

Do you think your child has questions about their gender or sexuality?

If your child is planning to come out, they may be watching for clues to guess how accepting and open you might be. Consider the following tips:

1 Try not to assume. It is natural for parents to make assumptions about our children, we think we know them best. When it comes to gender and sexuality however, try to be open minded as your child begins to understand their place on this wide spectrum. Even though you may wish to address your assumptions, avoid jumping to conclusions and focus on respecting your child's need to discover and disclose their own identity when they are ready.

2 Recognise and address your concerns and fears. Many parents have concerns and fears about having an LGBTIQ+ child. It can make a difference to realise your child is not alone and there are many other parents before you who have navigated the best way to support their child. If it's hard for you to accept the idea that your child might be gay or transgender, here are resources that may help.

3 Show that you are open and accepting. There are still ways to show your child that you are open without addressing it directly. Using offensive language or negative discussion around LGBTIQ+ people will likely lead your child to assume that it is not safe to come out to you. Ways to show your support without putting your child on the spot include using respectful language when talking about them, and watching TV programs or reading books that have LGBTIQ+ characters.

4 Be approachable and available. Make time and space for your child to be able to talk to you privately. Give them openings to talk about whatever is on their mind.

5 Show unconditional love in your actions and words. Tell your child that you love them for who they are and that nothing can change that. Show your love by treating your child with care and respect. A strong relationship can help give your child the confidence to confide in you.

Your child just came out. Now what?

You may be relieved that they finally told you, frantic with fear that they will never live a happy life, or somewhere in between. Now what? Your acceptance is the one thing that can make the biggest difference in their health and well being.

1 Show unconditional love in your actions and words. Remind yourself how much you love your child. Tell your child that you love them and that nothing can change that. This may be the thing your child most needs to hear. Even if you are uncomfortable with the news, show affection and avoid saying things that they might find hurtful.

2 Believe your child. Your child has probably thought long and hard about this, maybe even agonised over it, before coming out to you. Questions like "Are you sure?", "How do you know?", "Is this a phase?" are likely to make your child feel unaccepted. They may think that you are hoping that their identity will go away.

3 Acknowledge the courage it took. Coming out to a parent can be extremely hard and takes a lot of bravery. Even if it's hard to hear, let your child know that you appreciate their openness and honesty.

4 Recognise and address your own concerns and fears. If you are finding the news hard, you don't have to fake it. It's OK to let your child know it is challenging for you. Your child probably went through a process to accept their identity and you may need this too. Ask your child to be patient with you. Meanwhile, get the information and support you need.

5 Try not to out your child to others. Your child came out to you, but that doesn't mean they are ready to be out with everyone. Respect their privacy. Ask permission before discussing it with others. If you need someone to talk to, find a way that you can do this without violating their trust.

Is my child normal?

It's easy to worry about our children, what toys they are playing with, who they emulate or how they dress. This worry can be reinforced when media or other parents are giving us messages about what they think children should do. Try not to worry about the way your child chooses to express themselves.

1 Toys are toys. Even today, we carry ideas about what toys our children should play with based on their assigned gender. If your little girl plays with toy trucks, or your boy likes to play dolls, stand by them. Encourage them to play with whatever toys they like, and support them if other children or parents tell them it's wrong.

2 Clothes are clothes. Like toys, clothes form a way that our children explore, develop and express who they are. Whether for play or for everyday, a boy wanting to wear a dress does not mean they will grow up to be gay or transgender. Support and enable their choices.

3 Couldn't this just be a phase? It's possible for children to go through different phases, but it also might be who your child truly is. Either way, what will impact your child most is how you respond to them and support them through this time. Your child needs to explore and come to a conclusion on their identity on their own terms.

4 Where did they learn these behaviours? In recent decades there has been a change in attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people, with law changes, positive role models, and more. This encourages our children to think for themselves, explore and accept different ideas about sexuality and gender.

5 The most important thing is to show your child unconditional love and support. Research shows that the most important thing in determining how happy and successful your child is in life is unconditional love and support from you, their parents. This might be difficult to do when coming to terms with their sexuality, gender or something else, and that's OK, your child will one day appreciate the effort you put in to change your mindset.

I love my child, but...

Sometimes we want with all our heart to love and accept our child, but there are big concerns we have for them.

1 This goes against my beliefs. Many religions or cultures believe that being LGBTIQ+ is wrong. There is no simple fix to this – pray on it, talk to your faith leaders or others in your community. Many believe that God made your child this way for a purpose.

2 I'm worried about HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is very prominent in discussion around the gay community, due to the epidemic that started in the 1980's. Today, safe sex messaging and improved medications means transmission rates amongst LGBTIQ+ communities is low.

3 I'm worried about them being happy. Being worried about your child is normal and understandable, particularly if you think they are going to face extra challenges or discrimination in their life. The best way you can make this journey easier for them is to provide them with a source of unconditional love.

4 How do I explain this to my friends/family? Ask your child how they would like you to explain it to them. They may not want you to at this stage. It can help to come up with a plan with your child about who you're going to tell and when.

5 I hoped to have grandchildren one day. This can be a common reaction from parents, and becomes part of the grieving process you might go through when a child comes out. Many LGBTIQ+ people still go on to be parents, or parent in less traditional, non-biological ways.

Places you can call
OUTLine – 0800 OUTLINE (6885463) – a free service for LGBTIQ+ people and their whānau. Talk to a member of the LGBTIQ+ community trained to listen and answer your questions. www.outline.org.nz

Groups
Parents and Guardians of Gender Diverse Children in NZ. Secret Facebook group (not searchable on Facebook) with 184 NZ members and growing (as at March 2018). To join the group please email either: **Sharyn Forsyth** nzparentsoftransgenderchildren@gmail.com or the group's Auckland contact **Rebecca Jones** support@transgenderchildren.nz

Or see the portal group: www.facebook.com/groups/180569895612937 - please be sure to read the pinned post at the top of the group for joining instructions.

Holding Our Own Support & Education forum for Parents and Whanau of LGBTQ children (all ages) to meet & talk safely. This group supports your struggle to manage and resolve your difficulties with any aspect Gay or Trans children pre and post "coming out". www.holdingourown.co.nz Email holdingourown@outlook.com - or contact **Amanda Aarons 021125 7775**

Drum Beat For caregivers of children and young people who are gender diverse or gender questioning. Meet up monthly in Greenlane. Contact julie.watson@kahuitukaha.co.nz or **0277000432**

Hearts Not Parts Facebook group for parents or supporters of transgender and non-binary people based in South Auckland <https://www.facebook.com/groups/hnpsa/>

Takatāpui.nz: Resource hub for Takatāpui and their whānau. www.takatāpui.com

Gender Minorities Aotearoa - Information for Young People and families www.genderminorities.com

Supporting trans and gender expansive children <https://www.hrc.org/resources/supporting-caring-for-transgender-children>

Gender Spectrum - helps to create gender sensitive and inclusive environment for all children and teens. www.genderspectrum.org

Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Parents of Trans Youth <http://www.ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/C-TYS-FIT-Families-in-Transition-Guide-2nd-edition.pdf>

First Steps: Shared stories from parents and caregivers of trans and gender diverse children <https://goo.gl/z5er7d>

kidsinthehouse: The Ultimate Parenting Resource, Dr Johanna Olson, Center for Transyouth Health and Development, Childrens Hospital Los Angeles www.kidsinthehouse.com/expert/parenting-advice-from-johanna-olson-md

Families like mine is a multimedia guide that offers practical advice to families of young gender diverse people, same-sex attracted and bisexual people, and those who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity. <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/lesbian-gay-bi-trans-and-intersex-lgbti-people/families-like-mine>

Thanks to our strategic partner



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My child just came out as Transgender

When a child comes out as Transgender, there are a whole lot of extra questions we might have:

1 What does being transgender mean for my child? If your child has said they are transgender, non-binary or gender diverse, it means they feel strongly that they are not the sex they were assigned at birth, which can cause distress. The steps people take to reduce this distress is called transitioning.

2 When does my child start to transition? Your child can start to transition when it is right for them. There is no set age or required steps, and some people transition later in life or not at all. Transition is generally thought of in two parts: social transition, and medical transition.

3 What is social transition? Social transition is often the first steps a transgender person can make to explore how they live their gender. This can include changing the style of hair, clothing, make up, and a different name. Many children might ask you to start using different pronouns, for example 'she or her', instead of 'he or him'. People who are just starting to transition might only want to do these things in a safe place, for example at home.

4 I'm struggling to use a new name. Everyone takes time to adjust to change. Using a new name is very validating for transgender people, so the effort you put in will be well worth it to them. Using the wrong name or pronouns can be upsetting, if you do slip up apologise to your child.

5 I'm concerned about what medical transition means. That is a totally fair reaction! It sounds scary. There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to medical transition – generally the youngest blockers will be prescribed is around the onset of puberty. Talk to your doctor (with your child!) about the options. The effects of some treatments, for example puberty blockers, are 100% reversible.

When do I need to seek more support?

Sometimes we need to get advice or guidance from people we trust. This could be a doctor, community elder, faith leader, online resources and information, or from a LGBTIQ+ community organisation. How to know when you might benefit from more support:

1 You and your child fight constantly. When we're dealing with our own feelings about our child coming out, disagreements can escalate more easily. This might be normal to start with, but if it continues for a long period of time it could be useful to have someone you both trust or a counsellor to help you talk to each other.

2 Your child is distressed. If your child appears significantly distressed from coming out, or peoples reaction to them being LGBTIQ+, reach out to someone who can help. Your child's school may have counsellors available. Your child being distressed can affect their schooling and relationship with family.

3 School, community or church are not accepting my child. Your child deserves to be happy, healthy and respected in all parts of their life. There are resources and organisations that can help support a school, community or church to accept your child.

4 You have unanswered questions. And who wouldn't! There is a lot to understand about being gay or transgender. Look up the resources online, ask someone you trust or a LGBTI community organisation. They want to help you support your child the best you can.

5 You want to meet others in the same situation. Great! Meeting other parents in the same situation to yourself (or having your children meet each other) can be a great way to reduce that feeling of being the only one in the world going through this. There are several groups (including online) where you can talk with other parents.

As with any tips, take what makes sense to you and use your own judgment. Do your best, be forgiving of yourself, and always remember how much you love your child.

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