



## **“Mummy, Daddy, I’m transgender.” - Part 1**

This is a sentence that many parents hardly ever expect their child to say. Perhaps some of you may not have heard of the term ‘transgender’ before, and your head is reeling with thoughts of what this means for your child, your family, and where to take things at this point in time. If this sounds like you, take a few minutes to breathe, have a seat somewhere comfortable, and read on. We hope that this article will help you to understand some of the things that you may be thinking about.

### **What does it really mean to be transgender?**

Transgender people are people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many people who were assigned male at birth grow up as boys and men, and most people who were assigned female at birth grow up as girls and women. But some people’s gender identity – their innate knowledge of who they are – is different from what was initially expected when they were born. Most of these people describe themselves as transgender.

Gender identity is different from sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to who we’re attracted to, while gender identity is about our own personal sense of being a man or a woman, or outside the gender binary. Transgender people can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight. Learning the difference between the two can help you understand how gender identity does not determine sexual orientation, and vice versa.

### **Names and gender pronouns**

Many of us don’t think twice about using the name we were given (or have chosen for ourselves later in life) and the gender pronouns we use (e.g. he or she). For some transgender people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. Gender pronouns are also one of the ways we express ourselves. When someone asks you to use their pronouns, they are asking for you to respect their identity.

The consistent, intentional use of incorrect gender pronouns when referring to a transgender person is a real and exhausting stressor. It is a form of disrespect (commonly referred to in this situation as misgendering) which can have long-lasting harmful impacts, such as gender dysphoria, exclusion, worthlessness and isolation.

Making a conscious effort to use the right name and gender pronouns on and when referring to your child is a great way to show love, acceptance and respect for each other, and can help alleviate negative feelings they may be experiencing.

## **Could this just be a phase?**

Your child, like many children and teens (and adults, too), has probably gone through “phases” – like only wearing all black, dyeing their hair, being obsessed with a certain band, or asking to go by a nickname – but being transgender is not a phase, and trying to dismiss it as such may cause psychological distress during a time when your child needs validation and support the most.

Growing up as transgender without strong parental support can be challenging, even life-threatening. Compared to their peers, transgender youth suffer higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide risk. Being transgender is not something parents or people can cause, or change. However, parents and allies can play a major role in keeping their transgender children healthy and safe, and doing so is more straightforward than you think!

(end of part 1)

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## **Questions from Concerned Parents - Part 2**

Coming out is a nerve-racking experience for many. While awareness of the LGBTQ+ community in Singapore has grown especially in the last decade, many parents are still not quite sure what to do when their child comes out to them as transgender. We hope that we can help put your mind at ease by answering some of the frequently asked questions by parents of transgender children:

### **What do I do if my child withdraws after coming out to me?**

Your child may be withdrawing if they:

- Spend extended periods of time in their room/out of the house
- Not initiate conversations with you as much, even though they are usually chatty
- Shy away from displays of affection

There may be a few reasons why your child might withdraw from you. Perhaps the initial conversation about them being transgender didn't go as well they'd hoped, or didn't go well at all. It could even be that the conversation went extremely well and you've expressed your support for your child's true identity, but your child may be going through something else.

In any case, it's important to continue initiating conversations (not confrontations) with your child, and also being receptive to future conversations they might want to have. Your child, like you, may also need the time to process the conversations you've already had before this. Being mindful of their need for space and letting them know you are available when they are ready to talk again will also help re-establish or reinforce the trust that you both have in each other.

### **What does an affirming home environment look like to my transgender child?**

It's likely that your child has put a lot of thought into coming out to you, and may be feeling a lot of stress thinking about what may come next. The fear of rejection from a loved one is real! It is especially important now, while acknowledging your own thought process and emotions after your child's coming-out, to maintain an affirmative home environment.

Affirmations can be shown through words and actions. For you and your child, this may look different depending on the kind of relationship you have. Do you come from a household where lots of hugs and words of affection are exchanged? Or do you demonstrate your love with other acts of kindness, like small gifts or their favourite meal? Whichever language of love is used in your household, use it to remind your child that they are appreciated for trusting you to share their true identity, and are loved for who they are.

### **Why is it important for me, out of all people, to support my child, and how can I do that?**

The act of coming out to you means that your child sees you as a safe and trusted person. Whether you are the first or hundredth person who they have come out to, your child likely still looks to you as one of the most important people in their life. While your child may have a support system of close friends and peers, nothing beats having a supportive family, especially if your child is still living at home. Even though you may still need some time to fully understand what being transgender means for your child, it will be reassuring for them to know that you appreciate and thank them for their trust in you.

### **I still can't wrap my head around my child being transgender, but I don't want anything bad to happen to them.**

We can tell, since you're reading this article!

While it's perfectly normal to need time to understand your child's identity as a transgender person, it may not help the situation if you dismiss your child's hopes of you putting in the effort to recognise them for the person they are. Being dismissive of who they are may cause them distress having to cope with a parent that is not receptive to learning.

It's also natural for parents of transgender individuals to worry about how their children are perceived by society once they start transitioning. Perhaps you may feel that by not acknowledging or trying to understand your child's identity, they may "give up" and go back to living or presenting as the sex they were assigned at birth. While this can happen, repressing one's true identity can take a huge toll on a person, and may lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety.

You may not be able to change how others might view your child, but you can make a world of difference in your child's life by holding their hand and walking with them on the journey of life.

### **What Next?**

Being supportive of your child doesn't mean you have to understand everything right away, but you can be a great ally by listening with an open mind to transgender people speaking for themselves. Check out books, films, YouTube channels, and trans blogs to find out more about transgender people and the issues people within the community face.

Don't be afraid to admit when you don't know something. It is better to admit that you're unsure than to make assumptions, or say something that may be incorrect or hurtful. Seek out the appropriate resources that will help you learn more, or ask if your child can help point you in the right direction.

Remember, you are working with your child, not against them. By making the effort to learn about your child and understand what they are going through, not only are you making progress for yourself, but you're also showing your child that you respect them. The fact that you have read up to this point is a big indicator that you have your child's best interests at heart. With the support of a loving parent, your child can live a happy and fulfilling life, as many transgender people have and will continue to do!

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Alexander (he, him) is Oogachaga's first-ever full-time Youth Worker, having joined in early 2020. With 5 years of experience working with the local transgender community, he looks forward to continuing to support the next generation of local LGBTQ+ youth with his work. Alex identifies as a gay trans man.

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## Resources to Kickstart Your Learning Journey

### Resources in English (local):

Transgender 101: FAQ — TransgenderSG: <https://transgendersg.com/trans-101-faq/>

Transgender Persons — Congregaytion: <https://www.congregaytion.com/transgender>

Parents & Families — Congregaytion: <https://www.congregaytion.com/parents-families>

Pink Dot 2010 – Jamie and her parents: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ll9X89flgIA>

### Resources in English (international):

How to support your gender-diverse child: Your questions, answered — Boston Children's Hospital (USA)  
<https://discoveries.childrenshospital.org/supporting-trans-child/>

No Room for Hatred: A Mother Writes — Orinam  
<http://orinam.net/no-room-for-hatred-a-mother-writes/>

Supporting your transgender child — Mermaids (UK)  
<https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/support-videos/>

Transgender Children & Youth: Understanding the Basics — Human Rights Campaign (USA)  
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics>

Transgender Identity Terms and Labels — Planned Parenthood (USA)

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/transgender/transgender-identity-terms-and-labels>

“I think I might be trans” and other resources (Asia)

<https://weareaptn.org/2017/08/01/aptn-fact-sheets-being-trans-in-asia-and-the-pacific-i-think-i-might-be-trans-and-other-resources/>

### Resources in Mandarin:

解答你的问题: 关于跨性别者, 性别认同及性别表达 — American Psychological Association

<https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/chinese-simplified-transgender.pdf>

男女同性恋、双性恋、跨性别者和间性者的平等:常问问题 — United Nations: Human Rights

<https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FAQs-Chinese.pdf>

認識同志: 同志是什麼 — 臺灣同志諮詢熱線協會 (Taiwan)

<https://hotline.org.tw/book/10>

### Resources in Malay:

Definisi Identiti Gender dan Orientasi Seksual — Queer Lapis (Malaysia)

<https://www.queerlapis.com/glossary/>

Semasa MCO (Movement Control Order), golongan LGBT berdepan dengan keganasan oleh keluarga — Queer Lapis (Malaysia)

<https://www.queerlapis.com/mco-keganasan-oleh-keluarga/>

Tanya Kami — Queer Lapis (Malaysia)

<https://www.queerlapis.com/ask-us-tanya-kami/>

### Resources in Tamil:

அறிமுகம்: திருனர்கள் — ஓரினம்

<http://orinam.net/ta/resources-ta/family-and-friends-ta/faqs-transgenders-ta/>

அறிமுகம்: பாலீர்ப்பு மற்றும் பாலடையாளம் — ஓரினம்

<http://orinam.net/ta/resources-ta/family-and-friends-ta/faqs-gender-and-sexuality-ta/>

குடும்பம் என்றால் இப்போதும் குடும்பம்தான். . . அன்பு என்றால் இதுவும் அன்புதான். . . — NQAPIA

<http://www.nqapia.org/wpp/tamil/>

சொற்பொருள் — ஓரினம்

<http://orinam.net/ta/resources-ta/family-and-friends-ta/terminology-ta/>