



## Family Centre Information Package

### Transgender Identities

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRANSGENDER?

“Transgender” is a loosely defined term that means having a gender identity, or gender expression that is different from the binary gender expression or identity that is associated with one’s biological sex assigned at birth. For example, an individual who has been assigned a gender identity at birth based on biological characteristics but does not identify with that assignment now. It is important to note that not all people who are gender variant are transgender. For the purposes of this information package, transgender will be used to mean individuals whose gender identity does not match the binary gender identity and expression associated with their biological sex.

#### DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS

In order to better understand transgender issues, it is helpful to understand terms that are commonly used in discussions about those issues. The following are terms that will be used in this document. For additional terms, please consult this [list](#)

**Gender Dysphoria:** the distress one may feel when one’s gender identity does not match one’s body

**Gender Expression:** the way in which a person signals gender identity (i.e. clothing, voice, etc.)

**Gender Identity:** a person’s inner sense of being a male or a female, or of not falling easily into either category

**Gender Variant:** acting or dressing differently than others of the same gender typically do

**Gender:** refers to roles, behaviours, and activities that are usually created from social expectations. These are things that are considered appropriate by the society in which an individual lives.

**LGBT:** refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, as well as those who identify as something other than heterosexual. There are many variations of this acronym, depending on which gender identities are included and who is using the acronym. It is acceptable to most people to just use LGBT as a shorthand.

**Physical Transitioning:** making physical changes to one’s body and can include such things as surgery and hormone therapy. Many aspects of physical transition are irreversible.

**Sex:** being biologically male, female, intersex, or atypical, as defined by genitalia or chromosomes.

**Social Transitioning:** adopting the behaviour, clothes, style, and overall gender expression of the gender with which the person identifies. Social transitioning is reversible. Note: Not all individuals who dress the opposite of their biological sex are attempting to transition. For example, some biological males

who identify as male and are sexually interested in women belong to a counterculture that dress in female clothing.

## FACTS

- Gender identity is formed within the first few years of life. Although it is possible to influence someone's external behaviours, it is not possible to change one's sense of who they are.
- Gender variance and transgender is not the result of "poor" parenting and should not be considered to be a "condition." Individuals with varying genders have existed during all of human history. People of all genders have the same rights to a full and productive life that apply to all individuals in Canada, as supported and described in the statement of support for Bill C-279.
- Some transgender individuals may transition early in life, while others may wait until they are older or may not transition at all. Cultural norms and societal pressure may prevent some people from identifying as transgender.
- Individuals may transition socially and decide not to go further. Some will choose to undertake physical transitioning as well.
- Children who are gender variant will not necessarily grow up to be transgender or transsexual. Likewise, not all adults who are gender variant will undergo physical transition.
- Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same things. Gender identity is about how you see yourself and the way you fit into the world, whereas sexual orientation is about who you are attracted to physically and mentally. Identity is about feelings toward oneself and orientation is about feelings toward others. One does not depend on the other – that is, someone who sees herself as a woman may be attracted to men or to women, regardless of whether she is biologically male or female. True gender identity is typically known within the first few years of life, whereas sexual orientation may not become clear until puberty. However, there are exceptions and it is important to keep an open mind about individual situations.
- There are transgender individuals in all racial, religious, socio-economic, and age groups.
- In some non-Western cultures, transgender individuals are recognized as a third gender. For example, the Samoan *fa'afafine*, the Indian *hijra*, and the Mexican *muxe*. Many First Nations groups recognize *two-spirit* people. These categories are not the same as trans man/trans women as they are culturally specific gender identities that are not defined by western normative gender roles.
- According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5), gender dysphoria affects approximately 5-14 persons in 100,000 men and 2-3 persons in 100,000 women.

## FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Family Centre can help you connect to resources in our community through our Family Connector. They are knowledgeable about the agencies and resources available in Lethbridge and surrounding area and can help get you to the right service.

We also offer parent support, where parent educators can support you to support your children.

Please leave a message for our Family Connector at (403) 320-4232 extension 240.

Family Centre offers the Kin Family Resource Library. Visitors to the library have access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics, including transgender. There is no cost for accessing the library; all that is required is a library card, which is available at reception.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT

If your child comes out to you as a trans-identified person, there are a few things that you can do:

- Listen to your child. Do not immediately dismiss your child's statement as "just a phase." For some children this behaviour will pass. However, if the thoughts, behaviours, and affirmations persist, it is likely not just a phase. It is important to let your child experiment with gender-variance so that they can figure out their identity.
- Educate yourself. You may be encountering new terms or ideas, and it is important to understand what language you are hearing and using. The language may be confusing at times but knowing more will be very helpful. The list of terms and definitions from the beginning of this document may be useful.
- Challenge any stereotypes you may hold or know with regards to LGBT individuals.
- Find out what resources are available to you and your child. Look online, go to the library, or speak to LGBT groups such as local Pride groups or PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).
- Get connected to the LGBT community. People who have gone through the same thing as you can provide invaluable knowledge and support.
- Support your child. Identifying as a member of the LGBT community can be very difficult, so it is important to be supportive and understanding.
- Respect chosen pronouns and preferred names. These may change during your child's gender journey and it is important to support their decisions and make conscious effort to respect these choices in how you address them directly and to others.
- Speak to your family doctor. Your doctor should be able to refer you to the appropriate professionals who can help with the medical aspects of transitioning if you and your child choose that route.
- Find out where to find psychologists and psychiatrists who specialize in gender and sexuality. You may eventually have to travel outside of the Lethbridge region.

Although this process may be difficult for you as a parent and for the child, your child deserves your love and respect. It is important to know that, by invalidating your child's identity and refusing to see them as their "new" identity, you risk permanently damaging the relationship you have with your child. As a parent, it is important for you to affirm your relationship with your child independent of their gender expression. Telling your child, you love them regardless of their gender is very important.

Children and adolescents who are rejected by their parents, or fear they will be rejected:

- are more likely to be homeless
- have lower self-esteem
- have an increased rate of suicide or attempted suicide
- are more likely to be depressed and have other mental health issues
- are more likely to use drugs and alcohol
- are less likely to have safe sex and are thus at higher risk of contracting an STI or HIV

For more information on the effects of rejection and acceptance of LGBT youth, click [here](#).

Allowing your child to explore their gender identity is not without risks. One such risk is bullying and disrespect from other children and adults. You may consider moving to a new community to allow your child to have a "fresh start." You may also attempt to educate others about transgender identities and experiences. No matter what, it is important to have a "zero tolerance" policy with regards to disrespect, both when interacting with others and in your own home. Transgender people deserve the same respect that everyone else has and it is perfectly acceptable to request this respect.

## SOCIAL TRANSITIONING

Social transitioning is the process of living as one's identified gender, without physically altering the body. Social transitioning may require any or all of the following:

- Adopting the clothing and/ or hairstyle consistent with one's gender identity.
- Legally or socially changing one's name. You can apply for a legal name change at any Alberta registry or through [Alberta Vital Statistics](#). **NOTE:** Once a legal name change has taken place, the new name is published in the Alberta Gazette. If you do not want this, a court order will have to be issued. Discuss all questions and concerns with Vital Statistics.
- Having ID and official documents (birth certificate, driver's license, etc.) changed to reflect new name. Gender markers (male or female) on ID **cannot** be changed until the proper documentation from surgeons and the courts have been provided stating Sexual Reassignment Surgery has been completed. For trans-masculine, "binding" one's chest to reduce the appearance of breasts. For trans-feminine, "stuffing" to have the appearance of breasts.
- Altering one's mannerisms (walk, speech pattern, etc.) to be consistent with one's gender identity
- Coming out—to friends, family, co-workers, or whoever one chooses.

- Living full time as one's "new" identity. You and your child may consider doing this step in stages. For example, you may allow your child to live as the desired gender at home for a few hours each day, then building up to living full-time as the desired gender. Each child is different. You will have to decide what is best for you and your family.

## PHYSICAL TRANSITIONING

Physical transitioning is the process of changing one's body to match one's gender identity. This may include surgeries that alter the body, as well as the use of hormones. Many aspects of physical transitioning are irreversible and thus should be thoroughly discussed with professionals before making any permanent changes. Minors are not eligible for any surgeries associated with physical transitioning (i.e. gender reassignment surgery, breast reduction/ augmentation). However, transgender youth may consider hormone blockers, which delay the onset of puberty. Any decisions regarding physical transitioning **must** be discussed with a doctor.

Adults who are thinking about physically transitioning may consider the following physical changes:

- Hormone therapy, including hormone blockers and/ or hormone replacements
- Breast reduction or breast augmentation
- Having surgery to alter the vocal cords or Adam's apple
- Laser hair removal or electrolysis
- Having surgery to alter the bone structure of the face
- Having gender reassignment surgery (GRS), including orchiectomy (removal of testicles), vaginoplasty (creation of a vagina), labiaplasty (creation of labia and clitoral hood), and phalloplasty (creation of a penis)

In order to undergo gender reassignment surgery in Canada, there are several guidelines that are outlined by Health Canada.

## RESOURCES

### LOCAL RESOURCES

- OUTreach Southern Alberta
  - [info@outreachsa.org](mailto:info@outreachsa.org)
  - Hosts a variety of events intended to support community involvement

### WEBSITES

- Gender Spectrum: <https://www.genderspectrum.org>
- PFLAG: <http://www.pflagcanada.ca>
- OUTreach SA: <https://www.facebook.com/OUTreach-Southern-Alberta-Society>
- Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: <http://www.ismss.ualberta.ca/>
- TransParent Canada: <http://www.transparentcanada.ca>

- Trans Youth Family Allies: <http://www.imatyfa.org/>

## VIDEO

- *Transforming Family: Transgender Basics* discusses terminology, as well as provides an insight into the lives of a few trans people: <http://transformingfamily.org/resources/>
- *Trans People Speak* hosts short video clips from trans people about their lives: <http://www.transpeoplespeak.org/>
- *Me Vie en Rose*: A young child named Ludovic, although born a male, insists she is really a girl. This fictional film depicts Ludovic and her family's struggle to accept her gender. Rated 18A.
- *Becoming Chaz* (2011): A documentary on the journey of Chaz Bono (formerly Chastity, daughter to Sonny Bono and Cher) who underwent gender reassignment surgery to become a man. Interviews with family and friends are included. NR.

## BOOKS

- *Breaking Out II* by Kevin Alderson: This book outlines challenges that may be faced by LGBT individuals, as well as specific strategies for dealing with these challenges. This book has sections that are aimed specifically at transgender individuals. The goal of this book is to promote the building of a positive LGBT identity. Available in the Kin Family Resource Library.
- *Transitions and Beyond: Observations on Gender Identity* by Reid Vanderburgh: This book provides information on issues faced by transgender individuals, their friends and family, and their partners.
- *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* by Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman: This book is a compilation of the work of various transgender and gender-queer individuals who have a "radical" way of thinking about sexuality and gender.
- *Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools*: This book provides easy-to-understand information on gender variant youth, including definitions of common terms, biological information, common misconceptions, and strategies for social transitioning in a school setting. Available in the Kin Family Resource Library.
- *The Transgender Child* by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper: This book provides easy-to-understand information about transgender and gender variant children. Readers will learn about the unique developmental, legal, medical, and school issues faced by transgender children.
- *Gender born, gender made* by Diane Ehrensaft: A guidebook for parents and therapists alike who are dealing with children who are behaving in gender variant ways. It offers strategies for supporting and understanding children who are trying to understand their gender identity.
- *My Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis and Suzanne DeSimone: This story is about Dyson, a young boy who likes to do both 'boy' and 'girl' things.
- *For more children's books, please visit:*  
[http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/20314.Transgender\\_Friendly\\_Young\\_Children\\_s\\_Books](http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/20314.Transgender_Friendly_Young_Children_s_Books)

## OTHER

- Distress Line 403-327-7905
  - Crisis intervention. Listeners are available 24 hours a day
- Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
  - Provides confidential, bilingual telephone and web counselling to children and young adults (up to age 25) experiencing problems or concerns
- LGBTQ national hotline: 1-888-843-4564
- Dr. Kevin Alderson—Counselling and Clinical Psychologist (Calgary) 1-403-605-5234
  - Provides counselling services and is experienced with LGBT clients
- Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (Edmonton) 1-780-492-0772
  - Offers several programs and services including [Camp Fyrefly](#), a four-day summer leadership retreat for LGBT youth
  - Held in Edmonton, Calgary, and Saskatchewan (alternates between Regina and Saskatoon)
- Dr. Lorne Warneke—Psychiatrist (Edmonton) 1-780-450-9450
  - Authorized to provide gender reassignment referrals
- Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Adults:  
[http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PsychologyWorksFactSheet\\_GenderDysphoriaInAdolescentsAndAdults.pdf](http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PsychologyWorksFactSheet_GenderDysphoriaInAdolescentsAndAdults.pdf)
- Gender Dysphoria in Children:  
[http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PsychologyWorksFactSheet\\_GenderDysphoriaInChildren.pdf](http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PsychologyWorksFactSheet_GenderDysphoriaInChildren.pdf)
- PFLAG 1-888-530-6777
  - Offers support services 24/7
  - For Gender Identity Support: 1-888-822-9494

## REFERENCES

- <http://www.imatyfa.org/parents.html>
- <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/173-parents>
- *Trans Families: A resource guide for parents*
- [http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/LGBT\\_Brief.pdf](http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/LGBT_Brief.pdf)
- <http://www.albertatrans.org/>