

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Supporting your transgender or gender non-binary child

Most parents see their role as providing support, structure, and opportunities that will help their children fulfill their potential and become responsible, successful, and happy adults. But for parents of transgender or gender non-binary children there are additional challenges. Their children are more likely to face:

- Bullying
- Rejection
- Stigma and stereotyping
- Discrimination
- Violence
- Isolation

The unconditional love and support of family and friends is important to any child's development, but for transgender and gender non-binary children, it is vital. And that unconditional support begins by understanding gender.

Understanding gender

We're assigned one of three genders based on our external sex organs (male, female or intersex). However, gender is more of a spectrum with all of us displaying both "masculine" and "feminine" traits.

Transgender people are also on this spectrum, but identify as a gender that is different from the one they were assigned at birth. Non-binary individuals identify as having an overlap of, or indefinite lines between, masculine and feminine; having two or more genders; having no gender; or moving between the two.

Gender and sexual orientation

Gender identity and sexual orientation are different things. The Human Rights Campaign defines gender identity as the "innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves."

Sexual orientation on the other hand is who we are sexually attracted to – someone of a different gender, the same gender, both or neither or asexual.

How do I know if my child is transgender?

All of us – especially children -- engage in behaviors associated with both genders. Although gender stereotypes still exist, it is perfectly normal for boys and girls to play with dolls one day and build forts the next. However, there are some early indicators that a child may be transgender. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Being insistent and persistent over the course of months that their gender identity is different from the one assigned at birth. At one time or other, children may say "I wish I was a girl," or "I wish I was a boy." A transgender child will say, "I am a girl" or "I am a boy".

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- Frustration about their genitals. By around age three, children understand the physical differences between boys and girls. A transgender child may express anger or confusion about their assigned gender and ask why they have the wrong genitals.
- Taking “gender play” seriously. Many young boys like to play dress-up in their sisters’ princess costumes, but a transgender child will want to put on his sister’s everyday clothes because he sees himself as a regular girl.

Supporting a transgender or non-binary child

Here are some other ways parents can help their transgender and non-binary children:

- Listen to your child. Being transgender or non-binary means many things to many people. Your child is an individual, so let their individuality lead the way.
- Educate yourself about the concerns facing transgender youth and adults.
- Always use the child’s preferred gender pronouns and preferred names.
- Be your child’s advocate – call out transphobia when you see it and ask that others respect your child’s identity.

Finally, remember your family is not alone. There are people and places you can turn to for advice and community. Begin by contacting your local LGBTQ+, PFLAG or transgender organization or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for resources in your community.