

Affirming Adults

A Guide to Supporting
Gender Diverse Children and Youth

Egale



Dedication

This guide is dedicated to all affirming adults who seek to make the world a better, safer place for Two Spirit, trans, nonbinary, and gender diverse children and youth. Your willingness and commitment to learning, being brave, and standing in solidarity will ultimately save lives. Thank you.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Egale is based on the traditional shared territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. The territory is protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. The concepts of gender, sexuality, and oppression that we often rely on in 2SLGBTQI advocacy work are largely based in white, Western, colonial systems of thought and do not represent the multitude of understandings of identity that exist outside of this viewpoint. Colonial violence created the foundations for the landscape of gender-based violence that we understand today. Indigenous communities and Two Spirit activists, scholars, writers, and artists have gifted us with ample tools to work with as we move toward the collective liberation of gender and sexuality minority people. We are grateful to carry these with us here and in our work beyond. The violence of colonialism is ongoing. So too are movements toward resisting this violence.

About Egale

Egale is Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. We improve and save lives through research, education, awareness, and by advocating for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world. Our work helps create societies and systems that reflect the universal truth that all persons are equal, and none is other.

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Introduction and Welcome

IF YOU'RE READING THIS GUIDE, YOU'RE AWESOME!

You are taking an important step in familiarizing yourself with your child's gender identity and/or gender expression. If you're here, you might need a little help sorting through some of the complex emotions that come along with becoming an affirming adult, or you might need some assistance getting familiarized with the support skills that you need to help your child. Perhaps you might need a refresher on some basic terminology, or some links to some more resources. That's exactly what we're here for! This Affirming Adults guide is designed to support you as you support your child.

When a child comes out as trans or nonbinary, their family also goes through a transition process, and it can feel like a race to know everything as quickly as possible. But remember; transition is not always linear, and neither is the process of learning. As educator Dr. Andrew Campbell says, "You don't need to be in a hurry to know everything." Take your time, give yourself the grace to make mistakes, ask questions in the learning process, and remember that you're never alone.

Being an affirming adult is a lifelong journey, and we're so glad you're here learning with us.

Part One:

Introduction to Gender Identity Terms and Concepts

In this section, we'll look at some common terms and concepts related to gender identity and expression, including what happens when others try to put limitations on how we may express our gender to the world. These will form a solid base for developing the skills you'll need to support and affirm your child.

Some of this information may be new to you, and some of it may be a refresher. Some of it may feel easier to understand, and some of it may take time to digest. This guide is here to meet you wherever you're at, at whatever pace you need! If you need additional resources or clarification, please feel free to get in touch with us at learning@egale.ca.



The Four Components of Human Identity

No matter what terms a person uses to describe their identities, everyone possesses these four components of human identity: Gender, Gender Expression, Attraction, and Assigned Sex.

Each component represents a unique part of a person's identity. People sometimes muddle or confuse them, but each one is separate and distinct from the others.



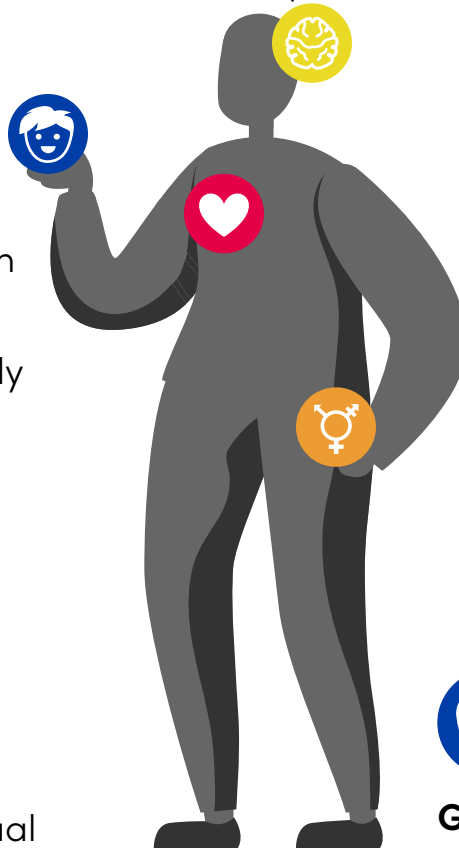
ASSIGNED SEX

The biological classification of a person as female, male or intersex. It is usually assigned at birth based on a visual assessment of external anatomy.



ATTRACTION

Often referred to as a sexual orientation, attraction describes a person's potential for emotional, spiritual, intellectual, intimate, romantic and/or sexual interest in other people and may form the basis for aspects of one's identity and/or behaviour.



GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is not necessarily visible to others and it may or may not align with what society expects based on assigned sex.



GENDER EXPRESSION

The way gender is presented and communicated to the world through clothing, speech, body language, hairstyle, voice and/or the emphasis or de-emphasis of body characteristics and behaviours.

You can find the full resource for The Genderbread Person on our website here:

<https://egale.ca/awareness/the-genderbread-person/>

Follow-Up Activity: Complete Your Own Gendy

How we describe ourselves says a lot about how we experience the world. It can also help us find areas of common ground with others. Go through this activity with your child as a bonding exercise and to help you better understand their experiences and the language they use to communicate them. What identity terms do you each use to describe your own experiences of assigned sex, gender, gender expression, and attraction? What additional components of identity are personally important to each you – such as your cultural identity, age, or education? Feel free to write them down or just think about them together.



Heather notes: “The goal of this exercise isn’t to trigger some grand revelation, just to get you thinking about something you may not think about much. Get to know yourself a little better. You deserve it. Disclaimer: if it does trigger a grand revelation of a sort, that’s okay. I recommend talking it through with a friend you trust.”¹

¹ Flowers, H. (2020). [@HTRFLWRS]. (2020, Dec 25). Cis people: I want you to take half an hour sometime and think about your gender. [Tweet.] Twitter/X. <https://twitter.com/HTRFLWRS/status/1342553808178716672>

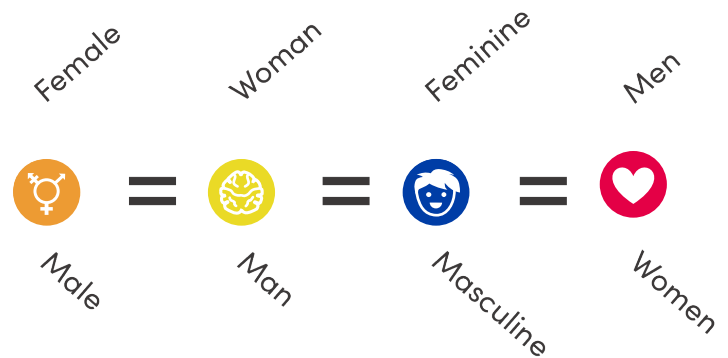
► Go More in Depth

Trans game developer Heather Flowers (they/she) once asked cisgender people to reflect on the following questions about gender, as a more in-depth exercise:

- What do I enjoy about being my gender?
- Why do I identify with my gender?
- What gendered expectations do I put on myself? Do I enjoy those expectations? Why or why not?
- What gendered expectations do I put on others? Why?
- How do societal pressures affect my gender presentation?
- In what ways could I better feed my gender? What small things could I do in order to make it happy?
- How do I visualize gender as a concept? What does my gender, in specific, look like?

The Dominant Equation

For many people, the four components line up in a particular way. As an example, someone assigned female at birth may feel internally that she is a woman, express herself in feminine ways, and be only attracted to men (and vice versa for someone assigned male at birth).



When a person's assigned sex and gender align in the way society expects, we say that person is **cisgender**.

However, it is a mistake to assume that the relationship between these components always lines up this way (or that they should). There are many ways someone can identify within each component to produce different combinations and therefore different experiences of the world. When society builds structures based on the expectation that everyone's assigned sex, gender, gender expression, and attraction line up in accordance with the dominant equation, it produces exclusion, injustice, and even violence against anyone who does not reflect that alignment. This is a bias known as **cisheterosexism**.

Cisheterosexism can take many forms: erasure and denial that certain identities are real, avoidance and exclusion of 2SLGBTQI people, harassment and discrimination, and physical violence against anyone whose experiences and identities don't line up with the dominant equation.

Cisheterosexist bias within our everyday culture, laws, and organizations can look harmless on the surface, but it creates conditions that exclude, create barriers to access, and contribute to an overall hostile climate for many individuals and groups, including 2SLGBTQI people. These harmful structures are reinforced and perpetuated when we allow them to remain uncontested and modelled for others to repeat.

The Trans Umbrella

Now that we're brushed up on the four components of identity that give rise to gender and sexual diversity, let's spend a few moments exploring exactly who it is the term 'trans' captures.

A **transgender** person is someone who does not identify, either fully or in part with the gender associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. It is often used as an umbrella term to represent a wide range of gender identities and may be called simply '**trans**' for short.

The trans umbrella can include nonbinary people as well, since nonbinary people also do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.



The Trans Pride Flag, designed in 1999 by Monica Helms.

Here are just some of the identities that fall underneath the trans umbrella.

You can find more information about these terms in the [Glossary](#) at the end of this guide.

Transgender

Transmasculine

Trans woman

Genderqueer

Genderfluid

Agender

Nonbinary

Two Spirit

Gender non-conforming

Transfeminine

Trans man

The Term Transsexual: "**Transsexual**" is an older term that should generally be avoided. Historically, it was used by medical and mental health communities as a disease diagnosis. Although the term is very occasionally used in self-reference by some trans people, today it is widely considered to be medicalizing and highly stigmatizing.

The Nonbinary Umbrella

Nonbinary is an umbrella term to reflect a variety of gender identities that are not exclusively man or woman. It is sometimes called **enby*** for short (a phonetic spelling of the letters N-B).

Given that the common feature shared by the identities falling under the trans umbrella is having a societally unexpected experience with gender, many nonbinary folks consider the nonbinary umbrella a sub-category within the trans umbrella.

However, some nonbinary individuals describe their gender experience as being totally distinct from the trans experience, that is, as a separate umbrella entirely. As such, it's exceptionally important to remember that self-identification will look different for everyone and to remain open minded when someone shares their identity details with you.



Nonbinary pride flag designed by Kye Rowan in 2014.

*Enby is the recommended abbreviated term for nonbinary, to avoid confusion with NB, an abbreviation commonly used to mean “non-Black.”

Here are some terms that folks under the nonbinary umbrella might use to describe their gender identity. You can find more information about these terms in the [Glossary](#) at the end of this guide.

Genderfluid

Neutrois

Pangender

Gender
expansive

Agender

Genderqueer

Third gender

Polygender

Bigender

Ambigender

Gender
creative

Pronouns

Pronouns are the words we use to refer to someone without using their name. Just like their name, a person's pronouns are highly personal and dependent on the individual. Using someone's correct pronoun(s) is how we convey respect. While this holds true for all people regardless of how they self-identify, using a trans or gender-diverse person's affirmed pronoun(s) is a simple but important way to affirm their identity.

Pronoun Usage Guide

To be inclusive and respectful of gender diversity, use the gender-neutral pronoun set, they/them/theirs, when referring to any person whose pronouns you do not know until you have a chance to find out what they are.

“ Today we have a guest speaker coming in. They are an expert in marine biology. Please give them a warm welcome! ”

* Notice how gendered pronouns are not important in this context. The meaning is not lost. By using gender neutral pronouns, you hold back on making assumptions about a person's gender based on your own perception of them.

While it is normal to take practice when adopting a new habit, it is also important to demonstrate genuine effort. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun when referring to someone, even if they are not present, simply correct yourself and commit to getting it right next time.

“ Did you hear that Fae wrote her own, sorry, I mean, their own play over the summer? Sh..They even wrote a score to go with it! ”

* Everyone makes mistakes, it is okay. After you have apologized, do not dwell on your mistake. Remember it is not the responsibility of the person you have misgendered to address your feelings about having slipped up.

If you have trouble remembering someone's pronouns, it is always best simply to ask for the reminder! It is also important to ask if you may use these pronouns in front of other people.

//

Hi Fae! How was your vacation?

Can you remind me what your pronouns are again?

//

Pronoun Sets

Here are pronouns that you might see or hear. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

He Him His	She Her Hers	They Them Theirs	Ey Em Eirs	Zi Hir Hirs	Xe Xem Xirs
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Multiple/Rolling Pronouns

When a person uses more than one pronoun set (e.g., “she and they”), we call these **rolling pronouns**. Rolling pronouns may be used simultaneously (e.g., switching back and forth within a conversation), or may shift over cycles of time (e.g., daily, weekly). Sometimes, the person will use a lapel pin or other visual marker to signal to others which pronouns to use currently. If you are unsure what to use at a particular time or to refer to the person at a past point in time, default to their current pronoun or simply use their name until you can verify with them what they would prefer.

Inclusive and Affirming Language

It is important to remember that pronouns aren't the only parts of language marked by gender. Trans, nonbinary, and other 2SLGBTQI people are constantly faced with reminders in everyday language that invalidate their existence.

Shifting to gender-inclusive choices in our written and spoken language respects and acknowledges the gender identities of all people and is more accurate as well. Be mindful of your assumptions and consider gender-neutral ways of communicating the same thing. **For example:**

"Hey folks"
instead of
"Hey guys"

"They"
to refer to general people in official documents instead of
"he/she"

In letters and emails, use **"Dear Mx."**
(or simply type their full name without any marker) instead of **"Ms. or "Mr."**

"Partner/spouse/significant other"
instead of
"husband/wife", "boyfriend/girlfriend."

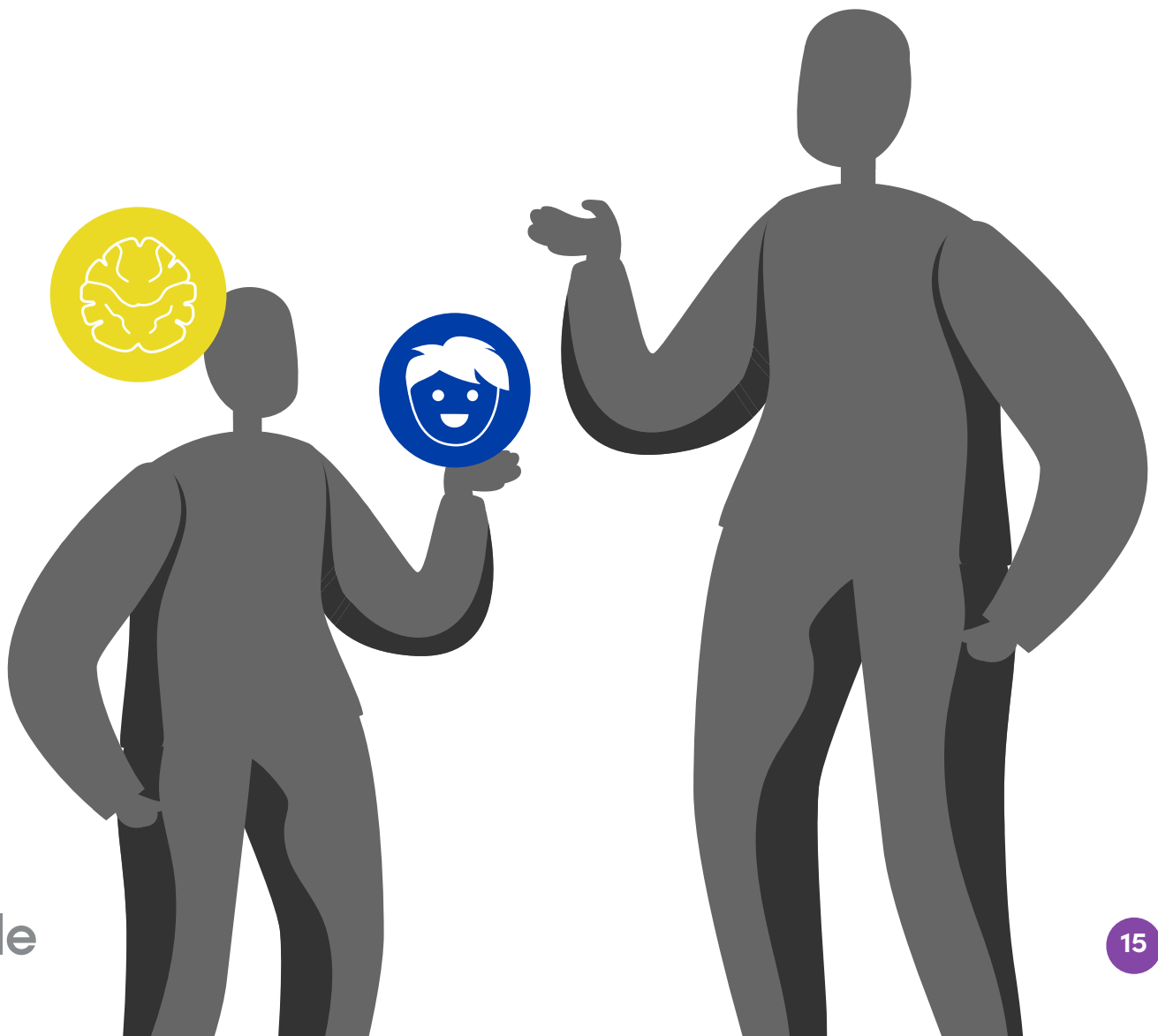
"There's someone here to see you"
instead of
"There's a woman here to see you."

For more information, please check out our resource on affirming and inclusive language here: <https://egale.ca/awareness/affirming-and-inclusive-language/>

Addressing Gender Diversity with Children and Youth

Children know more than we think. Don't assume that by ignoring discussions of gender and attraction at a particular age that your child will be sheltered from those ideas. Unless you explicitly tell them that you are accepting and that you understand these topics, they will likely seek affirming resources from elsewhere. To ensure children develop appropriate conceptions and values, role model positive attitudes with them and use the guide below to support age-appropriate conversations about attraction and gender diversity.

Before talking with children, affirming adults should reflect on their own gender awareness, biases, and values so they can be prepared with constructive responses and reactions when children ask.



Development

Adult Support

Age 2-3

Children become aware of physical similarities and differences and are able to identify themselves as a “boy” or “girl”, even if this does not match with their assigned sex. At this age, fantasy and reality are fluid. Understandings of self and world are negotiated through imaginative play, observing, and imitating others.

Discussions with children can centre on noticing similarities and differences across all people and raising awareness of natural human diversity. Exploratory behaviours should be entertained to avoid development of shame and self-doubt. Model inclusivity through non-gendered phrasings when possible (e.g., “children” not “boys and girls”).

Age 4-6

Personal senses of gender and self become more concrete. Preferences in gendered clothing and toy options become apparent. These preferences may or may not continue to fluctuate throughout childhood. Awareness of gender expectations and stereotypes form and, in some cases, may manifest in periods of strong expression (e.g., vocal insistence of gender or wearing/not wearing certain types of clothing). Deviations from social expectations may be noticed by other children. Reasoning is highly rule-based.

Discussions with children can centre on understanding categories and situations in which objects defy singular categorization (e.g., toys are toys, different family types) and problem-solving gender-related social restrictions. Cis, trans, and non-binary are surprisingly easy concepts to grasp for children this age due to their imagination-based mindset (e.g., “some people’s insides match the outside and some don’t”). Stories can include characters that deviate from stereotypes. Imaginative play and opportunities for children to explore different gender roles or personal expressions should be supported.

Age 7-9

Gender expression becomes subtler as personal confidence and social acceptance of one's gender increases. Social anxiety can begin to manifest if child feels their gender is different from their assigned sex and/or is not recognized by others. Personal values develop, influenced strongly by adults and outside culture.

Discussions with children can centre on the things that make them unique, gender and expression as fluid and spectral, reasoning through the effects of their decisions (e.g., peer reactions), respect for the differences of others, and development of resilience skills (e.g., self-efficacy, emotional control, flexibility, etc.). Readings can include stories with gender diverse characters successfully gaining agency and self-confidence. Model respectful speech by using trans inclusive phrasings and pronouns.

Age 10+

Gender identity, attraction, and body awareness increase from onset of puberty throughout adolescence. Attempts to up-/down-play physical characteristics or follow/thwart stereotypical expressions are common, regardless of gender identity. Social regulation (e.g., peer pressures to conform, trans/ homophobic comments) tends to increase during high school and can deter social bonding, and hamper self-acceptance, emotional resilience.

Affirming conversations are crucial during puberty and can be lifesaving. Conversations can centre on the elements of positive relationships, evaluating depictions of gender and sexuality in the media as positive/negative and accurate/inaccurate, recognizing the degree to which a single stereotype can faithfully reflect any one person, examples of non-/conformity within themselves and others, and the power of language to influence others and reflect one's inner self. Readings should include characters of diverse genders and attractions in affirming roles. Actively challenge bullying based on attraction or gender.

Adapted with information from Bergman (2022), and the Canadian Paediatric Society (2023).

Types of Gender Affirming Transition

Now that you've had a chance to learn the common terms and concepts related to gender diversity, as well as the age-appropriate conversations you might have with your child about these concepts, let's look at **gender affirming transition**.

Gender affirming transition is the collection of processes or activities a trans or nonbinary person undertakes to feel more aligned socially and physically with their internal sense of gender. Transition-related activities generally fall into one of three categories: social, legal, and medical.

Social



Social transition refers to the common ways in which individuals may choose to publicly affirm their gender identity in social environments.

This can include:

- Using chosen name and pronouns
- Gender expressions
- Access to gendered spaces
- Finding community
- Having family support

Ways to Be Affirming:

- ✓ Use your child's chosen name and pronouns
- ✓ Encourage them to explore different hairstyles and clothing styles
- ✓ Help them to find affirming communities
- ✓ Support and set boundaries within the family



Legal



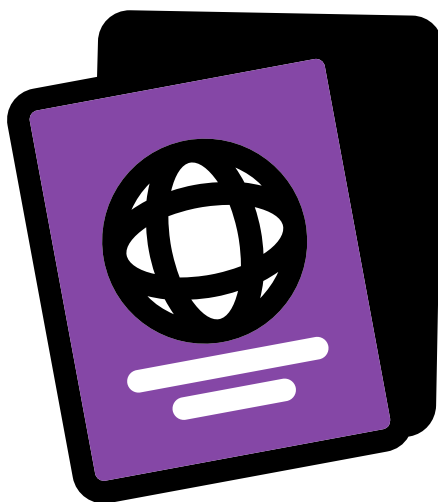
Legal transition refers to the process of updating official identification documents to reflect the individual's affirmed name and/or gender markers.

This can include:

- Birth certificate
- Passport
- Citizenship card
- Driver's licence
- Health card

Ways to Be Affirming:

- ✓ Advocate for your child's chosen name and pronouns to be used in documentation at their school
- ✓ Consider implications of passport photographs that last five years, etc.
- ✓ Proactively research documentation that might be needed as your child approaches the age where they may apply for a driver's license
- ✓ Seek assistance with procedures around changing gender markers in your province or territory (does your child need physician or psychologist confirmation? Two guardians/parents to sign documentation?)



Medical



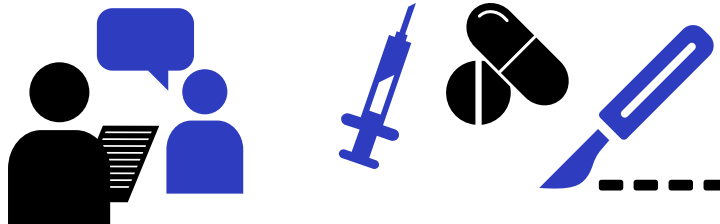
Medical transition refers to a wide range of interventions that support mental and physical health, including treatments that assist individuals in feeling at ease with their body as an expression of their gender. When it comes to medical transition for children and youth in Canada, providers follow the most recent standards of care from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). These best practices for gender-affirming care are evidence-based and developmentally appropriate.

This can include:

- Counselling support
- Hormone therapies, including puberty blockers
- Gender affirming surgical procedures (When it comes to surgical procedures, the Canadian Paediatric Society notes that these are rarely performed on youth, but youth can identify these as part of their future transition goals so that they can receive appropriate patient education. There are age restrictions on surgeries. “Bottom” or “lower” surgeries are explicitly restricted to individuals aged 18+.)²

Ways to Be Affirming:

- ✓ Proactively seek out gender-affirming medical providers
- ✓ Facilitate developmentally appropriate conversations with healthcare providers about gender-affirming care
- ✓ Remember that transition may or may not include some medical elements, but that youth still have the right to informed consent about their options



² Vandermorris, A., & Metzger, D.L. (2023). An affirming approach to caring for transgender and gender-diverse youth. *Paediatr Child Health* 28(7):437-448.

Question:

What does it mean for you to be an affirming adult?

Answer:

“

Being honest when I was unsuccessful, when I didn't do what I was hoping to do. I think being able to apologize to your child, to say, "I goofed, I didn't do it right, let's try again!" But also just to be open and curious about their lives so that when you get to this transition those questions you're going to ask are: "tell me more," "oh, I didn't know that."

”

- Liz, parent of a trans child



Part Two:

Your Journey as an Affirming Adult

Everyone starts their journey as an affirming adult from a different place, depending on their life experiences, existing skills, and access to knowledgeable others. It does not matter where you are starting from, only that you do start.

Along the way, you may find that the journey of being an affirming adult and providing support to your child feels like a “transition” of its own...and you’d be right. Research has confirmed that when children and youth pursue gender affirming transition, those around them also go through their own process of having to reconsider some of their own thoughts and expectations. There may also be shifts in family dynamics and roles, and adults may experience some “ambiguous loss” as they deal with a child who is obviously still present, but who is also changing in some significant ways.³

In this section, we take you through some of the aspects of that emotional journey, all of which are entirely normal. Then we’ll talk about building your “circles of care”: the various supports that you might want or need from others as you support your child.



3 Sánchez-Ferrer, A., Postigo-Zegarra, S., Tamarit-Chuliá, A. et al. (2023). Ambiguous loss and emotional intelligence in families of transgender people: a mixed-methods study. *LGBTQ+ Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19(2), 128-144.

Overcoming Barriers: Acceptance is not Linear

As we mentioned before, when a child goes through a gender-related transition, their loved ones also go through a process of coming to terms with change and adjusting their expectations. Sometimes, despite all our best intentions and supportive actions, this process can still feel a lot like grieving. This is because, as Jeni Wahlig⁴ explains, “gender is a deeply felt, value-rich, organizing principle; it informs our understanding of who we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to act within relationships.”

When someone’s gender identity and presentation shift from what we are used to or expect they should be, this can make us question or rethink some of the important values and principles at the heart of our relationships. Even if that process ends up being ultimately very positive and affirming, updating our long-held understandings can feel difficult to navigate, especially at first.

You may have heard of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief⁵ before. Kübler-Ross’s model is one of the most well-known models of working through any process of significant life adjustment. While this model may not apply to every person’s experience or journey to becoming an affirming adult, it can be a helpful lens through which to understand our own experiences and those of other adults in the lives of an 2SLGBTQI youth.



Even for the most accepting of us, these emotions don’t always process through in a neat and tidy order. It’s possible to find yourself bouncing between different stages or feeling multiple emotions simultaneously. You may experience moments of relief or happiness with your child as you support them in their journey, only to be hit with

4 Wahlig, J.L. (2015). Losing the child they thought they had: suggestions for an ambiguous loss perspective with parents of a transgender child. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 11(4): 305–326. doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2014.945676

5 Kübler-Ross, E. (1970). *On Death and Dying*. Collier Books/Macmillan Publishing Co.

waves of loss or confusion when alone.

While holding space for the emotional process is important, paramount to that is being aware of the direct impact it may still have on your child, and doing the work in a way that minimizes harm to them.

Managing, processing, and expressing any fears, worries, grief or loss must be done in a way that protects your child and doesn't make them responsible for managing the emotions of the adults around them, while they are still learning and discovering their own sexuality and gender identity. We've included some examples of some of the thoughts that parents and caregivers have as they navigate these different phases.

Remember: these are entirely normal thoughts and feelings to have, and you are not the first nor the last person to have them.

Denial:

- "It's probably just a phase."
- "I don't want to hear about it."
- "You just haven't found the right [opposite sex] person yet."

Bargaining:

- "Just don't tell anyone else."
- "We'll find you help."
- "I don't want you to bring anyone home to meet us."

Anger:

- "I'm disappointed in you."
- "How could you shame our family like this?"
- "We were good parents! What did we do wrong?"

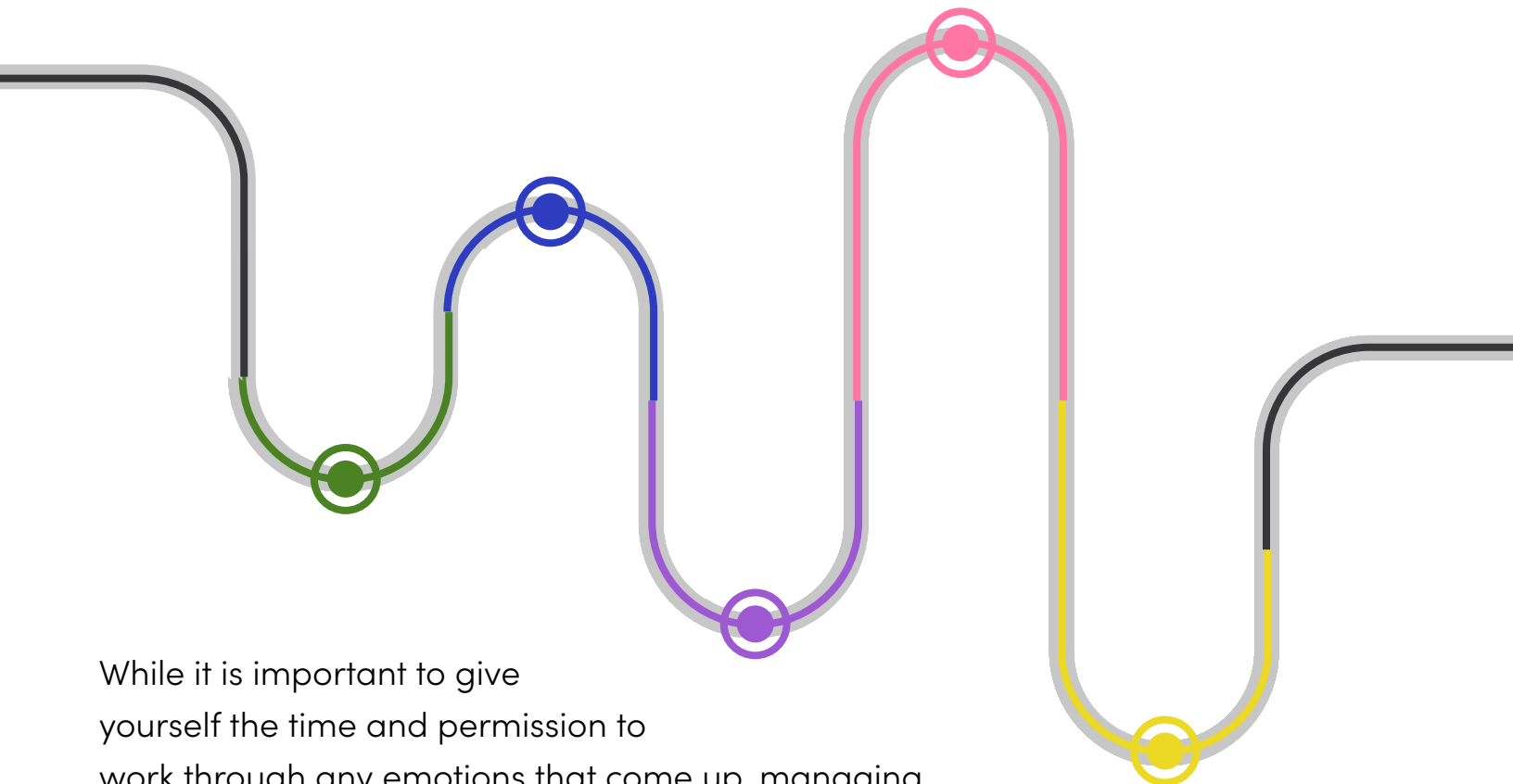
Depression:

- "I don't know what to do."
- "We've lost a child."
- "I just don't know who my daughter [or son] is anymore!"

Acceptance:

- “I don’t understand, but I want to understand.”
- “We value your honesty and openness.”
- “If any of my friends or family have a problem with you, they have a problem with me too.”

For many of us, though, the transformation process isn’t always quite so linear. It’s possible to find yourself bouncing between different stages or feeling multiple emotions simultaneously. You may experience moments of relief or happiness with your child as you support them in their journey, only to be hit with waves of loss or confusion when you’re alone. The process may feel a bit like the “snakes and ladders” game below.



While it is important to give yourself the time and permission to work through any emotions that come up, managing, processing, and expressing your feelings must be done in a way that protects your child. Ultimately, your child must not become responsible for managing the emotions of the adults around them, while they are

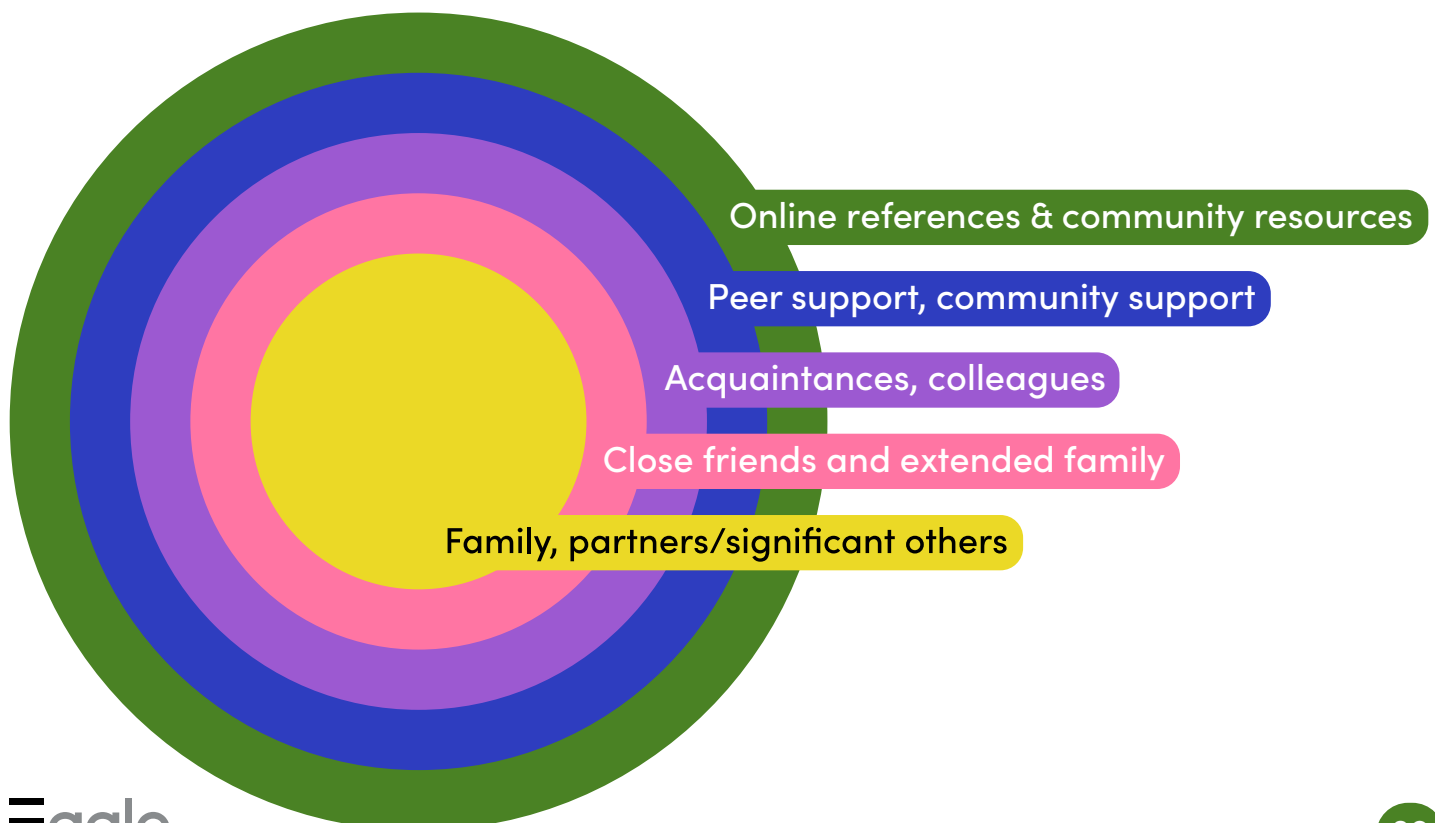
still learning and discovering their own sexuality and gender identity. This is why it is so vital that you have a support system of your own, which we'll discuss in the next section on **circles of care**.

Circles of Care: A Community-Wide Approach to Affirmation

Community care is an incredibly important resource when it comes to navigating your child's transition, and when it comes to you being able to develop the skills you need to be an affirming adult.

► Connection allows you to:

- have support when needing to have difficult conversations
- work through difficult emotions with peer support
- feel understood by others going through the same or similar things
- gain access to more resources
- help support 2SLGBTQI youth in their self-advocacy and self-affirmation
- explore ways to tap into local or online advocacy



Many adults feel like they are alone in doing the work of finding resources or seeking support: communities of adults supporting each other can lead to resource sharing and networks of support, meaning the heavy lifting of education can be done together.

Offering emotional, social, and informational support to people who share similar experiences can empower others and improve social inclusion and communication.

Peer support also provides adults a safe environment where people feel welcome, safe, and respected. You need a space where it is okay to make mistakes, process emotions together, ask questions, and even be challenged to consider or do things differently.

We need to acknowledge the reality that **community care is not an equally distributed resource**. You might be parenting or caregiving alone, may have limited family or community support, and may also have limited time to try and access support groups online and in person. We know that building these networks of support requires both effort and vulnerability, but the benefits are demonstrably important.

For Reflection: Here are some questions to consider regarding your Circles of Care:

- ? Who is in your Circles of Care today?
- ? Who do you want or need in your Circles of Care in the future?
- ? Is there anyone you do NOT want in your Circles of Care? (Remember: you and your child are allowed to assert your boundaries)
- ? What kinds of support do you need or want?
- ? When it comes to maintaining boundaries, what kinds of information do you feel comfortable sharing in your Circles of Care, at each level?
- ? What information does your child feel comfortable with you sharing with your Circles of Care?

Part Three:

Why We Need Affirming Adults

In 2021, Egale published the “[Still in Every Class, Still in Every School](#)” report, which reported the findings of a Canada-wide survey of youth in Grades 8 to 12. A major finding of the report was that 2SLGBTQI youth with supportive adults both inside and outside the home are **FOUR TIMES** more likely to report good or excellent mental health.⁶

Having the support of affirming adults is not only a protective factor against serious mental health outcomes such as self-harm or suicidal behaviour⁷, it also creates positive downstream effects for a young person’s future in terms of their educational attainment, employment and economic opportunities, and the sense of self-esteem and self-worth that they carry into adulthood.

Importantly, when trans and nonbinary youth are allowed to thrive and be themselves in affirming environments, they also get opportunities **to just be kids**.

In this section, we will look at the principles of being an affirming adult, and then examine why boundaries and consent are so important to upholding these principles, whether it’s in conversations with your child or with others.

6 Peter, T., Campbell, C.P., & Taylor, C. (2021). Still in every class in every school: Final report on the second climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

7 Taylor, A.B., Chan, A., Hall, S.L., Saewyc, E. M., & the Canadian Trans & Non-binary Youth Health Survey Research Group (2020). Being Safe, Being Me 2019: Results of the Canadian Trans and Non-binary Youth Health Survey. Vancouver, Canada: Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, University of British Columbia.



What does it mean to be an affirming adult?

Affirming adults can show up for 2SLGBTQI youth by demonstrating affirming actions. These are principles that you might want to review for yourself, but they might also be ones that you want to share with people in your circles of care so that they know how they can show up for you and your child.

These **PROUD** principles may also form the basis of some courageous conversations that you may find yourself in the position to have with people who might be less informed about queer and trans issues.

✓ Proactive:

This is about demonstrating active allyship and solidarity regardless of who people think is and isn't in their space. For some people, their immediate reaction to discussions of 2SLGBTQI equity and inclusion might have been "well I know for sure that my own child isn't 2SLGBTQI identified", or "there aren't any 2SLGBTQI people in this area/school."

Educating oneself as an affirming adult, therefore, is something to do proactively and pre-emptively and not just as a response or intervention to negative incidents or consequences.

Being **proactive** can also mean showing genuine interest and excitement about trans and nonbinary issues! Researching historical moments, searching out events or

rallies, or seeing what kinds of queer-related media (novels, comic books) the library has on offer can be a great way of demonstrating interest.

✓ Responsive:

People and groups do not always need to take an explicitly anti-2SLGBTQI stance to perpetuate harm. Sometimes, 2SLGBTQI people and issues are simply never discussed. Erasure and silence are forms of discrimination: avoiding these topics sends a clear message that 2SLGBTQI people are undesirable and unwelcome.

Lukewarm or quiet tolerance is not enough. Anything less than strong and explicitly **responsive** support is less than helpful and in fact could be harmful, especially in places where an

anti-2SLGBTQI stance or attitude is the assumed default still in many settings.

Make your allyship and support explicit, visible, and ongoing. But remember, safety is still paramount. What kinds of actions you undertake as an ally will depend on your social position, your resources, and your abilities.

✓ Upholding:

Taking a support role means letting the 2SLGBTQI youth take the lead and **upholding** their voice. Listen to them actively, keep communication channels open, and find out what support looks like for them. We like to use the co-piloting metaphor: you help them navigate but ultimately, they are in charge.

This might mean supporting a 2SLGBTQI youth in ensuring they have everything they need to share their identity with their peers, their teachers, one or more parent/caregivers, extended family, etc. Upholding this decision still means checking in to see that they are comfortable and safe, but it also means trusting that they have very likely given this decision a significant amount of careful consideration.

✓ Overt Actions:

Back up symbolic gestures (such as pride flags, safer space stickers, or solidarity statements) with concrete action. Rainbow stickers and posters are great, but they mean little without active allyship to back it up.

Here are some examples of affirming actions:

- ✓ going to Pride Parades with youth
- ✓ consuming media that contains queer characters
- ✓ setting up a 2SLGBTQI youth group or parent support group
- ✓ working on creating intergenerational spaces for queer folks, which can be especially encouraging for queer youth
- ✓ taking action in schools and communities when it comes to inclusive spaces
- ✓ making plans with your young person around goals for transition or coming out
- ✓ having difficult conversations with other people and potentially sharing resources with them



Demonstrative:

Demonstrate your allyship by remaining open to continued learning and receiving feedback graciously and with humility, and demonstrate accountability by committing to not repeat the same mistakes.

Know that it's okay to make mistakes and it's also okay not to have the answers, because learning about equity and inclusion is an ongoing commitment. By showing your openness to learning, you can help foster a culture of learning for yourself and other affirming adults around you. Allyship is a dynamic and ever-evolving process.

As an affirming adult, you will inevitably come across stumbling blocks and you will very likely make mistakes...but you will also share successes with your child and with your circles of support and care.



“

My daughter isn't out and hasn't spoken to a wide circle to people, so I'm very careful. [...] I'm really taking my cues, asking questions. Before I participated in this panel, I sat down with her and I said I've been asked, you know, if it's a no-go for you, it's a no-go. I'm not here to tell your story, that's yours, I'm here to tell my own journey.

”

- Liz, parent of a young adult trans child



Boundaries and Consent

As an affirming adult, you might find yourself in the position of relaying information or needing to make decisions with or for your child that involve dealing with tricky issues around boundaries and consent.

For instance, your child may be out to some people but not others. You may find yourself trying to figure out which pronoun or name to use in some situations so as not to violate their privacy. You may be dealing with inquisitive people—well-meaning or not—who have questions about a change they’ve noticed in your child’s gender presentation.

It is vital that we model consent with youth by asking their permission before sharing information about them. This is crucial in preserving their sense of agency as they move through self-development and/or transition. When it comes to discussions around personal identity, that means the youth must willfully and explicitly consent to sharing those details.

Examples of consent-based behaviours include:

- asking if it’s okay to share a chosen name or pronoun with a family member (if your child is not already out to everyone)
- discussing in advance whether your child wants you to share information, or if they’d prefer to tell people themselves
- asking permission to include them in social media posts
- particularly if your child is older, double-checking how you can support them in having conversations with their teacher or doctor
- modelling consent in conversations: “I have some questions about that. Is this something you’d feel comfortable talking about?”

Remember: while you or your child may want to engage in advocacy or education, safety and health come first. You may encounter people who are seeking information from you not because they are genuinely interested in learning, and who do not respect boundaries or consent. Dr. Andrew Campbell, a specialist in racial justice education, shares this:

“

Sometimes people come to me to ask information about someone else and I will literally say “you should ask them.” Or, if I have permission to say, I will preface by saying “I have permission to say...” Sometimes I don’t, I would say why do you want to know, because sometimes you can sense the only reason is just gossip. I don’t feed gossip, and I don’t feed your thirst for being inquisitive.⁸

”

Misinformation and Disinformation

As an affirming adult, you may be responsible for finding information to help your child make decisions about their health or explore their identity. Given the amount of information available online today, it can be challenging to know which sources to trust. Some sites may feature **misinformation**, which is inaccurate information that is not intentionally harmful; it may be outdated or simply incorrect. But other sites may feature **disinformation**, which is inaccurate information that is intentionally designed to deceive, mislead, and harm.

Misinformation and disinformation feed many myths and misconceptions that people have about trans and nonbinary youth. Let’s debunk a few of the biggest ones here. Additional mythbusting resources regarding trans health care, nonbinary identity, and detransition are featured in the [Resources](#) section.

⁸ Egale. (2021, Aug 9). Affirming adults: a safe return to class, for parents and guardians [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxbsXGm_9r8

► Common Myths and Misconceptions about Trans Youth

! MISCONCEPTION #1

Children who haven't reached puberty do not have a fully developed sense of their own gender identity.

► FACT #1

Research shows that, on average, children's sense of their own gender develops between the ages of three and five, and that this can begin as early as two years old.^{9,10} If a child is articulating insistently and consistently "I am a boy" or "I am a girl" or "I am both" or "I am neither" they are old enough to know the intensity at which they feel this as their truth, regardless of if they are cisgender or transgender. As such, being trans is part of one's innate sense of self. That said, no two experiences of gender identity development are alike. Some may know from a very early age. Others may not have the language to articulate their sense of self until much later. There are many environmental factors that will affect how one's journey of gender identity development will unfold. For example, a person may choose not to disclose their authentic gender based on how safe and supportive their environment is to do so. Trans people all experience their body, their assigned sex, the related social expectations of their gender, and their gender identity differently. These differences will influence the ways in which each transgender person chooses to embrace their identities and move through transition.

9 Ruble, D. N., Taylor, L. J., Cyphers, L., et al. (2007). The role of gender constancy in early gender development. *Child Development*, 78(4), 1121-1136. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01056.x;

10 Boskey, E. R. (2014). Understanding transgender identity development in childhood and adolescence. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 9(4), 445-463. doi:10.1080/15546128.2014.973131

! MISCONCEPTION #2

Being trans or gender diverse is the same thing as being gay or lesbian.

► Fact #2

It is a common misconception that attraction ('sexual orientation') and gender identity are the same because they both fall under the 2SLGBTQI umbrella. Attraction and gender identity are separate and distinct components of human identity and are not necessarily related. Some people may identify as BOTH trans and gay. Other trans people may identify as trans and straight. You cannot and should not jump to conclusions about how your child understands and frames their own attraction identity based solely on how they express or identify their gender.

! MISCONCEPTION #3

Being transgender is a choice.

► FACT #3

Just as being cisgender is not a choice, being transgender is not a choice. Your child is not "doing this" to be trendy, rebellious, or to get a reaction from you. Though being trans is not a choice, a person may make choices about the ways and extent to which they will embrace their true and authentic gender. While it is true that trans identities and experiences have gained a considerable degree of visibility in mass media in recent years, gender diversity is not a trend nor "an indulgence for millennials". In fact, gender diversity is as ancient and universal as humanity itself. What is new, however, is the language we now have available to talk about this aspect of human diversity, owing largely to strides made by trans human rights movements.

! MISCONCEPTION #4

Not conforming to dominant gender norms or expressing gender in unique and diverse ways are signs that a child is trans or will identify as trans when they grow up.

► FACT #4

The degree to which someone conforms to dominant social gender norms reflects a person's gender expression and not necessarily their gender identity. Gender expression is the way a person presents themselves to the world, whereas gender identity is a person's internal sense of the gender they know themselves to be. A child saying, "I prefer girl clothes" and a child saying, "I am a girl," are very different. Both transgender and cisgender children can explore clothing and expressions associated with masculinity and femininity. "I prefer boy clothes" may be a preference for any child regardless of their gender identity. However, transgender children are usually consistent and insistent with this need to be recognized for who they are. It is therefore very important to listen closely to what your child is communicating to you about their gender.

! MISCONCEPTION #5

All transgender people go through a transition process by changing their name, using hormones, and undergoing surgery.

► FACT #5

There is no one way to transition! Every trans person determines for themselves what they need to best affirm their gender identity. This journey may or may not include socially coming out as trans, legal changes to identification documents, or accessing gender affirming medical care like hormones or surgery. There are many reasons why a person may pursue certain processes and not others. Regardless, engaging in legal or medical transitioning does not make anyone any more or less trans.

Part Four:

The Joys of Being an Affirming Adult

We've given you a lot of information in this guide. You may find you need time to digest it all. Being an affirming adult is a long-term commitment. Figuring out how to approach this journey in a way that is sustainable and supportive for you and your child likely won't happen overnight. We want to end on a hopeful note, with a nod to the joys of being the parent, guardian and/or caregiver of a trans, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming young person.



Quotes from Affirming Parents

Dwyane Wade (basketball player)

parent to Zaya Wade

“

Zaya, as your father, all I've wanted to do is get it right. I've sat back and watched how gracefully you've taken on the public scrutiny. And even though it's not easy, I watched you walk out of that house every morning as yourself. I admire how you've handled ignorance in our world. I admire it that you face every day. To say that your village is proud of you is an understatement.¹¹

”

¹¹ Corrine, A. (26 Feb 2023). Gabrielle Union and Dwyane Wade dedicate NAACP President's Award to daughter Zaya and Black trans people. *Vibe*. Available from: <https://www.vibe.com/news/entertainment/gabrielle-union-dwyane-wade-naacp-presidents-award-speech-1234738112/>

*Colin Mochrie (comedian)
parent to Kinley Mochrie*

“


This is my child, this is the exact same person with a new coat. When you have a child, all you want for your child is for them to be safe, to be happy and to be better than you are.¹²

”

In the first episode of *Gender Playground: a podcast dedicated to the joys of gender-affirming care for kids*, hosts Marcelle Kosman and Raimi Marx talk about how about one of the lesser-discussed aspects of trans and nonbinary kids' experiences is **gender euphoria**.

Gender euphoria is the positive experience someone has of feeling comfortable in themselves as they receive affirmation, whether that be using a chosen name and pronouns, or engaging in a different set of affirming extra-curricular activities, getting a different haircut, etc. Gender euphoria can also be experienced in the relationships we have with people: when children get to participate in their family and social lives in the ways that feel authentic to who they know themselves to be.

¹² Frisk, A. (7 Sep 2018). Colin Mochrie shuts down trolls after wishing transgender daughter happy birthday. *Global News*. Available from: <https://globalnews.ca/news/4434381/colin-mochrie-trolls-transgender-daughter-birthday/>



We hear a lot of discussion of how difficult trans lives can be, but it is just as if not more important to acknowledge and celebrate these moments of trans and nonbinary joy. As an affirming adult, you can help facilitate and witness this joy, and that is something that your child will also carry with them into the future as they grow and develop.

As you continue your journey as an affirming adult, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- It's okay if it's not always easy.
- Reach out for support when you need it.
- Watching your child grow into their authentic self is a beautiful, wonderful process.
- You don't ever have to become an outspoken activist: being your child's advocate and supporter is the most important thing, and it is more than enough.

You've got this.

Resources & Information

Our Funder

Public Health Agency of Canada

Our Community Partners

pflag

"pflag Canada is a national charitable organization that was founded by parents who needed help learning how to accept and support their 2SLGBTQ+ children. We are dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for 2SLGBTQ+ people and those who love them."

pflag has chapters in many Canadian cities that provide peer-to-peer support for adults, as well as education, resources, and events: <https://pflagcanada.ca/chapters/>

Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

"The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD) intersectionally promotes diversity in gender identity, gender expression, and romantic and/or sexual orientation in all its forms on a national level through services in the areas of education, health, and advocacy."

More Egale Resources

Title & Description	Link
<p>Supporting Your Gender Diverse Child: A Guide To Support Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers who Advocate for their Trans, Intersex, Two Spirit and Gender Diverse Children and Youth in the Ontario Education System.</p> <p>This 2017 resource was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education and was specifically designed to help adults understand and navigate the educational systems in Ontario. It explores issues such as gender segregated spaces, data systems and privacy, discrimination and harassment, and managing disclosure. It also includes a series of helpful checklists that can be used to make gender affirming support plans and decisions, regardless of the province or territory you and your child are in.</p>	<p>https://egale.ca/awareness/supporting-gender-diverse-child/</p>
<p>Anti-2SLGBTQI Cyberbullying: A resource for Educators.</p> <p>This resource highlights the disproportionate harm that 2SLGBTQI young people face as a result of cyberbullying. It offers educators and school staff a range of practical strategies for prevention and intervention that respond to the specific context of anti-2SLGBTQI bias, discrimination and violence within the school community, online and beyond.</p>	<p>https://egale.ca/awareness/tackling-anti-2slgbtqi-cyberbullying-in-schools/</p>

<p>Affirming Adults: A Safe Return to Class (For Parents/Guardians).</p> <p>What can school communities look and feel like when 2SLGBTQI affirming adults show up? Our fabulous host, Deb Pearce, spoke with an expert line-up of panelists, who exchanged stories, struggles and promising practices for building environments where 2SLGBTQI students can thrive.</p>	<p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxbsXGm_9r8</p>
<p>Pride Safety Toolkit for Attendees.</p> <p>The Pride Safety Toolkit for 2SLGBTQI people and allies attending Pride or other community events, includes answers to common legal questions and scenarios as well as safety tips, support resources and other ways to take action to combat rising levels of anti-trans and anti-2SLGBTQI hate, discrimination and violence.</p>	<p>https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Pride-Safety-Toolkit-Attendees-3.0.pdf</p>
<p>Leading the Way: Supporting Social Action By Young Change Makers.</p> <p>Some trans and gender diverse youth and their families want to engage in advocacy and social action: this is a comprehensive starter guide to help you figure out how! Sections include understanding the landscape of social action; clarifying intentions by envisioning change; getting strategic about change through planning and developing and refining leadership skills.</p>	<p>https://egale.ca/awareness/leading-the-way/</p>

Egale Resources for Building Affirming Environments

Title & Description	Link
<p>Toilet Training: The basics of making your washrooms inclusive for everyone.</p> <p>Having all gender bathrooms is a step in the right direction, and is even becoming the norm when it comes to making your event, school, or workplace more inclusive for trans and gender diverse people. To help make life a little easier, we've laid out everything you need to know about inclusive, all gender washrooms and provided you with some resources so you can get started today.</p>	<p>https://egale.ca/awareness/inclusive-washrooms/</p>
<p>Preparing Students for the Transition of a Trans or Gender Diverse Peer.</p> <p>The following document aims to assist school staff with key considerations and language to approach a conversation regarding the upcoming transition of a trans classmate. To ensure that inclusivity is proactive and not merely reactive, please use and implement the concepts within this resource regardless of whether a student has come forward to indicate that they are trans.</p>	<p>https://egale.ca/awareness/preparing-students/</p>

Pride Safety Toolkit for Attendees.

The Pride Safety Toolkit for 2SLGBTQI people and allies attending Pride or other community events, includes answers to common legal questions and scenarios as well as safety tips, support resources and other ways to take action to combat rising levels of anti-trans and anti-2SLGBTQI hate, discrimination and violence.

<https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Pride-Safety-Toolkit-Attendees-3.0.pdf>

Leading the Way: Supporting Social Action By Young Change Makers.

Some trans and gender diverse youth and their families want to engage in advocacy and social action: this is a comprehensive starter guide to help you figure out how! Sections include understanding the landscape of social action; clarifying intentions by envisioning change; getting strategic about change through planning and developing and refining leadership skills.

<https://egale.ca/awareness/leading-the-way/>

Misinformation and Mythbusting

Organization	Resource
MediaSmarts Canada's Centre for Digital Literacy	Guides for Parents A series of guides for parents on topics including digital citizenship, how to deal with cyberbullying, how to tell "fact from fake," how to navigate video game use, etc,
Canadian Centre for Cybersecurity The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (the Cyber Centre) is part of the Communications Security Establishment. It is the single unified source of expert advice, guidance, services and support on cyber security for Canadians.	How to identify misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation Specific consumer tips for identifying and investigating elements of websites.
"How gender-affirming care for kids works in Canada" CBC Explains (Nov 23, 2023) Interviews with health care experts and transgender youth answering some of the most common questions and about medical transition	https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/gender-affirming-care-youth-1.7021529
"10 Myths about Nonbinary People it's Time to Unlearn" Everyday Feminism (Dec 6, 2014)	https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/12/myths-non-binary-people/
"Dispelling Myths Around Detransition" Stonewall UK (Oct 7, 2019)	https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/dispelling-myths-around-detransition

Resources for Black and Indigenous Trans and Nonbinary Youth

Organization	Location	Description/ Specific Resources	Contact
Native Youth Sexual Health Network	National	<p>A Mental Health Peer Support Manual for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Gender Non-Conforming Indigenous Youth</p> <p>A mental health manual written by and for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ Indigenous youth.</p>	<p>Website: https://www.nativeyouth-sexualhealth.com/</p> <p>Email: info@nativeyouthsexualhealth.com</p>
Urban Native Youth Association	Vancouver, B.C.	<p>2-Spirit Collective</p> <p>"UNYA's 2-Spirit Collective provides support, resources, and programming for Indigenous youth, ages 15 to 30, who identify as 2-spirit or LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, along with many other identities), and for those who are questioning their sexual or gender identities."</p>	<p>Website: https://unya.bc.ca/</p> <p>Phone: 604-254-7732</p> <p>Email: info@unya.bc.ca</p>

Black Queer Youth Collective	Toronto	The Black Queer Youth Collective has organized community “table talks,” outings to art galleries, and photo voice projects.	Website: https://www.blackqueeryouthcollective.org/
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Confidential Resources for Trans and Nonbinary Youth

Organization	Location	Description	Contact
LGBT Youthline	Ontario	LGBT Youthline offers confidential peer support services for queer and trans youth 29 and below in Ontario. The Youthline offers phone, text, and chat support, but does not provide crisis support.	Website: https://www.youthline.ca/ Text: 647-694-4275 Phone: 416-962-2232 Toll Free: 1-888-687-9688
Kids Help Phone	National	Kids Help Phone provides confidential 24/7 support for youth and children across Canada, including crisis support. Services are available in both English and French. Youth can also access counselling services in over 100 languages with the assistance of trained interpreters.	Website: https://kidshelpphone.ca Text: 686868 Phone: 1-800-668-6868
Trans Lifeline	National	Trans Lifeline is peer support run by and for trans people.	Website: https://translifeline.org/ Phone: 1-877-330-6366

Confidential Resources for Indigenous Parents and Caregivers

Organization	Location	Description	Contact
Hope for Wellness Helpline	National	Hope for Wellness provides culturally competent counselling for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, in English and French, 24/7 a day. Support is available upon request in Cree, Ojibway (Anishinaabemowin), and Inuktitut, although these are not available 24/7.	Website: https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/ Phone: 1-855-242-3310 Chat: through website
Indian Residential School Crisis Line	National	The national Indian Residential School Crisis line provides 24/7 support to former students and intergenerational survivors. The line provides emotional support and crisis referral services.	Phone: 1-866-925-4419

Resources for Parents and Caregivers in Crisis

Organization	Location	Description	Contact
Canadian Suicide and Crisis Helpline	National	National, bilingual (English/French) suicide and crisis support hotline.	9-8-8
Wellness Together	National	Kids Help Phone provides confidential 24/7 support for youth and children across Canada, including crisis support. Services are available in both English and French. Youth can also access counselling services in over 100 languages with the assistance of trained interpreters.	<p>Website: https://kidshelpphone.ca/</p> <p>Crisis Support Text: Text WELLNESS to 741741</p> <p>Indigenous Peoples: 1-855-242-3310</p>

Glossary

Agender

A person who experiences either having no gender or a neutral gender identity.

Ambigender

A type of bigender identity in which one experiences two types of gender that are not fluid, but are static instead.

Androgynous

A word to describe a behaviour, trait, or style of expression that either blends masculine and feminine forms of expression or is culturally read as gender neutral.

Asexual (Ace)

A person who does not experience sexual attraction, and/or who has little to no interest in sexual activity. When used as an umbrella term, it encompasses identities reflecting a range of experiences and degrees of interest in sexual intimacy, including demisexual and graysexual (see below).

Aromantic (Aro)

A person who experiences little to no romantic forms of attraction to others.

Assigned Sex

Short definition: The classification of a person as female, intersex, or male. It is usually assigned at birth based on a visual assessment of external anatomy.

Attraction

A person's potential for emotional, spiritual, intellectual, intimate, romantic and/or sexual interest in other people and may form the basis for aspects of one's identity and/or behaviour. Often referred to as "sexual orientation." Although the term sexual orientation is more widely known and extant in human rights legislation within Canada and internationally, the term is, in fact, a misnomer. This phrasing

perpetuates reductive conceptions of human sexuality as directional, fixed, centered on an “other,” and positions sexual contact as the sole determinant of how individuals experience the related phenomena of attraction, desire, pleasure, lust, love, and intimacy.

Bisexual

A person who experiences attraction to both people of their own gender and people of gender different from their own.

Bigender

A person who experiences two genders, either fluidly or simultaneously. These may or may not include the genders of man and woman.

Cisgender

A person whose gender identity corresponds with what is socially expected based on their sex assigned at birth (e.g. A person who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man).

Cisheterosexism

Prejudice and discrimination against anyone who is not, or is perceived to be not, both cisgender and heterosexual. It is a form of discrimination at the intersection of cissexism and heterosexism which targets anyone perceived as failing to uphold cisgender and heterosexual norms.

Deadname

“Deadnaming” describes the act of referring to a trans person with a name they no longer actively use, often the one they were assigned at birth.

Demisexual

A person who experiences sexual attraction to someone only after having an emotional attraction to them.

Disinformation

Disinformation is “deliberate and includes malicious content. It is designed to spread fear and suspicion among the population” (UNHCR). Some disinformation is difficult to spot, but some of its more noticeable traits are that it “makes a bold statement on a controversial issue,” “provokes an emotional response,” “makes an extraordinary claim,” and “uses small pieces of valid information that are exaggerated or distorted” (Government of Canada).

Gay

A person who experiences attraction to people of the same gender as themselves. It can be used by individuals of any gender but is often used to refer specifically to men who are attracted to the same or similar genders.

Gender dysphoria

The varying degrees of discomfort and/or distress that trans people experience when they are unable to live as and be affirmed in their true gender.

Gender euphoria

The psychological state of bliss and comfort that happens when the individual’s gender expression is aligned with their identity.

Gender expression

The way gender is presented and communicated to the world through clothing, speech, body language, hairstyle, voice, and/or the emphasis or de-emphasis of body characteristics and behaviours.

Gender identity

A person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is not necessarily visible to others and may or may not align with what society expects based on their assigned sex at birth. A person’s relationship to their own gender is not always fixed and can change over time.

Genderfluid

A person whose gender identity is experienced as not being fixed and that shifts and varies over time and in relation to the context.

Gender non-conforming

Anyone who does not conform to the dominant expectations associated with gender, particularly binary gender. This can be in terms of gender identity, expression, or roles.

Genderqueer

This term emerged in the 1990s, around the same time that “queer” was being reclaimed from having been a slur. While genderqueer may be similar in some ways to non-binary or genderfluid identity, genderqueer refers to people whose gender identity “queers” or otherwise challenges binary gender norms and social expectations.

Graysexual

A person who experiences interest in sexual intimacy infrequently or with limited intensity.

Heterosexual

A person who experiences attraction to people of a gender different than their own. Also referred to as “straight”.

Intersex

A person whose chromosomal, hormonal, or anatomical sex characteristics fall outside of the conventional classifications of male or female.

Lesbian

A person who identifies as either woman or nonbinary and who experiences attraction to the same or similar genders.

Misgendering

To refer to a person as, or consider them to be, a gender that they are. Often misgendering is unintended, though it can still be invalidating to the person who is subjected to it. People who harbour cissexist beliefs or attitudes will often engage in purposeful acts of misgendering trans people. Misgendering can include using incorrect pronouns, using incorrect gendered forms of address (e.g., sir, ma'am, guys, girls, ladies) or incorrect gendered titles (e.g., Mr., Miss or Mrs.). Organizations and administrative systems and processes can also misgender people, which is an example of institutional, or bureaucratic transphobia (Serano, 2015).

Misinformation

Misinformation is “false or inaccurate information” (UNHCR). While misinformation may not be ill-intentioned, it can still be incredibly harmful. It can include outdated facts, inaccurate summaries of research, or opinions presented as facts.

Nonbinary (Enby)

A person who experiences their gender as not exclusively man or woman. When used as an umbrella term, it encompasses identities reflecting a range of gender experiences, including agender and genderfluid.

Pansexual (Pan)

A person who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to others, regardless of gender.

Queer

An umbrella term that may variously describe 2SLGBTQI communities, one's relationship to a particular community, or an individual identity. It can denote same-gender attraction or reflect more complex dynamics between one's sex, gender, and attraction experiences.

Questioning

An umbrella term for the process of reconciling one's felt sense of self in terms of gender and/or attraction and the language one uses to describe those experiences. It may be experienced for a single period, episodically, or persistently over one's lifetime.

Transfeminine

An umbrella term for trans people who identify with or express femininity. Transfeminine people may or may not identify as a woman.

Transgender (Trans)

A person whose gender identity does not correspond with what is socially expected based on their sex assigned at birth. It can be used as an umbrella term to refer to a range of gender identities and experiences.

Transmasculine

An umbrella term for trans people who identify with or express masculinity. Transmasculine people may or may not identify as a man.

Two Spirit (2S)

An umbrella term for the many Indigenous traditional identities forcefully suppressed by colonization. The term honours the fluid and diverse nature of gender and attraction and its connection to community and spirituality. An Indigenous individual may choose to use this term instead of, or in addition to, identifying as LGBTQI.

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