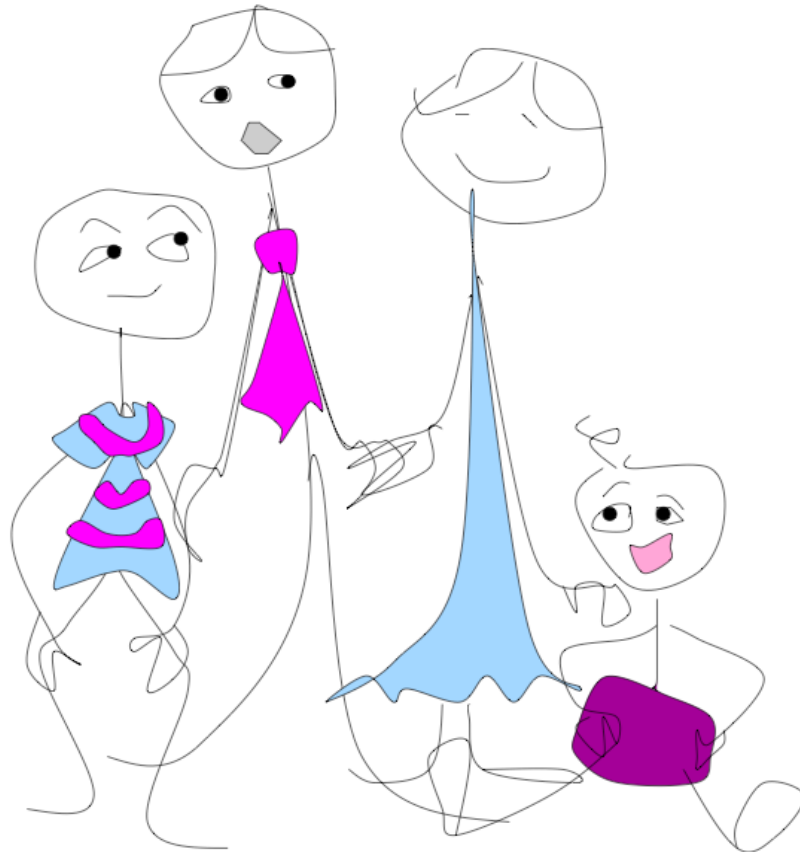


A Guide for Parents and Family Members of Trans People in the UK



gendered intelligence

understanding gender diversity in creative ways



consortium

of lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgendered
voluntary and community organisations

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Who are we?

Gendered Intelligence (www.genderedintelligence.co.uk) is a community interest company that delivers arts programmes and creative workshops to young trans people from across the UK. We facilitate workshops to trans and non-trans young people within schools, colleges and other settings, in order to generate discussion and debate around gender, and the ways in which it presents challenges in our everyday lives. Our professional development and trans awareness training for teachers, youth workers and other service providers is also key for ensuring staff can feel confident and equipped to tackle discrimination of trans people and provide appropriate and supportive services. Our aim is to promote multiple and diverse expressions of gender identities in all aspects of young people's lives.

The Consortium of Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Voluntary and Community Organisations (The Consortium, www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk) operates as a national membership body for LGBT organisations throughout the UK. Different to other national LGBT charities, the focus of the Consortium is around the development and support of LGBT groups, organisations and projects, rather than actually delivering direct services or campaigning for individual LGBT rights. It champions the value and importance of LGBT specific organisations and groups, as well as the need for their existence.

As membership organisation, the Consortium exists to represent the needs and support requirements of those LGBT organisations, groups and projects that subscribe to a set of shared values and a vision of a "LGBT" sector. By listening and working with members the Consortium can advocate to Government and other policy makers the concerns and issues that members have with regard to funding, capacity and local engagement.

About this booklet

In conjunction with the LGBT Consortium, Gendered Intelligence gathered a group of people to discuss various issues and concerns that parents and family members of trans people have. You will read quotes throughout this booklet as it hopes to relay some of what came up for us.

You may be a parent or a family member of a trans person yourself looking for information and stories that will help you. It was thought by the group that understanding what trans means is vital when coming to terms and accepting your loved one as trans. This booklet hopes to offer some basic information that we feel is important for those coming across trans for the first time or for those who have questions about their loved one's future

What is trans?

Trans is an umbrella term for various people who feel that the sex that they were assigned at birth does not match or sit easily with their sense of self. The world is generally divided into two categories - men and women. Sometimes it is thought that trans is complicated because a trans person doesn't fit neatly into these two categories. Indeed the concept of 'trans' raises questions about what it even means to be a 'man' or a 'woman'.

The trans spectrum encompasses transsexual and transgender people, crossdressers, and anyone who challenges gender norms. It may be that a trans person feels more the "opposite" sex and so chooses to use medical intervention in order to align their body with their mind or their outside appearance with their internal feelings. Crossdressers may dress to express the more masculine or feminine side of themselves, or simply because those clothes feel more comfortable.

Language

There are many different terms used around trans identities, which can often be the cause of some confusion. Parents and family members of trans people may be afraid of getting it wrong, especially when they are trying to support their loved one and demonstrate that they care.

The important thing to remember is that learning new words takes time and can only be grasped through practice. This means mistakes are bound to happen, but if it does it's important to forgive yourself and move on.

Language is often slippery and subject to change and this has both positive and negative outcomes. It is important to have the right words so that we can describe our identities, however as soon as we create categories for ourselves there are others who continue to slip between such categorisation.

For this reason trans is consciously a loose term. There are other words, such as transsexual, transgender or cross dresser, which may offer more of a description of those who feels themselves to fit within the trans spectrum. It is generally good practice to use adjectives, the words that describe us, rather than nouns. For example, say 'a transsexual person', rather than 'a transsexual'. This allows people to feel that they have the opportunity to shift and change as they go through life, rather than be fixed as one thing.

Key Terms

A transgender person	Someone who self identifies their gender identity as that which does not match the sex which they were assigned at birth
A transsexual person	This is a more clinical word used in the medical world and usually describes those who have decided to undergo procedures such as hormone therapy or surgical intervention
Trans man	A trans man is someone who was designated female at birth but identifies and/or lives as male. Also known as a female-to-male trans person.
Trans woman	A trans woman is someone who was designated male at birth but identifies and/or lives as female. Also known as a male-to-female trans person.
Intersex	Someone whose genitalia, reproductive organs, chromosomal or hormonal makeup cannot be clearly defined as 'female' or 'male'.
Genderqueer	'Genderqueer' is a word some people use to describe having a gender identity other than male or female. They may identify as both genders, neither gender, or something else entirely.
Crossdresser	People who wear clothes, make-up commonly associated with the 'opposite' sex, but who do not necessarily identify as that gender.
Cis	A cis person is someone who identifies as the same gender they were designated at birth. So if someone is born female and identifies as a woman, they are cis. It is an easy way to refer to someone who is not trans. The word 'cis' comes from the latin for 'same'.

Sexual orientation

People sometimes confuse gender identity with sexual orientation, and as a result, think that trans is another category of sexual orientation or sexuality. Trans, however, describes how you feel about your gender identity only. Trans people can be straight, gay, bisexual, or something else entirely – just like everyone else!

After transitioning, trans people may use another word to describe their sexuality than they might have done before. For example, a trans man who tends to be attracted to women might describe himself as a straight man, although previously he may have been seen by society as a gay woman. See below for more definitions.

Straight	Straight trans people are attracted to the opposite gender. So a trans woman (male-to-female trans person) who is attracted to only men would be considered straight.
Gay / Lesbian	Gay men and lesbian women are attracted to the same gender. A trans man (female-to-male trans person) who is exclusively attracted to men would be considered gay.
Bisexual	Bisexual people are attracted to 'both' sexes. However, this term poses problems for those people who identify outside of the male/female binary.
Pansexual	The word pan means 'all'. 'Pansexual' is used by people who consider themselves attracted to all genders – which unlike bisexual, is more inclusive of non-binary or genderqueer people.
Queer	Some trans people identify as queer, no matter what their sexual orientation. 'Queer' rejects the idea that sexuality must be defined by gender, and implies more fluidity and variation in attraction.

Other useful terms

Transitioning	Transitioning describes the journey going from female to male or male to female (or to something else entirely!). This may or may not be through taking hormones or having surgical intervention.
Coming Out	Disclosing your trans status or gender identity to another person.
Gender dysphoria	This is the clinical diagnosis for transsexualism.
Sex Change	This term can be useful to some as it very quickly describes the idea of someone transitioning. It can, however, imply that a person changes their sex through just one operation which many trans people find offensive or misleading.
Full time or part time	Full time refers to the step taken where you appear in the world in your new chosen gender in all aspects of your life. Other trans people choose to express their gender identity only some of the time.
Gender binary	<p>The idea that there are only two genders – male and female. People who are genderqueer or non-binary feel they are outside of these categories.</p> <p>However, many trans people do feel they fit within the gender binary, but want to transition from one side of it to the other.</p>
Transphobia	Transphobia is the fear or dislike of someone who identifies as trans.
Heterosexism	Privileging a heterosexual lifestyle implicitly or explicitly whilst simultaneously excluding, undermining and/or deleting non-heterosexual and non-normative gendered identities
Pre-operative / post-operative	Refers to where a trans person currently is in relation to any surgery he or she may have had or will be having. Not all trans people choose to have surgery.
Living Stealth	Living stealth means for a trans person to choose not to disclose his or her trans status to others after living in his or her new gender role.
Being born in the wrong body	A popular expression used by some people that describes how a trans person may feel about his or her own sense of self. Other people find this expression has become clichéd.
Gender Normative / Non-normative gendered expressions	Gender normative is expressing one's gender through cultural acts that fit within the binaries of man and woman, boy and girl, e.g. for a girl to wear nail varnish or a boy who likes to play football is gender normative. Non-normative gender expressions are acts that do not fit within the binaries of man and woman, boy and girl, e.g. for a boy to wear nail varnish or a girl who likes to play football is non-normative gendered behaviour.

What happens when your loved one tells you that she or he is trans?

It is often a difficult time when your loved one tells you that he or she is trans. At first you may have felt confused or shocked, in denial about it all, or even grief stricken. Some parents have equated their child's transition with the loss of a son or a daughter.

Here are some excerpts of other parents' experiences:

"I was not particularly taken aback, but I was taken aback by my own physical reaction, because I just couldn't stop crying. It was uncontrollable. I tried to analyse why that was the case. I think it's wrapped up with a parental guilt. I wanted to have been able to help my child. The second thing is the realisation of the pain and confusion that my child must have gone through. But I'm very, very happy and positive for him." (Parent)

"Alex came out to me and I wasn't paying attention. It was a pretty intimate moment. We were talking about honesty. ... Alex told me that Alex was a member of the gay straight alliance and I thought that meant that Alex was gay. I thought no big deal. I didn't quite get that it was really about the gender. With my partner, I'm accepting but I'm confused... and with family and friends how do you balance that with the interests of Alex? For us we love Alex. I'm happy to have Alex and hope to have him go through this journey and come out with what Alex is looking for." (Parent)

It takes time for parents and family members to realise that being trans does not change the person deep inside, even though he or she may begin to look somewhat differently.

"I feel it's the same person... the person inside is exactly the same person that I've always loved." (Parent)

"It's not a different being. It's the same child." (Parent)

“Have I done something wrong?”

No one really knows for sure what it is that makes someone trans. There is some scientific research that points to the brains of transsexuals to be the gender that they feel themselves to be, despite their genitalia stating otherwise. Other theories offer ideas of surges of hormones that take place in-utero during the final stages of pregnancy, switching the mind of the baby but not the body. Others feel that gender identity, including trans identities, develop and emerge through various experiences and influences living in the world.

Parents in particular might feel guilty or responsible for their loved one's trans identity. However, in order to come to terms with a loved one's trans status, it is important that parents do not blame themselves or think that they have done something wrong. In our discussion group one of the young trans people made an excellent remark:

“You wouldn't go and see a comedian and ask why are they funny? Or [ask] is it in their genes?” (Young Trans person)

Parents often have ideas as to how their children will turn out, but more often than not things don't quite turn out that way! Asking why someone is the way they are is indeed a big philosophical question. However simply accepting people for who they are is a necessary part of human existence.

“I had to accept that it is real. It's so clear that our daughter wants to go down that path. The sort of unhappiness that she's had in trying to deal with the outside world, and you observe this and you think well you wouldn't be doing this if it was just some psychological problem that perhaps some counselling would solve.” (Parent)

Emotional labour

When a loved one is coming to terms with their own trans identity it is not easy and this no doubt has an effect on all members of the family. A trans person might put barriers up or distance themselves from their family. It can be a particularly anxious time and trans people can be very sensitive to the smallest of comments. Emotions might run high. Also, because so little is understood about trans, family members might have questions that their trans loved ones don't even know how to answer or respond, which may add to the difficulties. Despite all of the best intentions parents and family members of trans people can end up feeling rather helpless and lost. It can be hard seeing a loved one struggling or feeling unhappy. It is equally hard to manage your own feelings as a parent or family member when you are trying to do what's best for your trans loved one.

“You feel responsible for them being miserable.” (Parent)

Looking after siblings

When there is more than one child in the family, siblings of trans people can also have struggles and questions that also need attending to.

"The sibling might feel that their whole paradigm of what their childhood was gets twisted because they [the trans person] are saying it was so different for them."
(Parent)

If a child is attending the same school as their trans sibling they may also experience difficulties from their peers, as well as members of staff and their safety and well being is of equal importance. This may add pressure to the sibling relationship, especially if there is blame. The important point to remember is that it is not the trans person at fault but the specific transphobic environment which needs addressing (see Schools, Colleges, Universities and the Workplace later on in this booklet).

One family who we interviewed talked to us about a series of bullying that was carried out on the sibling of a young trans person.

"There was one point when I was actually threatened with physical violence... School became a really scary place. I felt quite isolated by it because I felt that I was going to cause more problems if I discussed it with anyone. Mum had difficulties thinking about it" (Sibling of a young trans person)

"Danny felt guilty because he thought he was the cause of it all" (Mother of a young trans person)

"I felt incredibly guilty... I knew it was going to be difficult for her [sibling] when I transitioned but I didn't know that she'd get bullied about it." (Young trans person)

"I never believed that it was Danny's fault" (Sibling of a young trans person)

Siblings, like parents and other family members, need to be included in any support offered, including access to information about trans identities. It may be appropriate to offer information in a way that suits the age range of the sibling as well as taking into consideration the different social context of being a sibling, rather than a parent.

Communicating as a whole family

Being honest and open about our feelings is not easy, but it is imperative if all members of the family are to be given an opportunity to express themselves and be heard. For many young adults, teenagers and children it might feel difficult to talk openly about internal feelings. Indeed, 'being yourself' in front of parents and family members is often a rite of passage into adulthood.

Trans people might feel guilty about the impact that their trans status is having on their family and so 'play down' the expressions of their chosen gender in order to protect parents and family members.

"Even when I had transitioned, with my family, because of social dynamics with my family, I found that I was different with them than when I was with other people. I found that the dynamic of me being their son before was still there when I first transitioned and it was only after a period of time when my relation to them as a daughter had been built up that I felt affirmed." (Young trans person)

For a lot of trans people 'coming out' as trans is met by their family with an assertion of their love and support. It can be a very life affirming experience, especially after keeping things in for so long. Although things may change rather significantly from here on in, it can be a weight off the chest for the trans person and things can move forward positively.

"We have regained the person that was lost for a while, because they are so miserable they withdraw and you don't know what's going on and when they are able to be who they want to be and they are happier you can regain that connection." (Parent)

At what point do you tell others?

Talking about family life is a regular every day occurrence and knowing when to mention that a member of your family is trans or is now living as the 'opposite' gender can be a bit of a minefield. Indeed it is not just the trans person who comes out but the parents and family members of a trans person too.

"We have to come out over and over again and explain and get other people to understand it when we're still struggling." (Parent)

Trans is definitely a hot topic and hearing other people's opinions on the matter can be quite exhausting!

"When you tell people it's quite isolating not only because people don't know much about trans but rather that everybody has such major opinions on the subject! It promotes a whole heap of guilt in me because people say "oh well if you'd only done that" or "If you do this". I find it confuses me considerably." (Parent)

It's very important to take the time to absorb the news that your loved one identifies as trans, before you feel you have to tell someone else. When you decide to come out as a parent or family member of a trans person it is a good idea to talk this through with your trans loved one first and to agree what is best for all of the family. It is good to be clear as to why you are telling others. It may be that you are looking for support yourself, or it may be because your trans loved one is beginning to transition, and this demands some explanation to others in the outside world.

In time certain people will need to know - from extended family, local neighbours, schools, universities, other communities, such as faith groups. It is best to come up with a plan together as a family on this.

Some parents will feel that it's the child's responsibility to disclose their trans status to other members of the wider family or circle of friends or in the neighbourhood. Some times the trans loved one may prefer this, or they may instead feel that this is an extremely difficult thing to do, and it may be better coming from a parent or sibling.

It's possible that these people do not have a great understanding of trans, and will need to be offered some clear information about what trans means if they are going to support the trans person and his or her family in their disclosure. In other cases it may not be necessary to disclose a person's trans status to people as you go about your daily business as a family.

"You don't want to tell the average Joe on the streets." (Parent)

When you are used to introducing your loved one as a brother or sister, son or daughter, these words may no longer apply. Some trans loved ones will want their family members to make the switch from 'son' to 'daughter' for instance, and parents and family members may find this difficult to do at first. It's crucial that parents and family members as well as the trans loved one know that this is going to take time and patience may be required. The key is for everyone to do their best. It can, however, be a bit embarrassing for those all round when, for instance, a trans person is referred to in a female name or pronoun, but is clearly 'read' by the stranger as male.

It might be an option to be a bit more inventive and use other words to describe your relationships. For instance, a parent might introduce her trans loved one as 'my youngest', or 'the middle one', 'the eldest'; alternatively 'child' or 'sibling' is a gender-neutral word. There are also lots of local colloquialisms that can be used such as 'our kid', 'the nipper' etc.

Ways of telling people

Finding ways of telling the story of your loved one's trans status is something that comes with time and repetition. At first it's hard to know where to start, or even what words to use. To the general public some of the language that trans people describe themselves is not always understandable.

"Words such as 'transitioning' sound a bit sci-fi." (Parent)

"The term sex change means that people understand it straight away and because there is an understanding usually the response is positive." (Parent)

Communicating effectively with confidence is key. When parents and family members are themselves confused or nervous about broaching the topic this will certainly have an impact on the reaction of the other person. The best way of describing trans to people is to do it in a way that parents and family members understand themselves, using words that they are comfortable with. A trans loved one might be able to help out here with some appropriate terminology, or perhaps even try out some of the phrases used in this booklet.

New names, pronouns and looks

It's possible that a trans loved one will wish his or her parents and family members use a new forename and/or pronoun to reflect his or her preferred gender identity. At first this might not be easy, but is definitely something that eases over time and through repetition. The trans person may feel as if their parents or family members keep 'getting it wrong' which causes upset and frustration.

Parents and family members may find it easier to use the new name but more difficult to say 'she' or 'he' when they have been saying the opposite for all of this time. It can also be very difficult to negotiate a conversation without using pronouns, so it might be best to just take the decision and make the switch, if that's what your trans loved one has asked.

The trick is to do your best to perceive the person as the gender she or he perceives her or himself to be, as opposed to a 'girl who wants to be seen as a boy' or vice versa. Simply making that effort to see them in their new gender role (as a boy or a girl, who however they wish to be described) means that using preferred pronouns will come much quicker.

It does not mean that a trans person has to look like what society typically thinks of as a 'woman' or a 'man'. We often have a fixed idea of what that means, but in reality men and women come in all different shapes and sizes and all people change their look over time. It's important for a trans loved one to experiment with and enjoy their new 'look' and for them to be supported by their parents and family members when doing so. It might be a good idea to make positive comments on any changes a trans loved one has made, rather than ignoring it. Such support will build confidence and self-esteem for a trans loved one, which will equip him or her going out in the world.

Versions of the past

When a loved one comes out as trans to their family, it can be particularly upsetting if the parents and family members were unaware of what he or she has been going through. It also forces people to ask questions about the past. Different people have different memories of the past and it's difficult to locate the "truth". Family members can feel discounted when the trans person reveals how bad their lives were and how they hated themselves.

"What was wrong with me that I didn't see that they were so miserable?" (Parent)

Some trans people decide to hide their past, but this is often due to fears that others will suddenly treat them differently if their trans status is revealed.

"My child was, at one point, ripping up photos of him[self] when he was female. I can understand why you're doing that but if you're doing that you are kind of destroying who you were as a child and those photos might be part of a memory that you may want later on in life. But because he didn't want anyone else to see them, I persuaded him to put them away somewhere safe." (Parent)

Laws that protect trans young people

Gender Recognition Act 2004

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 means that people can apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate. This allows trans people over 18 to be issued a new birth certificate and to be legally recognised in their preferred gender, providing their preferred gender is 'male' or 'female'. This includes the right to marry someone of the opposite gender, or to form a civil partnership with someone of the same gender, and to retire and receive state pension at the age appropriate to the acquired gender. A person whose birth was registered in the United Kingdom will also be able to obtain a new Birth Certificate showing his or her recognised legal gender.

In order to obtain a certificate each trans person must prove that they have, or have had, gender dysphoria; that they have lived fully for the last two years in their acquired gender; and that they intend to live permanently in their acquired gender. A trans person applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate needs to be 18 years of age or older. All applications to obtain a certificate go to a Gender Recognition Panel.

For more information go to: <http://www.grp.gov.uk/formsguidanceotherguidance.htm>

Equality Act 2010

All public services are bound to promote equality through the Single Equalities Act 2010. This highlights protected characteristics such as race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, and gender reassignment. This Act aims to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment.

The definition of gender reassignment has been changed by removing the requirement for medical supervision. This means that you can self-identify as a person who is undergoing, has undergone or intends to undergo gender reassignment. You do not have to be over 18 to be protected.

Public sector organisations have to demonstrate due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations in the course of developing policies and delivering services through the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The aim is for public bodies to consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work, in developing policy, in delivering services, and in relation to their own employees.

This act makes it clear that this includes protection to young trans people in goods and services, including schools, clubs, healthcare etc. Therefore any school that does not take in to account the needs of young trans people and make steps to ensure they are treated fairly is in breach of this act.

Fear for safety and well being of your trans loved one

"People are not open-minded." (Parent)

"I just want to say I'm not ashamed, but I don't want the prejudice to deal with."
(Parent)

The safety and well being of a trans loved one is often of major concern to parents and family members. The world is indeed rather a gender rigid place and for the most part people do not know very much about trans. Where there is ignorance there is fear and of course fear creates hostility.

Most members of the trans community do not ever experience extreme hate crime or violence because of their trans status. There is however much work to be done in order to educate the wider world and to intervene and stop transphobic bullying and harassment in schools, colleges, universities, in the work place, in youth clubs, pubs and clubs and of course on the streets.

"I became aware that I was being too open in the wider public for Dan's safety. There might be people out there who might beat him up." (Parent)

If a trans loved one or indeed any other family member has been a victim of transphobic related hate crime, it is a police matter and it should be reported. If you do not want to go to the police you can report or get advice on any transphobic hate crime to an LGBT voluntary organisation called Galop. If you need other support as a victim of hate crime, contact Victim Support.

GALOP	0207 704 2040
Galop is an LGBT community safety charity.	Galop.org.uk
Victim Support	0845 30 30 900
Victim Support is the national charity which helps people affected by crime.	supportline@victimsupport.org.uk
Broken Rainbow	0300 999 5428
Helpline providing support to LGBT people experiencing domestic violence.	help@brokenrainbow.org.uk

Schools, colleges & universities

Working out the best way for a trans loved one to come out at school, college or university is best done in tandem with the appropriate members of staff working in those environments. It is important that the trans person involved, regardless of his or her age, should be central to all decision making, and agree the best way forward together as a team.

Often staff members will know little about trans and this means it can be left to trans people and their parents and family members to provide basic information. It is important to know that trans people are entitled to ask staff, colleagues and fellow students to use the name and gender pronoun of choice. Remember if staff feel that they are lacking in confidence and knowledge here, professional development training can be made available to them – see the next page for details.

The Gender Equality Duty 2007 means that all public authorities (including schools) must demonstrate that they are promoting equality for women and men and that they are eliminating sexual discrimination and harassment. They are also required to have a gender-equality scheme.

The Equality Act 2010 protects transgender people in schools, which means trans children and young people have the legal right to be referred to correctly and treated with respect in school. The Equality Act applies whether someone has undergone gender reassignment or whether they intend to, which means young people who haven't medically transitioned are protected too.

All educational institutes will have an anti-bullying policy, which is there to ensure the well being of every individual, and should specifically include trans people and those who express gender variant behaviour. If it doesn't, you can quite rightly ask them to change it!

School is often a place where there is a huge pressure to conform, especially to gender roles. If a trans loved one is being bullied at school, because of his or her gender expressions, then senior members of staff should get involved. It may not be that there is a specific anti-transphobic bullying policy but there may be an anti-homophobic bullying policy, which may address diverse gender expressions and the stigma around boys who are feminine and girls who are masculine.

There are also various organisations and agencies that you can get advice around bullying.

Anti-Bullying Alliance	aba@ncb.org.uk anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
School's Out	secretary@schools-out.org.uk schools-out.org.uk
Local Education Authorities	To contact your LEA go to the Department for Children, Schools and Families website - www.dfes.gov.uk/localauthorities/index.cfm
Community Legal Service	You can find out what your parental rights are by downloading this PDF: www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk/media/808/FD/leaflet20e.pdf

Support in Education

Young trans people in education may find the need extra help and support during their studies, or that their school, college or University needs to ensure greater understanding of their trans identity. Gendered Intelligence offers a number of services that may be helpful for young trans people in education, or those who work with them.

Gendered Intelligence Mentoring Service

We run a one-on-one mentoring service for young trans people in education. This can provide regular support to the young person with a trans mentor. Mentors can also act as advocates when dealing with trans issues in school/college/university, or act as extra support when coming out. For more details, see the mentoring section on our website.

<http://www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/trans-youth/mentoring>

Trans Awareness Training for Staff

Gendered Intelligence provides training sessions for staff members in organisations that work with trans people, including schools. If your child is attending a school, college or University that you think could do with training on the issues, put them in touch with us. More information is available on our website.

<http://www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/professionals/schools-and-youth-services>

Creative Workshops for Young People

We run creative workshops discussing gender diversity in schools. This can be a good tool for helping children and young people understand the issues their trans peers may face in an age-appropriate and engaging way. Put your child's school or college in touch with us if you think you could benefit. More information is available on our website.

<http://www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/professionals/schools-and-youth-services>

When things don't go well

If there is clear unhappiness about a trans loved one's school or education, parents may wish to make a complaint. In order to do this it is best to get a copy of the school's complaints procedure (many schools have one) and follow the procedure on it as a first step. If they do not solve the problem, the next step might be to complain to the governing body of the school.

All parents also have the right to vote for the parent governors that will represent them on the school governing body. Being a parent governor is also an excellent way of ensuring schools are celebrating diverse gender expressions along with all other diversity inclusions.

Gaining support

There is growing support networks for trans people across the UK, however for parents and family members of a trans person finding someone to talk to about their own feelings is not so easy.

"There was nobody I knew in my situation that I could talk about it with." (Parent)

"There is nobody to talk to and sometimes I think I'm going to explode." (Parent)

"You feel so isolated because you don't know anybody else in a similar situation and there is so little information. You don't know whether it's real. Whether the person is masking some other psychological problem." (Parent)

Not having anybody to talk to can be detrimental to a parents' or family members' well being. Friends, relations and allies of parents and family members can be a vital support mechanism. Even if they do not know very much about trans issues, long-term close friends and relations offer a deep love and understanding and relying on such people in times of need is necessary. It may feel awkward to do this and parents and family members can feel that they don't have the right words to broach the subject.

"Most of our friends we haven't talked to about it because we don't know what to say." (Parent)

There are various other ways of gaining support and/or answers to questions parents and family members may have surrounding a trans loved one's identity.

Groups & Community

It may be that parents and family members of trans people would like to meet others in similar circumstances to share stories and find out information. The best way to go about this is to access the trans community. Some trans people attend community and support group and there may be opportunities to meet other trans people and their family members through various events. There are also Internet forums and e-mail services where parents and family members can chat online. Attending conferences, workshops, arts festivals, picnics and pub quizzes within the trans community can make people feel a whole lot better. It decreases the sense of isolation and ensures people that there's nothing wrong with being trans.

"It's helpful to get other trans people's perspectives on things. To have a meeting where some of you [trans people] can talk about how you felt and experienced life. It offers a wider perspective on things rather than just my child." (Parent)

Support for Families from Gendered Intelligence – Online and in-person:

Gendered Intelligence Online Parents Support Group Support and discussion space for parents & family members of young trans people.	More information: www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/families/group
Gendered Intelligence Youth & Family Meetings Quarterly in-person meetings for parents, family members, partners and friends of young trans people aged 13-25	More Information: www.genderedintelligence.co.uk/families/sessions

Useful trans organisations and links

<p>Gendered Intelligence</p> <p>Gendered Intelligence run projects for young trans people from across the UK. They run in-person meetings for parents and families, and have recently set up an online group and parents mailing list.</p>	<p>Email: admin@genderedintelligence.co.uk Website: www.genderedintelligence.co.uk</p>
<p>GIRES</p> <p>GIRES run workshops for families who wish to know more about transsexualism. They also distribute research and medical understandings of transsexualism and offer presentations around causes of transsexualism.</p>	<p>E-mail – admin@gires.org.uk Website - www.gires.org.uk</p>
<p>FTM London</p> <p>FTM London is an 18+ support group for trans men and trans masculine people, which meets monthly. They also run a group for Significant Others, including family members.</p>	<p>E-mail - info@ftmlondon.org.uk Website - www.ftmlondon.org.uk</p>
<p>Mermaids</p> <p>Mermaids provides an online support group for gender variant children and teenagers (aged up to 19), also offering support for parents, carers and others. They also have annual residentials for trans children & young people and their families.</p>	<p>Help line number - 07020 935066 (3pm - 7pm. Mon – Sat) E-mail - mermaids@freeuk.com Website - www.mermaids.freeuk.com/</p>
<p>The Gender Trust</p> <p>The Gender Trust offers caring support and information for anyone with any question or problem concerning their gender identity, or whose loved ones who are struggling with gender identity issues</p>	<p>Helpline number - 0845 231 0505 E-mail - info@gendetrust.org.uk Website - www.gendertrust.org.uk</p>
<p>Pink Therapy</p> <p>Independent therapy organisation for clients with gender and sexual diversity, with a nationwide directory of counsellors and therapists with knowledge or specialism in gender and sexuality issues.</p> <p>Some of these counsellors or therapists also work with families of trans or LGB people.</p>	<p>www.pinktherapy.com</p>

Professional services

There are other professional services in place for those who feel that they need to talk things through, either as a family or as an individual, with a qualified therapist or counsellor. Any good practitioner should be able to help and it doesn't mean they have to have extensive knowledge about trans issues in order to be of value. However it may be necessary to access a therapist or counsellor with proficient knowledge in a certain area, whether it is in gender identity or in family therapy. Pink Therapy (pinktherapy.com) has a directory of therapists who have knowledge of trans or gender issues and may be useful for locating an appropriate professional.

Parent services

Parents may wish to seek support locally as well as in trans specific places. There are mainstream services aimed for all parents who want some assistance or advice around family life. Parents of trans people have a right to access these too. Such services should have some knowledge of trans people and the needs they and their family have. You can reach your nearest parent and family service through your local council. Or there's services like Family Lives, a national helpline for parents who feel like talking things through parent-to-parent.

There are also LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) and LGB support groups for parents that gather locally. Although these identity categories are different, there is often some overlapping of experiences and mutual support can be gained by parents and family members whose loved ones identify as LGB or T. Coming out as trans can be a similar experience to coming out as a lesbian, gay or bisexual person in terms of coping with dominant social pressures of identifying as a heterosexual male or a heterosexual female.

Family Lives (formerly Parentline Plus) National charity providing advice and support on all aspects of family life.	Helpline: 0808 800 2222
Local Councils Many local councils provide support services to parents.	To find out how to access your local council website, type in your borough or county into a search engine or go to www.direct.gov.uk
FFLAG Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is a continually growing national voluntary organisation and registered charity with 18 telephone helplines across the UK and parents' groups which hold regular meetings across various regions.	Helpline: 0845 652 0311 Email: info@fflag.org.uk Website: www.fflag.org.uk
Parents Enquiry Scotland Support for families of LGBT people.	Telephone: 0131 556 6047 E-mail: parentsenquiry@hotmail.com Website: www.parentsenquiryscotland.org
Manchester Parents Group Support group for parents of LGB people.	Email: ask@manpg.co.uk Website: www.manpg.co.uk/index.htm
Birmingham Parents Group Support group for parents of LGB people.	Telephone: 0121 742 0230 Website: birminghamparentssupportgroup.co.uk

Other ways to access information about trans lives

People access information in different ways. Reading about scientific findings and medical research will appeal to some people, whilst others will gain a better understanding by reading a novel about personal stories. As well as books, autobiographies, journal articles, interviews and websites, there are also plenty of films and television programmes that have looked at trans lives. For those continuing their interests and research it is good to be aware that there are a lot of diverse opinions around trans and people have different biases. The trick is to gather information from different places and to form your own thoughts that will help you to feel better in your role as a parent and family member, and that will guide you in your relationship with your trans loved one.

Further reading

[Gendered Intelligence Resources including:](#)

A Guide for Young Trans People in the UK

<http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/guide>

Issues of Bullying Around Trans and Gender Variant Students in Schools, Colleges and Universities

<http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/bullying>

[Resources produced by other organisations](#)

GIRES Information for Families

<http://www.gires.org.uk/families.php>

Mermaids UK – “Where do Mermaids Stand?” Poetry, prose, artwork and personal stories by children, young people and their parents

<http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/New%20Mermaids/Files/Mermaid%20Brochure.pdf>

GIRES & Mermaids UK - Medical care for gender variant children and young people: answering families' questions

<http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/DOH-Assets/pdf/doh-children-and-adolescents.pdf>

Letters from families of trans people

<http://www.transfamily.org/resources/letters-1>

A collection of resources from other organisations

<http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/trans-community/resources>

GIRES: Transphobic Bullying – Could you deal with it in your school?

<http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/Schools/TransphobicBullying.pdf>

Books

Mary Boenke (editor) Trans Forming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones

Imperial Beach, CA: Walter Troom Pub, 1999

Fish, Linda Stone and Rebecca G. Harvey Nurturing Queer Youth: Family Therapy

Transformed New York: Norton & Company, 2005

Videos

It Gets Better – Parents of Transgender Children

<http://youtu.be/2lozIzWrYVY>

My Transsexual Summer (Channel 4 Documentary)

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/my-transsexual-summer/4od>

Websites

Press for Change

www.pfc.org.uk

LGBT History Month

www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/index.htm

School's Out

www.schools-out.org.uk

Trans Media Watch

<http://www.transmediawatch.org/>

The Gender Trust

<http://gendertrust.org.uk/>