

FAMILIES IN TRANSITION

Useful information, tips and
advice for families of trans
young people

USEFUL INFORMATION

This is a guide to help you support someone you love who is trans.

Your child or sibling may have come to you and let you know that they are unsure and questioning their gender identity or that they are trans. You may have known for a while and feel relieved that your family member has shared this news with you. Or, you may not have anticipated this and feel as though it came from nowhere. It is normal to feel a range of emotions when you learn this news. Families of trans young people can commonly feel fear, grief, worry, disbelief, shame or isolation. You are not alone in feeling any of these feelings.

You may feel a sense of loss about a future you dreamed you would have with your family member. Try to remember that is it their life and future to hope and dream for, not the version you wished for.

Many family members want to know why their loved one is transgender, look for something or someone to blame and ask questions themselves like 'what did I do wrong?' It is important to remember that this is not a choice. You didn't do anything wrong and there is nothing to blame. Nothing can make a person transgender in the same way nothing makes a person cisgender.

Try and give your family member the support they need. Your family member has likely experienced all the feelings you are going through on their own. Now they are turning to and opening up about what may be the biggest secret they have held. They are still the same person – the packaging has just changed.

"I WISH THAT I HAD BEEN MORE EDUCATED ABOUT WHAT BEING TRANSGENDER MEANT. ALL OUR CHILD WANTED WAS TO BE LOVED AND ACCEPTED FOR WHO THEY WERE, BUT WE DIDN'T HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE NOR THE UNDERSTANDING TO HANDLE IT ANY OTHER WAY."

Kirsty

TRANS TERMS

Gender Identity: An individual's internal sense of their gender, including they feel about, think about and view their own gender.

Sex Assigned at Birth: A person may be assigned female or male usually based on observation of external genitals. However, this does not necessarily reflect how a person will identify themselves.

Transgender/trans: People whose gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Trans Man: Someone who is a man but was assigned female at birth and identifies as trans. Some trans men socially and/or medically transition in order for their body to better reflect their gender.

Trans Woman: Someone who is a woman but was assigned male at birth and identifies as trans. Some socially and/or medically transition in order for their body to better reflect their gender.

Non-binary: Someone who identifies as neither exclusively male or female or maybe identifies as both.

Gender Expression: How someone shows their gender through clothes, hair, behaviour etc.

Gender Dysphoria: Distress resulting from a difference between a person's gender identity and the person's assigned sex at birth, associated gender role, and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics.

AFAB: Assigned female at birth.

AMAB: Assigned male at birth.

Sexual Orientation: Sexual and romantic attraction. Trans is not a sexual orientation. Trans people can have any sexual orientation.

Cisgender: Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Pronouns: Ways people refer to themselves – often related to gender e.g. he/she/they.

Binding: Compressing one's chest to create a more androgynous or masculine appearance. This should be done with a chest binder designed specifically for this purpose.

Tucking: This is a technique for achieving a flat groin for trans women or trans feminine people.

SUPPORTING YOUR FAMILY

Even with the best intentions it can be a struggle to know what to do to show support. Here are some simple tips for supporting your family during this time of transition.

Show That You Care

Coming out as trans can be a scary experience for a young person. Many trans people are scared that if they come out, they will be rejected by loved ones. Sharing this information is a huge step and shows that you are important to them and that they want to be open with you. Tell your family member that you love them no matter what and that you support them to be true to themselves.

Accept Their Identity

It is likely that your family member has spent a long time contemplating their gender identity before letting you know. Rejecting this, telling them it is a phase or asking them to prove it can be harmful. You may be feeling upset or shocked but remember how vulnerable they are in this moment too. Create a space where that person can be honest and open about their gender and what steps they want to take next.

Follow Their Lead

As a family member, it's important to listen and talk to your child or sibling about how they feel and how they want to transition. They are the expert on how they feel and who what works best for them. Try not to make assumptions about what they want. This includes whether they want to transition, change their appearance or tell other people.

Communicate

Encourage your family member to explain how they feel and what it means to them to feel that way. If you don't understand, ask them to break it down for you. Keeping communication lines open and check in regularly. Teenagers can find it difficult to open up about their feelings but remind them regularly that you are there if they need to talk.

SUPPORTING YOUR FAMILY

Be Honest

If you are struggling, be open with your family member. Let them know that you are doing your best – but you are playing catchup. They have had time to learn about trans identities and process this – you may need some time to do the same.

Educate Yourself

Take some time to learn about trans issues and the difference between sex and gender. There are great books and resources that will help you understand the issue. Visit www.belongto.org for resources and videos to help you understand this topic. No matter how much you learn, don't assume that you know more about this than your trans loved one – they are the experts on their identity.

Be Open

If you see that your family member is very distressed, let them know you're there for them. Ask if there is someone else that they would like to talk to, perhaps suggesting they speak to a professional who is aware of trans identities. Our Youth Workers at BeLonG To have a lot of experience supporting trans young people. We also offer a free crisis counselling service with Pieta House. Please get in touch with us.

Include Other Family Members

Siblings may also experience questions and struggle as a family member transitions. Educate siblings using language that is age-appropriate and help them understand trans identities. Encourage questions and dialogue to strengthen family relationships. Consider how family dynamics may have shifted with this change for example, your eldest son is no longer the eldest son.

Telling Other People

Talk to you family member about whether they would like to share this information with other people or if they would prefer to keep it between you for now. They may not be ready to tell anyone else or they may prefer to do it themselves. Talk to them about who they want to know and when. Consider taking some time to come to terms with this news before telling extended family and friends. Together with your trans family member, come up with a plan that works for your family.

SUPPORTING YOUR FAMILY

Misgendering

Using new names and pronouns may be difficult at first and you may become overwhelmed at the thought of getting it wrong. Try not to misgender your family member by using their old pronoun or call them by their previous name ('birth-name' or 'dead-name') if they have changed their name as part of their transition. This may happen accidentally – if you make a mistake, apologise and correct yourself. Questioning their gender identity can be extremely hurtful and have long lasting emotional effects.

Support Yourself

Don't be afraid to get your own support to help you understand and support you emotionally. This can be a challenging time for your family and speaking to other people who have gone through or are going through the same process can be helpful. Some family members feel a sense of loss that they person they knew so well seems to have changed. Others worry for their child or sibling's safety or what the neighbours or other family members think. You are not alone in this experience. There are a number of support groups for parents and family members nationwide. Find a list at www.teni.ie.

TRANSITIONING

Transitioning is a process through which trans people change their gender expression to match their gender identity.

Transitioning is a totally unique process for everyone and can range from minor changes (such as names and pronouns) to more long-term changes (such as surgery and hormones).

There is no one way for a trans person to live their life. Some people will try out some of the smaller changes and see how it feels.

Social Transitioning

This may involve changing appearance such as how they dress, their hair or make-up. It can also involve use of bathrooms and changing rooms that suit their gender identity. It can also include the use of binding or tucking to feel more comfortable in their gender.

Part of coming out can be asking people to call you by a different name or use a different pronoun. Some trans people refer to the name they were given at birth as their 'birthname' or 'deadname'. Pronouns are words you use to talk about someone when you don't use their name for example he/him/his, her/she/hers or they/them/theirs.

Legally Transitioning

Some steps that may be taken to legally transition from sex assigned at birth to better reflect one's gender identity include:

Legally Changing your Name

A legal name change via deed poll from a birthname to a new name. A deed poll is a signed declaration by a person. The person who signs it is held to whatever the statement contains from that point on. For example, deed poll for a change of name means you are then legally only known by your new name and declaring that you are abandoning your old name. For young people between 14 and 17 years, consent is needed from both parents/guardians to execute a deed poll. To find out how to execute a deed poll visit citizensinformation.ie or get in touch and we can offer you support.

TRANSITIONING

Applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate

The Gender Recognition Act 2015 allows individuals over the age of 18 to self-declare their own gender identity by applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate. Where a certificate is issued, a person's gender becomes their gender on legal documents going forward. With a Gender Recognition Certificate, a person can apply to change their gender marker on documents including a passport and birth certificate. The application form is available from www.welfare.ie.

For 16 and 17-year-olds, it is possible to apply for legal recognition, however the process is more complicated. Parental/guardian consent is required and a person must then apply to the Circuit Family Court with this consent and an application form. More information is available from www.teni.ie

Medically Transitioning

Making the decision to medically transition can be scary and most people have no idea where to start or how to support their family member. Below are the first steps to take if your family member has decided to medically transition. This may include the use of hormone blockers, hormone replacement therapy or surgery.

* Some of this information may change due to a review of the Gender Recognition Act 2015. Check out our website for updated information.

TRANSITIONING

Under 18 Years*	Over 18 Years*
<p>You will need adult support, preferably from a parent, guardian or caregiver. You can also talk to your school's guidance counsellor or pastoral care team.</p>	<p>Ask your GP to refer you to St. Columcille's Hospital in Loughlinstown, Dublin is the designated 'National Gender Services' and they provide a service to those over 18.</p>
<p>Your local LGBTI+ service will be able to support you and help your family and school if needed.</p>	<p>You will be placed on a waiting list for a Team Assessment from the National Gender Services. Please note the waiting list can take over 12 months.</p>
<p>At the GP, ask for a referral to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).</p>	<p>Following this you will be referred to the liaison psychiatry service for diagnosis of gender dysphoria. This is required to medically transition.</p>
<p>CAMHS can provide a diagnosis saying you fit the criteria of gender dysphoria. This is required to medically transition.</p>	<p>You will then be referred on to the endocrinology unit for treatment.</p>

* This information may change with time, so please check in BeLonG To for more up-to-date details if needed.

SUPPORT AT SCHOOL

Support for trans students can vary from school to school.

If your child wishes to be out at school, identify a member of the school staff that they feel safe to approach about this. The young person should be central in all decisions about their journey.

Some staff members will not be familiar with trans identities and it can be left to family members to explain basic information. Let the school know that professional training is available for educators. Ask them to get in touch with BeLonG To.

Names and Pronouns

Together with your child, let your school know how important it is to call your child their new name and pronouns in day-to-day interactions. Changing a student's name or gender on the school register is a decision the board of management makes, but this should not impact everyday use of your child's name of choice. Meet with a representative from the school with your child and let them decide if or how they want to let staff and students know about a name or pronoun change.

Bathrooms and Changing Rooms

Students should be able to access toilets and changing facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Many trans young people avoid these space as they don't feel safe. Being able to access gender neutral toilets can be particularly important as someone transitions. Talk to the school and your child about their needs relating to spaces.

SUPPORT AT SCHOOL

Uniforms

Many schools have gendered uniforms which can cause challenges for trans students. All students, including trans students, should follow their school's uniform policy and any policies on use of make-up, appropriate dress, jewellery, etc. However, trans students should be allowed to wear a uniform that is consistent with their gender identity. For some schools this will be easier than others, as many offer variations in their uniform (i.e. trousers, skirts and tracksuits).

In single-sex schools, varied uniform options may not be available, and specific accommodations will be necessary for a student who transitions. At a minimum, there should be a gender-neutral option. If you are unhappy with how a school handles their uniform policy, you can make a formal complaint (see below).

Transphobic Bullying

Some trans people experience bullying because they are trans. This is known as transphobic bullying and it is never acceptable. According to the Government of Ireland's 2013 Action Plan on Bullying, transphobic bullying must be specifically named on a school's bullying policy. If your child experiences transphobic bullying at school, talk to their year head or principal. If this is not helpful, you may wish to make a complaint.

Making Complaints

If you and your child are struggling with getting the support you need for your child at school, you may consider making a complaint. Get a copy of the school's complaints procedure and follow the steps on this. This may include writing a letter to the school's board of management stating what the requirements are for your child (e.g. name and pronoun to be used and respected, and for your child to wear trousers). If you have exhausted all these avenues and are still not happy with the response from the school, you have the authority to go to the Ombudsman for Children with your complaint.

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

BeLonG To provides



Free Crisis Counselling



Monday Chats



LGBTI+ Youth Groups

info@belongto.org

01 670 6223

www.belongto.org

Useful Support Services

TENI

(Transgender Equality Network Ireland)

www.teni.ie

Gender Identity Family Support Line

01 907 3707

LGBTI+ Ireland

www.lgbt.ie

Gay Project

www.gayproject.ie

Samaritans

www.samaritans.org

Pieta House

www.pieta.ie

Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &
Trans Young People in Ireland



Charity # 20059798

CHY #: 16534



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Grúthai Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs



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