

Making Decisions and Moving Forward Together

Like all young people, gender independent or transgender children rely on their parents and caregivers to listen to what they need and respond supportively. A common challenge for families is that parents and young people may have conflicting feelings about transition. Sometimes parents feel grief, fear or hesitation while youth feel certain and urgently want to begin. In other cases, youth may feel fluid and open about their identity, while parents feel impatient for youth to settle into a stable gender role.

Many experts advise parents to follow the child's lead, stay open to many possibilities, and avoid imposing their own preferences for their child's future identity. As a parent, you can communicate some of your concerns to your child in an age appropriate way, but you may need other supportive adults to help process your complex feelings. Having as much information as possible will help youth and parents make decisions that are best for the young person's wellbeing.

For more information about the health and wellbeing of gender independent children, please see our fact sheet "*Supporting Gender Independent Children and Their Families*".

Key Points

- For gender independent or transgender people, "transition" is the process of altering their gender expression (through social transition) or altering their body (through medical transition) to align with who they feel they are.
- Not all gender independent young people want or need to transition. For those who do, it is becoming more common to begin at a young age.
- For younger children, social transition is an option. For adolescents and teens, puberty suppression and medical transition are available.
- Concerns regarding privacy and safety are real. Families can get support to find the best way to address these concerns.
- Decisions about early gender transition are challenging. The young person's happiness and wellbeing will be your best guide.
- Gender independent and transgender young people can be happy and healthy with the support of their families and caregivers.

Check out the other brochures in this series:

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

**Advocating for Your
Gender Independent Child**

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

Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line
Support, information, referrals for
youth by youth.
1 800 268 9688


Diversity Clinic for Children and Youth
Adolescent Health Program
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario
Phone: 613-737-7600 x3664
Fax: 613-738-4298
www.cheo.on.ca/en/genderidentity
Comprehensive health care and support for
gender non-conforming children and youth
in Eastern Ontario.

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

Transition Options for Gender Independent Children and Adolescents Information for Parents



Rainbow Health Ontario
A Program of Sherbourne Health Centre



Gender independent children are those that express their gender in ways that differ from what others expect. Other terms are gender variant, gender non-conforming or transgender. While not all gender independent people want or need to transition, some do, and it is becoming more common to do this at a young age. For parents and caregivers, this raises important questions.

What Does 'Transition' Mean?

For gender independent or transgender people, "transition" is the process of altering their gender expression (through social transition) or altering their body (through medical transition) to align with who they feel they are. While this might seem surprising to others, for the person transitioning it often just feels like being themselves. A young person might express the need to transition as early as age 3 or 4, or they may wait until puberty, their teen years, or adulthood to share this. Some might let their parents know how they feel directly through words, or indirectly through anger, depression or self-harm. For parents, this usually raises complex feelings and fears and most find it helpful to talk to other parents in this situation, or to supportive and non-judgmental professionals. Parents may benefit from our other brochure: *"Are you worried about your child's gender expression?"*

Social Transition

Social transition refers to a change in social gender role, often including a new name, appearance, and gender pronoun ("he", "she" or the gender neutral "they"). It is important that children know that they don't have to transition in order to behave in non-traditional ways. Yet some experts advise that when a child persistently identifies as a different gender, families should think about this option. Some families arrange to safely explore the new gender role at home or on vacation. If the child is happier or calmer, this may help to understand what is needed. It is possible that a child who has socially transitioned while young could later change their mind. Parents need to stay open to this possibility and reassure their child that they will still be supported and loved no matter what path they choose. Social transition is the only transition option for young children, but medical interventions are available for adolescents and youth.

Puberty Suppression

For gender independent or transgender adolescents, puberty can bring unwanted body changes that can lead to severe distress and even self-harm. For these youth, physicians can prescribe "puberty blockers" to delay puberty, reduce stress and provide time to explore identity and make decisions. The effects of puberty blockers are fully reversible and youth who choose not to pursue gender transition can cease treatment and resume puberty without long-term physical effects. Puberty suppression is generally begun after

the onset of puberty. Many parents are understandably concerned about medical interventions for their child. Yet it is also important to understand the urgency which gender independent or transgender youth may feel. Some of the effects of puberty can be irreversible, for example, a deepening voice for a trans girl (male to female). Other effects are difficult to reverse, for example, the growth of breasts for a trans boy (female to male) or facial hair for a trans girl. Puberty suppression has immediate benefits, like reducing stress, as well as potential long-term benefits, like reducing the surgeries needed for those who go on to pursue medical transition. Some doctors may require a diagnosis of *Gender Dysphoria* before they will prescribe puberty suppressants or cross sex hormones

Medical Transition

Medical transition refers to cross-sex hormones and / or surgeries. For some gender independent and transgender youth, working towards medical transition is very important, while others may not be interested in these steps. For those who do wish to transition, research shows that they are healthier and happier once they are able to do so. In Ontario, the age criteria for accessing cross-sex hormones varies from 14-16. Surgeries are generally not performed prior to age 18. The organizations on this brochure can help you find providers in your area who can answer your questions.

Privacy and Safety

Transition often raises concerns about privacy and safety. These concerns are real and every family will address them differently. If your child is transitioning, plan together for how to share this information with others, but also keep in mind that plans may change along the way. Transgender adults make a range of decisions about who they want to share their identity and history with. Much the same, young people who are transitioning also differ in how visible they wish to be. Try to respect your child's comfort level and make decisions together as a family. Despite planning, it's not possible to control how others will respond and advocating for your child may become necessary. For added legal protection, some parents choose to document their child's transition and collect letters from professionals who support them. For more information, see our brochure *"Advocating for your Gender Independent Child"*. Many parents find that other families in similar situations are their greatest resource.

