

Taking Action, Supporting Your Child

As a parent, it's ok to be uncertain about how to best support your child. The most important steps are to find support for yourself, listen to your child, and communicate your love and support for them as they are. In fact, research shows that strong parental support is key to young people's success. While there are many adult decisions to be made about schooling and health care, some children will want to take part in these decisions. If so, involving them can help teach the self-advocacy skills they need to be safer and more confident. In addition, parents can encourage gender independent kids to find their voice and express themselves through art, writing and other outlets at school, at home or in the community.

Remember that as a parent, you *cannot* prevent your child from facing challenges, but you *can* teach them to advocate for themselves and help them to feel good about who they are. Finding support can help you and your child figure out what is safe, possible and best for their wellbeing. The organizations on this brochure can help.



Key Points

- It's common for parents of gender independent children to worry about how their child will be treated. Remember that neither you, nor your child, are responsible if they experience harassment or bullying.
- In schools, daycares, health care settings and other environments, try to assert your child's needs and identify solutions before a negative incident occurs.
- Communicating with school officials and health providers can be challenging. Try bringing someone with you for support.
- There are policies that protect your child's rights, for example anti-discrimination policies, the Ontario Accepting Schools Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- Many parents find that other parents in similar situations are their greatest resource.
- Remember that you don't have to have it all figured out. It's ok to be uncertain. Ask for the help you need to best support your child. The organizations on this brochure can help.

Check out the other brochures in this series:

**Are you worried about
your child's gender expression?**

**Transition Options for Gender Independent
Children and Adolescents**

Resources

Rainbow Health Ontario

LGBTQ health information, training, research
and policy services.
www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca
416 324 4100

Gender Creative Kids

Canadian resources for supporting gender
independent children and youth.
www.GenderCreativeKids.ca

Trans Parent Canada

Resources for parents of transgender children.
www.transparentcanada.ca

PFLAG Canada

Resources for families of LGBTQ children.
www.pflagcanada.ca

U.S. Organizations

Gender Spectrum

www.genderspectrum.org

Trans Youth Family Allies

www.imatyfa.org

Family Acceptance Project

familyproject.sfsu.edu

To locate supportive health and
social service providers in Ontario see:
www.RainbowHealthOntario.ca

Advocating for Your Gender Independent Child



Rainbow Health Ontario
A Program of Sherbourne Health Centre

As a parent, you advocate for your child every day, helping to meet their needs and keep them safe. If your child expresses their gender differently from how others expect (a gender independent child), you both might need a little extra support.

Your Worries and Concerns

In a world that discourages diversity, it's common for parents of gender independent children to worry. Parents may have concerns about bullying, inclusion in recreational activities and access to appropriate bathrooms and change rooms. Often, they wish their child didn't have to struggle for acceptance at all, and could just be a kid. It's normal for parents to feel uncertain about facing these challenges. Many parents find that getting support for themselves helps them to become better advocates for their children. The following are some tips for advocating with schools, and in recreational environments and health care settings.

Schools, Recreation and Extracurricular Activities

Before your child begins a new school, daycare or activity (or begins a gender transition at an existing school or activity), it can help to ask for a meeting with the principal, teacher or club leader. This is a chance to introduce yourself, share your expectations, and suggest helpful websites, books, training and resources. It can help to first identify possible problems and solutions before a negative incident occurs. It may help to bring someone along to support you.

It is the responsibility of schools and daycares to provide a safe learning environment and most already have an *anti-discrimination* or an *equity* policy that protects your child. The Ontario Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13) requires schools to train staff and prevent bullying based on gender identity (and other forms of bullying). The Ontario Human Rights Code protects citizens of Ontario from discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender identity and gender expression (Bill 33). Some educators may not be aware of these policies and the organizations on this brochure can help you research this yourself.

Health and Social Services

Many parents rely on the opinion of doctors and other professionals, yet in fact very few service providers receive any training on gender diversity. Unfortunately, being gender independent is still considered by some to be a mental health disorder and though many disagree with this, you may need to be assertive to ensure your child receives respectful care. It can be helpful to book a special appointment or write a letter to a new provider to share your needs in advance.



Some gender independent children may benefit from supportive counselling, while others may not need any mental health services. Try to find out how other families in your area access support. When families already have a supportive provider, they sometimes ask for a letter to help with other challenging situations, like talking to schools and travelling across borders. If you get advice from a professional that doesn't feel right, trust your feelings and get another opinion. For information about gender transition, see our other brochure "*Transition Options for Gender Independent Children and Adolescents*" or our fact sheet "*Supporting Gender Independent Children and their Families*".

Your child has the right...

- To be free from discrimination and harassment.
- To receive respectful health care.
- To use the bathroom or change room they feel is most appropriate.
- To dress in a way that feels right and safe for them.
- To be spoken to with their chosen name and gender pronoun ("he", "she" or the gender neutral "they").

