

ALL ABOUT GENDER

Information and resources for parents and guardians about their transgender, questioning, gender expansive, gender nonconforming, or non-binary kids.

GENDER CAN BE HARD TO TALK ABOUT.

Talking about gender can be hard when we don't know what words to use!
Here are some definitions of important gender related terms so that we're all on the same page right from the start.

Gender Identity: A person's deeply felt sense of their own gender. Someone could be female, male, both, neither or any other gender they feel most comfortable with.

Gender Expression: This is how someone expresses their gender identity to other people, and is often expressed through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, and/or voice.

Sex Assigned at Birth: The sex that's listed on a person's original birth certificate. This is most often based on physical genitalia present at birth.

Transgender: A term used for people whose gender identity or gender expression is different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Nonconforming: When someone's gender identity or gender expression is different from what we typically think of as male or female.

Non-Binary: A term for people who have a gender identity that isn't male or female.

Cisgender: A term used for people whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth.

IT'S OKAY TO HAVE QUESTIONS

We understand that you might have some questions about your child's gender or gender expression. It's important for parents/guardians to have the opportunity to ask these questions and hopefully get some answers. Below are some common questions parents have about gender.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS TRANSGENDER OR GENDER NONCONFORMING?

There's no test or checklist that can be used to determine whether or not your child is transgender. Your child's way of telling you about their identity depends on their age, developmental level, and what words they know about gender. It's important to listen to what your child is telling you as they know themselves best. Many children with a transgender identity say, "I *am* a boy," or "I *am* a girl," instead of only expressing their gender through clothing choices, toy preference, etc.

IS THIS JUST A PHASE?

This is hard to answer because all people experience their gender differently. If your child has a gender that is different from their sex assigned at birth, it is most likely not a phase. How your child thinks about and expresses their gender can change over their lifetime though.

WHAT IF I FEEL LIKE I'M LOSING MY CHILD?

Parents/guardians of transgender children often have a sense of loss and need to grieve. It is normal to feel this way. Seek out parent support groups in your community or online like PFLAG, Trans Youth Equality Foundation or Stand with Trans. It's really common to need a little extra support just be sure that you deal with these feelings without looking for support from your child. They need you to be there for them during this time of change, not the other way around.

DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG TO MAKE MY CHILD TRANSGENDER OR GENDER NONCONFORMING?

No, you did not do anything wrong or do anything to make your child transgender or gender nonconforming. Just like you can't change someone's eye color or height, nothing you did or could do would change your child's gender identity. The best thing you can do is support them and let them know you love them just the way they are.

WHAT CAN I DO TO SUPPORT MY CHILD?

To start, let your child know that they are loved. Accepting them and letting them live in ways that make them happy can really increase your child's well-being. Research shows that loving and accepting your child as they are can lead to a happier, healthier life.

HOW DO I TELL MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS?

First, find out if your child wants friends and family to know about their gender identity, what they would feel comfortable with others knowing, and how they want you to talk about it. If your child is okay with you sharing, it can help to practice what you're going to say before you start the conversation. For example, choose what words you might use and whether you'll talk to someone over the phone, by e-mail, or in person. It may even help to think about how other people might react so that you're ready for their reactions. In deciding who to tell first, it can help to talk to someone who you think will be supportive because it's important that you have someone to talk with too. If you have access to the Internet, there are several online groups for parents of transgender and gender nonconforming people that you can connect with. Support groups are a great place to talk to other parents who are going through the same thing you are.

GENDER AFFIRMATION: Some people make changes to affirm their gender identity. Changes can include both social and medical changes. Social gender affirmation can include going by a different name and different pronouns (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs) or wearing different clothes. Medical gender affirmation involves physical changes that could include puberty blockers, hormones and/or surgery. Legal gender affirmation includes making legal changes to one's name and gender marker on identity documents. For info about changing identity documents, visit the National Center for Transgender Equality's website at <http://www.transequality.org/documents>. There are many ways people affirm their gender and there is no right or wrong way to do so.

SOCIAL TRANSITION: MY CHILD WANTS TO CHANGE THEIR NAME.

Your child might ask you to call them by a different name and use different pronouns for them as part of their social transition. Even when you want to support your child, this can be a difficult thing to do and can take some getting used to. However, it is very important to try your best to always use the name and pronouns they chose for themselves. Using their name and pronouns is a great way to show your support. Be sure to ask your child who they want you to use their new name and pronouns with.

MEDICAL TRANSITION: MY CHILD WANTS TO CHANGE THEIR BODY.

Here is a very brief introduction to some of the medical gender affirmation options available.

PUBERTY BLOCKERS

Puberty blockers stop or suppress puberty by stopping the production of testosterone and estrogen. The effects of puberty blockers are reversible (changes go away if someone stops taking blockers).

TESTOSTERONE

Testosterone is used to give someone a more masculine appearing body. Each person's body reacts differently to hormones but typically changes include a deeper voice, facial and body hair growth, stopping someone's period, and a more muscular body, among other things. Some of the effects of testosterone are permanent (changes don't go away even if someone stops taking testosterone) and some are reversible (changes go away if someone stops taking testosterone).

ESTROGEN

Estrogen is used to give someone a more feminine appearing body. Each person's body reacts differently to hormones but typically, changes include breast growth, decreased growth of facial and body hair, softening of skin, and a more feminine/curvier body, among other things. Some of the effects of estrogen are permanent (changes don't go away even if someone stops taking estrogen) and some are reversible (changes go away if someone stops taking estrogen).

ANTI-ANDROGENS

Anti-androgens like spironolactone block the effects of testosterone and makes someone's body less masculine. People often take anti-androgens at the same time they take estrogen. The effects of anti-androgens are reversible (changes go away if someone stops taking anti-androgens).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Beyond Gender

<http://www.beyondgenderproject.org/>

Gender Spectrum

<http://www.genderspectrum.org/>

Gender Spectrum Lounge - connect with others!

<http://www.genderspectrum.org/lounge/>

Supporting and Caring for Transgender Children

<http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files/documents/SupportingCaringforTransChildren.pdf>

Healthy Children: Gender Nonconforming and Transgender Children

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Non-Conforming-Transgender-Children.aspx>

Trans Youth Equality Foundation - For Parents

<http://www.transyouthequality.org/for-parents/>

National Center for Transgender Equality

<http://www.transequality.org>

Center of Excellence for Transgender Health

<http://www.transhealth.ucsf.org>

National LGBT Health Education Center

<http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org>

The Trevor Project

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

The Gender Book

<http://www.thegenderbook.com>

GLAAD's Tips for Allies of Transgender People

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies>

Trans Student Educational Resources

<http://www.transstudent.org>

Gender Spectrum's AFFIRMING PARENTING PRACTICES

1. Create a supportive family environment.
2. Require respect within the family.
3. Express love and support for your child's gender expression.
4. Allow zero tolerance for disrespect, negative comments or pressure.
5. Maintain open and honest communication with your child.

Learn more about affirming parenting practices at <http://www.genderspectrum.org/explore-topics/parenting-and-family/#seis>

SOURCES

Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of California, San Francisco. Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Nonbinary People; 2nd edition. Deutsch MB, ed. June 2016. Available at www.transhealth.ucsf.edu/guidelines.

Gender Spectrum: Parenting and Families. Available at <http://www.genderspectrum.org/explore-topics/parenting-and-family/>

Central Toronto Youth Services. Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Families of Transgender Youth, 2nd edition. 2013. Available at <http://www.ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/familiesintransition.pdf>



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