

## Helping the Parent Understand the Gender Non-Conforming Child

LGBT is an umbrella term for individuals who fall outside of sexual or gender societal “norms.” Statistically, you might think of them as population outliers.

Gender non-conformity falls into this group of outliers.

There are no magic words that one can say to a parent who shows concern when their child demonstrates gender non-conforming behavior.

There is much confusion among the public about terms such as transgender and gender non-conforming (in professional fields, too, for that matter).

Here are a few thoughts...

Gender expression and identity is very diverse. We can no longer try to make a child “fit” into binary definitions of “boy” and “girl.” This is much easier to say than to practice. Our society has made this our dogma. Our brain may tell us that gender diversity is reasonable, and yet, when we see our child demonstrating gender non-conforming behaviors, our heart may tell us something different. We all have hopes and aspirations for our children. When we get a mind-set for how we want our child to be that doesn’t match how a child wants to be, the heart/mind gap can be so wide as to cause conflict. We cannot lose site of the fact that it’s the child’s well-being that is most important....even if it forces parents to get out of their comfort zone.

Is a child transgender? It is not up to the teacher, counselor, or parent to decide whether or not a child is transgender. That can only be done by a professional who is trained to do so. Even most psychologists and therapists have little training in this issue. This can make it hard for those who care about the child and want what is best for them.

Being transgender is when an individual’s gender identity is opposite that of their birth sex. ***This is not anyone’s fault; neither the child nor the parents are not to blame.*** This is a condition that arises during pre-natal development.

Gender non-conformity is not a mental illness. It is not something that needs to be cured. Rather, it needs to be understood.

There are many ways that a child may demonstrate behaviors that may be viewed as gender non-conforming. It could be by actions (a boy playing with dolls, a girl playing with trucks). It could be more by expression (a boy wearing nail polish, or a girl being a “tomboy”).

Imagine the child who is gender non-conforming. They know they aren’t quite like others. When they try to be themselves, they risk the chance of verbal and physical bullying by friends, teachers, and parents. To keep these feelings or to be told that what they are is “wrong” can lead to anxiety, depression, and anger. To express how they really feel (or who they really are) could expose them to emotional and/or physical trauma.

So, what *do* you tell the parent who suspects that their child may be transgender or gender non-conforming?

- First, let the parent know that it's not their fault that their child is the way they are.
- Acknowledge that like them, you want the child to be healthy and happy.
- Let the parent(s) know that they are not alone. There are many other parents with similar concerns and fear. We are in this together.
- Hopefully, the parents will agree to wanting what's best for the child. That the child's needs must be met (*not* the parents' needs).

The key to providing what's best for the child is to keep love in our hearts and open minds. We need to abandon antiquated social and religious dogma for new paradigms. We (all involved) need to educate ourselves about how to families, children, professionals...the entire community deals with gender non-conformity.

- Parents need to be given places where they can turn. Have handouts/books to give to the parents

There may be a PFLAG (Parents, Friends & family for Lesbians And Gays) Chapter in the area. This organization provides support for all of those involved with LGBT issues. It allows parents to share fears and concerns as well as get ideas and advice. Such networking is invaluable. ( [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) )

There are many on-line chat rooms that deal with gender issues.

The Gender Spectrum ([www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)) contains a wealth of information on gender issues. There are any number of articles that can be downloaded that are for professionals and parents (too numerous to list here...go to the website and scroll down to the bottom of the home page for a menu).

Gender Spectrum Lounge provides on-line chatting opportunities for children, parents, and professionals, covering a variety of gender issues.

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/lounge/index.php?sid=d17db282b0b6aa78a0dae6964f5c26d5>