

SUPPORTING YOURSELF

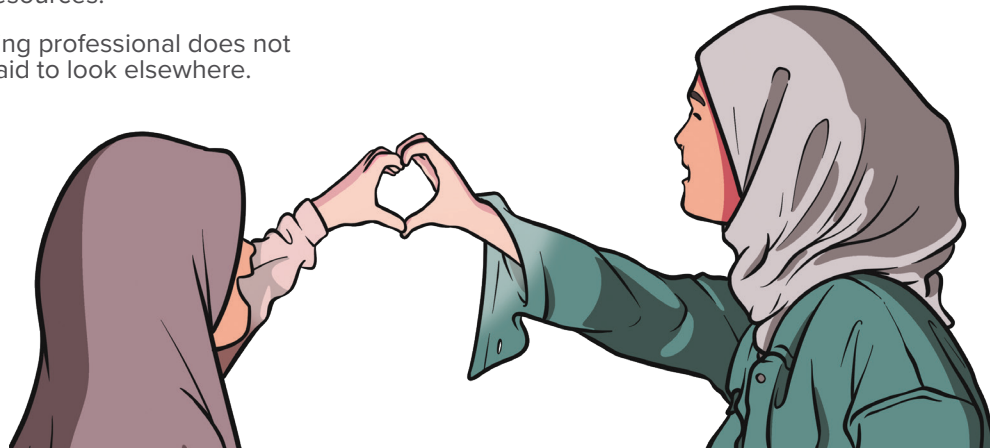
You may be experiencing feelings of loss about your child living as another gender, or you may be anxious about their future and the effect on the rest of your family. The more support that parents can find for themselves, the better they can provide support to their child.

Research has also shown that, if given the chance to learn about 2SLGBTQ identities and experiences, and to understand the negative impacts that their rejection has on children and youth, parents, caregivers, and other family members may become more supportive.

If you feel anxious, confused, or uncomfortable, you are not alone.

Help and support are available.

- It can be helpful to talk with parents who have a similar experience, or with a non-judgmental counsellor. Talking to others can help you work through some of your own feelings and understand what you can do to support your child.
- If you don't understand what your child is experiencing, learn about what it's like to be gender independent, or to identify as trans or gender non-conforming.
- There are also helpful books and videos available, and the organizations on the back of this pamphlet can help to locate these resources.
- If the advice of a helping professional does not feel right, don't be afraid to look elsewhere.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Like all children, there is no way to know who a gender independent child will be as an adult. They may grow up to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual. Some may identify as gender fluid, gender non-conforming or with their gender assigned at birth. Others may come to identify as trans and may want to transition to a new gender role. All of these paths are healthy.

Though children may not transition, some parents may find it helpful to get more information about this option. Please see our brochure: *Information for Parents - Gender Affirming Options for Gender Independent Children and Adolescents*.

No matter who they grow up to be, gender independent children can be happy and healthy with the support of their caregivers.

For help navigating the transition, seek the guidance of a supportive primary care provider, pediatrician, and/or therapist who is trans-positive and trans-competent.

For information about gender transitions, visit RainbowHealthOntario.ca to find our other brochures, *Information for Parents - Gender Affirming Options for Gender Independent Children and Adolescents* or *Parenting Gender Independent Children*.

OTHER RESOURCES

If you are looking for support or information regarding your child's gender health, or if you would like to connect to a network of parents, here are some helpful resources:

Rainbow Health Ontario
rainbowhealthontario.ca

Gender Creative Kids
GenderCreativeKids.ca

PFLAG (find a local chapter)
pflagcanada.ca/ontario

Family In Transition Guidebook – A Resource Guide for Families of Transgender Youth
ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/CTYS-FIT-Families-in-Transition-Guide-2nd-edition.pdf

Gender Spectrum
genderspectrum.org

SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Kids Help Phone
kidshelpphone.ca
Phone: 1-800-668-6868

LGBT Youthline
youthline.ca

Gender and Identity Support & Resources
teens.aboutkidshealth.ca/article?contentid=3964&language=english



supporting your child's gender identity and expression



INTRODUCTION

Many parents struggle with understanding their child's experience of gender, especially when it is different than they expected.

In the past, gender variance has been framed as a psychological disorder. More recently, we have come to better understand and accept that gender is complex and not limited to male or female.

For many people, the sex they are born with (assigned at birth) aligns with who they are. But for some, their sex and gender identity are not aligned. For example, a child whose sex is assigned male at birth, is a girl on the inside; or a child whose sex is assigned female at birth, is a boy on the inside; or a child who does not identify completely as either a boy or a girl. These kids are sometimes called gender independent. Other terms are non-binary, gender creative, gender non-conforming, gender-expansive, trans, and for some Indigenous children, Two Spirit.

When a child expresses their gender in nontraditional ways, people sometimes blame

the parents or suggest that there is something wrong with the child. However, being gender independent is not an illness and is not caused by something parents do or don't do. It is also not something that children do on purpose to defy their parents. Gender diversity exists across all cultures and is normal and healthy.

Learning that your child doesn't identify with their sex assigned at birth can be a lot to handle, and it's okay to feel confused. Parenting a gender independent child can raise difficult feelings and worries, especially if that child belongs to other identities that are discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, and/or disability. Parents worry about what other people will think, how they will behave towards the child, and how their child will fit into or be accepted by their family, cultural or faith community, and society. Parents may feel shame or grief because their child is different than they expected and many worry that their child will be picked on or bullied. In some families, there may be anger and serious conflict over a child's gender independent behaviours.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

Children sometimes worry that if they tell you how they feel, you won't love them anymore. Signs of distress in a child can include anxiety, withdrawal, destructive behaviour, or depression. It's also likely that such behaviours will have been noticed at school.

Every child's identity is important to them, and every child needs to know that they are loved and welcomed by their caregivers for who they are.

Research tells us that supportive relationships with family are an important element in the healthy development of young people who are exploring their gender or have identified as Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer (2SLGBTQ). For example, children and youth whose exploration and identification of their gender are accepted by their families are healthier, have higher self-esteem and are less likely to use drugs, be depressed or attempt suicide.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

- Remind your child that you love them unconditionally and thank them for their honesty in sharing their feelings with you.
- Listen to your child. This can help you identify what challenges they are experiencing and together work out how you can best support them.
- Allow space for gender expression and give the child permission to be themselves.
- Respect the child's preferences regarding pronouns and names.
- Offer to connect children to safe spaces and helpful resources in the community.
- Find opportunities to show your child that Two Spirit, trans, non-binary, gender independent, and gender non-conforming people exist, are valued, and belong to many communities who appreciate and love them.
- Read books or watch videos with your child that talk about many different ways to be a boy, a girl, or have another gender identity.
- Don't pressure the child to change who they are.
- Be aware that a child who is worrying about gender may show signs of depression, anxiety, and poor concentration. They may not want to go to school.

In the home environment, you as a parent may be able to provide a loving and affirming place. However, children constantly receive messages about gender from social environments outside the home and these messages can be negative or distressing. While a safe home environment can foster emotional wellbeing and help children cope with gender-related stress, challenges around authenticity and safety often emerge in settings such as at extended family gatherings, schools, extracurricular activities, and community spaces. Safety concerns are real and may arise as teasing, harassment, rejection, exclusion, and violence. The physical and emotional risks can be significant. Parents are faced with tough choices about how to support their child's authentic gender while keeping them as safe as possible.

YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY

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DECREASING RISK FOR YOUR CHILD:

- Be aware of potentially negative issues that your child may face. Let your child know that you want to hear about any bullying or intimidation towards them.
- Keep open and regular communication with your child - give them a chance to talk about their day and their feelings.
- Observe their behaviours and reactions.
- Make sure your child can reach you or another support person if they are feeling unsafe.
- Make sure your child knows that there is nothing wrong with them, that it is others in the world who have issues with gender.
- If you are concerned about your child's safety or emotional health, talk to your child's school or teacher, your child's family doctor, paediatrician, or other mental health professional.
- Find professionals who are trans-positive and trans-competent.
- It is very important to seek help if there is a threat of abuse or violence within your family.