



Transition Tips for Parents

Since there are very few parenting resources available to transgender people, we have included these best practices for transitioning parents. Of course, there are other issues involved in transgender parenting. See COLAGE's *Transgender Family Resources List* for publications, websites, and parenting organizations. If you haven't already, please request a copy of COLAGE's *Kids of Trans Resource Guide*, read it over, and give it to your children.

- Coming out to family is a major issue for transgender people and can be a difficult process. Please keep in mind that **the entire family transitions**, not just the transgender parent. Every member of the family needs time and support to adjust to the changes of a gender transition. The process of acceptance can take a while and is often ongoing. **You can let your children know – through language and action – that, no matter what, you will still be their parent.**
- As a parent, remember that your children come first and your transition comes second. Transition is an inherently self-focused process, as you align your body and appearance with your gender identity. The best way to be a responsible parent during transition is **to make your children a major priority throughout the process.** Sometimes this means that you have to compromise your ideal time frame for your transition in order to keep relationships with your family healthy. We suggest working with a transgender-competent therapist to deal with your own issues before coming out to your kids. **The more comfortable you are with your decision, the easier it will be to answer their questions and support them through your transition.**
- How you tell your children is critical. Try to avoid coming out around the holidays or major family events, when there is often extra pressure and expectations. You can **have the conversation in a safe space with plenty of time**, where the conversation can't be overheard and where they will feel comfortable continuing the conversation.

- Knowing your kids and the way they process will help you decide just what to say. If you are nervous, you can write it down first or practice with a friend. **Come out to them in an age-appropriate way** that fits with their personality. It's best to keep your sentences short and concise to **avoid overwhelming them with too much information** (such as details about surgeries or hormones). People's responses will vary – some children will ask a million questions and others will have no reaction at all. Keep in mind that they may not want to talk about it right away or may just want some space to think things over. Regardless of their initial reaction, you can **make yourself available for future conversations**.
- Many times, this is a traumatic event, in that it changes the way your child sees the world. Throughout the transition, it's important to acknowledge that this is a process for everyone and that feelings are okay. If possible, you and your spouse/partner (or ex-spouse/ex-partner) should **create a united front** to support your children through your transition, especially if you are separating or divorcing. Continue to be a responsible, caring parent and remind them that **you will love them no matter what**. You can also provide your children with transitional objects, such as a letter or card, something they can hold onto to remind them that you will always be their parent.
- Children benefit when you involve them as much as possible. Try to give them advance notice about decisions you are making and how they may impact your appearance, your day-to-day lives, or your family. When possible, make some decisions together. **Respect your children's wishes about how, when, and to whom they come out about you**. We encourage you to **give them a say about what to call you** and how involved you will be in their public lives. If the decisions your child is making about these issues are hard for you, discuss your feelings with other adults, trans parents, or therapists, rather than expecting your child to take care of you.
- Your child may benefit from additional support throughout your transition. You can provide them with options of other supportive adults to talk with, such as a therapist or family friend. **Encourage them to connect with other people with LGBT parents through COLAGE** – either locally or through the internet. As a parent, you can help them understand that there is so much difference in the world

and everyone is explaining their own difference. Ultimately, that is the gift of having a transgender parent.