

What if my child decides to undergo medical procedures to change gender appearance?

If your child decides to make the physical transition from one gender to another, it is important to be as supportive as possible. While it may be hard to see your child's physical appearance change so drastically, gender transition is often a necessary step for your child to feel more comfortable living openly as another gender.

Will my child be discriminated against? Is my child in danger?

Unfortunately, both of these things are possible. When someone who is TG comes out, the ability to pass for their new gender is usually limited. Due to the amount of discrimination against TG people, it may be hard for your child to live a life free of harassment. It is even more unfortunate for your TG child when this discrimination exists within her/his own family.

Now what? How can I support my child?

The fact that you are reading this pamphlet shows that you are a concerned parent who is willing to show support for your child and learn more about transgenderism. You are on the way to feeling better. You should be willing to talk, listen, and learn together with your child. It may also be helpful for you to talk about your experiences with others, and PFLAG-NYC is here to help you with your needs as the parent of a TG child. It is important that you educate yourself as much as possible about transgenderism and then help reduce some of the discrimination that exists in our society. After all, it is silence that allows prejudice and discrimination to survive. For more information, ask for our special brochure for parents – *Our Trans Children*.

Parts of this brochure have been adapted from PFLAG publications *Our Trans Children* and *Simple Answers to Parent's Questions about Lesbians, Gay, and Bisexuals*.

Additional materials available from PFLAG National:

Visit www.pflagnyc.org/go/tnet for:

- *Our Trans Children*
- *TNET Reader's Corner*

Other Helpful Web Resources:

- www.childrenastheyare.org
- www.transfamily.org
- www.gpac.org
- www.transgenderlaw.org
- www.nctequality.org
- www.ifge.org



Answers to Parents' Questions about Transgender People



Our main monthly meeting is on the second Sunday of every month from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at St. Bartholomew's Community House 109 E. 50th St. (between Park & Lex) New York, NY

For other meeting locations throughout the city, see our website.

All are welcome, including parents, friends, family members and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, with or without their families.

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What does transgender (TG) mean?

A person who identifies as transgender (TG) feels that his or her gender identity differs from what would generally be expected by simple anatomy. Gender identity is one's internal sense of being male or female, which is commonly communicated to others by one's gender expression (clothes, hairstyle, mannerisms, etc.) It's important to note that the term 'transgendered' describes several distinct but related groups of people who use a variety of other terms to self identify.

How can my child be sure they are TG?

Your child did not choose to be TG. It is natural to think that your child is simply undergoing an experimental phase or that your child is confused. However, keep in mind that you could direct a similar question to yourself: "Why did I choose to be male/female?" It is important to remember that just as you are living your life as male or female because it is comfortable for you, your child feels the need to do what is most honest for him or herself.

I feel I am losing my daughter/son. How can I get her/him back?

It is normal to feel that the child you once knew is no longer a part of your life. However, your child is still the same person. Any person close to you who may present shocking information is still the same person at heart. Try not to take this new information as a reason to give up or feel left out, but rather as a new opportunity to learn more about your child. Bear in mind that the things you wanted or thought you understood about your child may not reflect how your child actually feels.

Why did my child wait so long to tell me?

It is a difficult process to realize that your gender identity does not correspond to the way others perceive your gender. Many people who realize that they are TG may have felt "different" throughout a portion of their lives without ever understanding why they felt that way. Plus, our

predominant culture does not make it easy for those born male to feel they are female (or vice versa), which can cause your TG child to be reluctant or frightened to express how he/she truly feels. The fact that your child has told you the truth means your child is ready to express this very personal part of her/himself with you, and wishes to be more honest with you.

Does this mean my child is gay?

Being TG does not necessarily mean that your child is gay. Just as a person who is not TG may be gay, straight, or bisexual, so can a TG person. It is up to your child to decide what is most comfortable for her/himself.

If my child isn't gay, why are TG people so often grouped with the gay community?

TG people are often grouped with the gay community because there is a common feeling of being ostracized by the people in their lives and the world around them. Similarly, PFLAG recognizes that parents, families, and friends of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans persons may all experience the same stages of denial and grief. While sexual orientation may not bring gay and TG people together, the struggles and stages of acceptance are very closely connected.

Is there anything I could have done to prevent this?

Your child's gender identity is not preventable. Many families may never recognize that their child is having severe difficulties, while others report children as young as age three clearly identifying with the other gender. It is not your fault that your child feels the way he/she does; instead of thinking of your child's unconventional gender identity as something you should have prevented, think of it instead as something you can help flourish. Your child needs you.

What about Gender Identity Disorder?

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is a psychological classification found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) published by the American

Psychiatric Association. While GID is the only diagnosis under which transsexuals may receive treatment, GID has been used inappropriately and harmfully by some psychotherapists to treat gender variant youth. Moreover, many if not most TG people also believe that they do not have a mental disorder, and to treat them as such would be offensive and mentally damaging.

Should my child undergo psychotherapy?

While some children with GID may benefit from a supportive therapist, the GID diagnosis has been used to manipulate these children to become more gender-conforming. If your child feels therapy is necessary, it is important that the therapist supports your child's gender identity and helps her/him become more comfortable – an unsupportive therapist will be mentally damaging to your child.

Why does my child have to express this openly?

The fact that your child has decided to express his/her unconventional gender identity openly is due to at least one of two factors. For one, your child is starting to build self-esteem and become more comfortable with his/her gender identity. Also, in some cases, your child's readiness to be more open about his or her identity is a part of a process called gender transition. Gender transition is the period during which a TG person may decide to change his/her physical appearance and body to match his/her internal gender identity. If your child decides to do this, he/she may identify as a transsexual. Transsexuals are TG persons who decide to make the physical transition from one gender to another.