

I
Think



I
Might
Be

Transgender,



Now What Do I Do?

A Brochure by and for Transgender Youth

What Does It Mean to Be Transgender?

Transgender people feel that the gender to which they were born, or assigned at birth, does not fit them. Transgender people include people born female who identify as male (female-to-male) and people born male who identify as female (male-to-female). Transgender people also include those who identify as “genderqueer,” gender neutral, and/or gender-free—people who may not identify as either male or female. Transsexual people are those who choose to medically transition to the gender that is right for them. Cross-dressers are people who like to wear the clothes of another gender but who don’t identify as another gender. You may find yourself identifying with one or more of these definitions pretty strongly or with none of them at all. No one has to rush to self-label, now or ever, and some people choose different labels that express more clearly how they see themselves.

How Do I Know if I’m Transgender?

I’ve always felt that I was a girl from the time I can first remember.

Tasha, 19

I know I’m transgender because my brain knows it’s female, and my body disagrees.

Lana, 26

You may feel that you are more comfortable expressing yourself as a gender other than the gender you were born or assigned at birth. This gender might be the “opposite” of the gender you were born or assigned, or it might be neither male nor female but something else entirely! You may feel extremely uncomfortable with the gender-specific parts of your body. For example, you may have breasts and prefer not to have them. Or, you might not feel uncomfortable with your gender-specific body parts and, at the same time, feel a deep need to have other body parts.

You may feel more comfortable relating to people who perceive you as the gender you see yourself. You may simply feel you would be more truly yourself in another gender. People who are transgender may feel any or all of these emotions.

Am I Normal?

Since identifying myself as gender variant, I've met several other people my age who do, as well as lots of adults and also lots of other people who respect and love gender variant people. It may not be 'normal' to many people, but it's certainly healthy and widespread. And despite how it feels sometimes, I know I'm not the only one who feels the way I do.

Mark, 18



It's normal for me. I couldn't stand living the rest of my life in my biological gender. I have been through reams of depression and low spots, and I have looked over my past; all these spots were caused by my deep need to be male.

Riley, 22

Being transgender is as normal as being alive. Throughout history, many people have felt they were transgender. Transgender people are everywhere. They are teachers, doctors, construction workers, and waiters. They attend college, have children, and enjoy careers. You may interact with other transgender people every day and not know it! Certainly, being transgender is not “typical,” and you may encounter many people who do not understand or who feel uncomfortable or even discriminatory. However, you are certainly normal.

What's It Like to Be Young and Transgender?

Until I graduated from high school, it was horrible. Afterwards, it has been wonderful being seen as a woman wherever I go. Tasha, 20

Being young and transgender is just like being young and anything else. People our age accept us more readily than adults do, just like all other kids who are different. We do the same sorts of things that other kids do for fun, like playing sports, reading, writing, dating, and listening to music. Mark, 18

Most people will doubt your judgment because of your age. It may take a lot more talking to convince the 'adults' that you really know who you are. Chris, 19

Some young people who are transgender feel a great relief that they have discovered how they are most comfortable expressing themselves. Other youth feel frustrated at being discriminated against or because they aren't yet able to transition. Still other young people find that being transgender is just one part of who they are and that they mostly think about all the things that many youth think about—school, dating, work, and family. There are as many ways to be young and transgender as there are ways to be young.

Whom Should I Tell?

I tell myself first, repeatedly. I keep it up until I bore myself. Once I'm bored, that means that my mind has completely come to terms with what I'm telling it. Then I'll be ready to tell others. Lana, 26



People had all sorts of reactions to my coming out. I lost a few friends and a lot of dates, but most people really tried to understand. Not everyone can get it, but with time and respect, people have learned to understand.

Mark, 18

The first person I told was my girlfriend at the time; I told her before we got serious. I also told two close friends, my sister, and then my parents. After that, I considered myself out and didn't hide it anymore.

Chris, 19

There is no obligation to tell anyone about your identity. However, many people find it very important to share who they are with others, especially if they plan to transition publicly. If you decide to share your identity, first tell people with whom you are comfortable and that you feel will understand. They might include a trusted teacher, counselor, sister, brother, parent, friend, or people at a youth group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) people. Some young people stop there and choose to transition more fully later in life, but other youth choose to begin to live full-time as their identified gender. If you choose to do this, you may need to come out to many different people. You should definitely look for support when going through this process, from a therapist, a youth group, friends, family, and others.

What Will Happen When I Come Out?

That depends on your family. Mine is fairly accepting of me and now, almost six years after I came out, mostly treats me as if I had been born a girl.

Tasha, 19

Coming out as trans was the hardest thing I've ever done. Sometimes, I can't believe I ever did it. Since then, everything has happened very quickly. It depends on your financial situation and what you want to do. I started therapy shortly after coming out, and within eight months (of coming out), I started testosterone therapy. What matters is that you do what you're ready to do and at the pace that makes you comfortable.

Chris, 19

Some people feel relieved and happy when they come out. Others feel as if they are thrown into a lion's den, with challenges from parents, friends, and family. You will most likely experience a bit of both. Some transgender youth may face violence at school or in their home. Please, make sure you have people you can talk to before you come out publicly, just for this reason. As you come out, you may find PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) a useful resource. To make coming out easier, surround yourself with as much information, knowledge, and support as possible.

What Does It Mean to Transition? Should I Do It?

I know lots of people who have gone through medical transition and lots who haven't. I have not and I don't plan to. People whom I really care about tend to accept me as I am, so I don't feel that I need to. People who are happiest seem to just do what feels right for them.

Mark, 18

I cannot continue living inside this male body. My femininity has been repressed too long. I need to be free of my cage.

Lana, 26

I plan to medically transition. I don't feel that I will ever be comfortable being viewed as female.

Riley, 22

Some people who come out as transgender are comfortable telling a close circle of friends. Other people choose to change their name, their pronouns, their style of dress, and their appearance to be congruent with their gender identity. Still others choose to take hormones and have surgery to medically alter their appearance. As you decide which, if any, steps to take, it can help to talk about these feelings with others, such as a mental health professional who is competent with gender identity issues, friends and family members you trust, and other transgender people. You should express yourself the way you feel most comfortable, without pressure from others.

Medical transition, the taking of hormones and having one or more surgeries, is a big step. For some, it is absolutely necessary. Most people who choose to transition medically strongly need identity and body to match. They want to be seen all the time and without question, as the gender they feel they are. To medically transition, you must first see a therapist and, in most cases, be diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder. In most states, if you are under 18, you will need a parent's permission to undertake medical transition. If you plan to pursue medical transition, it is important that your transition be supervised by a medical professional. Undertaking transition without professional medical guidance can have severe health risks.

What Does Being Transgender Mean about My Sexual Orientation? Am I Gay or Straight or What?

I love guys!! I love to look at them; love how they move. I see myself as a heterosexual female. Tasha, 19



I have always been attracted to females; but transgender people may be attracted to the opposite or to the same sex, and some are bisexual.

Riley, 22

I thought I was a lesbian, because I was primarily attracted to women. Now I identify as 'queer' as an umbrella term, and avoid a label, though I am bisexual. Since coming out as male, my attraction has risen to other males.

Mark, 19

Being transgender has to do with your gender identity: how you feel about who you are. It has nothing to do with your sexual orientation, which is about who attracts you. Some transgender people are attracted to men, some to women, some to other transgender people, and some to people regardless of their gender. People may define themselves with different labels, depending on who attracts them. For example, some transgender women who are attracted to men define themselves as straight, because they are attracted to the opposite gender. Other transgender women may feel attracted to men and define themselves as queer, to challenge the notion of “opposite” genders. Regardless of who attracts you, rest assured that many transgender people have happy, healthy relationships with people whom they love. Remember, you deserve to date people who respect you for who you are.

What about Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV, and Pregnancy?

Remember that not having sex is the surest way to avoid unwanted pregnancy as well as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In fact, many youth choose to show affection through activities such as hugging, kissing, talking, and massage. If you choose to have sex, be responsible and talk with your partner

about methods of protection for both of you. It's your responsibility and your partner's to protect both of you from unwanted outcomes.

Transgender people can have a hard time finding safer sex information that speaks in language that reflects how they feel about their body. Because many may feel that their biological body doesn't reflect their gender identity, they may use different terms for body parts. Finding information that corresponds to an internal/emotional body concept can be difficult. No matter how transgender youth label sexual body parts, some or all of the following tips apply to each:

- ✓ For vaginal intercourse where there is a risk of pregnancy, use a latex or polyurethane condom *and also* another effective method of contraception, such as birth control pills or Depo-Provera.
- ✓ When touching someone else's genitals with your hands, use a latex or polyurethane barrier, such as surgical gloves.
- ✓ For oral sex, regardless of the genital area that the mouth touches, use a condom, a dental dam, or saran wrap.
 - ✓ For anal intercourse, always use a latex or polyurethane condom with non-petroleum based lubrication, such as KY Jelly.
 - ✓ When sharing sex toys, always use a latex or polyurethane condom with non-petroleum based lubrication.

Two important tips:

- ✓ Lubrication—Do not use petroleum- or oil-based lubricants with latex condoms because such lubricants weaken and/or destroy the latex. Use *only* water-based lubricants, such



as KY Jelly. Avoid using nonoxynol-9, because it may cause irritation and increase the risk of infection with HIV or other STIs.

- ✓ Remember that blood-to-blood contact is the surest route for HIV infection. Sharing drug paraphernalia or needles—whether for piercing or tattooing the body, taking medications, or using drugs—is highly dangerous, since blood left on the used equipment or needle will come into contact with *your* blood as soon as you use the equipment or needle. Avoid sharing needles, razors, or other such paraphernalia, for *any* purpose.

How Do I learn to Like Myself?

Coming to terms with who you really are is the most important step that anyone can make in this situation. How far you decide to go with it is important, but never as important as accepting yourself because accepting yourself will lead to liking yourself.

Riley, 22

For me, it's a matter of continuing to focus on what I like about myself, what I think is great about my body, hanging out with positive people, and avoiding, as much as I can, the negative messages directed towards women (particularly transwomen) in the media.

Brynn, 23

If you have just discovered or recognized that you are transgender, remember that you are normal and you are likeable, just as you are. With big discoveries come big life changes, and it is normal to feel nervous, apprehensive, and upset about the days ahead. Remember, too, that discovering something this important about yourself can be a truly amazing experience. You are one step ahead on the journey of discovering who you truly are, and with that journey, the world becomes full of possibilities as well as challenges. You are getting to know another part of yourself, and this is truly a wonderful opportunity!

What Resources Exist for Transgender Youth?



Remember that you're not alone, and there is help out there:

- ✓ www.youthresource.com is a Web site for youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. It has some great information for transgender youth, as well as online message boards where you can talk with other young people who are facing the same or similar issues.
- ✓ www.pflag.org offers lots of information for friends and family of transgender people.
- ✓ www.youthresource.com/our_lives/youth_groups lists support groups. There, you may find a GLBTQ youth group in your area, offering friendship, support, and/or referral for professional care in your area.

Talking to others who face the same issues can help you learn to like yourself while, at the same time, giving you opportunities to help others.

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