

## What words to use

Sometimes it can be hard to know whether to refer to someone as "he" or "she." If you are in doubt, it is okay to ask "What pronoun do you use?"

It is often very important to ts/tg people to be referred to by the right pronoun. At first, it can be challenging for friends and family members to refer to someone they have always known as a "he," as "she," or vice versa. In the end, it comes down to simple courtesy. Apologising for mistakes and trying to keep them to a minimum is a simple way to show that we respect and care for our friend or family member.

Ts/tg parents and their children come to their own decisions about what parental terms to use. Some children continue to call their ts/tg parent "mom" even when they have fully transitioned and look to outsiders entirely like a dad. Others make the switch from "dad" to "mom" or vice versa. The decisions parents and children make together need to be carefully respected by family, friends and schools.

## Respecting Privacy

Sometimes ts/tg parents and their children get asked questions that may feel intrusive or devaluing of themselves and of their families.

There is sometimes a curiosity about ts/tg people's genitals that can make for inappropriate questions. Asking ts/tg people (or their children) about Sex Reassignment Surgeries or for details about their genitals is the same as asking anyone else about their genitals. In most situations, and unless you know the person very well, these kinds of questions are intrusive - and it is hard to imagine a situation in which it would be appropriate to ask any child about their parent's genitals.

## Defining Family

Ts/tg parents who stay together through and after one parent's transition, or ts/tg people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, may present us with unfamiliar family structures. While it can be confusing to meet a child with two mothers, two fathers, or some other combination of parents, it

can be helpful to take a minute to think about the questions you want to ask. Why do you want to know this information? Would you ask the same questions of heterosexual parents? Remember that families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or transgender members get asked these questions regularly by people who may not be respectful.

## Celebrating Family

Transsexual/transgender parents, like most parents, love and want the best for their children. They struggle with the same issues all parents struggle with - finances, daycare, schools, childrearing, etc. Please celebrate with ts/tg parents the children in their lives and the families they are creating.

Some of the language involved in addressing ts/tg issues can be confusing. Here is a list of key terms:

**Sex:** the biological form of male or female or intersex. Includes external genitals, hormones, internal reproductive organs and chromosomes. We often imagine that everyone is either male or female. In reality there is more of a continuum.

**Intersex:** general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

**Gender Identity:** the inner sense of whether you are male or female or both or neither, regardless of your biological sex.

**Sexual Orientation:** refers to who you are attracted to. Ts/tg people, like others, can be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, etc.

**Transsexual:** people who are attracted to ts/tg people.

**Transition:** the process of change that a person goes through to bring their body in line with their inner sense of gender.

**Hormones:** Many, but not all, ts/tg people use hormones to transition. Good health care for ts/tg people includes access to safe hormones, with medical supervision.

**Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS):** the generic term for a group of surgeries which are part of the transition process for many, but not all, ts/tg people.

**Transphobia:** irrational fear and hatred of ts/tg people.

**Trans:** umbrella term referring to people who cross traditional gender norms; can mean people who are transgender, transsexual, crossdressers, intersex and/or genderqueer.

**Gender Dysphoria:** the persistent discomfort someone feels with her or his sex or the persistent sense of the inappropriateness of acting out the gender role of that sex.

For a more complete list of terms see: "TS/TG 101: An introduction to transsexual and transgendered issues for service providers" [www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org) (trans programmes). See also "Canada-Wide Trans Support Resource Guide."

## RESOURCES

LGBT Parenting Network, Sherbourne Health Centre  
416-324-4100, ext. 5219 [www.sherbourne.on.ca](http://www.sherbourne.on.ca)

Queer Parenting Programmes  
The 519 Church St. Community Centre  
416-392-6878, ext. 109 [www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org)

FSA Toronto [www.fsatoronto.com](http://www.fsatoronto.com) (LGBT Parents)

Health Centre at 410 Sherbourne (St. Michael's Hospital)  
416-867-3728 [www.csmh.toronto.on.ca/](http://www.csmh.toronto.on.ca/)

Transfamily [www.transfamily.org](http://www.transfamily.org)

Transgender Legal Education Advocacy Foundation (TLEAF)  
250-920-9822 [tleaf@shaw.ca](mailto:tleaf@shaw.ca)

TransParentcy [www.transparentcy.org](http://www.transparentcy.org)

GQTGPARENTING · Trans & GenderQueer Parenting  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GQTGPARENTING/>

International Foundation for Gender Education  
[www.ifge.org](http://www.ifge.org)

TGStation [www.tgstation.com](http://www.tgstation.com)

Trans-Health.com [www.trans-health.com](http://www.trans-health.com)

Transsexual Menace Toronto [www.themenace.net](http://www.themenace.net)

Harry Benjamin's "Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders"  
[http://symposium.com/ijt/soc\\_2001/index.htm](http://symposium.com/ijt/soc_2001/index.htm)

Intersex Society of North America [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)

Intersexed and Transgendered People [www.itpeople.org](http://www.itpeople.org)

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design: [www.orangehabitats.com](http://www.orangehabitats.com)

# Transsexual Transgender (ts/tg) Parenting:

## Basic Information For Our Friends and Families

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There have always been people who do not fit within traditional notions of male and female. There have also always been people whose bodies and genders do not match. For example, someone who is born with a male body but experiences themselves as a woman; or somebody who experiences themselves as neither completely male nor completely female.

Transgender is an umbrella term intended to include anyone whose gender identity or expression falls outside the stereotypically expected behaviours of men and women. Transsexuals, people who have made, or are making, a transition from one gender to the other, sometimes prefer not be included under this umbrella. In this brochure we will use the term transsexual/transgender (ts/tg) in an attempt to respect these differences.

Until recently, ts/tg people have been seen as unfit parents. Many have lost custody of their biological children; many have been completely cut off from contact with their children. Those who wanted to bring children into their lives felt that it was impossible.

Although civil rights struggles regarding the rights of ts/tg people are currently being waged world wide, there is still a lot of discomfort with ts/tg people generally, and particularly as parents. You may find it difficult to have ts/tg people as friends or members of your family. You may have concerns about ts/tg people raising children. Many of these concerns are based on myths about gender identity and parenting. Some of these myths are addressed below:

### **Myth: Children will be damaged by knowing that their parent is ts/tg.**

Several research studies have concluded that there is no harm to children raised by ts/tg parents.

"Available evidence does not support concerns that a parent's transsexualism directly adversely impacts on the children .... transsexual parents can remain effective parents and children can understand and empathise with their trans-

sexual parent." (Richard Green, M.D., Dept. of Psychiatry, Charing Cross Hospital, London, England, 1998)

"There is no logical reason why someone living in the opposite gender role should be separated from his or her offspring. A sex change does not in any way diminish the parent's love for the child, nor does it affect the ability to be a good parent." (Mildred Brown, Ph.D. in True Selves Jossey Bass Publishers, 1996)

Canadian courts have also ruled in favour of transsexual parental rights. In *Forrester v. Forrester*, 2001, Justice Theo Wolfer of the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton, Ontario ruled that: "The applicant's transsexuality, in itself, without further evidence, would not constitute a material change in circumstances, nor would it be considered a negative factor in custody determination."

### **Myth: Transsexual/transgender people can't/don't have children.**

Many ts/tg people have biological children from before they transitioned. Ts/tg people who want to bring children into their lives can do so in many different ways, including adoption, co-parenting and step-parenting. The hormones taken to transition do affect fertility so some ts/tg people store their eggs or sperm prior to transition for later child rearing.

### **Myth: Children need to be a certain age before they are ready to learn about a transgender parent or family member.**

Families have successfully dealt with and continue to deal with the issues of gender transition and fluidity with children of every age. Each age has unique needs that must be met, and it is up to the parent to pay attention to those needs. The quality of the parent-child relationship is a more important factor than the age of the child.

### **Myth: Transgender people are child molesters.**

Pedophilia is an adult attraction to children. There is no connection between ts/tg identity and pedophilia. The myth arises out of fears and discomfort with differences that are unfamiliar, and has nothing to do with lived reality.

### **Myth: Children living in ts/tg families will be ostracized by their peers. It is unfair to put children into these situations.**

Children make fun of other children for all kinds of reasons: for being too short or too tall, for being too thin or too fat, for being of a particular race or religion or speaking a different language. Children show remarkable resilience, especially if they are provided with a loving home environment.

To argue that ts/tg people should not be parents assumes that groups that experience social discrimination should be denied the right to parent because of the impact on their children. This is like arguing that people of a particular race or religious group should not be allowed to parent because of the discrimination their children might face. Making this comparison can help clarify how discriminatory it is to argue that ts/tg people should be denied the right to parent.

### **Myth: Transgender parents must resolve all issues of gender identity before coming out to their children.**

Exploring gender identity and being a parent are two entirely different things. The period of exploration of gender identity is not always traumatic and stressful - it can also be full of joy and deep relief. Many ts/tg parents who are in the process of exploring their gender identities remain good parents throughout, and raise ordinary, healthy children.

There is no simple answer as to when is the right time in a parent's transitioning process to tell

children about it. Of course, the information given to children must be age-appropriate. Coming out to children can dispel feelings of secrecy and dishonesty and increase feelings of closeness. Helping children decide who to tell and who not to tell can be a process that teaches children important lessons about boundaries, trust and tolerance of difference. In any case, decisions about whether and when to come out or not are highly personal and must be respected.

### **Myth: Children of ts/tg parents will be unable to establish a comfortable gender identity.**

Richard Green (1998) concludes that the children of ts/tg parents are no more likely to experience gender identity confusion than any other children. After all, most ts/tg people have grown up that way despite their parents' strong discouragement of any gender experimentation, and despite often having more rigid gender role models. Children of ts/tg parents grow up with a particular freedom to question gender roles and to explore and decide their own identities.

## Challenges for Family Members

It can be difficult for the spouse or family members of a ts/tg person to deal with the transition. Often people, especially spouses, feel betrayed, abandoned and confused. Sometimes this translates into anger, hostility and a desire to separate the children from their ts/tg parent.

Many studies have shown that children are much more harmed by losing contact with a parent than by dealing with ts/tg realities. Children are able to make sense of and deal with a parent's transition if both parents are informed and supportive. Grieving the loss of a parent is much more damaging to a child's mental health than learning about gender differences.

"My mom is a lot happier since starting to live as who she wants to be. When I was 13, my mother said, "I want to be a man, do you care?" I said, "No, as long as you are the same person inside and still love me. I don't care what you are on the outside." (14-year-old daughter with female-to-male transsexual parent)