FACT SHEET
Transgendered Children and Youth: Information for Parents and Caregivers

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Further information on transgender health can be found by visiting www.eMentalhealth.ca

Summary: Transgendered people are those who may act, feel, or view their gender identity differently than the way society expects males and females to be. It is a neurodevelopmental condition that is "hard-wired" into the brain which means that they do not choose to be this way. And as one would support anyone else with a brain condition, transgendered individuals need and deserve the same thing -- the support and acceptance of family and friends.

Introduction

From a very early age, boys and girls learn exactly what distinguishes boys from girls. Most of the time, a boy is content with the fact that he is a boy, and most of the time, a girl is happy with being a girl.

That is because the person's external sense of sex (i.e. their outside genitalia), matches their internal sense of gender identity (i.e. how their brain is ‘hard-wired').

But imagine what it would be like if you were a boy on the outside, but on the inside you actually felt like a female?

Transgendered people are those who may act, feel, or view their gender identity differently than the way society expects males and females to be. Whereas most people take their gender identity for granted (i.e., their genitalia match their mental gender identity), transgender people struggle because genitalia do not match their gender identity.

For example:

- A teenager who looks (and may act) like a typical male, but who identifies as female.
- A teenager who looks (and may act) like a typical female, but who identifies as being male.

Stigma

It is sad, but even despite the progress made against discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and even sexual orientation (gay/lesbian), there remains significant stigma and taboo against transgendered individuals.
It is important to realize that transgendered interests are not chosen nor are they inherently harmful to anyone. This is why it is essential to be respectful of and to accept the diversity of transgendered individuals.

As long as they are given the appropriate respect, love and support, that all children and youth deserve, they will go on to enjoy satisfying, productive lives.

Signs of Gender Dissatisfaction

It is normal for many boys and girls to experiment with different gender behaviours as they are growing up. Many boys may try on girl's clothing, and many girls may try on boy's clothing.

But children and youth with transgender issues are truly and deeply distressed by their biologic sex on a fundamental level.

Boys with transgender issues express unhappiness at being a boy, and express the wish "to be" a girl. The boy may actively prefer dressing in girls clothes, and play "stereotypical" games and hobbies of girls (e.g. playing with dolls) and be more comfortable in the company of other girls. At the same time, he may avoid "rough-and-tumble" play and competitive sports and have little interest in cars and trucks. They may express a wish to be a girl and assert that they will grow up to be a woman. They may insist on sitting to urinate and pretend not to have a penis by pushing it in between their legs. On the other hand, some males with transgender issues may over compensate by going the other way, and being hypermasculine, e.g. being captain of the football team.

Girls with transgender issues want to be "male". They tend to prefer boy's clothing and short-hair, to the point where others may mistake the girl as a boy. They prefer to be with boys and to play "boy's games", they show less interest in feminine activities. They may insist that one day she will grow up to be a man.

If a very young boy or girl is having behaviours unexpected for their gender, there is a chance that s/he will grow out of it, but this isn't always the case.

But if it is a teenager or adult continuing to have transgender issues, the odds are greater that s/he will go on to become a transgendered adult, and be someone that wishes to live as a member of the opposite sex.

Important Definitions

**Sex**, or "biological sex" refers to a person's physical appearance based on having either male or female genitalia. Typical males have an XY chromosome pattern; females have an XX chromosome pattern. (Note: a small percentage of people are 'intersex' meaning they have the appearance of both male and female sex organs. Intersex conditions are different from gender identity disorders. Another term for intersex is hermaphrodite.)

**Gender**, refers to the personal feeling of being a male or female (boy/man; girl/woman) but it can also be neither (androgynous: neither male or female).

**Gender identity** can be further distinguished from gender expression or gender role. For example, a person's gender identity may be as a woman, but that person may still chose to dress as a man at work.
Gender dysphoria: also known as body dysphoria, is the distress that people feel about their physical sex, and their gender identity. Note: this is likely different from the condition known as body dysmorphia which is limited to concerns about physical appearance.

Transsexual refers to individuals whose internal gender identity differs from their body's external sex. For example, "a woman trapped inside a man's body", or vice-versa. An individual who is truly transsexual will sometimes want to live full time as the gender that they identify with, which includes wanting to correct their external body through hormone therapy and possibly surgery so that it matches with their internal, identified gender.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is the medical term used to describe individuals who are transgender. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV TR):

- A. There must be evidence of a strong and persistent gross-gender identification, which is the desire to be, or the insistence that one is of the other sex (Criteria A).
- B. This cross-gender identification must not merely be a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex. There must also be evidence of persistent discomfort about one's assigned sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex (Criteria B).
- C. The diagnosis is not made if the individual has a concurrent physical intersex condition (e.g., androgen insensitivity syndrome or congenital adrenal hyperplasia) (Criteria C).
- D. To make the diagnosis, there must be evidence of clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (Criteria D).

Understandably, this term is not without controversy, as some feel that it implies judgement and stigma in being a 'disorder'.

How Common are Transgendered Persons?

Older studies suggested that transgender was quite rare, whereas newer data suggests it is more common. According to the DSM-IV, one in 30,000 biological males and one in 100,000 biological females are transgender (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Newer data suggests at least one in 500 persons is transgendered (Olyslager & Conway, 2007).

What Happens to Transgendered Children and Youth When They Grow Older?

Transgendered children and youth are like any other children and youth. Their ultimate outcome in life strongly depends on whether they are supported by family and friends, or whether they are rejected for who and what they are.

Transgendered children and youth that are supported have the best chance of growing up to be content, productive adults. It is universal that any human being who is allowed to be him or herself, and who is loved and supported, will ultimately do far better in life.

On the other hand, transgendered persons that must stay "closeted" due to shame and fear of rejection from loved ones have the strongest likelihood of negative future outcome, which unfortunately can include clinical depression and even suicide.
What Causes Someone to Be Transgendered?

It is generally accepted by the medical community that being transgendered is a neurodevelopmental condition that is "hard-wired" into the brain (Krujver et al., 2000; Zhou, 1995). Most likely it occurs due to numerous factors including 1) genes passed down from parents, 2) and how the baby developed during the pregnancy.

In other words, transgendered persons do not choose to be who they are -- though nonetheless, life situations can determine how free they feel to express their true gender identity.

Signs of Transgender Issues

Your child/youth may be having issues with gender identity if:

- Your child/youth talks about wishing to have been born (physically as) the opposite sex
- Your child/youth shows confusion, or stress over his/her physical sex
- Your child/youth feels comfortable or enjoys dressing in clothes of the opposite sex

If You Notice Transgender Issues

It should be noted that many young transgender people hide any sign of gender identity disorder from their family for many years out of fear of losing family love and support. In many cases the only sign that something is wrong is depression.

If you notice your child has transgender issues, one helpful resource that supports many parents of transgendered youth is Parents and Friends of Lesbians, Gays (PFLAG). No doubt, you are feeling stressed and confused about the fact that your child is, or may be transgendered. PFLAG was formed by parents and friends in the same situation. PFLAG also supports parents and friends of transgendered children and youth.

There are additional resources as well, which can be found at the end of this handout.

How are Transgendered Children and Youth Treated?

Children and Youth

It is universally agreed that counselling / psychotherapy (and not surgery) should be provided until the person is an adult, at which point the person can be referred to adult services (Diamond, 2004). However, there is more controversy over hormone treatment. Although many in the medical community state that hormones should not be provided until the person is an adult, there are those in the transgender community who believe teenagers (who fully understand the risks and benefits of hormone treatment and who consent) should be prescribed hormone treatments.

For adults

Many transgendered men and women wish to be publically identified as belonging to the gender with which they identify.
A minority also wish medical interventions to alter their bodies in order to appear more like the opposite sex.

As an adult, if the person is still distressed about his/her physical sex, then other options such as counselling, hormone replacement therapy and/or gender reassignment interventions can be considered.

Prior to any intervention, it is essential to ensure that individuals are medically and emotionally ready.

Possible medical interventions include:

- Hormone replacement therapy
- Gender reassignment surgery (also known as sex reassignment surgery), which refers to various procedures that can change sexual anatomy so that it better matches the person's gender identity (World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 2008).

**Gender Assignment in Canadian Law**

Most jurisdictions in Canada require that a physician certify that a person is anatomically a member of their identified gender (via sex reassignment surgery) before the sex recorded on a birth certificate can be changed.

It is notable that outside Canada, some jurisdictions, such as New York City, allow change of legal sex without having to undergo sex reassignment surgery.

"Transgendered persons are individuals with an extraordinary dilemma, facing extraordinary odds, and taking extraordinary measures in a further quest to feel ordinary.

-- Anonymous

**Supporting your Transgendered Child/Youth**

If you have just recently learned that your child/youth is transgender, you might 1) be upset yourself, and 2) not know how to act around that person.

If you are upset by the idea of your child being transgender, realize your child is probably more upset than you are. Being transgendered is no one’s fault. It is not caused by bad parenting, or "bad choices". It is not something that can be simply changed through your child going through "trying harder", or your child's willpower.

The most important thing your child needs is your love and support independent of their gender.

**References**


Wikihow, "How to Respect a Transgender Person", retrieved Apr 11, 2008 from [www.wikihow.com/Respect-a-Transgender-Person](http://www.wikihow.com/Respect-a-Transgender-Person)


### Recommended Websites

In addition to the websites of the organizations mentioned earlier, some additional websites include:

- True Selves online support for Gen-X and Y youth and young adults.
  [http://www.trueselves.com](http://www.trueselves.com)
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health, is a professional organization devoted to the understanding and treatment of gender identity disorders.
  [http://wpath.org](http://wpath.org)
- Transgender Canada Forums
  [http://transgendercanada.com](http://transgendercanada.com)
- How to Respect a Transsexual Person: [http://www.kisa.ca/respect.html](http://www.kisa.ca/respect.html)

### Recommended Books


About this Document

Written by the eMentalHealth.ca Team.

Special acknowledgements (in alphabetical order) to:

- PFLAG Ottawa
  http://www.gaycanada.com/pflag-ottawa/
- Gender Mosaic, http://www.gendermosaic.ca/

Disclaimer

Information in this pamphlet is offered ‘as is’ and is meant only to provide general information that supplements, but does not replace the information from your health provider. Always contact a qualified health professional for further information in your specific situation or circumstance.