



# FAMILIES IN TRANSITION:

A Resource Guide for Families of Transgender Youth

2ND EDITION



## PRIDE & PREJUDICE, CTYS

**Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS)** is a community-based, accredited Children's Mental Health Centre that serves many of Toronto's most vulnerable youth. We believe in building the strength and resiliency of young people in ways that are engaging, respectful and empowering. Established in 1983, Pride & Prejudice was the first program to offer counselling and support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in Ontario. Pride & Prejudice offers counselling based programs for queer and trans youth age 13 to 24. Our core services provide individual, group and family counselling/ psychotherapy to LGBTQ youth and their families. CTYS is recognized as a leader in providing gender affirming clinical services for transgender youth.

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We have produced several research-based and community resources about LGBTQ youth, and we are pleased to present the second edition of *Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Families of Transgender Youth*.

The first edition of *Families in TRANSition* was written in 2007. Since that time, the trans community has evolved in many exciting ways: language has changed; human rights laws for trans people have been established; services for trans youth have increased; and, community based research has revealed new, important information about the central role that families play in building resilience in trans youth. At CTYS, we continue to offer individual and group counselling for trans youth, but our services have grown to provide parents support and information, and family counselling services. We have learned that the more supported trans youth feel by their families, the better they will do in all aspects of their lives. In this second edition, we reflect these changes, and offer more tools, resources and information for families to have the strongest possible relationship with their trans youth. In a world where there is still significant discrimination against trans people, providing a safe, loving, supportive home and a strong family bond is crucial. Our hope is that this guide will help families achieve this goal.



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And of course...all the trans youth and parents of trans youth who shared their struggles and triumphs.

This information is current at the time of publication. Understanding, expertise, and resources continue to change and evolve. Please refer to our resources page or check with your local doctor and/or therapist for the most up-to-date information.

## A PARENT'S STORY

**B**efore our child came out to us as trans, we knew that something was deeply troubling him, but our attempts to discover what it was were met with resistance.

When he finally said the words, “*Mom, there’s something I need to tell you...*” our lives changed forever...for the better.

It was not easy at first. We had to educate ourselves before telling others, and it was difficult to ask our son questions without invading his privacy. We did not know of any other parents walking our walk. My mantra in those early days, as it became apparent we would have to tell family and friends, became: “*This is not about me, this is not about me, this is not about me.*” Over time, the anxiety and fear I felt for our son has been replaced with an overwhelming sense of celebration as he hurtles towards a happy, fulfilling and authentic life.

While I know my son may face difficulties (housing and job discrimination, medical and legal hurdles, and so on), I know for a certainty that the confidence and happiness he has gained by being allowed and encouraged to be who he is, eclipse any hardships that might occur in the future.

He is an amazingly courageous person, and we, as his parents, are privileged and honoured that he trusted and respected us enough to invite us to share this odyssey of discovery. We are also profoundly grateful to his young friends who loved, accepted and encouraged him when our son thought we would not.

As we tell anyone who will listen, our son is the same gift to the world he has always been, just wrapped up in a different ribbon.

— *Proud mom of a trans man*




# WELCOME

## **If you have this guide in hand,**

someone you love may have just come out as transgender or is questioning their gender. This is big news. You are likely feeling some of the common feelings parents and families initially report: shock, disbelief, fear, grief, anger, or shame. You might feel like your world has been turned upside down. You might feel very alone. Or, you may have already suspected this, and you could be feeling relieved, hopeful and proud. A range of feelings and thoughts is normal. Regardless, you probably have a lot of questions, and that's why we wrote this guide.

In the following pages, we share experiences of other families, answer commonly asked questions, suggest lines of communication, offer ways in which you can help your loved one, and point you towards additional sources of information.



## A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

**Throughout this guide,** we will be using the pronoun ‘they’ instead of ‘he’ and/or ‘she’ when referring to individuals. The singular use of ‘they’ has been accepted in English usage for at least 600 years as a ‘gender neutral’ pronoun. We continue this here as a practice of not assuming someone’s gender as well as being inclusive of people whose gender identity does not fit neatly into a male or female category.



# GETTING STARTED: WHAT TO LEARN

## First steps towards understanding

### 1. You are not alone.

Researchers estimate that 1 to 3 people in 1000 identify with a different gender than the one assigned at birth. There are plenty of other parents and youth going through this journey – seek them out!

### 2. Parents don't 'make' their child trans.

Try not to waste time and energy feeling guilty. Instead, be proud that your child is brave and honest enough to embark on this scary, yet necessary, process; be happy they trust you enough to tell you about it. While nothing you did as a parent 'made' your child trans, how you respond will have a long-lasting impact on the quality of their life and your relationship moving forward.

### 3. Your support can make the biggest difference.

According to numerous studies, strong parental support is the most significant factor in improving mental and physical health in trans youth and in reducing depression, low self esteem and suicidality. That means that your love and acceptance is crucial; without it, your child may be at greater risk.

Reassure your loved one (and yourself) that you will eventually find your way to loving and accepting them with all your heart. Finding a way to say, honestly, *"This is a lot for me to take in, but I know we can get through this together. I love you no matter what"* might be enough to start.

### 4. Ask questions...and listen.

When you hear the word 'transgender,' a certain image may come to your mind, but instead of assuming your young person fits this image, ask questions about how they identify, and what they want and need to be themselves. They may be still deciding and sorting things out, but they will have ideas about what makes them comfortable, how they want to look, and what they want to be called. So ask questions, and listen to what they say.



## 5. There are many different paths.

Many of us grew up learning that gender came in only two forms: male and female. This is simply not true. Be careful not to make assumptions or decisions about who your loved one will become, or what steps they'll take to get there. There are no 'rules' – every youth is different, and every path is unique.

## 6. Allow your youth to set the pace.

Your loved one likely waited a long time before telling you about this, and may have done so now because it has become too difficult to hide who they truly are. There is never a 'perfect' time for someone to come out publicly. So, as much as possible, let them set the pace.

## 7. Try not to let fear get in the way.

You may fear 'losing' your son or daughter, fear that your hopes for them are no longer a possibility. Trans youth are often afraid too – of rejection and of how their lives might change. All dreams are still possible – finishing school, getting a good job, finding someone to love, and having a family. Some extra planning or precautions may be necessary, but anything is possible...especially with strong family acceptance.

Any statistic about the size of the trans population is, at best, a rough estimate as most surveys and censuses don't ask about gender other than 'Male' or 'Female.' Even if they did, many trans people might be afraid to reveal their trans identity; as well, there is disagreement as to what would even be included in the term 'trans.' In 2011, The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law examined results conducted from 11 other U.S. and international surveys; from this, they concluded that 0.3% of people in the United States identified as transgender. This would mean there are 700,000 (or 3 in 1000) people in America who identify as trans.

## 8. This may challenge your beliefs and values.

Truly accepting your young person's gender identity may challenge everything you learned about gender from your family, school, society, culture and religion. But remember, trans people are found in every culture and religion worldwide, and have been throughout history. One father who initially struggled to accept his child's gender identity based on his cultural and religious values finally came to this conclusion: *"At the core of all my beliefs is love, and I choose to love my child unconditionally."*

## 9. Trust that this will lead to a happier and healthier life.

You may not notice it right away, but as time passes, you will see your loved one become happier, more comfortable, and more at ease. Life is difficult and stressful for trans youth. While it may be frightening to hear statistics about the high level of trans youth who self harm, commit suicide, and live with depression, trust that the more your family member lives openly as themselves with your love, encouragement and acceptance, the more they will thrive.

According to recent research, suicide rates for trans youth drop 93% with strong parental support.

Travers, R., Bauer, G., Pyne, J., Bradley, K., Gale, L., Papadimitriou, M. (2012). *Impacts of strong parental support for trans youth: A report prepared for Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Delisle Youth Services*. Trans PULSE.

## 10. Take care of yourself.

This journey may be confusing and disorienting for you. You may be afraid for your youth's safety, and worry about bullying and discrimination. You may be angry and confused and upset. You may feel guilty and disappointed. You may fear that you have lost your son or daughter. These feelings are common. Be patient with yourself as you move through them. Trust that how you feel today will not be how you will feel in the future.

Try not to overwhelm your youth with negative feelings as this may damage your relationship. Whenever you can, find other adults to share any hurt, fear, or disappointment with, especially those who may be going through similar experiences.

## 11. You'll find helpful information and support.

In addition to this guide, there are many wonderful people and sources of information that can support you and your family as you come to understand more about this issue. Hundreds of websites are dedicated to assisting trans youth and adults, and most major cities have groups that meet regularly.

It might seem a bit unrealistic now, but down the road, you may even appreciate this experience. You may learn more about your youth, about gender, and about the world. You may meet other families struggling with these same issues, celebrating milestones, and may create deep bonds with them. Few things bring us as close as being 'outsiders' together. Some of what you learn may frighten or sadden you – but some will be illuminating and perhaps, even inspiring.



**Feeling overwhelmed?** We understand! Don't push yourself to continue reading if you don't feel ready. There's nothing 'special' you need to do right now. Remember, by reading on at your own pace, you'll get more out of it.

# 'Transgender 101'

You may have never met another trans person before now. In fact, your only prior knowledge may have come from the media – portrayals of trans people based on stereotypes often rooted in fear and ignorance. Try not to react based on this limited (and often incorrect) information; instead, educate yourself about trans issues as that may alleviate some of your fears. Also, taking time to gain knowledge will actively demonstrate your support, take the pressure off your loved one to be your sole source of information, and ultimately, may lead to more productive conversations, and a richer relationship.

## So, what does it mean to be 'trans?'

Often, when a baby is born, a doctor examines them and declares, "it's a boy" or "it's a girl"; that baby, typically, is expected to accept the label assigned by the doctor and encouraged to dress, speak and act in ways that are recognized, in their culture, as 'male' or 'female.' That baby is usually expected to grow up to be sexually attracted to members of the 'opposite' sex.

However, what the doctor actually looked at initially, was the baby's 'sex' and not their 'gender.' In order to really understand what 'transgender' is, you need to know that **sex**, **gender identity**, **gender expression** and **sexual orientation** refer to different concepts:

**SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE (page 10) FOR AN ILLUSTRATION AND DEFINITIONS OF THE TERMS MENTIONED ABOVE.**

*What's in a name? Should a mom feel differently about a child whose name does not remain the same as the name given at birth? I did feel differently, at least in the beginning. At 20, my 'daughter' changed names...and genders. I experienced denial, panic, fear, admittance, guilt, and finally, acceptance and support.*

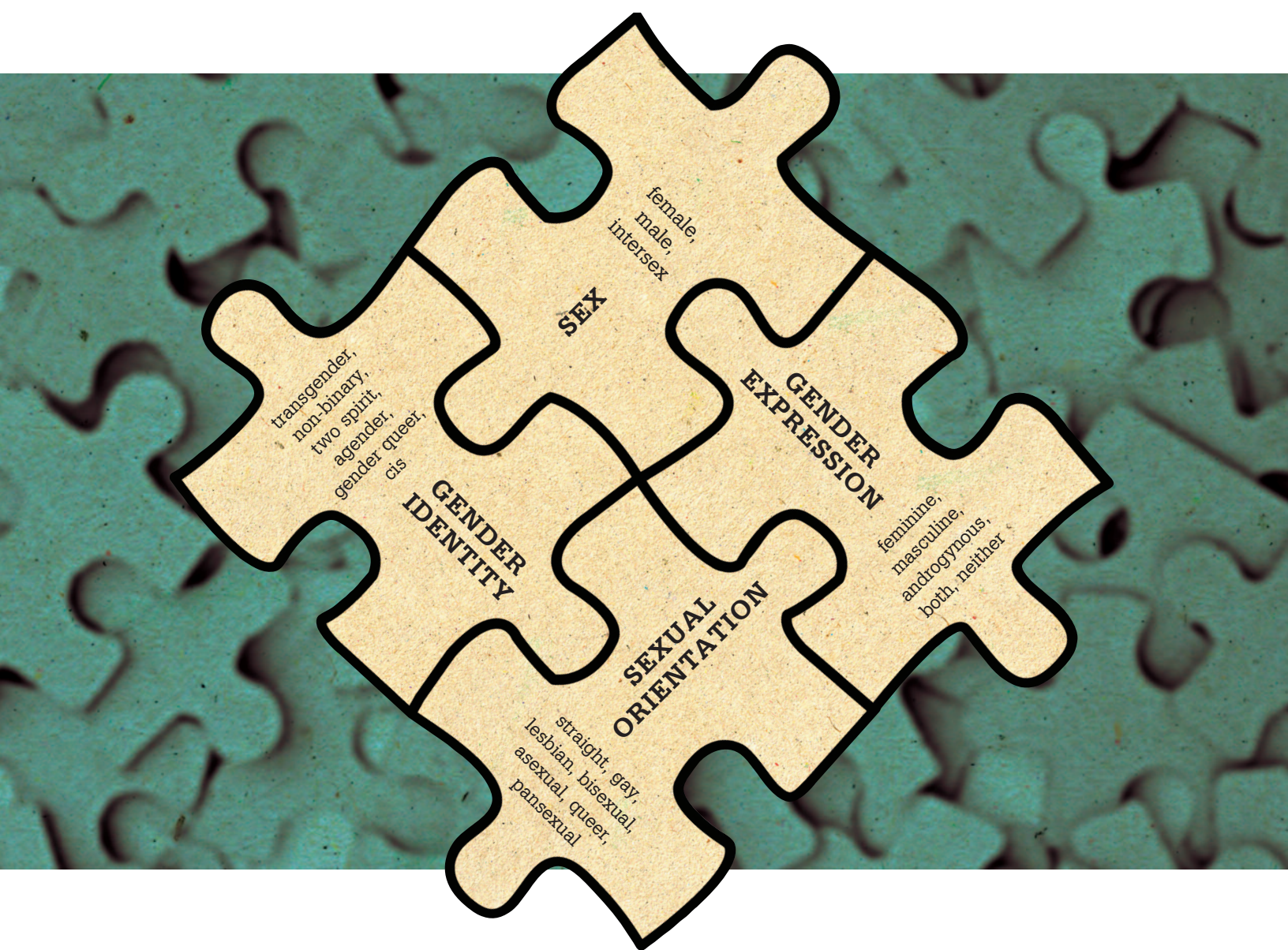
*From A Mother's Story by J. Wilson*

### Myth #1

#### Being trans and being gay are the same thing:

Actually, these are two very different things. Being trans is about gender identity and not sexual orientation; in fact, for many, the umbrella term 'transgender' or 'trans' replaces the term 'transsexual' to reflect just that.

Gender identity is about the inner feeling that you are a man, a woman, somewhere on a 'continuum' between masculine and feminine, or perhaps a completely new gender. Sexual orientation refers to who you are attracted to. Heterosexual, gay, lesbian, queer and bisexual are some of the common words used to describe different sexual orientations.



**Sex:** is a medical term generally referring to a biological or physical combination of hormones, chromosomes, gonads, external gender organs, and secondary sex characteristics. Common terms are male, female and intersex.

**Gender Identity:** is an individual's internal sense of being a man or a woman or something else. Gender identity is often thought of as how a person 'feels' about their gender, and is not necessarily visible to others. Terms like man, woman, or transgender are a few common terms used.

**Gender Expression:** refers to how someone chooses to externally represent or express their gender identity to others, often through behaviour, clothing, hairstyle, voice or body characteristics. Terms like femininity or masculinity or androgynous are often used.

**Sexual Orientation:** is about who a person is attracted to sexually. A person could be attracted to members of the same gender and/or a different gender. Terms like lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, queer, pansexual or asexual are some terms used to refer to sexual orientation.

So...many assume that a person born with sex characteristics that are assigned female will have a gender identity of woman, a gender expression of feminine and will be attracted to men. However, we can no longer make that assumption. People, both trans and 'cisgender' (non-trans) people, express vastly different and unique combinations of sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

To put it simply, a transgender person is someone whose 'gender identity' and/or 'gender expression' doesn't match society's expectations of the 'sex' they were assigned at birth.

## Language, language, language...

*“Help! I recently referred to my youth as an ‘MTF,’ meaning ‘male to female’ – I thought that was the right term – even our doctor uses that expression – but my youth told me I was out of touch! I am doing my best, but how do I keep up with all the changes to language and terminology?”*

It can certainly be challenging to try to affirm your trans youth, and to be told you are *‘getting it wrong!’* Language is ever changing; just do a quick internet search, and you will discover countless words and concepts to describe different gender identities and expressions. Some terms, especially ones that imply that being trans is a mental illness (such as Gender Identity Disorder) or that compare transitioning to switching from one side of the gender spectrum to another (for example: FTM – Female **to** Male; MTF – Male **to** female; Sex change) are falling out of usage as trans people more and more reclaim their experience as **affirming** the gender they already knew they were, rather than **changing** genders.

Transgender or ‘trans’ (the term we are using throughout this guide) is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Like any umbrella term, ‘trans’ encompasses a wide diversity of experiences. For example, many trans people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to change their bodies. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all trans people can, want to, or will, take those steps, and a trans identity is not dependent upon medical procedures, despite what popular culture would have us believe. Likewise, people under the trans umbrella may describe themselves using one or more terms.

In the end, ask your young person what term, name and pronoun they prefer...and know that this might change as they continue to explore their gender identity and expression.

Intersex people are individuals born with some combination of male and female physical sex characteristics (could include ambiguous genitalia, underdeveloped gonads, chromosomes, or hormones) and are not easily classified as male or female. Scholars estimate that up to 1.7% of people are born intersex. Although it is often mistakenly thought that intersex people and transgender people are the same, intersex is actually about someone’s sex and not their gender identity. For this reason, the experiences of intersex individuals lie outside the focus of this guide. For information and resources specific to this community, visit the Intersex Society of North America website at [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org).

### **Myth #2:**

#### **You can’t be trans AND gay:**

Actually, you can. Once again, being trans is about one’s gender identity and has nothing to do with one’s sexual orientation. Trans people are as varied as ‘cisgender’ (non trans) people in their sexual orientations, and likewise, all trans people will have a sexual orientation based on the gender of people they are attracted to.

## BELOW IS A CHART

of a few **COMMON TERMS** someone might use to refer to **THEMSELF** or **ANOTHER PERSON**:

### **Transsexual:**

A term that originated in the medical and psychological communities to describe people who have or will permanently change their bodies through medical interventions (including, but not limited to, hormones and/or surgeries). Unlike transgender or trans, transsexual is not an umbrella term, and is not frequently used anymore.

### **Non Binary:**

A person who does not feel comfortable in a social system that recognizes only two categories – male or female; people using this term may, for example, identify as having no gender, or are in-between genders, or have a gender that fluctuates, or are a new 'third' gender.

### **Crossdresser:**

Someone who occasionally dresses in the clothing of the 'opposite' gender as part of their gender expression.

### **Drag King/Drag Queen:**

Someone who dresses up as the 'opposite' gender for performance.

### **Gender Independent:**

A person who doesn't follow conventional societal expectations of 'male and female' or 'masculinity and femininity.'

### **Genderqueer or Gender Variant:**

A person who identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female.

### **Gender Fluid:**

Someone whose gender identity and presentation are not fixed, and vary with time and/or situation.

### **Two Spirit:**

A translation of words used in different Aboriginal cultures to refer to a person having both a male and female spirit. It can include Anglo/North American ideas of both sexual orientation and gender identity (i.e. both a gay cisgender man and a trans-man could claim the identity of two-spirit). It also includes significant spiritual and cultural layers.

### **Agender:**

An individual who identifies as having no gender identity; some people define this more as having a gender identity that is neutral.

### **Cisgender/Cissexual:**

A person who is not transgender, and whose gender identity and gender expression are in harmony with what their culture expects from a person with their sex assigned at birth. The short form of this term is 'cis.'

Here are some  
**OTHER KEY TERMS and EXPRESSIONS** you may encounter:

**Gender Binary:**

The classification of gender into two (and only two) distinct groups: masculinity and femininity.

**Gender Dysphoria:**

A formal diagnosis used by psychiatrists, psychologists and physicians to describe the distress that transgender people may feel towards an assigned sex that does not align with their gender identity.

**Gender Euphoria:**

Many transgender people, rejecting the medical model of gender dysphoria, speak instead of gender euphoria: a feeling of joy or elation that comes from honouring gender identity and bringing gender expression more in line with their true feelings.

**Transition:**

When a trans person begins living as the gender with which they identify: social transition could include changing one's name and pronoun, and/or dressing and grooming differently; legal transition could include changing the gender markers on identification documents (e.g. driver's license, Social Security number); medical transition could include taking hormones or having various surgeries.

**Gender Affirmative Surgery:**

**Note: 'Sex change surgery' and 'Sex reassignment surgery' are considered derogatory terms by many and have fallen out of usage.**

Surgical procedures that change (affirm) someone's body to better reflect their gender identity. Contrary to popular belief, there is not 'one' surgery; in fact, there are many different surgeries including those sometimes referred to as 'top surgery' (breast augmentation or removal) or 'bottom surgery' (altering genitals). These surgeries are necessary for some people; however, not all people want, need, or can access surgery as part of their transition.

**Stealth ('going stealth' or 'being stealth'):**

A trans person living in their affirmed gender, but choosing not to reveal that they are trans to friends, classmates and colleagues.

**Transphobia:**

Fear or hatred of transgender people; transphobia is manifested in a number of ways including violence, harassment and discrimination.

**Cissexism, Cissexual Assumption or Cisnormativity:**

The assumption that people conform to a gender binary (male or female only), and the privileging of this; can often result in excluding, undermining and/or deleting non-normative gendered identities and is considered a form of transphobia.

**Transmisogyny:**

A term that comes from combining transphobia (the fear or hatred of trans people) and misogyny (the fear and hatred of women and femininity). It refers to the unique discrimination faced by trans women and trans-feminine people because of the assumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to maleness and masculinity. It also speaks to the way that transphobia intensifies the misogyny faced by trans women and trans-feminine people.

# Questions you may have

## What causes people to be transgender?

The short answer is...nobody knows. For many years, researchers have looked at multiple biological, psychological, and social causes, and none provide consistent or convincing explanations. The best scientific answer at the moment is that gender identity development is multi-determined, meaning there are many factors involved.

## Is it my fault? Did I do something wrong in my pregnancy? Is it because I let him play with dolls, or I let her be a tomboy?

No. It's not your fault; there is no evidence that suggests that parenting contributes to people being transgender. More importantly, asking that kind of question implies that, deep down, you think there is something 'wrong' with your child. There is nothing wrong!

It bears repeating...there is nothing wrong. Whether you fully understand what being trans means, or whose fault it is, or why this is happening, ultimately does not matter. What matters most is that you understand that your trans youth will do better with your love and acceptance.

Trans youth who report strong parental support are 72% more likely to report overall life satisfaction than those who report they do not have this support.

Travers, R., Bauer, G., Pyne, J., Bradley, K., Gale, L., Papadimitriou, M. (2012). *Impacts of strong parental support for trans youth: A report prepared for Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Delisle Youth Services*. Trans PULSE.

## Will they grow out of this?

*"Do I even need to worry about this? Youth go through so many 'phases' at this time in their lives, so this is something they might grow out of, right?"*

While anything is possible, the chances that your loved one will 'grow out of this' are very small. Although gender identity can shift over a lifetime, for many, gender identity will be fixed after puberty. Psychological treatments are not successful in changing gender identity and are considered unethical and damaging by many professional bodies.

## Why didn't I know about this before now?

Many youth do not feel comfortable sharing their questions and concerns about their gender identity for fear that they may disappoint or hurt their parents and families, or may not be believed or supported. As well, your child lives in the same transphobic (and cissexist) society that you do; sifting through their feelings about their gender identity can take time.

## Is that why my youth spends so much time online?

Your loved one may have been grappling with their gender identity on their own for many years. Many youth turn to the internet as an important source of information, and this is often their first experience of feeling accepted by and connected to a gender-affirming community.



## Is life more difficult for trans people?

No.

Let's face it. Your youth's life has probably already been challenging in many ways: feeling different; getting teased and/or bullied; or, hiding their true identity. The process of social, legal and/or medical transition typically resolves a lot of this distress, and many trans people report feeling more comfortable, confident, and happy as they claim their true identity.

And yes...

...life may be more difficult: dealing with discriminatory attitudes in employment and housing; living with laws that do not adequately protect the human rights of trans people; and, encountering barriers to services – many of which are gender-based and lack clear policies, so that even using public washrooms can be an ordeal. Also, remember, transitioning isn't magic. It won't solve any pre-existing problems that are not gender-related, and in some ways, it may introduce new challenges. But, the good news is...

...the more support and advocacy trans youth have from the people who love them, the better. One of the ways families show support to their trans youth is by challenging transphobia and cissexism when and where they are able to.

## Can a trans person really be happy?

Yes – most trans youth go on to live happy, fulfilling lives, especially ones who are supported by parents and families. These youth tend to do well in school, find good jobs, have successful careers, and build meaningful relationships. They can even still have children if they choose to. Everything you hope for is still possible.

## It's not a big deal for me, so why should I focus on it?

Even if you feel 100% supportive, trans youth often have many challenging decisions ahead of them, and most navigate subtle and overt forms of discrimination every day. It is vital for you to treat this as a significant life event: ask questions, get involved, and show an interest in what your young person is navigating. This can help build a life-long bond.

### MYTH #3:

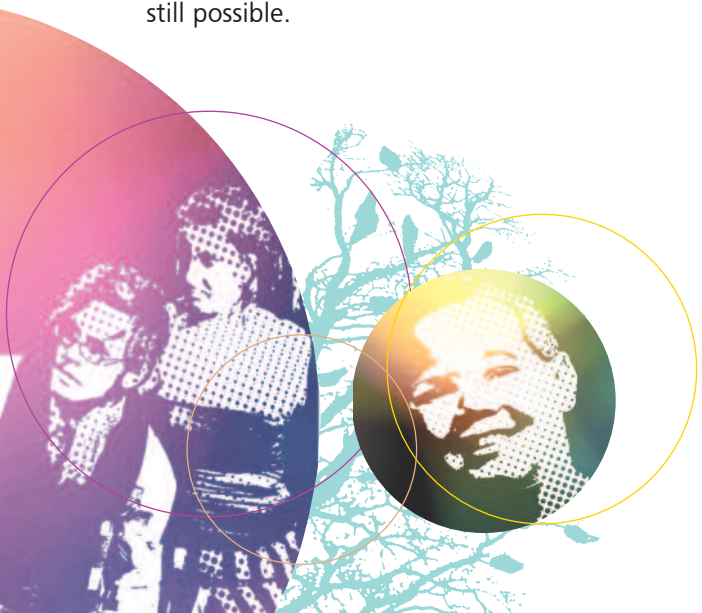
**All trans people know from babyhood that they are trans:**

Actually, everyone's journey is unique. Certainly, some trans people do report early signs of feeling 'different' from their peers and of preferring toys, clothing, friends, and activities typically associated with the opposite sex. But, not every child with this history grows up to be trans, and likewise, many trans people don't share this experience. Some trans people try hard to act 'normal' and meet conventional expectations for their assigned birth sex so as to not stand out. For other trans people, it is the onset of puberty, the point at which bodies begin to change, that puts things into a new perspective. Sometimes, for older youth, it is through dating and/or through grappling with sexual orientation that they gain a fuller picture of their gender identity. Still others find that learning about trans people for the first time and learning there are others 'like them' is a turning point in their self-understanding.

### MYTH #4:

**Being trans is a recent phenomenon:**

Actually, being trans is not a new, white, or western concept. While there may be more visibility of trans people in the media currently, trans people have existed throughout time and across all cultures. In fact, in a number of cultures, gender variant and trans people are honoured as having sacred powers or assume roles as spiritual leaders.





# TAKING CARE: WHAT YOU CAN DO

## Caring for yourself

***“How could I not see this coming?”***

***“Why is this happening?”***

***“Please, please let this just be a rebellious phase.”***

***“They aren’t old enough to know what they want.”***

***“How will I tell my friends? What kind of parent will they think I am?”***

***“I don’t believe it.”***

*I came home from work to find Jen watching Oprah. It was a show about transsexual people...I squirmed in my chair as they described their surgical ordeals. They had all suffered through so much, and not just physical pain. Each of their lives had been bruised by the effects of being ridiculed. They had lost jobs and been abandoned by colleagues, friends, family, even parents.*

*Jen decided this was the time, looked at me apprehensively, and quietly said, “Mom, I think that is what I am.” It came like a blow that knocked the wind out of me.*

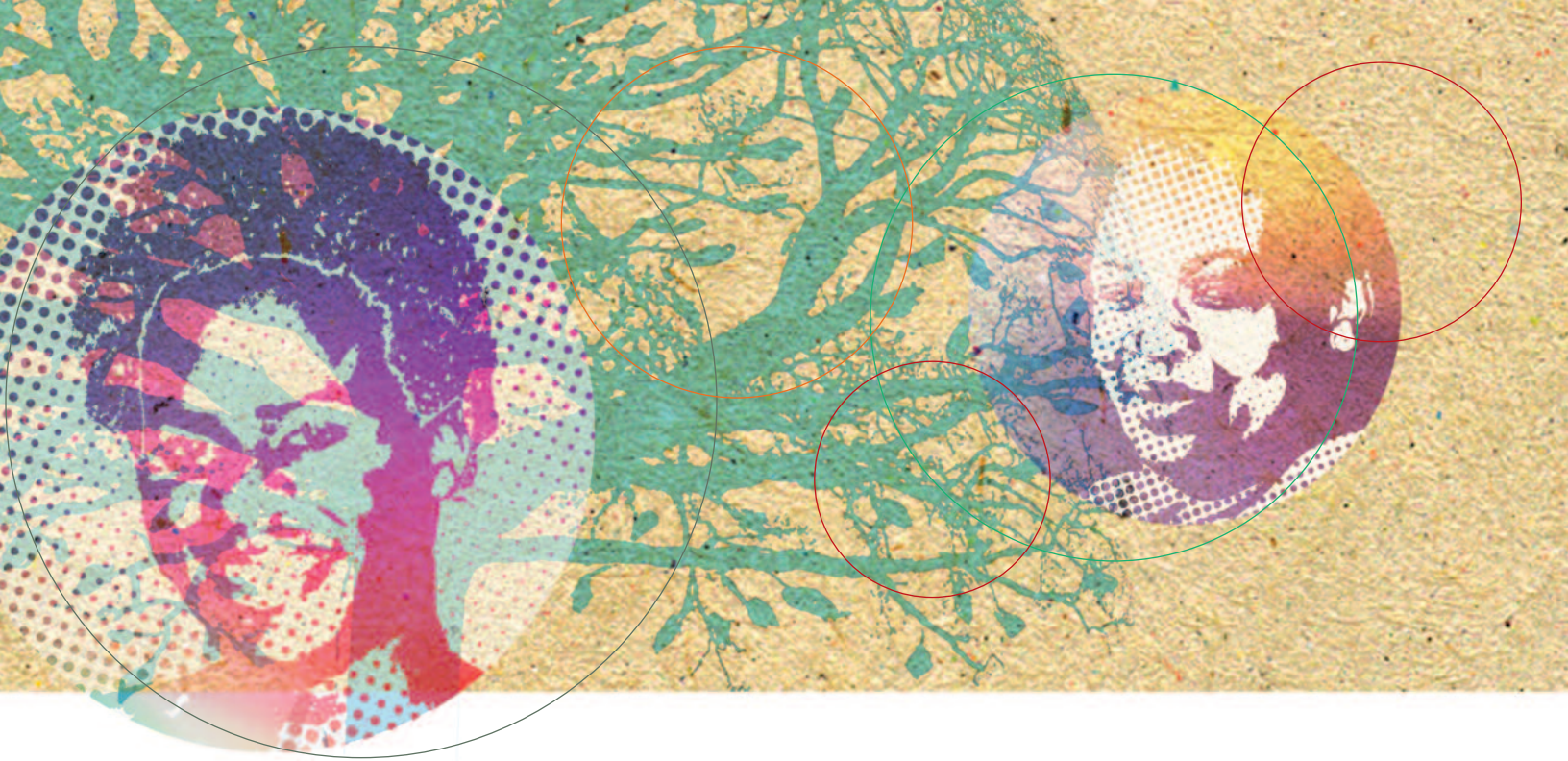
*From A Mother’s Story by J. Wilson*

While some of you already suspected, and may feel relief and even pride when your child tells you they are trans, for many, your feelings will be overwhelming and confusing: Shock. Fear. Shame. Blame. Guilt. Grief. Anger. Loss. Betrayal. Denial. Worry. All of these are common first reactions, and even make sense given society’s negative attitudes towards trans people.

It’s important to be honest with yourself and acknowledge what it is you’re feeling, even if you wish you didn’t have those feelings. To ignore feelings doesn’t make them go away, and will only delay the process of acceptance.

But...while it is important to be honest with yourself, think carefully about what reactions you share with your youth. Many people initially think, feel and say things they later realize aren’t true, or simply have shifted over time. But remember...you can’t un-ring a bell...and likewise, it is impossible to take hurtful words back.

At the beginning, it may be tempting to rely on your young person for support as you work out your feelings. That isn’t to say you shouldn’t have a place for your emotions – quite the opposite, in fact. Seek appropriate support from friends, other adult family members and professionals.



## “Okay, but how do I move forward? What helps?”

Being honest with yourself about your feelings is not the same as getting ‘stuck’ in those feelings – being ‘stuck’ is not productive. You love your child, and you owe it to them (and yourself) to move forward. The only way out of your feelings is through them, and that usually means hard work. Here are some ideas:

### 1. Get accurate information about trans people.

There is a lot of misinformation about trans people out there which can fuel any fears and anxieties you may already have. Reading and learning more about trans issues from accurate and trustworthy sources is an important start. Feel free to ask your loved one questions too, but always ask permission first, and try to do some of your own work ahead of time. It can be exhausting and burdensome for youth to educate their families.

#### **MYTH #5:**

##### **Trans youth can be cured:**

Actually, they can't. There is no therapy or drug that will make a trans youth stop being who they are. In the past, mental health professionals tried to ‘cure’ transgender people by making them cisgender; this is called ‘reparative therapy’ or ‘conversion therapy,’ and is illegal in Ontario and many other places. These therapies don't work, are very damaging and will cause great emotional distress for you and your youth. The only ‘cure’ worth investing in, is the cure for the distress that often comes with being trans: your affirmation for their gender identity; reassurance; love; respect; providing a safe home; advocating for your loved one; and, continuing to communicate openly and honestly.

## 2. Get some support for yourself.

You are not the only family with a trans youth – even though it may feel that way. You are not alone. Meeting up with other families to get support, or maybe to give support, can bring relief and be a great place to share information. There may be a parent support or education group in your community. As well, there are lots of online support groups, even some culturally specific ones. You may choose to seek a therapist knowledgeable about trans issues if you don't already have one. Looking for a skilled family therapist who has experience working with trans youth and their parents can also help your family move through this in a loving, healthy way.

## 3. Focus on self care.

Although this may feel like a crisis, it rarely is. Remember that your youth coming out to you is a positive first step in making their life happier and healthier. Self-care is crucial to manage the stress that you may be experiencing. Carve out time to **not** think or talk about your loved one's gender identity. Use self-care tools that you have already established, and try some new ones. Remember, you will not be feeling this way forever.

## 4. Unpack what you have learned about gender, and connect to your parenting values.

We are all taught many things about gender, both explicitly and implicitly, through media, families, culture and religion. Often, we never question it, but when a young person comes out as trans, our belief system about gender gets activated and maybe even challenged. Take time to figure out the messages that you were given about gender and what has been incorporated into your belief system. Recognizing that your beliefs are influencing your feelings can be the first step in moving towards a feeling of peace regarding your child's identity.

Take a moment to reflect on the parenting values you hold dear. Think back to the values you wanted to instill in your newborn as they grew up: *"Always be yourself."* *"Be truthful."* *"Act with integrity."* Reflect on how you might continue, in this time of stress and transition, to parent according to these values, and continue to support your child in embodying these values.

*Look for the hidden blessings. The bad stuff is going to be easy to see. It's going to be right in your face. But there are blessings there too. Amazing chances to love and be loved. To see your child blossom. To find out about your own issues and find freedom from the ugly places inside that you didn't even know were there. Look for those things.*

*– Parent of a trans youth*

Trans youth who report that their parents strongly support their gender identity and expression are 66% more likely to report excellent physical health, and 70% more likely to report excellent mental health, as opposed to those without this support.

Travers, R., Bauer, G., Pyne, J., Bradley, K., Gale, L., Papadimitriou, M. (2012). *Impacts of strong parental support for trans youth: A report prepared for Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Delisle Youth Services*. Trans PULSE.



## 5. Know that this is a process (and not a linear one).

Whatever you are thinking and feeling today will not be the same as what you are going to think and feel in the future. Families go through a journey heading towards acceptance, and this can take time. The more you learn, talk to other families, and see your young person becoming healthier and happier, the more peaceful you will become. This will be a journey of discovery for yourself, and it has great potential to bring you and your family closer.

## 6. Tend to your own relationship.

If you are in a relationship, your partner may react differently to this news. As in many parenting decisions, you and your partner may be in agreement with your thoughts and feelings about your trans youth, and maybe, you will not. Much like grief, everyone responds in their own way. As a result, this can cause conflict.

As well, you may be relying solely on your partner for support, which may put an additional strain on your relationship. You may need to set time aside to nurture your relationship, seek support for yourself with other adult friends, find support with other parents of trans youth and, possibly, seek counselling.

Any life stressor on the family unit, such as a new job, a move or a transition of this nature, may highlight underlying tensions or unresolved issues in your family. Try to protect your child from difficult relationship dynamics between you and your partner. If they feel that their gender identity is causing tension with your partner, this may only add to their stress and worry.

*I struggled with my new son's name change; he cringed every time I got it wrong. Even more challenging was that stupid little three-letter word: 'she.' Try changing to 'he' after 20 years with a daughter. It took practice, but everything worthwhile takes time. Now, five years later, thanks to hormone therapy and surgery, I have an amazing son complete with facial hair, flat chest and the letter M ticked off on his identification.*

*From A Mother's Story by J. Wilson*

*Disappointment, fear, embarrassment – those are your issues. Don't tell them to your child. Tell them only love, acceptance, and belief in their ability to get, have and be whatever they want. Tell them they're the most wonderful, beautiful being that every existed – because they are. They don't need your disappointment, fear and embarrassment. Those are your issues. You deal with them.*

*– Parent of a trans youth*



A rose by any other name...

Most parents and families spend hours choosing just the right name for a new baby. Many families have names that are passed down from generation to generation, or choose special names to honour people in their lives. Many cultures have important traditions around the naming of babies. So, it is understandable that it may be upsetting when someone changes their name, and in the process, might appear to be discarding something of great familial and cultural significance.

For example, naming is an integral part of Chinese culture – a person's name can determine luck or fortunes in their future education, career or relationships. One trans youth was concerned about finding a new Chinese name – it was important to them to respect their cultural traditions, as well as to acknowledge the care with which their original name had been selected. They decided to include their parents in choosing their new name, and the experience was a positive one for all.

Trans youth who report strong support from parents are 64% more likely to report greater self esteem than those who report not having parental support.

Travers, R., Bauer, G., Pyne, J., Bradley, K., Gale, L., Papadimitriou, M. (2012). *Impacts of strong parental support for trans youth: A report prepared for Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Delisle Youth Services*. Trans PULSE.

## Is it grief? Or...is it fear?

You may feel a need to say goodbye to and grieve the gender your loved one was assigned at birth. You may find yourself grieving many things:

- Packing away old photos (and memories) you cherish because it causes your youth distress.
- Not sharing 'gender role' activities your young person was not interested in.
- Your child discarding a birth name that was chosen for them with care.

There are other things, though, based on stereotyped notions of what it means to be trans, that you may be 'grieving' prematurely and unnecessarily:

- *"We may never be grandparents"* – the truth is that many trans people have children.
- *"No one will ever love my child"* – the truth is that many trans people have loving partners.
- *"My kid is going to be a whole new person that I don't know"* – the truth is that trans people do change and grow, but transitioning actually honours who they already are.
- *"I need to let go of all my hopes, dreams and expectations for my child"* – the truth is that (especially with family support) trans youth can have happy, healthy lives, and achieve everything they want.

Often, when you examine these specific things more carefully, they actually amount to fears based on misinformation rather than anything based in reality – transphobia disguised as grief.

So ask yourself: *"Am I feeling grief? Or is this fear?"*

If it is grief, then find support (from a friend or professional) to say goodbye, and allow yourself some time and space to grieve. If it's fear, then educate yourself, and challenge misinformation; you will likely see that your child is the same person you have always known, and find your feelings of 'grief' lifting. You may soon find that all of those things you were 'grieving' were a low price to pay for the happy healthy young person you now have.

# Communication matters

While it is developmentally important for youth to gain independence in their life, it is equally important that they feel secure enough to turn to their caregivers for support, understanding and acceptance with major life challenges, situations that feel scary, or when in need of comfort. Some trans youth may feel reluctant or scared to share their gender identity for different reasons such as the impact of societal transphobia and transmisogyny, or communication patterns already established in their family. Even if your loved one does not show it overtly, and withdraws or ‘acts out,’ sharing their gender identity with you is a crucial moment – not just for them – but for your relationship. In addition to the typical pressures of adolescence, trans youth are navigating extremely significant life decisions, and they need you on their team more than ever.

Early conversations about gender identity are high-stakes and often emotional. Your youth may find a long-rehearsed conversation unfolding as they most feared – in the context of an argument or through a heated text exchange. You may feel caught off guard and thrown into unknown territory without a compass. Things you say out of fear and worry, which may reflect a lifetime of societal conditioning about gender, may register as rejecting to your youth – “*You’ll never look like a ‘real’ woman/man*” “*This is just another one of your phases*” or “*How will you find someone to be with?*” Hearing these things from you may amplify their own deep seated worries, and have a lasting negative impact on their self esteem, and on your relationship.

Discussing your child’s gender identity in a balanced manner is easier said than done. Strong emotions can overwhelm your ability to stay grounded and curious about their hopes, fears and needs. Cultivating the capacity to notice your emotional state and steady yourself before and/or during an important conversation is a valuable tool that can help safeguard your relationship.

‘Micro-aggressions’ refer to ways well-meaning people behave and things well-meaning people say that can be unintentionally hurtful. Unfortunately, regardless of the intention, people can still be injured by these words and actions, and the cumulative impact of daily micro-aggressions can be a significant detriment to one’s mental health.

Some examples of micro-aggressions for trans people are:

- Using the wrong pronouns (‘misgendering’ someone).
- Using the wrong name.
- Not correcting others (i.e. extended family) when they use the wrong pronouns or name.
- Making assumptions about how someone should dress based on stereotyped gender roles.
- Making subtle comments, or ‘giving looks’ about clothing and appearance.
- Implying that “*this is just a stage.*”
- Saying things like “*you are too pretty to be a boy.*”

You may have just realized that you have said or done something along these lines to your loved one. It’s understandable – we have all grown up in a transphobic and transmisogynistic world, and it takes some time to unlearn. The important part now is to ask your youth how they felt about these moments, and to apologize.

*My mom’s probably the biggest adult ally that I have. She doesn’t always know what I’m talking about, but she tries really hard, and has done really well with the learning curve.*

*– A trans youth*

## When is a good time to talk?

### GREEN ZONE: "Go for it!"

#### *Do you notice:*

- Feeling emotionally steady, present, and 'in the moment.'
- Your body is relaxed and at ease.
- Your mind is open and receptive.

If so, you are in the GREEN ZONE where you are able to be curious and reflective about the views and experiences of others, adapt to the unexpected, and listen and see things from someone else's perspective.

**If you are in the 'green zone,' proceed with important discussions.**

To strengthen your relationship and learn more about your youth's experience, ask open-ended questions: "Can you tell me more about...", or "How does it feel for you when...?"

It is possible to feel negative emotions (such as worry, fear or sadness) and still remain in the green zone. Be sure to take care of yourself, so that you stay balanced and can keep what's going on in perspective:

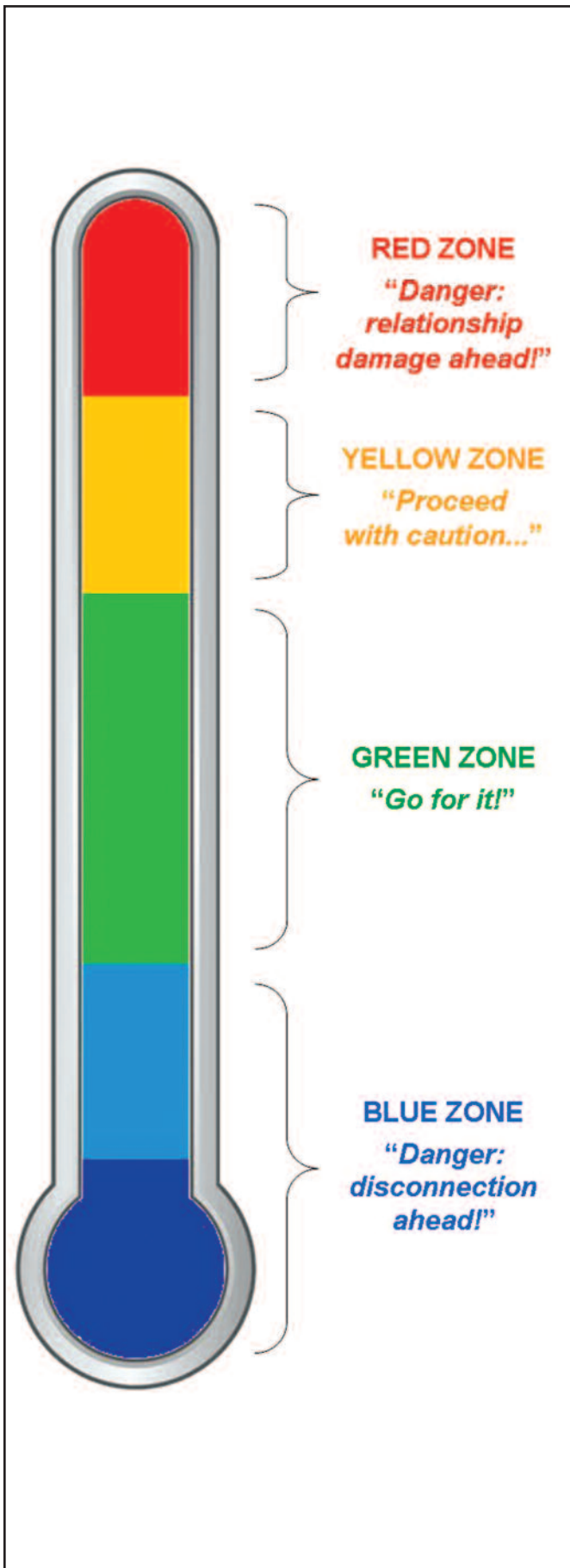
- Do things you enjoy that nourish your body, mind, heart and relationships.
- Spend time with supportive people.
- See a trans-positive counsellor and/or keep a journal – process your difficult feelings and worries apart from your youth.

### YELLOW ZONE: "Proceed with caution..."

#### *Do you notice:*

- Feeling emotional, anxious or worried.
- A tightening in your stomach, chest or throat.
- Racing thoughts.

If so, you may be entering the YELLOW ZONE where it is hard to remain open and curious about the views and experiences of others, and there can be a sense of urgency to get your point across. It is here that you are more prone to quick judgments, reactions and comments.



If you are in the 'yellow zone,' proceed with caution into important discussions.

To protect your relationship, you might say: *"I see how important this is to you – I need some time to process what you've just told me,"* or *"I'm needing to step back; can we return to this a bit later?"*

## **RED ZONE: "Danger! Relationship damage ahead!"**

### **Do you notice:**

- Feeling panicked, overwhelmed or angry.
- Your heart beating quickly, feeling flushed/warm, shallow breathing.
- 'Worst case scenario' thinking, tunnel vision.

If so, you may be in the RED ZONE, or the 'danger zone' for communication. Conversations in this zone cannot be productive as you are quick to react, prone to 'blurting things out' that you would not otherwise say, and/or doing things you later regret.

The 'red zone' is **not** a good time to have an important conversation.

To protect your relationship, you might say: *"This conversation is too important to fight about – I need time to cool off,"* or *"Let's stop now, and talk again in a few days."*

When you are in the 'yellow zone' or 'red zone,' take a break, and find ways to rebalance. For example:

- Take 5 deep, belly breaths with extended, controlled exhales.
- Ground yourself: bring your focus to your feet against the floor; push them into the floor for 5 seconds; notice any changing sensations in your legs and feet; repeat.
- Connect with nature, spirituality/religion, and/or with a trusted friend or counsellor.

## **BLUE ZONE: "Danger: Disconnection ahead!"**

### **Do you notice:**

- Feeling disengaged, bored, 'checked out,' shut down, and/or stuck.
- Yawning, feeling tired or numb.
- Not being able to think clearly, or thoughts like: *"This is too much for me,"* or *"I'm not good at this."*

If so, you may be in the BLUE ZONE where it is unlikely that you will be able to actively participate in family discussions or help your young person deal with important things. This is not because you do not care about what is being discussed; instead, it is the way you are dealing with feeling overwhelmed.

To protect your relationship, you might say: *"I do really care about what's going on, but I don't know what to say right now,"* or *"This is a lot for me to take in – let's talk later when I'm feeling more clear-headed."*

When you are in the 'blue zone,' find a way to reconnect with yourself. For example:

- Do something active, and engage your senses: go for a walk and notice different sounds, smells, colours and sights in your neighbourhood.
- Do something physical like tossing a ball that requires you to be alert and focused.
- Engage in a hobby.
- Spend time with a trusted friend.

## **When it's damaged: Try to fix it!**

Despite your best intentions, arguments will sometimes erupt, and emotions will run high, especially in times of transition and stress in a family. When this happens, do damage control as soon as you are feeling more balanced. To repair your relationship, you might say: *"I'm feeling a lot calmer now, and wonder if there is anything I said that stuck with you after our fight the other night?"* or *"When I told you how worried about you I am, I wonder how that made you feel?"* If these conversations still do not go well, consider getting family counselling. By tending to your relationship in this way, rather than letting hurts pile up, you are teaching your child how to repair important relationships, providing an opportunity to clear up misconceptions, and ultimately, strengthening your bond.

*Source: This segment on communication is influenced by the work of Dan Siegal and Pat Ogden*

## How do I start the conversation?

You are in the 'green zone,' a good time for a conversation, but where do you start? Here are some openers to get a conversation going:

- How can I help?
- What should I call you? What pronouns would you like me to use?
- How long have you been thinking about this? What started you thinking about it?
- How do you see your gender?
- Where did you learn about trans people? What did you learn?
- How do you feel about your body?
- Are there people you can talk to about these feelings?
- Does anyone harass or bully you about your gender?
- Who affirms your gender? Who are your allies?
- What do you think I need to get more information about?
- What's helping you in this process? What's not helping you?

*Our kids come to us with all sorts of challenges, all sorts of experiences on the playground, in school and social situations, and we support them; this is just one more thing they need our support, love and guidance around. The hardest thing is to expect them to handle being gender variant or thinking through new ways of being in this world, and to have to do it alone. We're their parents; we're there for them, we've been there for them in all other areas of life, and this is just one more way we can show them we love them, and we want them to succeed. We need to support our kids, advocate for them, and help them through this – it's just one other challenge in their life.*

– Parent of a trans youth

Things to keep in mind when creating a safe, comfortable space that your youth can share their feelings in:

- You may not get all the answers you want in the first conversation.
- No matter how your youth answers, validate their feelings and be empathetic and affirming as best as you can.
- Speak in 'I' statements wherever possible. For example, say, "I feel...when you...because..." instead of, "you are" or "you are making me."
- Be thoughtful about the questions you ask; know why you are asking them.
- Avoid asking invasive questions. Ask yourself, "Is this a question I would be prepared to answer myself? Is this a question that I would reasonably ask a cisgender person?"
- Ask your child if you can speak with their psychotherapist or physician to ask specific questions about their care. Understand that they may not feel comfortable with this.
- Try to find other ways to stay engaged with and informed about your child's care.
- Pace your questions, for both your sakes.
- Assure your youth that you are going to do your part to get informed about trans issues, and then follow through with this. For example, you might join a group, seek a counsellor knowledgeable about trans issues and/or read a relevant book.
- Try not to ask a question if you're not prepared to hear the answer.

# Caring for your loved one

*“Will my child be safe? I keep hearing and reading frightening statistics about trans people being harassed and bullied – even physically assaulted and murdered! I love and support my kid, and I am really worried that they are at risk for being trans!”*

Of course you want to protect your loved one from harm! In fact, they may have already (or continue to) experience oppression and bullying based on other (non trans related) aspects of their identity such as race, class, citizenship, disability, body size, sexual orientation, religion, or language. Chances are, at some point, you have already seen your child hurt, and you were there to help them navigate scary, unfair, and even dangerous situations.

As much as you want to, you cannot control what young people will encounter. You can, however, support them to develop the tools and resilience needed to thrive in a transphobic and transmisogynist society. If you yourself have ever had to deal with racism, ableism, homophobia, sexism or other kinds of discrimination, you may already possess transferable strength, skills and tools that can help cope with these oppressive experiences. Try to provide support and positive messages necessary to build strength and a positive sense of self.

And, for yourself, when your fears and worry about potential violence to your trans youth are strong, remember that research confirms the many physical and mental health benefits of social, legal and medical transition, and of a person living authentically – however that looks for each person. The happier, more comfortable, and more supported trans youth are, the more likely they are to thrive in every aspect of their lives.

## Trans Youth in School

- 90% of trans youth reported hearing transphobic comments daily or weekly from other students.
- 23% of trans students reported hearing teachers use transphobic language daily or weekly.
- 74% of trans students reported being verbally harassed about their gender expression.
- 78% of trans students indicated feeling unsafe in some way at school.
- 44% of trans students reported being likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe.

Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Schachter, K., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., & Paquin, S. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report.* Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

*As soon as I say I am from Iran and I'm Muslim, it's quite strange the way people react...part of it is Islamophobia, and part of it is racism...but, I believe that their reaction would be different if I was coming from a white family...people just assume that my family have been violent to me for being trans – the truth is, my parents have actually been my biggest support, and that has made a world of difference.*

– A trans youth

## 1. Be reassuring. Let them know how much you love and care for them.

In the aftermath of ‘coming out,’ your child may be feeling vulnerable, or even afraid of your rejection. Ensure their home is a safe and respectful environment: use their choice of name and pronoun; respect any agreed on privacy limits; give them a chance to explore and express who they are through changes in dress and grooming; and, encourage a positive sense of self. Your trans youth may even appreciate help and support in searching for suitable clothes, or choosing a new name. They might also need reassurance about how they look or sound.

This may (or may not) also involve some aspect of repair to things you have said in the past. For example, many trans people remember being told by their parents to stop being a ‘sissy’ or ‘tomboy,’ thereby being taught to feel fear and shame about who they are.

Try to be a ‘safe landing place’ for your young person to tell you about any negative experiences they might have had when they were at school, on the bus, at work, or out with friends. If they don’t volunteer this information, let them know you’re interested. Try to resist the urge to ‘fix’ or take away their pain; rather, ask them open-ended questions to learn more about their experience, and solicit their wisdom about how to address problems. Ask if they’d like your feedback or help. Try asking about the positives as well – perhaps they had a gender-affirming experience when a teacher or a barista used the correct pronoun. Show them that you’re thinking about what they are navigating when you are apart from them.

## 2. Adapt to pronoun and name changes.

Learning to call someone by a new name and pronoun can be hard. You’ve been using their name for years; you may have even chosen it, so it makes sense that you have some emotional attachment to it. However, getting your youth’s pronouns right and using their preferred name is one of the simplest, most profound ways you can show acceptance. Know that you will likely have some slip-ups, but practice, apologize when you make a mistake, and take comfort in knowing it will get easier with time. If you are just not ready to use a new name or different pronoun, try a temporary compromise of not using a name or pronoun at all.

If your loved one is presenting in public as their chosen gender, keep in mind that you could undermine others’ acceptance of the change or, worse, place them at risk of harassment.

## 3. Help your young person connect with a transgender and/or LGBTQ community.

Being connected to a supportive community of trans peers increases resilience in trans youth. Trans youth may not have had a regular peer social group; perhaps they were socially excluded by others, or perhaps they didn’t ‘fit in’ and withdrew themselves. Regardless, finding a welcoming and nurturing space with other trans youth can provide a space to:

- ‘Normalize’ the experience of being young and trans.
- Exchange strategies used to deal with navigating systems.
- Share experiences of transphobia.
- Safely explore their identity.
- Just be themselves.

There may not be an active trans youth community in your local area. If this is the case, online communities are also especially important for trans youth to affirm and validate their experiences and cultivate a sense of collective identity.

## 4. Continue to parent.

All of your energy may be focused on understanding, talking about, and acting upon your child’s gender identity. Other parents have certainly reported this. It’s worth repeating that although this may seem like a crisis, it doesn’t need to be.

Continue to:

- Set limits and boundaries with your child.
- Keep family routines consistent.
- Attend to other needs of your trans child.
- Attend to the needs of siblings, your spouse and, of course, yourself during this time.

## 5. Give space for gender identity to evolve.

You may have many questions for your trans youth, but try to remember that they may not yet have all the answers, and may, also, have many questions. This is a normal part of adolescence. Give space and permission for their own relationship with their gender to evolve and change.

## 6. Strategize around dealing with harassment.

Schools have been notoriously difficult places for trans youth, a disproportionate number of whom face serious verbal and physical harassment from peers, and receive limited protection from staff. Many trans youth do not feel safe in school, and may drop out.

School is just one venue. Ultimately, you cannot protect young people from the harassment they may face in the world. What you can do is anticipate these challenges, and help them strategize about, or role-play, how to deal with them. Create a safety plan, so that they know what to do if, and when, something happens.

## 7. Be an advocate.

Navigating systems is daunting for many of us, but for trans youth, it can be overwhelming. Finding appropriate health care, filling out name change applications, or accessing health insurance coverage for surgeries are just some of the things that may happen in the transitioning process. Ask your youth if they need you to support them in accomplishing any of these tasks. Often, there are many roadblocks and hoops that youth need to jump through in order for their needs to be met by many institutions. Add your voice to ensure that they receive timely, comprehensive, trans-positive care. At school, for example:

- Sit down with your child's principal or teacher(s), and explain trans issues and what your child is going through.
- Insist that they use your child's chosen name and correct pronouns.
- Ensure that your child can use a washroom they feel comfortable in.

- If there is a school dress code, ensure that reasonable accommodations are made.
- Follow up with the school if your child is being bullied: make sure the school is taking a zero tolerance approach to bullying and is dealing with these issues responsibly.
- Check your local school board's equity policies; ensure that the 'needs and safety' of all transgender students are specifically named and included in these policies.
- Insist that your child's school is mandated to 'respond effectively' when and where necessary.
- Staff may vary in their knowledge of trans issues, as well as their responsiveness to incidents, so insist that there be training provided to educate staff on appropriate care of trans people.

It can be difficult, as a family member, to figure out when and how best to intervene on behalf of a youth. It depends on the situation, their age, and what the potential consequences of intervening (or not) may be.

## 8. Get active; lobby for social change.

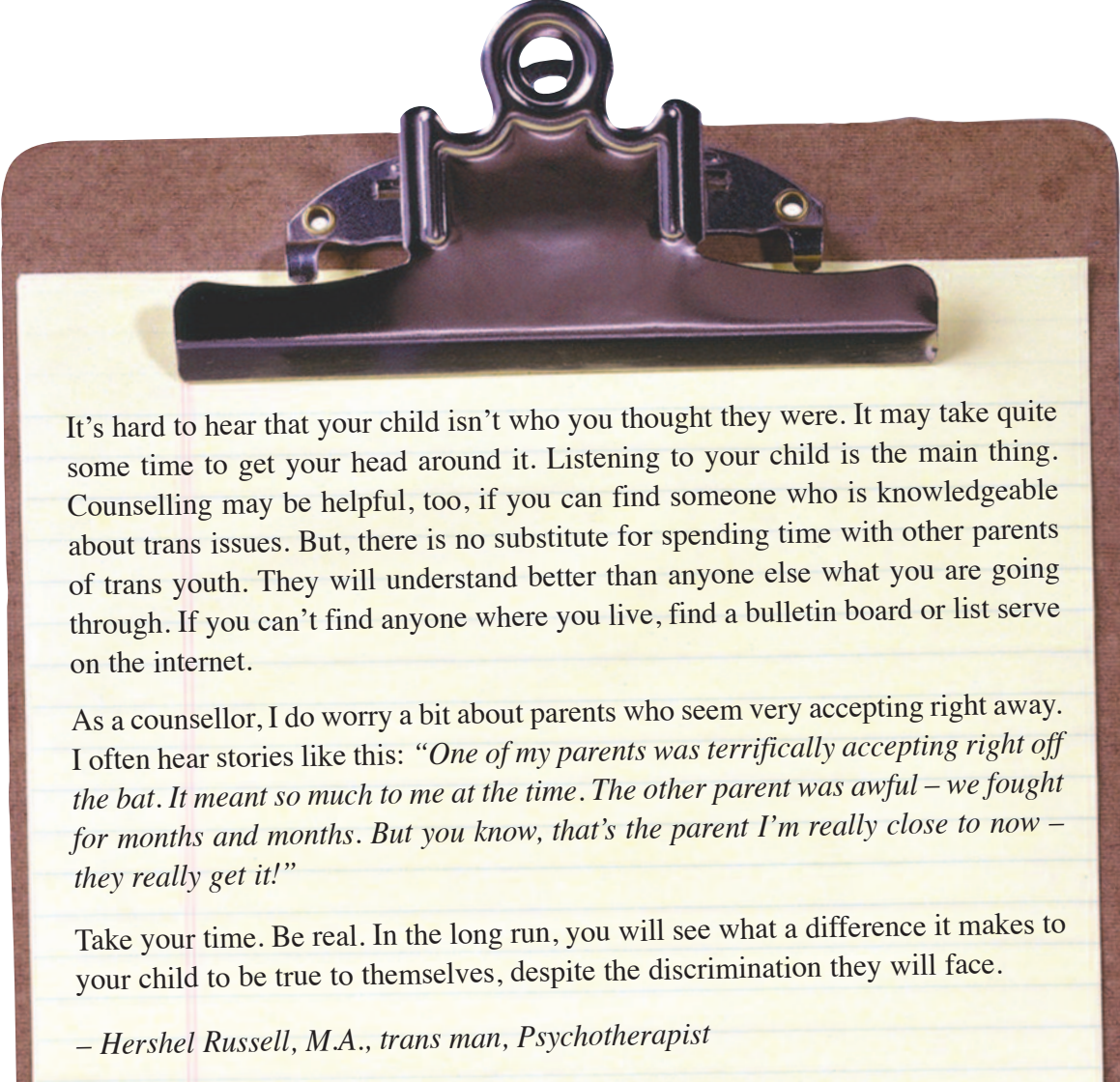
Active lobby groups are working on enhancing human rights and access to services for trans people. Many workplaces are working to put protections in place for trans people. These initiatives need the support of allies.

Find out how you can help by phoning or visiting the websites of groups addressing your particular concerns. Youth often feel a lack of power and control over their situation, and helping them get active in transforming the system can increase a sense of agency. Activism is a powerful way to channel helpless feelings and heal transphobic violence. It is a wonderful way to model your acceptance of your loved one.



# TUNING IN: WHAT OTHERS WANT YOU TO KNOW

## What professionals have to say



It's hard to hear that your child isn't who you thought they were. It may take quite some time to get your head around it. Listening to your child is the main thing. Counselling may be helpful, too, if you can find someone who is knowledgeable about trans issues. But, there is no substitute for spending time with other parents of trans youth. They will understand better than anyone else what you are going through. If you can't find anyone where you live, find a bulletin board or list serve on the internet.

As a counsellor, I do worry a bit about parents who seem very accepting right away. I often hear stories like this: *"One of my parents was terrifically accepting right off the bat. It meant so much to me at the time. The other parent was awful – we fought for months and months. But you know, that's the parent I'm really close to now – they really get it!"*

Take your time. Be real. In the long run, you will see what a difference it makes to your child to be true to themselves, despite the discrimination they will face.

– *Hershel Russell, M.A., trans man, Psychotherapist*



Trans youth are often at greater risk for social isolation, targeted bullying and discrimination – this can affect their mental health and may lead to depression, anxiety, self-harming behaviours and even suicide...

The good news is that we know there are many factors that build resilience – the ability to overcome adversity – in trans youth. They are:

- Strong parental support (at the top of the list).
- Connecting to a trans affirming community.
- Finding people to love and support them.
- The ability to define their own identity, which includes choice of name and pronouns.
- Gaining a sense of agency over their own life, and especially, their own gender.
- Transitioning to honour their affirmed gender in a timely manner.
- Understanding that something is wrong with transphobia and transmisogyny, and that there is nothing wrong with them.
- Fostering a compassionate internal voice rather than being hard on themselves.

I have had the privilege to witness many trans youth struggle, but when they have been given the opportunity to engage in these resilience strategies, they go on to have very happy, healthy lives. With your support, your loved one can too.

– *LeeAndra Miller, MA, RP, Psychotherapist, Pride & Prejudice-CTYS*

Transmisogyny – discrimination or prejudice directed towards trans women or femininity – is real, and it’s scary. Trans youth who were assigned male at birth, will get all sorts of attention, both positive and negative, because of sexism, misogyny and transphobia – the three work together. Being worried about how transmisogyny is going to affect your child is understandable. You can help to combat this most by not contributing to it:

- Encourage your child to explore femininity without scrutiny, shaming or criticism from you.
- Try not to encourage them to be more feminine to try and blend in if they don’t want to. Try not to shame them if they want to be more feminine than you anticipate. Remember, there are many ways to be a woman.
- Support them, and listen to them when they tell you about negative experiences at school, at home, or out in the community. They aren’t making it up.
- Show them that they are safe to be who they are with you.

– *Kit Wilson-Yang, trans woman, Youth Worker*

Although trans people exist across all cultures, it is important to remember that many times, different cultures have different ways of expressing things like gender. For instance, a lot of cultures just don’t have a word for ‘trans.’ That’s something that is used to describe this experience in Canada. As a newcomer, you might be concerned that you can’t express yourself the way your own culture would around this – that it has to be this way because of being in Canada and having to integrate into this society. It is important to know there are ways to support your trans child, and still stay connected to culture and community.

Because of your own experiences in your country of origin, you might feel afraid and reluctant to send your child to an agency or organization or to seek medical care – not because you don’t want your child to have support, but because you fear for their safety. Most large Canadian cities have LGBTQ groups, many specifically for newcomer and immigrant youth, so encourage your child to find support groups where they can be supported as trans **and** maintain connections to their cultural community. If you are in an area with no such support group, try to find online support.

As newcomer parents of a trans youth, you may have to educate your doctors about trans issues, so you may have a cultural or language barrier as well. One challenge will be to find a doctor you are comfortable with culturally and/or language-wise, but who is also knowledgeable about trans issues. Because of this, it may be hard for you to have an equitable, informed conversation. In the 3 years I have worked with newcomer youth, I have met at least a dozen Irani parents who are so happy and relieved to finally find someone who speaks Farsi with whom they can talk about their trans youth in their first language.

– *Kusha Amir Dadui, Trans Program Coordinator, Sherbourne Health Centre*

If your child would like to express their gender and identity at school, you will want to begin a school social transitioning plan together. A school social transitioning plan begins with conversations at home about how your young person wants to express their true self at school. A school social transitioning plan can take place at any time throughout the year. Your child does not have to wait until the beginning of a new school year to socially transition.

**Example of questions asked in a basic school social transitioning plan:**

1. Would you like to change your name?
  - The right name can be added to school records and class lists even if the legal name change has not happened.
2. Would you like to change your gender marker?
  - The right gender marker can be changed in school records.
3. Would you like to change your pronoun?
4. What washroom would you like to use?
5. Would you like to try out for and play on a sports team?

The next step is to book a meeting with the principal and main teachers involved in your child's school support system.

– Beck Hood, *LGBTQIA Trainer and Public Educator, Around the Rainbow, Family Services Ottawa*

One of the things we sometimes worry about for our youth is that being trans is going to make things even more complicated for them; and, certainly for families of colour, or families where there are experiences of disability, perhaps, or experiences of trying to make ends meet in a world that expects you to have lots and lots of resources and time, we might worry that this is just going to be one more thing that is going to be a struggle for our youth. But, in actuality, trans people have existed across time and space for all of human history, and there are so many different communities and cultures where trans people have been celebrated for generations. Being trans – being supported in being trans – is one thing that can really make the difference to allow your loved ones to thrive, and to maybe experience peace and freedom and a bit of a break from some of the other challenges they face in society.

– Syrus Marcus Ware, *Activist, Artist, and Community Leader*

Early interactions about gender identity between parents and adolescents can have lasting impacts for youth. Things you say or do out of fear, worry or distress often register as anger or even rejection to your youth. It is normal to have 'ruptures' or disagreements in relationships – the important thing is how well these ruptures are revisited and repaired. Left un-repaired, things said or done in the heat of the moment can damage your relationship and negatively impact your young person's sense of belonging, self-esteem and sense of self. It is never too late to revisit these early interactions!

– Lindsay Elin, *MSW, RSW, Youth and Family Counsellor, Pride & Prejudice, CTYS*

# Transgender youth research soundbite by Jake Pyne

Research generally confirms that trans youth struggle as they navigate a world often not ready for them. While trans youth are not all the same, and differences such as race, class and non-binary identities make for different experience, research confirms some overall challenges: school harassment (Taylor et al., 2008); discrimination; poverty and hunger; physical threats; and a lack of supportive health care (Veale et al., 2015). In particular, the suicide rates for trans youth are much higher than trans adults and the general population (Scanlon et al., 2010). In a recent Canadian survey of 923 trans youth, over 1/3 had attempted suicide (Veale et al., 2015).

## MYTH #6:

### Being trans is a mental illness:

Actually, it isn't. Medical professionals are generally moving away from a pathologizing diagnosis towards an understanding that trans identities are about diversity, and that being trans can be a physical medical issue rather than a mental health one.

However, the experience of being trans in a transphobic and transmysogynistic world can be highly stressful, and can lead to (or compound pre-existing) anxiety symptoms, depression symptoms (sadness, hopelessness, social withdrawal, suicidal thoughts), and feelings of shame and isolation. Some trans youth might begin missing school, acting out behaviourally, or engaging in self-harm, internet over-use, or substances to cope with overwhelming and confusing feelings, and/or to seek a sense of belonging.

These behavioural indicators that 'something is wrong' may be the most overt indicators that a youth is in need of help, and are sometimes the 'gateway' through which trans youth get the mental health supports and gender affirming counselling that they require in order to put words to their experiences and identify the source of their concerns.

*PLEASE NOTE: some trans people do experience 'Gender Dysphoria (GD),' which is often resolved by transitioning to their affirmed gender.*

Trans people often describe puberty as traumatizing – a time of true despair that they may not have had the language or self understanding to express. It is a time when feelings of depression or thoughts of suicide may emerge or worsen. If this is the case now, please help your youth find professional help promptly.

While these statistics are very troubling, and might lead some to believe that being trans is so difficult that it causes outcomes like depression and suicide, research, in fact, proves otherwise, and points to transphobia and a lack of adequate support as the real problem (Bauer, Pyne, Francino & Hammond, 2013). In one study, the correlation between young trans girls experiencing gender abuse and their having major depression and suicidality was so strong that researchers suggested the gender abuse itself was the direct cause (Nuttbrock et al., 2010).

Perhaps most telling is the growing body of research confirming the importance of support for trans youth, in particular from their parents. In a cross-Canada study, trans youth who had supportive adults both inside and outside their family, were four times more likely to report good or excellent mental health. In an Ontario study, when trans youth had strong parental support for their gender identity, the likelihood of a suicide attempt dropped by 93% (Travers et al., 2012). In fact, according to the same study, parents appear to be unique among all others in a trans person's life, in that their support (or lack thereof) has a bearing on their child's risk for suicide for their entire lifetime (Bauer, Scheim, Pyne, Travers, Hammond, 2015). Lastly, when trans youth have support in other parts of their daily lives, this continues to protect their well-being. A British Columbia study found that in schools that had hosted a GSA Club (Gay-Straight Alliance) for more than 3 years, suicide rates among LGBT youth declined, as did suicide rates among non-LGBT youth in the school (Saewyc, Konishi, Rose & Homma, 2014).

As well as support, research shows that having access to social transition (clothing, name, pronoun) or medical transition (hormonal or surgical interventions) is vital for improving the lives of trans youth who wish to transition. In a recent survey with trans youth across Canada, those who were living full time in their felt gender were almost 50% more likely to report good or excellent mental health than those who were not (Veale et al., 2015). In an Ontario study, trans people who wanted to medically transition but had not yet begun, were 27 times more likely to have attempted suicide within the past year, than those who had completed medical transition (Bauer et al., 2013). This last finding highlights that the period before transition is the most dangerous time for trans youth, and raises the question about whether imposing wait times is always helpful or safe.

In closing, research often emphasizes the difficulties that trans youth face, but a closer look shows us what we can do about those problems. Advocating for trans youth in their schools, ensuring their access to transition if needed and working on building parental support, will go a long way toward trans youth feeling safe and welcome in their families, schools and communities.

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Trans youth who report strong parental support for their gender identity and expression are 100% more likely to report adequate housing, and 92% more likely to report adequate food, than those who report weak parental support.

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### MYTH #7:

#### **Being trans is a result of my parenting:**

Actually, it isn't. Gender diversity is not a result of parenting at all; it is certainly not caused by permissive parenting, gender-neutral, or rigidly-gendered parenting from a young age, or by a parent who secretly wished their child were the 'opposite' sex. It is not because of a divorce, or because you are a single parent. It is not because there was not a strong parent of the same or opposite sex in the house or because the parent of the same or opposite sex was too strong...in short, your parenting did not 'cause' your child to be trans. As parents and caregivers, you do have a great influence over your child, but you can't change their true gender identity. You can, however, strengthen their self esteem and sense of self worth by your gender-affirming parenting.

# 20 things Trans youth want you to know

## 1. Pronouns really matter:

"I remember the first time you referred to me in my correct pronouns; it made me so happy and hopeful."

## 2. Believe in me:

"When you told me that this is just a phase, it made me stop trusting myself."

## 3. I don't want to lose you:

"When I can't talk to you about gender, I can't talk to you about my life."

## 4. Protect me at home:

"I need you to stop my siblings from emotionally abusing me about my gender."

## 5. Side with me:

"It meant a lot to me when you refused to go to dinners with our extended family unless I was invited too."

## 6. Protect me from discrimination:

"I need you to be a shield between me and unsupportive extended family and community."

## 7. Don't under-react:

"When I came out, you said you love and support me no matter what, yet you didn't talk about it again and kept using the wrong pronouns. It felt like you didn't take me seriously."

## 8. Have faith in my process:

"Trust me and my decisions. Let me make my own mistakes. Be behind me and beside me while I walk my own path."

## 9. Show interest in me and in trans issues:

"Not all trans people are the same. Learn about me. Ask me questions. Read books about trans people, and then check in with me about what I think and how I feel."

## 10. Help me navigate systems:

"I am overwhelmed, and I need your help with all the things I have to do, but I want to make the plan together."

## 11. Reassure me:

"Remind me that you love me and that everything is going to be ok."

## 12. Protect me from your hard feelings:

"I feel really guilty, and I blame myself when you are upset about this."

## 13. I look to you:

"When you are calm, it helps me stay calm. If you don't feel calm...try to fake it for me!"

## 14. Check up on me:

"The medical stuff is not the only thing I am dealing with...when I get home from school or from being out, ask me, '*did anything bad happen today*,' so I can talk to you about what I'm going through."

## 15. Support my gender expression:

"Especially at first, I wanted your help to go shopping for clothing that looks good on me and reflects my gender identity."

## 16. Help me come out...but respect my preferences:

"There are so many people I need to tell who I am close to, and that is hard. It would take the pressure off if you told our extended family, neighbors and other people I don't know well." On the other hand, "Don't come out for me without checking how I want to be referred to and have my story told."

## 17. Your words matter:

"I still hurt today when I think of the things you said to me when I came out to you last year."

## 18. Be patient with me:

"It took me a long time to get ready to go out at first – I spent hours in front of the mirror stressing out – I was worried about how others would respond to me. Please understand, and don't be annoyed."

## 19. Show me you're proud of me:

"I feel like you're ashamed of me when you ask me to hide who I am or dress differently."

## 20. Your support matters:

"It changed everything when I felt like you accepted me – I use your support as a springboard to face the rest of my life."

To mom and dad,

It's been a while since we sat down and talked. Since I came out to you 3 years ago, my existence has been like having an elephant in the room. We've barely talked about my gender identity, my transitioning, and my life, and when we have, we've just ended up hurting each other. With the language barrier, we weren't able to tell everything that we had in our minds to each other.

You thought I was going the wrong way by transitioning, that I would never be able to live a normal life. You thought I didn't want to be part of our family anymore, that I was no longer a good child of yours. You thought I didn't respect you as parents anymore, that by being myself, I was disrespecting you. You thought I was becoming a so-called Canadian who was individualistic, opposite of the collective culture that we were born from. You thought I hated you, and you blamed me for hurting you, telling me that you were getting depressed because of me. You blamed yourself, thinking that it was your mistake to have me live in Canada, a more liberal country than our home country, and that this made it easier for me to think about my gender identity.

But the truth is, I miss you. I miss my family. I miss those days when we talked about everything, when we went camping, made dinner, watched TV, went to movies, played board games, and laughed together on our way back home. The truth is, there are so many exciting things happening in my life now, and I want you to be part of them all. The truth is that you have given me the value of respect, but respect looks different to me than it does to you. To me, respect is listening to, and honouring who people authentically are, and I want our love and respect for each other to be genuine instead of forced just because our cultural customs told us to do so.

I know you sacrificed your lives for me; you gave up everything: home, job, family, friends, and comfortable lives in our home country just for me to have a better life in Canada. I know your never-ending love and care for me even though you rarely say it out loud. I know you ultimately want me to live a good life.

I don't expect you to change overnight and accept me tomorrow, or any time soon. All I ask is you trust me a little more, and know that I love you as much as you love me.

– Euan Hwang

### WELCOME ABOARD!

Dear Parent,

Welcome to this new journey as you accompany your child in their discovery of themselves, and, possibly, in their transition – a journey that may be challenging at times and filled with lows and highs: lows may include uncertainty, fatigue or rejection from others; highs will include times you can see past all the negativity into a world of acceptance, self-discovery, new ways of being, new adventures and new friendships.

Like any change, you may feel resistance, fear or even guilt – you may go through the stages of grief as you let go of what you may have imagined for your child’s future. These are all normal feelings. I went through them all.

Things are quite different now than they were 14 years ago when my child, assigned male at birth, socially transitioned at the age of 3. Being anglophone Japanese-Canadians in a francophone province, we were already targeted for being a visible minority; now, we were faced with having the youngest child ever to transition in Québec. Today, my child is 17 years old, identifies as agender with an androgynous gender expression, and uses ‘they’ as their preferred pronoun. This second transition was a bit harder for me, but I realized that if I trusted my child at 2, I needed to trust them at 15. My child has taught me so much. By them being themselves, they have also opened a whole new way of ‘being’ for myself. Their courage helped me to develop my own. Through this journey, I have met friends for life that I would have never, otherwise, encountered.

As you take on this journey, rest assured, you are not alone; reach out to other parents who may be in similar situations. Seek out the answers to your child’s questions and to your own. Get what you need to be able to support your child, as strong parental support is a key factor for their general well-being.

There will be some battles that your child won’t want you to take on, and others where, maybe, you don’t have the energy to. Take a step back, and open the lines of communication on the best course of action to take. After all, this is their life, so follow their lead.

It is important to take care of yourself, in order to take care of your family. Remember to look out for the siblings of your trans youth. When a young person transitions, the whole family will transition in some way.

Many people have paved the way, and continue to do so, in order to ensure the safety and respect of all gender creative or trans youth. However, many things remain to be done as parents and young people are still struggling with having their basic rights respected. I, with many other parents, continue to advocate for trans youth everywhere, hoping for continued positive changes in the future.

– Akiko Asano, single mom, president of Gender Creative Kids Canada and administrator of the private facebook group Canadian Parents of Gender Creative Kids.

## LESSONS LEARNED

I am the mother of a 20-year-old transgender son; it was difficult for me to come to terms with my child being trans. For the first year, I went to bed and woke up crying, my grief like nothing I had ever experienced. There were many scary times when I thought my child would take his life, so we moved quickly, and he had a name change, top surgery and began hormone therapy within 6 months. Many of these changes were painful for me, and I had a hard time using his new name and pronoun.

I wouldn't allow my child to go through any major medical or legal procedure alone, so I was involved in every aspect and tried to approach this in a rational manner. This way, I felt I maintained some control. It also took a huge burden from my son as I can't imagine any young person trying to navigate this alone.

Initially, the fear of losing my child caused me to become lenient in my parenting, but I realized I was not doing him any favours, and I started setting down basic expectations and being the parent again. He felt more comfortable then because I was treating him no differently than before. That's not to say I don't make allowances for his situation, but I don't let my fear control every decision.

As he confided in me more, I often tried to think of solutions. One day, he told me he wasn't always looking for an answer, he just wanted to talk. That was so liberating. I now had permission to just listen without needing to be the expert or problem solver. He also said to me, "Mom, every conversation doesn't have to be about this."

One day, when my son was getting ready to go out, he asked me to help him choose a shirt. My normal response would have been to pick the more feminizing shirt, but all of a sudden, I got it! This was a boy – not a girl trying to look like a boy. I saw my son asking me to help choose what looked better on him. That was a turning point!

For many months, my husband was my sole support. Our intimate relationship was greatly affected. Every time I looked at my husband, all I could think was, "*my daughter wants to look like that.*" The most important thing I did for myself and my child was to find more support. It's amazing to know other parents going through this and realize you aren't alone.

My best advice to parents is to take your time and get the correct facts and information. Don't panic – this isn't the end of the world, even though it may seem like it. Love your child, and don't be ashamed. Do what you need to do to help them; well-meaning advice is great, but you know your child better than anyone. Trust yourself. Take care of yourself, keep the lines of communication open, and educate yourself. Remember your child is still your child, and behave accordingly. Know you haven't done anything wrong. Take everything at the pace that fits your child and your situation. Surround yourself with positive, supportive people. Take one day at a time.

I now have a happy son, entering his 2nd year of university, making friends, living away from home, learning who he is as a person and looking forward to his future. I know there will be issues going forward, but the worst is now behind us.

– *A proud mom*

## DAVID'S TRANSITION

I liked that David, assigned female at birth, was a typical 'tomboy' growing up – he had an awesome personality, was good at sports, and showed no interest in makeup, pretty pink clothing, or anything 'princessy.' As a child, David was always very social, and made friends very easily.

However, around age 11, David displayed increasing anxiety and panic attacks. One day, we got a call from the school psychologist informing us that David had disclosed suicidal thoughts. We started taking him to doctors and therapists to treat what was diagnosed as 'generalized anxiety' although we could not figure out what was causing this in a kid who seemed to have everything going for him. After a 3-day hospital stay, David told us that although assigned female at birth, he had always felt like a boy inside; he had wished on many birthday candles to be re-born as a boy, but never told us.

My husband took the news rationally, saying that this was not the worst thing that could happen to our child who was healthy and alive; I, however, was terrified for David's future: *Will he be accepted by his peers? Will his friends stand by him? Will he be safe? Who will love him?* While I still hoped this would turn out to be a 'phase,' David was absolutely sure of his identity, saying, *"Mom, I only have one life, I might as well be happy. I cannot be happy living as a girl."* Since then, I have become David's biggest supporter.

Our pediatrician had absolutely no experience with trans youth and did not know what to do or how to help. Luckily, the transgender youth clinic had just opened at the Sick Kids Hospital, and we took David there. Soon after, my son started puberty blockers.

My husband and I are first generation Russian immigrants. The Russian community, even in Canada, is not the most accepting towards LGBT issues, and many of my former co-patriots are years behind in their understanding and acceptance of anybody different in sexual orientation or gender. Thus, I did not know what kind of reaction to expect from my parents, extended family, friends and community. We decided to approach this by visiting and telling each family individually.

My parents pleasantly surprised me! In spite of their age (mid 70s), conservative views and lack of any previous knowledge, they listened to us, and very quickly started using David's new name. My mom actually complained that we had not shared the news sooner! Coming out to other family members and friends also went surprisingly well, and more than a year later, everybody we interact with uses David's new name and pronoun and respects his identity.

For many years, we were members of the Jewish Russian community of Canada (JRCC); a few months after David's transition, we decided to meet with the Rabbis to tell them what was happening. JRCC is part of the Chabad Lubavitch movement who don't refuse any Jewish person wishing to join; however, they do not accept LGBT people as equal. Our Rabbi was very sympathetic to us, but clearly said that he believes gender transition is wrong, and that our child was meant to be a woman and carry out a woman's duties in this world. We were still welcome to attend the synagogue for holidays, even if David came as a boy, but they did not embrace his identity in any way. Our Rabbi actually gave us an example of helping a man who believed he was gay, by referring him to a reparative therapist and eventually bringing him back into the 'heterosexual' camp. The Rabbi asked us try therapy with a Jewish Orthodox psychotherapist, but I was not going to subject my child to this reparative therapy, which has been proved harmful and is banned in Ontario. That was the end of it, and we are no longer affiliated with JRCC.

My son has now started the second year of high school as his true self. He is happy, has many friends and a wonderful supportive girlfriend. He stopped self-harming last year, and is living as a typical 15-year-old. He loves music, playing guitar, riding his various skateboards, and playing basketball. He started testosterone therapy a few weeks ago and cannot wait until he starts showing more male features in his appearance such as facial hair and low voice.

We are looking optimistically into the future.

*Note: I use 'he/him' pronouns when describing David's childhood. Even though he was labelled a girl by doctors and called by a girl's name, we now know he is a boy, and always was.*

*– A parent of a trans youth*



# MOVING FORWARD: WHAT LIES AHEAD

## Telling other people

We often think that 'coming out' only refers to what trans youth will be doing when they tell others about who they are; however, you will also be going through a coming out process. You will have many reasons to tell others:

- to obtain support for yourself
- to talk about your loved one using the right pronouns
- to get your youth the care they need
- to navigate systems such as schools, doctors etc.
- to help your child in telling extended family (if they want this support)

This process can cause a great deal of anxiety and stress. Here are a few things to think about before you begin telling others:

*All I could think was, "Oh my God, how could you want a life like that, honey?" A life filled with prejudice. The answer was simple. Jen didn't 'want' this life – it isn't a choice. I couldn't see that at the time... I thought about the impact of Jen transitioning, being judged by everyone in our hometown. How could I tell people that my 'daughter' had become a man? Even worse, how would we tell my very Catholic family?*

*From A Mother's Story by J. Wilson*

### 1. Examine your social context.

- What do you hope to accomplish by coming out about your youth?
- What are the values and beliefs of the people you are telling?
- How do you expect people will respond?
- Are there cultural and/or religious issues that will impact their reaction?
- What are the risks associated with telling them?
- Do the potential benefits outweigh the possible costs?

### 2. Where are you in terms of acceptance?

- How comfortable are you? The more accepting you are of your loved one's gender identity, the better coming out will be; if you are still struggling, negative reactions from others may have a bigger impact on you.
- Find the right time that honours your process. If you come out too soon, and share your own negative reactions, you might regret it later.

### 3. How much knowledge do you have regarding trans people?

- The more you understand about trans people, the better prepared you will be to answer questions.
- How well do you know about how your youth feels? If there are areas that you have not talked about, it's important to gain a better understanding first. Try not to make assumptions when speaking to others.



#### 4. Do you know how 'out' your trans youth wants to be?

- Try not to assume that you have permission to share someone else's story.
- You may be at a different place than your loved one with regards to how 'out' they want to be. You may be comfortable telling others, but they may not feel the same way.
- Be clear with boundaries of whose story gets shared and what details get shared. Often, people ask very intrusive questions, and it's important that you know and respect your youth's limits regarding information to be shared.
- If your youth doesn't want anyone to know about their gender, but you feel the need to be able to talk with someone, make sure to negotiate this need. Take the time to consider the full implications in order to come to a compromise.

#### 5. Develop a support system.

- Come out to those you believe will be the most supportive first. Rely on those supportive people when you are telling others who may have a more difficult reaction.
- Having one successful experience will give you confidence with the rest of the coming out process.
- Find allies to talk to who you know will support you.
- Connect to other families of trans people. They know what you are going through. Exchange coming out strategies.

- Identify people who can go with you when you are coming out. For example, sometimes, when there is a non-family member present, family members may keep transphobic responses to themselves.
- There is no need to share negative or transphobic responses with your trans youth. It will be important to turn to others for support instead of them.

#### 6. Prepare and practice.

- Prepare by rehearsing what you want to say.
- Practice how you might respond to anticipated questions or negative reactions.
- Sometimes, it's appropriate to end the conversation when inappropriate things are said. Make sure you have a limit in your mind of when that is. It's ok to ask to talk another time when emotions are not running so high.

At some point, you have probably heard a trans experience explained as being 'born in the wrong body'; while this concept does work for some trans people to explain their experience, for many, it is considered too simplistic. This concept does not acknowledge non-binary, gender fluid or a-gender identities, and also, makes the assumption that, if you were born in the 'wrong body,' then you will go to every length to change it. In fact, many trans people opt not to change their bodies.

## 7. Choose language and terminology appropriate for the receiver of the news.

- Phrase coming out in positive terms rather than negative. This sets the tone for potentially positive responses.
- People might not understand certain terms, so part of the coming out process may be to educate them.
- Bring information and resources that may help answer some of their questions in more general ways.

## 8. Select the method of delivery.

- Typical options are person-to-person, phone communication, social media and written letters/email.
- Benefits of coming out through a letter are: clear messages can be chosen thoughtfully; the receiver has time to have an emotional response without sharing it hurtfully; the receiver will have time to re-read the letter to reduce distortions of information.
- The drawback of coming out through a letter is that there may be misunderstandings, so it would be important to follow up with a person-to-person conversation.
- Another option is to have a third party present. It could be a friend/family member or a professional.

### MYTH #8

#### The 'sex change' surgery:

Unfortunately, many times when people talk about trans people they ask: “so, have they had **the** surgery, yet?” There are many misconceptions embedded in this question: first, there is no **one** surgery; second, not all trans people want, need, or can afford, any surgery; third, transitioning involves many different options including social, legal and medical transitioning (of which surgery is just one possibility). As well, this idea of a sex ‘change’ negates that transitioning for most trans people is about **affirming** their already known gender as opposed to **changing** gender. But, perhaps most importantly, there are sensationalist views attached to this highly personal question that are rooted in transphobia. The fact that people would even ask such a deeply personal question of trans people speaks to an underlying disrespect. Would anyone ask such personal questions regarding cis people’s body parts?

## 9. Prepare for the best-case scenario and the worst-case scenario.

- Often, people can surprise us with their responses. Be open and cautiously optimistic.
- Have self-care put in place. We live in a transphobic society, and coming out can be stressful. Have a list of ways to take care of yourself.
- Finally, find someone with whom you can debrief. It’s important to get support.

## 10. Things to consider when coming out to children (such as siblings).

- Present the information in an age-appropriate and matter-of-fact way.
- Children often react much better than you’ll expect. They are often open-minded in ways that adults are not.
- The more comfortable you are with your youth’s gender identity and trans issues, the better you will be able to respond to whatever reactions siblings have, and offer whatever support they may need.
- Find out how the child currently views gender. Developmental factors are at play during each age range. Generally speaking, the more rigid they are in their understanding of gender, the more difficult their reaction might be.
- Take the time to prepare the child by having open conversations that gently challenge different gender beliefs prior to telling them.
- Assist siblings in their own coming out strategies as needed. Often, this will mean establishing allies for them in their school and speaking with their friend’s parents.
- Finally, it’s your job to protect your trans youth in the family system. This means that if your other children are saying hurtful things to your trans youth, you will need to intervene in order to stop this.

Trans youth living full time in their felt gender are almost 50% more likely to report good or excellent mental health than those who are not.

Veale, J., Saewyc, E., Frohard-Dourlent, H., Dobson, S., Clark, B. & the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey Research Group (2015). *Being safe, being me: Results of the Canadian trans youth health survey*. Vancouver, BC: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, School of Nursing, University of British Columbia.

# Transitioning: Helping with decisions

There are many decisions ahead for your loved one:

- Will they change their name?
- Will they change their pronoun?
- Will they change their legal documents?
- Will they pursue hormone treatments?
- Will they opt for surgery? Or surgeries?

There is no 'one' way to transition. Some youth will be very clear about a desire to 'fully transition' and will seek out everything they have access to. Other youth find that they only need to change one aspect of their bodies, or need no medical interventions at all. There are many youth who choose to go through a social transition, but have no need for hormones and surgeries. Whatever the case, most experts advise you to:

- Ask questions, and listen to your youth.
- Follow their lead, and let them set the pace.
- Stay open to the multiple possibilities and trajectories for transition.
- Avoid projecting your own agenda on to them.
- Keep the communication channels open.

Your young person may ask for, and need, your support in making decisions and/or moving forward; like all youth, they rely on you to listen to their needs as you support them. Depending on their age and where you live, your trans youth may require your permission for some of these steps.

These are major life decisions, and as such, there are consequences – many of these interventions are reversible, but some are permanent. However, study after study show that:

- Gender affirming treatment such as surgeries and hormones (in those who choose them) produce positive results, and significantly outweigh any negative or non-desired effects.
- An overwhelming majority of people who transition have no regrets and are happier.
- The majority of people who transition are no longer in emotional distress regarding their body.
- People who transition generally function better psychologically, socially and sexually in their post-treatment lives.

- People who undergo transition at younger ages do better than people who transition later in their lives.
- There are also potential consequences to **not** moving forward. For example, puberty may be creating permanent undesired changes, and the situation may feel intolerable, putting your loved one at greater risk for depression, or suicidal feelings. These situations may call for involving professionals early and advocating with medical professionals to get what your youth needs.

Be sure to listen to what your trans youth has to say. If your child has a consistent pattern of changing their mind, or being impulsive, greater caution may be called for when making these major decisions. However, it's worth noting, that in our clinical experience, youth who have reached the stage of seriously considering transition have already thought the decision through quite carefully.

*I have been asked by friends if I miss Jen, if I had to grieve the death of my daughter. I have always answered no. But that's not the whole truth. Like any parent, I miss the days when my son was younger. I miss getting hugs and kisses as I tucked Jen into bed. I miss going to the beach together on hot summer afternoons. Yes, I miss those days, but no differently than any parent who thinks back on fond memories. Do I want Jen back now? I can honestly say no. I haven't lost a daughter. I have gained a confident, strong, level-headed son of whom I am immensely proud.*

*From A Mother's Story by J. Wilson*

*"You will experience extraordinary kindness and acceptance from people from whom you'd never have expected it. And you might suffer let down and ignorance from people you thought you could count on. But that's important to know – who it's worth spending your time and love on."*

*– Parent of a trans youth*

# Social transitioning

**Social transitioning refers to changes made in a person's social life. They could include:**

- Using a different name.
- Using a different pronoun (for example: he; she; they).
- Adopting a new hair style.
- Choosing and experimenting with different clothing, both in and out of the home.
- Using a bathroom that suits their gender more accurately.
- Buying gender affirming garments such as breast forms to add breasts and binders to reduce breasts.
- Getting electrolysis or laser hair removal to reduce facial and body hair.

# Legal transitioning

**Legal transitioning refers to steps a person could take to have their affirmed gender reflected legally. This could include:**

- Changing identification documents to reflect a new name.
- Changing identification documents to reflect a new sex designation.
- Changing name and sex designation in official school documents.

Assisting your child in the arduous process of changing i.d. can be a practical way in which you show your support. Student cards, class registrations, health care cards, birth certificates, and driver's licenses are just some of the places where this may need to change. Some come with fees that may be prohibitive for some youth. Changing name and sex designation on documents will depend on your local governing systems. The rules have been shifting as more governing bodies become aware of trans peoples' needs. Often, there are distinctions between the process for adults and youth. To access the most up to date information on this process in Ontario, go to our web site.

## **MYTH #9:**

### **Trans people can't have children of their own:**

Actually, there are many options open to trans people who wish to have children including adoption, surrogacy, fertility donations, and their partner or themselves giving birth. Thinking about these choices prior to medical interventions such as hormones and surgery is important. This can be a difficult conversation to have with your child especially if they are young. It might be hard for them to imagine having children in the future at all because they are focused on their present situation. Many trans people choose to bank eggs or sperm prior to taking hormones. Some trans people stop taking hormones and have found that their eggs or sperm are still fertile. Research is needed to accurately determine how hormones affect long-term fertility; however, there are many children born to trans people.

## **Why may legal transitioning be important?:**

- If someone is already presenting in their affirmed gender, government identification that displays their assigned sex at birth can cause great distress.
- Having the 'wrong' i.d. could possibly expose someone unintentionally. For example, imagine your youth travelling and having to provide official i.d. to an uninformed or transphobic person. At best, this could be an embarrassing interaction, and at worst could put them in danger.
- Having the 'wrong' i.d. could stop trans youth in accessing health care because of a potential for painful interactions with medical service providers.
- For those wishing to transition, having i.d. changed can be a significant step forward. The waiting times to begin medical transitioning can be long and could put your youth at significant risk. Breaking down the overall process into smaller tasks and moving forward can build and sustain resilience during the difficult wait.

# Medical transitioning: Hormones

**Medical transitioning refers to steps a person may take to physically alter their bodies. This could include hormone therapy, sometimes referred to as ‘cross-sex’ hormone therapy or HRT.**

Hormone therapies are medically recognized treatments that present an effective solution for persistent gender-related distress. Even in the absence of distress, it can also be something that greatly enhances one’s life. Open the conversation about hormones with your child by asking them about what physical changes they want, if any, to affirm their gender identity.

## **Masculinizing Hormones:**

### **Testosterone (‘T’):**

Testosterone can be administered in a number of ways:

- an intramuscular injection with a syringe (testosterone cypionate and testosterone enanthate) usually into the glutes or thigh. Given 1 – 4 times per month depending on dose
- a gel – administered to the skin every day

Changes will occur cumulatively over a period of up to 5 years (as in puberty) beginning in the first few months. Although each person reacts differently to hormones depending on hormone receptors in body, genetics, type of ‘T’ administration and dose, here’s some of what might be expected:

Permanent changes:

- deepening of the voice
- facial and body hair development
- enlargement of clitoris
- male pattern baldness

Reversible changes:

- muscle development
- increased libido
- redistribution of body fat
- cessation of ovulation and menstruation
- increased sweat
- changes in body odour
- acne
- elevated blood lipids
- increased red blood cell count

## **Feminizing Hormones:**

Typically, feminizing hormones involve the administration of estrogen (the main ‘feminizing’ hormone), anti-androgens (medication to block testosterone), or a combination of the two.

### **Estrogen:**

Estrogen works directly on body tissues (eg. breast growth), and indirectly suppresses testosterone.

Estrogen can be taken in different ways:

- pill (oral application)
- skin patch or gel (transdermal application)
- injection (intramuscular application)

Although each person reacts differently to hormone therapy, some physical changes that estrogen will promote include:

- softening of skin
- decrease in muscle mass
- redistribution of body fat to hips
- breast growth
- decreased fertility
- decreased growth of facial and body hair

### **Anti-androgens:**

Anti-androgen drugs work by blocking the effects of testosterone. This reduces ‘masculine’ physical traits and has a mildly ‘feminizing’ effect. Anti-androgen effects are relatively mild by themselves, but stronger when combined with estrogen. Anti-androgens are generally administered as a pill, most commonly spironolactone and/or finasteride.

Again, physical changes that will occur with anti-androgens will be different for each person, but typical changes will include:

- decreased libido
- possible loss of fertility (reversible)
- slower growth of facial body hair
- lessened balding patterns

## **Hormone-Blockers by Dr. Joey Bonifacio, MD FRCPC MSc MPH MA**

Hormone-blockers (gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonist) are a class of medications that work by decreasing the amount of the specific hormones that lead to the release of estrogen and testosterone. They are frequently used in conditions such as endometriosis and prostate cancer, and studies have shown the safety and efficacy of these medications in younger children with central precocious puberty (early puberty) as well as in adolescents with gender dysphoria. Hormone blockers essentially put puberty 'on pause' and diminish secondary sex characteristics such as facial hair, greater muscle bulk, or penis enlargement in youth assigned male at birth, and breast tissue and widening of hips in youth assigned female at birth.

For pre-pubescent youth who identify as transgender, youth who are unsure of their gender, or youth who do not fit the binary of male-female, hormone-blockers or 'puberty blockers' can allow more breathing room for youth to consolidate their gender identity, and allow youth and their families to access mental health resources as needed. Even if a youth has completed puberty, they may benefit from hormone blockers by having the effects of secondary sex characteristics decreased.

Studies have shown the benefits of hormone blockers for transgendered adolescents in the reduction of anxiety and depressive symptoms and in greater psychological functioning. However, it is important to note that hormone blockers should not necessarily be seen as a step towards medical transitioning. The time that a youth is on hormone-blockers should instead be seen as valuable time for youth and their families to seek out resources and to gather information to make longer-term decisions about transitioning. Depending on the individual case, I may (or may not) recommend individual therapy, family therapy, and/or group therapy, and I always recommend finding and accessing community resources.

Hormone-blockers are usually injections given every 1-3 months, and a youth could be on hormone-blockers for several years. During this time, a medical professional will meet regularly with the youth to check-in, talk about the effects of the medications, and work with youth and family to access resources, as needed, in addition to performing physical examinations and ordering lab work. During the first weeks of administration, signs of puberty, such as vaginal bleeding, increased moodiness, or increased breast development, may occur in youth assigned female at birth, and increased aggressiveness may occur in youth assigned male at birth, but these side effects will reverse once the medication levels stabilize.

Hormone-blockers used alone are not a long-term solution, and generally, there are two trajectories. A youth might decide to stop taking the blockers, and, because the effects are reversible, they would continue along puberty from where it was paused and reach their full growth potential. Those who had already completed puberty when starting hormone-blockers will have those changes come back. Or, a youth may wish to medically transition, in which case I would recommend the continued use of hormone-blockers in addition to the cross-sex hormone (ie. estrogen or testosterone).

# Medical transitioning: Surgery

**Medical transitioning could also include surgery. There is no one path that people take when they are medically transitioning, and there are many different surgeries available.**

Some surgeries are covered by local health care plans, and some are not. Some surgeries require approval processes in order to be financially covered. This process is often changing, so please check our website ([www.ctys.org](http://www.ctys.org)) to see up-to-date information for Ontario.

**For those assigned female at birth, some surgical options include:**

- Breast reduction or chest reconstruction
- Hysterectomy and removing fallopian tubes and ovaries
- Enlarging clitoris to create a small penis (metaidoplasty)
- Creating a penis from body tissue (phalloplasty)
- Extending the urinary tract into a new penis (urethroplasty)
- Creating a scrotum (scrotoplasty)

**For those assigned male at birth, some surgical options include:**

- Removing the testicles (orchietomy)
- Removing the penis (penectomy)
- Creating a vagina (vaginoplasty)
- Adding labia around the vagina (labiaplasty)
- Breast augmentation (breast implants)
- Feminizing of facial features
- Reducing the size of the Adam's apple

Trans people who wish to medically transition, but have not yet begun, are 27 times more likely to attempt suicide or self harm than those who have completed medical transition.

Bauer, G., Pyne, J., Francino, M. & Hammond, R. (2013). *Suicidality among trans people in Ontario: Implications for social work and social justice*. *Service Social*, 59(1), 35-62.

*Acceptance didn't happen overnight. Jen's stepdad, however, took the news with incredible grace, and his reaction gave me strength. I slowly began to tell people – my friends at first, my family, and eventually everyone. The first time I tried to talk about it with a friend, I opened my mouth, but the words held back. I pushed out the beginning, "Jen wants to be..." I forced myself to finish, "...a boy." And then the tears started. My friend reacted with kindness and encouragement. Other people's responses varied. Some gave me a warm hug. A few even thanked me for sharing such personal information. Others said nothing; they did not seem to be able to find the right words.*

*From A Mother's Story by J. Wilson*



# How can you support your youth with medical transitioning?

Hormone therapy and gender affirming surgeries may or may not be a part of your loved ones' needs. However, if your youth is considering any medical interventions, here are some things that you can do to support them:

## **Keep the conversation open:**

Ask your child what parts of their bodies they feel they need to change in order to support their gender identity. It has sometimes been assumed that trans people need to present deep personal pain about their body parts in order to qualify for surgery. While some may have significant pain and discomfort (sometimes called dysphoria), others do not. Trans people often choose surgery in order to affirm who they are and make their lives better. Ask what surgeries or hormones your child wants and/or needs.

## **Find your own support:**

Be prepared to have a variety of feelings regarding hormones and/or surgery. Many families share that when their youth have started hormones or undergone surgery, this finally made their gender identity more real. Find an appropriate place to talk through your feelings.

## **Find a trans knowledgeable doctor:**

Ideally, find a doctor with experience treating trans people, or failing that, one who is trans positive, willing to learn and who uses a well-known, well-researched hormone protocol. Ask your youth's doctor about their experience, knowledge, how many other trans patients they have, what hormone guidelines they use, and where they would turn to get answers. Speaking to other families about doctors and sharing resources can be useful. Make sure that your doctor does not intend to try to change your child's gender identity. This will only instill a long lasting, deep sense of internal shame, and increase their risk of depression and self-harming behaviours.

## **Find an experienced surgeon:**

If your child decides on a surgery or surgeries, assist in securing a surgeon who has successful previous experience with trans people and with the specific surgery in question. Ask about potential outcomes and complication rates. Get clear about the after care, and create a plan of post surgery care. Feel free to seek a second (or third) opinion.

## **Explore the reversible and irreversible effects of any medical intervention:**

Some physical effects of hormones, if discontinued, are completely reversible, some effects are irreversible, and some effects are partially reversible. Most surgeries are permanent. Make sure your child is aware of which physical effects will be permanent, and help them determine if they can live with the changes made in the (unlikely) event that they change their mind in the future. (Although this is important to consider when making decisions, it is very rare that people regret transitioning.)

## **Examine the health risks and benefits of medical interventions:**

This is a key conversation to have with your child and their doctor. Currently, there is little research on how hormones affect trans people in the long term, so it is difficult to make fully informed decisions. Balance the potential for harm to your youth's physical health, with the risk of harming their mental health if they do not receive the medical interventions they desire.

## **Manage your own fears:**

Your biggest fear may be that your loved one will regret an irreversible decision in the future. While it is important for you to support your young person to figure out what they want, and to go through a process of examining potential outcomes of medical transition, trans youth sometimes describe feeling pressured to be '100% sure' before talking to their families; this, unfortunately, closes off a potential resource for them in you. It is natural for any person to have doubts and uncertainties while making large life decisions. Make space for, and normalize these doubts when talking with your youth. And, reassure them that it is common to have some doubts and uncertainties, and yet feel good post surgery. Research has indicated that transitioning regret is very rare.

**Be aware of what hormones/surgery will and will not do:**

Sometimes, trans youth have unrealistic ideas about what taking hormones or having surgery will do for them, and certainly, there are a wide range of results. Ask your child what they are hoping will happen to their bodies while taking hormones and/or having surgery, and speak to their doctor about what is actually possible.

**Understand the time lines for physical effects:**

Like puberty, the physical effects of hormones are not instantaneous. Changes will likely be noticeable in the first year, but can also take up to 5 years to complete. Educating yourself and your young person on the time that physical changes are expected can help mitigate some of the distress in waiting.

Also, depression can be a post surgery reality for anyone. Often, there is a lengthy healing process before the accurate results are revealed, and people can initially be disappointed in the immediate results. Adjusting to a new body can also take time. Depression is a common side effect of the surgery anesthesia and pain medication. Parents may interpret this depression as regret, but generally, this depression lifts as their child fully heals.

**Know that timing is important:**

Even after a youth decides to take hormones or undergo surgery, they typically must wait before actually starting treatment. Finding the right doctor or surgeon, being placed on wait lists, getting blood work done, and going through assessments are just a few of the things that can slow this process down. This wait time is when a trans youth is statistically at the highest risk for depression and suicide. Although it may seem simple to ask them to wait and take their time, it is far from harmless. Youth who have made the decision to transition physically need to feel that things are moving forward in order to sustain hope. Try, as best you can, to keep the process moving forward. Consider developing a detailed timeline with your child that covers social, legal and medical transition to help them feel, during periods of waiting, as though they are moving forward – even by small steps.

**Help to consider overall time lines of legal and medical transition:**

Legal name changes and gender marker changes on documents take time. And, surgery and hormones take time. Having official documentation that correctly reflects how someone is seen in the world may help them avoid hassles as well as honouring their gender identity. It is worth thinking through the time lines on how these pieces of transition line up with each other.

*“One morning, you’ll get up and find that your head is no longer exploding. That the sun is still rising, that people are going about their day-to-day lives just as they were before. And, miraculously, you’ll find that you can too. And so can your child.”*

*– Parent of a trans youth*

**CENTRAL TORONTO YOUTH SERVICES  
WISHES YOU AND YOUR FAMILY ALL THE BEST  
ON WHAT IS SURE TO BE A CHALLENGING,  
COURAGEOUS, AND ULTIMATELY REWARDING JOURNEY.**

# RESOURCES:

Below is a select list of frequently-used resources.

For a more detailed and up-to-date list of resources, go to [www.ctys.org](http://www.ctys.org)

## Live support for families of trans youth in Toronto

- **Families In TRANSition**  
10-week group for parents of trans youth (13-24). Group focus: strengthening parent-child relationships, promoting mental health & resilience, and learning about social & physical transition options. 416-924-2100. [www.ctys.org](http://www.ctys.org)
- **Transceptance**  
Monthly, Toronto-based, peer-support group for parents of transgender youth/young adults. 416-924-2100. [www.ctys.org](http://www.ctys.org)
- **PFLAG (Toronto chapter)**  
Phone and group-based support for parents, family, and friends of LGBTQ youth. 416-406-6378 (support). 416-406-1727 (general inquiries). [www.torontopflag.org](http://www.torontopflag.org)

## Online resources for families of transgender youth

- **Rainbow Health Ontario**  
Information about LGBTQ health and links to LGBTQ-friendly physical and mental health services in Ontario. [www.rainbowhealthontario.ca](http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca)
- **Gender Creative Kids**  
Resources for gender creative kids and their families, schools, and communities. [www.gendercreativekids.ca](http://www.gendercreativekids.ca)
- **Family Acceptance Project**  
Family education information and research about the experiences, health, and well-being of LGBTQ youth. <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>

- **Gender Spectrum**  
Information to create gender-sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. [www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)
- **Trans Care: An advocacy guide for trans people and loved ones**  
Information resource published in 2006 by Vancouver Coastal Health, Transcend Transgender Support & Education Society, and Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition. [www.outforhealth.org/files/all/advocacy\\_trans.pdf](http://www.outforhealth.org/files/all/advocacy_trans.pdf)
- **Transgender Health Information Program**  
BC-wide information hub providing access to information about gender-affirming care and supports. [www.transhealth.vch.ca](http://www.transhealth.vch.ca)
- **Our Trans Children**  
PFLAG Transgender Network's introduction to trans issues for loved ones of trans people. <https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/files/2015/05/Our-Trans-Children.pdf>
- **A Guide for Parents**  
Children's National Medical Center's guide for parents concerned about their children's gender behaviour. [www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/resources/if-you-are-concerned-about-your-childs-gender-behaviors-a-guide-for-parents/](http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/resources/if-you-are-concerned-about-your-childs-gender-behaviors-a-guide-for-parents/)
- **TransParent Canada**  
Parent-to-parent support network. [www.transparentcanada.ca](http://www.transparentcanada.ca)
- **RR Consulting**  
A large list of Toronto based resources for transgender people and their families. [www.rrconsulting.ca](http://www.rrconsulting.ca)



## Standards of care for professionals

- *Caring for Transgender Adolescents in BC: Suggested Guidelines*  
Published in 2006 by Transcend Transgender Support & Education Society, Vancouver Coastal Health's Transgender Health Program, and the Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition. <http://www.amsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/CaringForTransgenderAdolescents.pdf>
- *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People*  
Published in 2012 by World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). [https://www.weareaptn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/WPATH-Standards-of-Care-V7-2011\\_.pdf](https://www.weareaptn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/WPATH-Standards-of-Care-V7-2011_.pdf)
- *Guidelines and Protocols for Hormone Therapy and Primary Health Care for Trans Clients*  
Published in 2015 by Rainbow Health Ontario, a program of Sherbourne Health Centre. <http://sherbourne.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Guidelines-and-Protocols-for-Comprehensive-Primary-Care-for-Trans-Clients-2015.pdf>

## Reading material for parents

- *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender-Nonconforming Children* by Diane Ehrensaft
- *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* by Stephanie A. Brill and Rachel Pepper

## Support for trans youth in Toronto

- **Pride & Prejudice Program at Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS)**  
Individual, family, and group counselling for LGBTQ youth aged 24 and under. 416-924-2100. <https://ctys.org/program/pride-prejudice/>
- **Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line**  
Free over-the-phone and online peer support for LGBTQ youth across Ontario.  
416-962-9688 (Greater Toronto Area).  
1-800-268-9688 (Ontario-wide, toll-free).  
[www.youthline.ca/](http://www.youthline.ca/)

- **Supporting Our Youth (SOY)**

Programming for LGBTQ youth in Toronto (note: Trans Fusion Crew is specific to youth who are transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, of trans experience, or questioning their gender). 416-324-5077. [www.soytoronto.org](http://www.soytoronto.org)

- **519 Church Street Community Centre**

Toronto's LGBTQ community centre with its own trans-specific programs. 416-392-6874. [www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org)

- **The Triangle Program**

Alternative school program where LGBTQ youth can learn and earn academic credits in a safe and affirming environment. 416-393-8443. <http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/triangle>

## Trans-positive medical care in Toronto

- **Hassle Free Clinic**

Free STI testing, anonymous HIV testing, and sexual health counselling, with separate clinic hours for men and women (trans people can go to either). 416-922-0566. [www.hasslefreeclinic.org](http://www.hasslefreeclinic.org)

- **Health Centre at 410 Sherbourne Street**

St. Michael's Hospital satellite clinic that has been serving trans people for years. 416-867-3728. [www.stmichaelshospital.com](http://www.stmichaelshospital.com)

- **Sherbourne Health Centre**

Community health centre specializing in LGBTQ, newcomer, and urban health. 416-324-4180. [www.sherbourne.on.ca](http://www.sherbourne.on.ca)

- **Planned Parenthood Toronto**

Offers interdisciplinary health care to youth aged 29 and under. 416-961-0113. [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

- **Gender Clinic at the Hospital for Sick Kids**

Medical and psychiatric support for gender nonconforming youth under the age of 18. 416-813-1500. [www.sickkids.ca](http://www.sickkids.ca)



**CENTRAL TORONTO YOUTH SERVICES**

65 Wellesley Street East, Suite 300

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(416) 924-2100

**[www.ctys.org](http://www.ctys.org)**





In this 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of  
**Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Families of Transgender Youth**,  
we share experiences from families, trans youth and professionals, answer commonly  
asked questions, suggest lines of communication, offer paths of understanding,  
and point towards additional resources.

Research has shown that families play a central role in building resilience  
in trans youth; the more supported trans youth feel by their families, the better  
they will do in all aspects of their lives. In a world where there is still significant  
discrimination against trans people, providing a safe, loving, supportive home  
and a strong family bond is crucial.

This guide was written to support you,  
so you, in turn, can fully support your trans youth.



### CENTRAL TORONTO YOUTH SERVICES

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