenters.org/Centers/findacenter.aspx>

<http://transparentusa.org/>

HOTLINES

The Trevor Project

866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)

Trans Lifeline

877-565-8860

Pride Institute

(800) 547-7433 Nation Suicide

Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-8255

SUPPORT GROUPS

Parents & Allies Support Group at Clock, Inc:

LGBT+ Community Center

4102 46th Ave Rock Island, IL 61201

For more information or ways to get involved, please
check out our website at www.clockinc.org