

# 10 Most Often Asked Questions

with a few answers to help you understand....

## 1. How do they know?

Trans-children know who they are the same way we know who we are. Imagine you go into the hospital for a minor operation; you awake to find, that by some horrible error, you've mistakenly been given a full sex operation. Do you think that just because your body now looks like the opposite sex, that you will ever be comfortable living as a man or a woman? This is the only way those of us who "match" (our brain development and our biologic body are congruent) can relate. At no point, regardless of how happy the child looks, are they truly comfortable in their body or with their expected social roles. Their only recourse is to dress as they identify and hope that no one remembers what is really under their clothes.

## 2. Isn't it easier to teach your child how to be a boy (or a girl)?

Not for the child. Trying to teach a trans-child how to be opposite of how they feel is like trying to teach a non-trans child the same. All you are really doing is teaching them how society expects them to behave based on their genitalia; which also comes with a number of ramifications. First and foremost, this track further emphasizes their hatred of their body. Telling a child "You are a boy - you have a penis" (or the opposite for a female-to-male child) just reinforces their feelings of discomfort. This "hatred of their body" often leads to eating disorders, self-mutilation, and suicide.

And even if you could be successful at teaching "proper expected behaviors", you end up sending mixed messages when you attempt to teach your child right from wrong when dealing with "peer pressures". How do you successfully teach your child how to be who others expect and also try to teach them not to be pressured into acting like "all the other kids" when the behavior is wrong? Teaching your child to "be what others expect" is contrary to developing a good sense of conscience and self-esteem.

## 3. How do I tell my family?

Keep your family informed and involved from the beginning. By supporting your child and allowing him/her to express in front of others, you avoid the "bombshell". Your family will become the most important part of your child's Team.

If you have already hidden these behaviors and feelings, then bring them up to speed with as much history as you can. Then, give them time to adjust and

absorb. Remember, you didn't "get it" at first either. Do not expect people to accept this within one or two conversations; time and patience will play a huge part in the transition process.

Finally, get educated. Help them to understand that your child is not alone nor are you the only family faced with openly raising a trans-child. There is wonderful documentation out there to help family, schools, pediatricians and others understand. A great place to start is [www.transfamily.org](http://www.transfamily.org).

#### **4. Aren't there problems in school?**

Yes. But the most serious problems are those associated with not allowing your child to "be who they are". Most children born gender dysphoric suffer from high levels of social anxiety and attention deficit disorder. When a child needs to spend so much time focusing on "acting in a way that pleases others", they find little energy to relax and be attentive in school.

Keep the school informed from the beginning. Make the faculty and administration another part of your child's Team. Ask them for their help as opposed to demanding it; ask them to protect your child from bullying and to inform you at all times of any problems. Most problems are based on society's lack of understanding therefore, be prepared to be the teacher. Again, equip yourself with information and educational packets to help them understand and help your child. There is Protection through Education.

#### **5. What about dating?**

Dating is an issue for all parents regardless of their child's identified and biologic gender. As parents, we all hope that we have equipped our children with enough pride and self-esteem that they will be able to choose "nice people" to date. We also hope that we have taught them when and where sexual activity is appropriate.

The most important part about allowing your child to date is teaching them to be comfortable about "who" they are and how they differ. As they build relationships, they need to know how and when to inform their friends and the importance of doing so. The danger arises when a "surprise" is discovered in a place where your child may not be safe. Making sure that your child has the "right tools" to build strong relationships is the best weapon against a dangerous situation. Parenting with common sense really gets pushed to the limit in this arena.

## **6. Will you allow your child to have surgery?**

This is entirely up to the family. Finding a doctor to perform SRS on a child under the age of 18 is extremely hard if not impossible. There are a few doctors in Thailand who have reportedly been performing this surgery on children as young as 14 with great success. This author has no opinion either way; there are consequences to performing surgery as well as not.

Take one day at a time. Hormone blockers and hormone therapy is now being prescribed to children reaching puberty to alter and control the secondary sex characteristics in trans-people. It is highly advisable that you do your homework about these treatments before contacting a physician, or making the decision to not do anything at all. Any decision you make about your child's adulthood should come only after you have a thorough understanding of all the consequences.

The best advice this author can give is "never say never". Do not plan too far ahead and never make a decision that cannot be changed. Surgical changes are forever and should be left up to the individual whenever possible.

## **7. Aren't you scared that something bad will happen to your child?**

Yes. I am scared something bad may happen to either of my children. Because trans-people are at high risk of being the victim of hate crimes, it is important to instill a strong sense of values, including a good self-esteem and positive decision-making skills in your trans-child.

More importantly, it is the belief of this author that the best way to protect our children is by educating the public. With increased awareness, society will soon begin to understand that trans-ness is not about a person's genitalia; it is a condition of the brain. Because science is many years away from affecting brain development, our only choice as parents of trans-children is to help them accommodate their bodies to live as normal a life as possible.

## **8. Do you tell the parents of your child's friends?**

Whether or not you reveal that your child is trans depends on the route you took during and after transition. Parents most commonly choose one of two options after allowing their child full identity expression; they either remain in the same location with the same friends and school-mates, or they move the family to a place where they are unknown and can start fresh.

If you choose to do this publicly, then it is important to continue to inform the families of new playmates, that your child is transgendered. In this way, you will avoid them learning about your child improperly. Most people cannot explain the

path that led you to allow open-expression. They tend to spew out something like “that kid’s really a boy in a skirt” or “that’s really a girl under those clothes”. Again, you may spend a lot of time discussing what should be a very private issue, but the purpose is to Educate and thus, Protect. New parents in your child’s life can become important members of your child’s Team if handled properly.

On the other hand, if your family transitioned privately, then you must attempt to keep it that way. Your child and your family may become unprepared to explain this condition if “the word gets out”. Private transition avoids the ridicule and taunting that both you and your child may face; but it is the belief of this author that “secrets have a way of coming out”, usually when it is least expected. It is highly advisable to build a Team for your child even in a Private transition, in the event that one day it will be needed.

## **9. Who do they marry?**

Hopefully, your child will marry the person with whom they want to spend the rest of their life. If your child is comfortable with “who” they are, they will be able to build long-lasting, honest relationships; any relationship is only as strong as the people involved. If they choose to have children, they will seek out options available to other infertile couples. With your support and your child’s Team, the answer to this question will be in the hands of your child.

## 10. Where do I go for more information?

There are many great resources for information and support, but the best place to start as a parent is with other parents. The feeling of loneliness can be overwhelming. Listed below are some of the great places I have found for more answers and emotional relief:

### Recommended Web Sites

**TransFamily of Cleveland** <http://www.transfamily.org>

Excellent Family support site. Newsletter, couples, spouses, parents, and youth discussion elists. Hundreds of members from all over the world.

**PFLAG Transgender Network**

<http://www.youth-guard.org/pflag-tnet>

Support organization specifically for transgenders, their families and friends. Special affiliate of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

**PFLAG** <http://www.pflag.org>

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Support organization for family members and friends coming out and recognizing their gay, lesbian, or transgender children or siblings.

**Therapist Resource Site for North America:** <http://ftmichael.tashari.org/therapists>

Lists therapists with experience dealing with transgender issues, sorted by state or province, then by city.

**Excellent all-purpose Resource Site:** <http://www.kindredspiritlakeside.homestead.com>

### Recommended Reading

*Our Trans Children (pamphlet)*: Published by the PFLAG Transgender Network (TNET). An introduction to transgender concepts and issues. Available from [maryboenke@aol.com](mailto:maryboenke@aol.com) or [pflagtnet@triad.rr.com](mailto:pflagtnet@triad.rr.com). Price quotes include shipping; discounts for larger quantities.

*Trans Forming Families*: Mary Boenke, Editor

A series of stories by the families of transgender people, all finding their way to acceptance. Available from [maryboenke@aol.com](mailto:maryboenke@aol.com) or [pflagtnet@triad.rr.com](mailto:pflagtnet@triad.rr.com) \$13.95 including shipping.

*Mom, I Need to be a Girl*: Just Evelyn

A wonderful story of one family's journey with their teenage child's transition from male to female. Available online at <http://www.justevelyn.com> (no longer in print – read online)

*Finding the Real Me*: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

A compilation of stories by transgenders about their accepting, transitioning, and coming out process. Available online at <http://www.Amazon.com>

*Always My Child*: Kevin Jennings, Executive Director of GLSEN and Pat Shapiro, MSW.

A superb book on dealing with GLBTQ children, especially during the coming out process. Many of the principles apply to dealing with ALL children. Available online at <http://www.Amazon.com>