

COLAGE

Kids  
of Trans  
Resource  
Guide

by Monica Canfield-Lenfest



# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Spring 2008

Dear Friend,

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Monica, and my father is a transgender woman who transitioned from male to female ten years ago, when I was 17 years old. Until five years ago, I had never met another person with a similar experience. Thanks to COLAGE and the work I've been doing to build our Kids of Trans Program, I now know quite a few people with trans parents and even more transgender people.

When my dad first came out to me, she handed me a pamphlet about transgender people. I never read the pamphlet because I didn't want more information about her; I wanted to know what this all meant for me. Where was the "Your dad just came out as trans... Now what?" booklet that I so desperately needed? I wanted someone to tell me what to expect, how to talk about it, and assure me that there were other people out there with similar experiences. This resource guide encompasses each of these elements as well as other important aspects of having one or more transgender or gender variant parent(s).

From October 2007 through May 2008, COLAGE hosted me as their Kids of Trans Fellow, to expand the KOT Program and create this resource guide. COLAGE is a national movement of children, youth and adults with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents. We build community and work toward social justice through youth empowerment, leadership development, education, and advocacy. I am so grateful to COLAGE – especially Program Director Meredith Fenton and Executive Director Beth Teper – for prioritizing the Kids of Trans Program and believing in the necessity of people with LGBTQ parents and families to speak for ourselves.

My work with the Kids of Trans Program has also benefited greatly from the encouragement of the transgender community. I am so grateful to the many members of the trans community who have reminded me of the importance of this work – the parents, the activists, the fellow children of transgender parents, and all of the other people who have welcomed me into the community. Thank you.

Special appreciation to those who gave editorial and conceptual input to this guide: Dr. Michelle Angello; Arlene Istar Lev, LCSW, CASAC; Moonhawk River Stone, MS LMHC; Lisette Lahana, LICSW; Lori Oshraim, PhD; Reid Vanderburgh, MA, LMFT; Jamison Green; Morgan Falkenrath Green; J. Cameron Venier; Richard M. Juang; T. Aaron Hans; Zeek Christopoulos; Taylor Flynn; Cathy Sakimura (National Center for Lesbian Rights); Ben Lunine (Transgender Law Center); and Lisa Mottet (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force). Further thanks to Jennifer Levi and others at GLAD for compiling the answers to our legal FAQ.

This guide is dedicated to people with transgender parents everywhere. Thank you to those of you who have shared your stories with me, reminding me that I am not alone, and inspiring me to continue my efforts to build KOT community.

Please share this guide with the KOTs in your life. I hope that will answer some of your questions, validate your experiences and inspire you to make a difference in the world. Also, please get in touch with COLAGE to connect with our vibrant community and continue this conversation.

In Pride,

**MONICA**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **INTRODUCTION:**

A Resource Guide for Us. . . . .p. 3

## **THE BASICS:**

What Does Transgender Mean?. . . . . p. 4

Glossary of Terms. . . . .p. 5

Frequently Asked Questions. . . . .p. 7

## **TRANSITION:**

Finding Out Your Parent is Transgender . . . . .p. 10

Initial Reactions . . . . . p. 11

Pronouns. . . . . p. 12

What We Call Our Parents. . . . . p. 13

Changes in Gender Expression. . . . . p. 14

## **FAMILY SHIFTS:**

Divorce and Separation . . . . .p. 15

Loss and Grieving . . . . .p. 16

Finding Support and Community . . . . .p. 17

## **COMING OUT AS KOT:**

Talking About Our Families. . . . .p. 18

Passing. . . . .p. 19

Transphobia and You . . . . .p. 20

Benefits of Being a KOT. . . . .p. 22

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

Transition Tips for Parents . . . . .p. 24

Legal Q & A for Kids of Trans Parents. . . . . p. 26

Transgender Family Resource List . . . . .p. 29

Not So Gay: Differences Between KOTs and Children of LG B/Q Parents. . . . . p. 35

NOTE to parents: This guide will be most accessible for people in middle school or older. If your child is younger, we encourage you to read through the guide and provide the information to your child in age-appropriate ways or read the content together so that you can help with any harder vocabulary and answer questions. Our Transgender Family Resources List has a few good resources for younger children.

# A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR US

**'THERE'S NO 'MANUAL' FOR PEOPLE IN MY SITUATION... I'VE HAD TO PLAY EVERYTHING BY EAR.' - KATIE B., AGE 23**

"So, your parent is transgender. What's that like?" Does this question sound familiar? As people with transgender parents, we often feel quite alone in our experience. When (and if) we explain that we have a transgender parent, we often find most people have never met anyone else with a transgender parent. Have you?

**WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?** Plenty of transgender people have children, but there are only a few resources available for transgender parents and their families. This guide is the first of its kind, a resource specifically created for and by people with transgender parents.

Your parent may have just come out to you as transgender or maybe you have known for years and just found COLAGE. People are transgender in a variety of ways and families relate to each other differently. Maybe your parent is pre-transition, meaning that they intend to transition from one gender to another, but they haven't yet. Or maybe your biological mother is a man, who has been living post-transition as a guy for as long as you can remember. Is your dad a crossdresser who likes to wear dresses sometimes? Maybe your parent is androgynous or genderqueer and neither of the names "mom" or "dad" seems to fit. If you have or had one or more parent who is transgender, gender variant, a crossdresser, transsexual, or somewhere else along the gender spectrum, then this guide is for you!

In this guide, we use the term 'Kids of Trans' or KOT to describe people with one or more transgender or gender variant parent(s). See our *Glossary of Terms* for definitions of other words used throughout the guide. We have included quotes throughout the guide from KOTs who responded to a survey in fall 2007, to represent diverse KOT voices. The goal of this guide is to answer your questions, inspire conversation, and empower you as a KOT.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy this resource guide and find it helpful for you and your family. Included is a list of publications, movies, and online resources for further information about having a transgender parent, as well as a legal fact sheet for KOTs, and transition tips for parents. We would love to hear your thoughts and encourage you to get involved with COLAGE. You can find or help organize a local chapter, join our KOT email list, send in a pen pal application, and/or join our Speak OUT program through our website ([www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)). Now that you have found COLAGE, you can rest easy knowing that you are not the only one with a transgender parent!

**'BE PROUD OF YOUR FAMILY STRUCTURE. THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE THAT ARE LIKE YOU WITH SIMILAR EXPERIENCES, YOU JUST MAY NOT KNOW IT.' - CAMERON V., AGE 22**

# THE BASICS

## What Does Transgender Mean?

**“BEFORE I COULD EVEN DEAL WITH MY OWN FEELINGS, I HAD TO EDUCATE MYSELF ABOUT WHAT ‘TRANSGENDER’ IS.” - COLLEEN M., AGE 44**

In order to better understand what it means to have a transgender parent, let's start with some basic definitions related to transgender identity and experience. This section provides language for people with transgender parents to use when talking about their families. First, we will explore some basic concepts. Next, review the Glossary for definitions of the words we use throughout this guide. Language is complex and sometimes controversial. If you ask fifteen people for the definition of transgender, you might get fifteen different answers, depending on each person. If you are looking for additional information about transgender parents and their children, check out our *Transgender Family Resource List* of books, movies, and online publications at the end of this guide. Remember that you can also talk to your parent if you have questions. They are probably waiting for you to ask!

**TRANSGENDER** is an umbrella term encompassing people whose gender identity and/or expression does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. When you were born, a doctor assigned you a **BIOLOGICAL SEX** - usually either male or female - based on what body parts you have. Your biological sex determines your role in the **GENDER BINARY SYSTEM**, which insists that every person fits into one of two categories: male-assigned and masculine or female-assigned and feminine. **GENDER NORMATIVE** behavior fits within the rules of the gender binary system. For example, female-assigned people who are feminine would be considered gender normative. There is actually an entire range - or spectrum - of gender options, not just two. When we talk about “opposite” gender in this guide, we are talking about the “opposite” end of the **GENDER SPECTRUM**. We put ‘opposite’ in quotes to remind you that there are more than two genders.

As you grow up, you learn about the supposedly “correct” way for a boy/man or girl/woman to behave - your **GENDER ROLE**. You also learn to express your own personality and interests, which may or may not fit with gender stereotypes (for example, all boys, and only boys, like to play football). Your **GENDER EXPRESSION** is the way you express your gender through gestures, movement, dress, and grooming. People use many terms to describe gender expression - such as butch (masculine), femme (feminine), androgynous (somewhere in-between masculine and feminine), to name just a few. Your gender expression may or may not fit with societal expectations. It may change from day to day or over time.

Your **GENDER IDENTITY** is the way that you identify and experience your gender in your heart and mind. When you close your eyes and focus on yourself, do you feel like a woman, a man, or something else? The sense that you have about your true gendered self is your gender identity. It may or may not fit with your current gender expression or your assigned sex.

When your gender identity (how you feel) or your gender expression (how you behave) does not fit with your assigned biological sex, you may be transgender. Not everyone who could fit under the transgender umbrella chooses to identify as transgender, and there are many ways that people may identify. One of the benefits of coming to understand our parents' transgender identities is the deeper awareness of gender for ourselves and others. We can come to understand our own gender identity and expression better as well as become better allies to transgender people of all ages.

"MY FATHER'S A WOMAN WHO RACES CARS IN HER FREE TIME, AND SHE CONSTANTLY EMBARRASSES MEN BY KNOWING FAR MORE ABOUT HIGH-PERFORMANCE ENGINES AND INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION THAN THEY DO."- JONATHAN F., AGE 24

## Glossary of Terms

"DO YOUR RESEARCH. KNOWLEDGE IS STRENGTH."- VICTORIA T., AGE 32

**BIOLOGICAL SEX** – The category (usually male or female) assigned by a doctor at birth, based on what body parts you have and certain other physical characteristics.

**CROSSDRESSER** – A person who expresses their gender by dressing in the clothing of the "opposite" gender, but does not identify as the "opposite" gender. They may wear male or female attire some or all of the time. Crossdressers used to be called "transvestites", which is now considered an inappropriate and disrespectful term.

**DRAG** – Performing a different gender role through dress, movement, and grooming for the entertainment of others.

**FTM** - (female-to-male, transman, transmasculine) Someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as male.

**GENDER BINARY SYSTEM** – An idea and system that insists everyone fits into one of two categories: male-assigned and masculine or female-assigned and feminine. This system gives power to people who follow gender norms at the expense of gender variant and transgender folks (in other words, people who don't). It also puts pressure on boys/men and girls/women to behave according to certain rules regardless of their own circumstances (for example, requiring them to dress or act a certain way).

**GENDER EXPRESSION** – The way a person expresses their gender identity through gestures, movement, dress, and grooming.

**GENDER IDENTITY** – A person's sense of being male, female, or somewhere in-between.

**GENDERQUEER** – An increasingly popular term used by LG BT people who feel their identities don't easily fit the male/female binary.

**GENDER ROLE/STEREOTYPE** – The social expectation of how an individual should act, think, and feel based on upon one's assigned sex.

**KOT** – (Kid of Trans) A person of any age who has (or had) one or more transgender parent(s).

**MTF** - (male-to-female, transwoman, transfeminine) Someone who was assigned as male at birth and identifies as female.

**QUEER** – A term used by some LG BT people to describe their identity. Not every LG BT person identifies as queer. It has been and still is used as a derogatory term against LG BT people, but has also been reclaimed as a positive and often political term in recent years. May be used to refer to either sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**QUEERSPAWN** - A term used by some people with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer parent(s) to describe their identity. This term asserts that people with LG BTO parents are part of the queer community because of their family and/or cultural experience, regardless of their own sexual orientation or gender identity. Not everyone with LG BTO parents identifies as queerspawn.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** - The sex/gender that a person is emotionally and physically attracted to over a period of time.

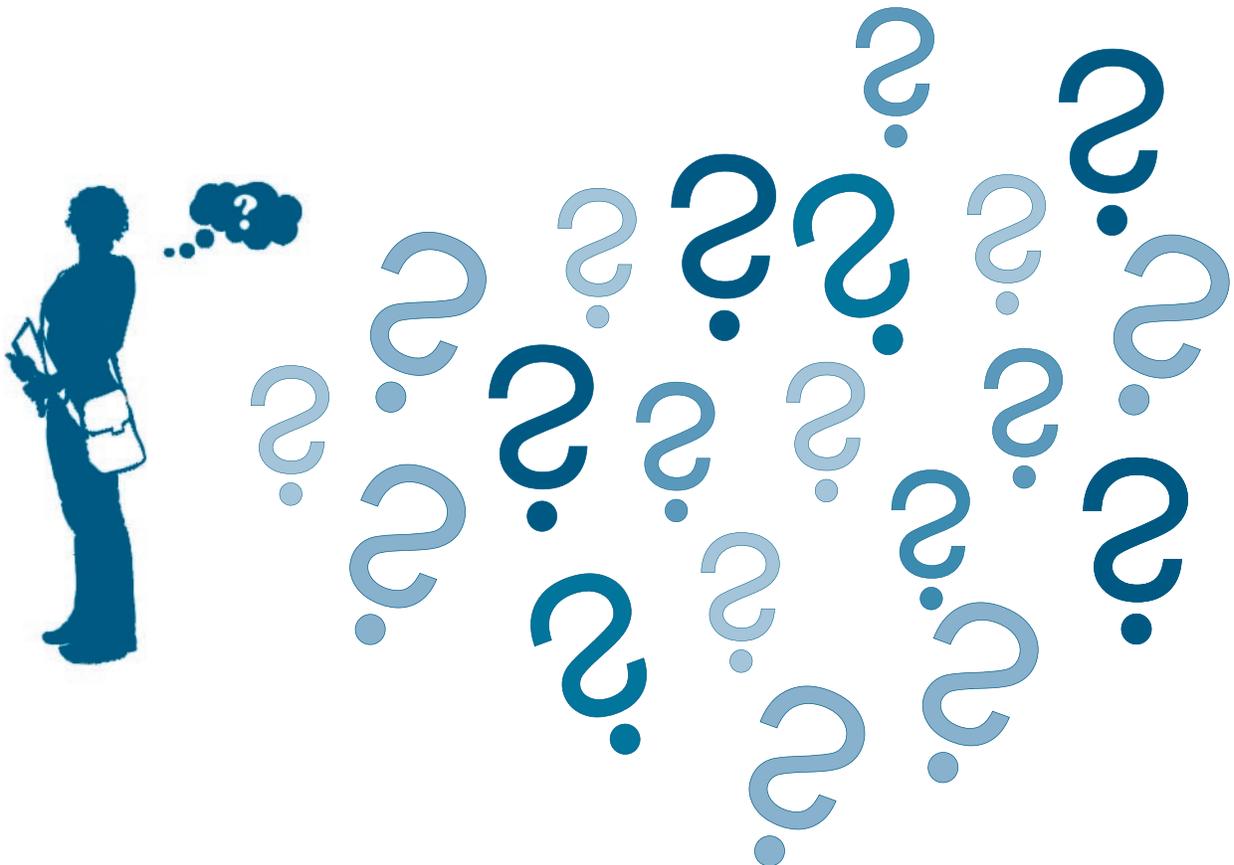
**SOFFA** - Significant Other, Family, Friend, and/or Ally to transgender people. This acronym often refers to significant others, but can be a useful term for family members, friends, and allies.

**TRANSGENDER** - An umbrella term describing anyone whose gender identity or expression differs from their biological sex. Literally means "across gender", and conveys the idea of transcending the boundaries of the gender binary system.

**TRANSITION** - The process of aligning one's body (and gender expression) with one's gender identity. Transition sometimes involves medical treatment and sometimes does not involve medical treatment.

**TRANSSEXUAL** - A person who medically changes their body to match with their gender identity. This may be done through hormone treatments and/or surgical procedures.

"I DON'T WISH THE CONFUSION AND ADJUSTMENT ON ANYONE. I DO WISH THAT EVERYONE COULD KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO SEE A PARENT BE TRULY HAPPY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS/HER LIFE." - LESLIE Q., AGE 24



# Frequently Asked Questions

**TALK TO YOUR TRANSGENDER PARENT(S). ASK THEM ANY QUESTION YOU WANT AND BE HONEST WITH THEM.- VICTORIA T., AGE 32**

There is a fair amount of information out there for transgender people, telling them how to find support, understand their identity, and make necessary changes. For KOTs, learning more about transgender people is a great way to better understand your parent. The question most of us have, though, is 'How does this affect me?' We explore the many answers to this question throughout this guide. Of course, the answers depend on each individual family, but here are some frequently asked questions:

## **HOW WILL MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENT CHANGE WHEN HE/SHE TRANSITIONS? WILL I STILL HAVE A MOTHER OR FATHER AFTER THE TRANSITION?**

Some parts of your relationship will probably change as your parent embodies a new gender role. The most important thing to remember is that your mother/father is still your parent, regardless of their gender identity and expression. If there are certain activities you really like to do with your parent (such as playing sports or cooking together), let them know that you'd still like to do these things together. That way, you can hold on to some of your favorite parts of the relationship. Keep reading for more tips in the *Transition* section.

## **WHAT DO I CALL MY PARENT NOW?**

The answer to this question varies from family to family. Your parent may change their name and pronouns (for example, he/his to she/her). Switching pronouns often takes practice, but once you get used to using his/her preferred pronouns, it gets a lot easier. Some people continue to call their parent Mom or Dad, while some others use the "opposite" parental term. Some families create new language to acknowledge the trans parent. You can have a conversation with your parent about what you will call them now to come up with a familiar name that feels comfortable for both of you (such as Da instead of Dad). See the *Pronouns* and *What We Call Our Parents* sections for more examples and ideas.

## **WILL MY PARENTS DIVORCE OR SEPARATE BECAUSE OF THIS?**

Again, it depends on your family. Some people stay together when one person transitions, while others decide to separate. Your parents can both continue to love and support you, even if their relationship to one another changes. The best way to figure out what will happen in your family is to talk with your parents. Read more about the changes that many families experience in the *Family Shifts* section of this guide.

## **IS MY PARENT GOING TO HAVE SURGERY?**

This is a big question for many people, since the idea of a parent having any kind of surgery can be pretty scary. The answer depends on your parent. People transition in different ways, and some don't medically transition at all.

Sometimes transitioning involves medical treatment, which could include taking hormones, electrolysis (hair removal for MTF people), and/or surgery. There are different kinds of surgeries, and your parent may elect to have one, more than one, or none. The purpose of these treatments is to make your parent's body express their gender identity more completely. You have the right to know as much or as little as you want to about these treatments. If other people ask you whether your parent has had 'the surgery', you can decide whether or not you want to talk about it. If you decide not to talk about it, you can tell people to ask your parent directly or even remind them how weird it would feel to be asked about their parent's body parts.

Not all transgender people undergo medical treatment, and people have different types of treatment. Having surgery (or not) does not determine someone's gender identity, and medical treatment is a private matter -- it's no one else's business. See the *Talking About Our Families* section for tips on addressing other people's questions.

### **SO, MY PARENT MIGHT NOT UNDERGO MEDICAL TREATMENT?**

Yes. Many transgender people do not seek medical treatment for a variety of reasons.

Crossdressers choose to dress and present in the 'opposite' gender some (or all) of the time, but do not change their body. Crossdressers may or may not spend time dressed in the clothing of the opposite gender when with their children, and will often go by a different name when dressed.

Genderqueer parents often do not choose to undergo medical treatment and may identify as a gender other than male or female (or as a combination of both). Other transgender folks may decide not to go through medical treatments for a variety of reasons. Many of the treatments are expensive and not all people can afford them. Someone may have religious, health-related, or other reasons to not alter their bodies. Other folks feel comfortable with the physical body they have, even though they want to express their gender in different ways.

### **WHY WOULD MY PARENT DECIDE TO HAVE KIDS IF THEY KNEW THEY WOULD TRANSITION?**

They probably didn't know that they would transition. Even if they did have the desire to transition, they may not have had the opportunity to do so. The world has changed a lot over the last few decades and transgender people have more options than ever before. People usually decide to have children because they love kids and want to be a parent. Transgender people are no exception.

### **DOES THIS MEAN HE/SHE IS GAY/LESBIAN?**

Not necessarily. Sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight) is different from gender identity. Just like everyone else, transgender people may be attracted to people of just one sex/gender or multiple genders and may identify as gay, lesbian, straight, or bisexual (or none of the above!). Your parent's sexual orientation may change as their gender identity changes (for example, a female-to-male who is attracted to women and identified as a lesbian female before transition may identify as a straight man once he transitions to male.)

### **IF MY PARENT IS TRANSGENDER DOES THAT MEAN I WILL BECOME TRANSGENDER OR GAY?**

The gender identity of your parent is very unlikely to determine your gender identity or sexual orientation. Transgender people often are aware from a very young age that they don't quite fit into the gender role assigned to them or they don't feel comfortable in their male or female body. Plenty of straight, gender normative parents raise transgender people, so it follows that transgender parents often raise straight, gender normative kids.

Remember, everyone has a gender identity and you may be more aware of your gender, since you have learned about transgender identity from your parent. COLAGE finds that many people with LG BTQ parents question their sexual orientation or gender identity at some point in their lives. Partly because other people often ask us about how we identify and partly because we might be more curious about the possibilities of different sexual orientations and genders.

Questioning your gender doesn't mean that you are necessarily transgender or queer. There are lots of stereotypes about how boys and girls should act. It's okay to explore whatever clothes, activities, and interests you enjoy. If you do start to question, you might check out COLAGE's 2nd Generation program, which is for folks with LG BTQ parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning themselves. They may help you sort through what you are experiencing. Remember, even if you do end up identifying as LG BTQ it will be because that is what is right for you, NOT because of the influence of your parent.

## MY PARENT ALREADY TRANSITIONED OR MY PARENT ISN'T GOING TO TRANSITION. IS THIS GUIDE FOR ME?

Of course! This guide is for anyone who has (or had) one or more transgender parent(s). Your parent may have transitioned before you can remember or when you were much younger. Maybe your parent is genderqueer, is a crossdresser or, for a variety of other reasons, has chosen not to transition.

There are many elements to having a transgender parent and transition is one of them, which we explore at length in the next few pages. Hopefully, future versions of this guide will encompass a wider range of experience, as the KOT community continues to grow and find its voice. If you aren't currently experiencing a parent's transition, you may find the following sections most relevant: *The Basics*, *Coming Out as KOT*, *Finding Support*, *Legal Q&A*, and our *Transgender Family Resource List*.

The next section of this resource guide explores the many ways a parent's transition impacts their children.

"IT'S OK TO HAVE A TRANSGENDER PARENT." - KITE W., AGE 8

"I AM... LEARNING TO ACCEPT THIS SITUATION FOR WHAT IT IS: MY LIFE."  
- LESLIE Q., AGE 24

# TRANSITION

**"THEY STILL LOVE YOU. THEY JUST NEED TO BE WHO THEY ARE." - ROBERT H., AGE 25**

While not everyone's parent transitions and some people's parents have already transitioned, we know that dealing with a parent's transition is one of the biggest challenges of having a transgender parent. Let's look at some of the major aspects of a parent's transition and the experiences of other KOTs.

See *Transition Tips for Parents* for ways that transgender parents (and their partners/spouses) can help their children navigate the transition process.

## Finding Out Your Parent is Transgender

**"MY FTM FATHER SAT DOWN AND TALKED TO ME ALL ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN AND [TOLD ME] THAT HE LOVED ME JUST THE SAME." - CAMERON V., AGE 22**

We discover that our parents are transgender in a variety of ways. Some families sit down for a family meeting and announce that a parent plans to transition. Other KOTs find out accidentally, by stumbling upon pictures or clothing, which can lead to a family crisis. Let's explore some of the ways that KOTs find out that their parent is transgender.

**"MY FATHER GOT VERY ANGRY WITH MY BROTHER AND... IN THE COURSE OF THIS ARGUMENT, SHE TOLD US THAT SHE WAS BECOMING A WOMAN." - BRANDUIN S., AGE 15**

**"MY SECOND MOM TOLD ME THAT SHE WAS GOING TO HAVE A SURGERY AND TURN INTO A GIRL."  
- MATTHEW B., AGE 9**

Parents come out to their children in different ways, some of which are easier to handle than others. Ideally, your parent(s) started the conversation in a private space (not a crowded restaurant or public location) where you could express your feelings, ask as many questions as you needed, and take some time to yourself if you needed it. You may have wondered why they didn't tell you earlier or what it means for your relationship. This was the beginning of an ongoing conversation, so be sure to ask questions as they arise. Remember that you can ask for as little or as much information as you are comfortable learning.

**"I FOUND OUT THAT MY FATHER WAS TRANSGENDERED WHEN I FOUND HIM DRESSED IN MY MOTHER'S CLOTHING." - EMMA, AGE 14**

Some people find out about their parent's transgender identity without being told. Emma discovered her father dressed in women's clothing. Other KOTs have discovered pictures of their parent presenting in another gender. If this was your experience, you were likely angry or confused that a secret was kept from you and that you had to find out on your own rather than having a conversation. Although you found out accidentally, you can still ask as many or as few questions as you need. Know that your parent(s) did not intend to hurt you by keeping it a secret. You were probably quite shocked at the discovery, but this wears off eventually. It may be a good time to seek additional support, such as a therapist or COLAGE group. Check out the *Finding Support and Community* section later in this guide.

**"IT WASN'T SO MUCH THAT HE WANTED TO DRESS IN WOMEN'S CLOTHES THAT BOTHERED ME. THE FACT THAT HE AND MY FAMILY MEMBERS KEPT THIS A SECRET FROM ME HURT MORE." - SKYELA H., AGE 29**

## Initial Reactions

**"WHEN [MY FATHER] FINALLY DID COME OUT, MY INITIAL REACTION WAS TO ASK IF WE COULD STILL MAKE THE 2:20 SHOWING OF X-MEN 2." - JONATHAN F, AGE 24**

So, how did you react when your parent told you they were transgender? Depending on the relationships within the family, the way a parent comes out, and your own process, KOTs react differently. You may be angry, scared, sad, confused, relieved, curious - all of these feelings are natural and okay. Perhaps you feel compelled to ask a lot of questions or, like Jonathan, you have almost no immediate reaction. If you have sibling(s), you may have an entirely different reaction than they do. People process new information differently and you may have questions or feel differently in the weeks, months, or years after your parent comes out.

**"MY MOM TOLD ME HE WAS TRANSGENDERED WHEN I WAS 8, WHICH WAS JUST BEFORE HE SWITCHED. THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS OTHER PEOPLE'S REACTIONS, AND TRYING TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION, OR AVOID EXPLAINING IT WITHOUT ACTUALLY LYING." - ELIZABETH M., AGE 23**

Your reaction depends on how you found out and also when you found out. Young children tend to adjust to change easier and might understand a parent's transition in simpler terms than older children. My four-year-old sister, for example, explained that "some people are girls on the inside and girls on the outside, like you and me. Some people are girls on the inside and boys on the outside, like Dad." My reaction at 17 years old was less straight-forward as I struggled to understand what it meant for my father to become a woman.

**"IT'S REALLY HARD TO DEAL WITH SOMETIMES. IT GETS OVERWHELMING. I REMEMBER HOW MY LIFE WAS BEFORE I FOUND OUT ABOUT MY FATHER'S TRANSITION AND I REMEMBER HOW PERFECT IT WAS AND HOW HAPPY I WAS." - EMMA S., AGE 14**

Older youth have learned more about gender roles and what is "normal", so it can be a lot harder to handle the news. They are also navigating their own social worlds, in which having a "different" family can be a real challenge. Even KOTs whose parents transitioned when they were younger often feel pressure to be "normal" during adolescence and may struggle with their parent's identity.

Some teenagers ask, "Why can't you wait until I'm out of the house?" Many transgender parents would rather postpone their transition until their children have grown up. The reality is, if your parent is coming out to you, they really need to deal with their transgender identity now. Ideally, your parent will transition slowly and give you a say in how involved they will be in your school activities and community. You are the child and they are the parent, so your best interest should always be a priority.

**"AT THE SURFACE, I AM SO VERY PROUD OF MY DAD, WHO AT 63 IS NOW FREE TO BE TRUE TO HERSELF. BUT I STILL FIND MYSELF HAVING DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO A PARENT WHO JUST DOESN'T FEEL LIKE THE SAME PERSON ANY LONGER." - DOUG S., AGE 29**

Adults whose parents transition later in life have known their parent for a long time in their previous gender, so it may take some time to adjust to a parent's new identity. However, adults may have an easier time than teenagers, since they are independent of their parents and can make choices about whether to tell people about their parent's gender identity.

Regardless of your initial reaction, remember that your parent's gender identity is not based on anything you did. People transition in different ways, so be sure to ask your parent what you can expect. For instance, is your parent going to change their name or pronouns? Will they be changing their appearance? Is it okay for you to talk to people about this? Continue to have conversations with your parents throughout the transition. It can really help. Also, if you don't feel comfortable knowing certain things, it's okay to ask your parent not to talk about something.

**"YOU AREN'T TO BLAME FOR THIS SITUATION... IT JUST HAPPENED TO YOU. ALSO... IT DOES GET EASIER. - EMMA S., AGE 14**

So, let's look at some of the things to expect as your parent transitions...

## Pronouns

**"WHAT DO I CALL HER? WHAT DO I REFER TO HER AS? HOW WEIRD IS IT TO SAY 'MY DAD' AND THEN IMMEDIATELY SAY 'HER'?" - KATIE B., AGE 23**

Your parent may ask you to start using different pronouns. They may use feminine (she/her) or masculine (he/his) pronouns. Some people prefer gender neutral pronouns, such as ze (pronounced zee and used instead of he or she) and hir (pronounced here and used instead of his or her). These pronouns reflect your parent's gender identity. It can be a real challenge to begin using different pronouns, especially if you still see your parent in their previous gender. You may forget and use the old pronouns, or you may be resistant to using new pronouns. Be gentle with yourself and keep in mind that this does get easier with practice.

One of the simplest ways to affirm a person's gender identity is to use their preferred pronouns and name. This, of course, is often easier said than done. Try not to assume that you know someone's gender identity or correct pronoun. If you meet someone and you aren't sure of their pronoun, politely ask them "What is your preferred pronoun?" Use their preferred pronoun, even if it differs from your perception of their gender identity or expression. This is a matter of respecting someone's right to self-identify and will make you a better ally to transgender and gender variant people (not just your parent).

If you want some extra pronoun practice, you can try this exercise:

### PRONOUN PRACTICE

Materials: picture of your parent, index cards (or scrap paper), marker

On the index card, write the following: "This is my parent, \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your parent's name). \_\_\_\_\_ (write your parent's preferred pronoun - "she, he, or ze") loves me very much. \_\_\_\_\_ (write the preferred pronoun - "her, his, or hir") eyes are \_\_\_\_\_ (insert color)."

Practice using your parent's preferred pronoun. Describe where they were when the picture was taken. If you mistakenly use the old pronoun or name, you can refer to the pronouns and name written on the card. Be gentle with yourself. This process often takes time and patience.

**"IT'S REALLY CONFUSING BECAUSE MY FATHER WANTS MY SISTER AND I TO CALL HER MOM. BUT SHE ISN'T MY MOM. IT'S REALLY HARD TO BE NEVER ABLE TO USE THE WORD DAD, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE I DO HAVE ONE. - EMMA S., AGE 14**

## What We Call Our Parents

**"I THINK THE CHALLENGE OF HAVING TWO BIOLOGICAL FATHERS IS THE LANGUAGE BARRIERS. I CALL MY EGG DAD 'DADDY' AND MY SPERM DAD 'DAD'. - CAMERON V., AGE 22**

We learn from society that mothers are women and fathers are men, but we also know from personal experience that this is not always true. So, when your mom becomes a man, what do you call him? Do you call him Mom? Some people do. Do you call him Dad? Maybe. Perhaps you decide to call him by a new familiar name. There are many options and it helps if you and your parent make the decision together. You can have a conversation with your parent about what you are comfortable calling them and how they want to be addressed. Come to a compromise on a name that feels good for both of you. The name you decide on at first may even change over time as you and your transitioning parent both become more comfortable with the new situation.

Your parent will probably change their name to a name that suits their gender identity, so when you talk about them to other people, try to be aware of their new name. Just like pronouns, using a trans person's chosen name is a simple and important way to acknowledge their gender identity.

**"IT'S CONFUSING TO TELL OTHER PEOPLE WHICH ONE IS THE 'REAL' MOM AND WHICH ONE IS THE TRANSGENDER MOM. - KEVIN B., AGE 7**

**HELLO**  
my name is

## Changes in Gender Expression

**"I KIND OF KNEW THAT SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT WHEN I WOULD SEE HER WEARING EARRINGS AND NECKLACES (NOT THE MANLY KINDS).- KATIE B., AGE 23**

As your parent transitions, their appearance will change to fit with their gender identity. They may start to dress differently or participate in new activities. Depending on how differently your parent has been presenting, this may feel strange. For example, if you have never seen your father in a dress or skirt and they start to wear skirts, it may take some adjustment. Part of this is simply adjusting to a loved one's new appearance, but there are probably other issues involved. Everybody receives a lot of messages about the way men and women should look and act. We discuss this more in the *Transphobia and You* section.

It can feel strange when our parent's appearance contradicts society's rules. For example, if you see your father in a skirt and it makes you feel uncomfortable, think about all of the reasons why you may feel uncomfortable. Acknowledge them and allow yourself to think about the positive aspects, too. The more honest you are about how you are feeling about the transition, the easier it will be. If you feel comfortable, you might ask your parent how it feels for them to be wearing the clothes. If you can understand that your parent feels safe, comfortable and happy in their clothing it may help you embrace their new fashion more.

**"WHETHER SHE WAS WEARING WINGTIPS OR HIGH HEELS, SHE'S MY DAD. I LOVE THE PERSON IN THAT BODY. - COLLEEN M., AGE 44**

Perhaps your parent's attire hasn't changed much since they came out to you. Maybe your mom has always been butch and worn more masculine clothing. If you think about it, many women can wear pants without any assumption about their gender identity. Whereas, the rules for men are a lot stricter when it comes to clothing, and if a man wears a dress, he is often met with confusion if not hostility. Keep in mind that we all learn what is and is not socially acceptable, which we have to reconcile with our parent's changing appearance.

**"MY CURRENT STRUGGLE RELATES TO HOW I SHOULD REFER TO MY MOTHER, HOW TO INTRODUCE HER/HIM TO OTHERS, AND WHAT TO TELL THOSE WHO GREW UP KNOWING MY MOTHER AS A DIFFERENT PERSON. - LESLIE Q., AGE 24**

As your parent's appearance shifts, it's important to keep communication lines open. Talk about different situations that may come up and how you will handle them. You can role play different scenarios with your parent to figure out what feels most comfortable for both of you. For example, if you are in public with your parent and you see a friend from school, how will you introduce your parent? Figure these things out ahead of time, so you don't get caught by surprise.

**"DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP IF YOU DON'T PICK IT UP QUICKLY. EVERYONE DEALS WITH THINGS DIFFERENTLY... GIVE YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY TIME TO RE-ACQUAINT YOURSELVES WITH EACH OTHER.- VICTORIA T., AGE 32**

# FAMILY SHIFTS

**"ITS OKAY TO NOT LIKE WHAT'S HAPPENING - FORCED TOLERANCE, OUT OF DUTY, IS NOT KIND. REAL RESISTANCE NEEDS A VOICE, TO ALLOW REAL ACCEPTANCE TO COME."**

**- STEVE VINAY G., AGE 48**

As your parent transitions, your family dynamics will shift - your parents may split up and your family will probably look different as your parent's gender role changes. If your parents stay together after one parent transitions, your two moms will look more like a straight couple or your mom and dad will look like a gay couple. Sometimes, KOTs lose contact with extended family members who choose not to continue a relationship with their parent(s). Remember that feelings are always okay. If you are feeling angry, sad, confused, you can express these feelings.

**"[ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES HAS BEEN] KEEPING RELATIONS WITH EXTENDED FAMILY."**

**- MORGAN C., AGE 20**

## Divorce and Separation

**"MY DAD CALLED ME AND MY SISTER... TO SAY THAT MOM WAS MISSING BECAUSE THEY HAD A FIGHT AND [MY DAD] CAME OUT AS TRANS... [SHE] SAID THEY MIGHT GET DIVORCED."**

**- MORGAN C., AGE 20**

Many KOTs experience a divorce or separation of their parents during their life. After a parent comes out as transgender, some people's parents do decide to stay together, even if their relationship changes. The transition of one parent may change or end the relationship between your parents. We also recognize that parents decide to split up for many different reasons, which could have little to do with your parent's transgender identity and could happen years after (or before) their transition. Your parents may have divorced long before your parent came out, and your parent's disclosure may bring some new challenges or shed light on some old issues. Divorce is never easy and, although the decision to split up is made by parents, it deeply impacts the lives of the children. For information about the legal impacts of divorce and separation, see our *Legal Q&A for Kids of Trans Parents*.

It can take people a long time to figure out their gender identity, regardless of their sexual orientation. Some trans people have identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual prior to deciding to transition. Sometimes, relationships end when one person transitions to another gender. Many straight-identified trans people choose to marry and have children prior to transitioning. Some people think that fulfilling the expectation for their gender role - such as becoming a husband and father - may 'cure' them of not feeling quite right in their body. Maybe they still were not happy and finally came to terms with their gender identity. Transition is a major process for everyone involved, especially the spouse/partner of the transitioning parent. Depending on a number of factors, your parents may decide to split up when one parent transitions.

Just like with your parent's transition, you have the right to as much or as little information about your parents' divorce or separation. There is often a lot of emotion involved in a break-up, and your parents may express anger toward one another to you. It is not your responsibility to take sides or take care of either of your parents' needs. You are the child in this situation, even if your experience has made you feel more grown up.

Remember to ask for what you need — access to or space from either parent, access to support (such as a therapist, caring adult, or community), time to process your own feelings, or anything else that will help you during this time.

**"THE HARDEST PART FOR ME WAS THE DIVORCE WHERE I HAVE TO ALWAYS BE APART FROM SOME OF MY FAMILY. IT MAKES ME SAD.- MATTHEW B., AGE 9**

## Loss and Grieving

**"IN THE PROCESS, I SOMEHOW LOST THE OLD, RELIABLE PARENT/MENTOR THAT I CAME TO KNOW IN THE COURSE OF MY LIFE.- DOUG S., AGE 29**

As your parent transitions, they shift into a new gender role. Their appearance, mannerisms, and temperament will probably change. As a parent's gender role (woman or man) transforms their parental role (mother or father), many KOTs experience a loss of the person their parent used to be. In her memoir *Dress Codes: Of Three Girlhoods – My Mother's, My Father's and Mine*, Noelle Howey talks about grieving for a persona, for the man her father was before becoming the woman that she needed to be. While this person is still your parent and is often more a whole person than they had been, we all are taught to expect and value certain behaviors from certain people, especially from our parents. When expectations are not met, we may be disappointed.

Gender-specific holidays (such as Mother's Day or Father's Day) and events can be particularly challenging. You may miss buying your dad a tie for Father's Day or feel upset that your mom will attend your wedding wearing a suit and tie. Maybe your bar mitzvah is coming up and you are trying to determine your female father's role in the ceremony. If everyone expects a mom to be a woman and a dad to be a man, it can feel strange to no longer have a male-identified father or a female-identified mother.

**"[IT FEELS] VERY STRANGE... LIKE A LOSS WHICH CAN'T BE FULLY MOURNED.- STEVE VINAY G., AGE 48**

Allow yourself to grieve the loss of your parent's prior identity if it makes sense for you. Not everyone experiences their parent's transition in the same way, and some people feel a loss more deeply than others. The silver lining is that you have the opportunity to witness your parent as they transform into their true self. You may even discover new aspects of your relationship that you never imagined.

**"TO SEE THE HAPPY, CONTENT PERSON SHE'S BECOME (EVEN IF THAT PERSON IS A MAN), IT JUST WARMS MY HEART. THAT KIND OF HAPPINESS... WELL I HOPE EVERYONE GETS A CHANCE TO SEE THAT IN SOMEONE THEY LOVE.- LESLIE Q, AGE 24**

## Finding Support & Community

**[I SUGGEST] FAMILY THERAPY, TO SUPPORT EVERYONE IN THE TRANSITION.**  
**- STEVE VINAY G., AGE 48**

Having a transgender parent is not always easy, as we've already discussed in previous sections. Sometimes, you may want to find someone to talk to about your thoughts and feelings. You can ask your parent to help identify another adult, such as a family friend, godparent, or other knowledgeable and reliable person who can help you sort through your feelings and come to terms with your parent's transition, separation, or other issues you want to discuss.

A good therapist can be a great asset to help you process the changes to your family.

### SO, HOW DO YOU FIND A GOOD THERAPIST?

Ask your parent's therapist to recommend someone in your area. You can also look online for LG BT-friendly helping professionals, through organizations such as WPATH or the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association. Check with your local LG BT community center or the Gay Yellow pages. If you are in a more conservative and/or rural area, your best option may be a therapist in the nearest large city or college town. If there is a nearby university, local women's health clinic, rape crisis center, or other community service center, they may be able to make appropriate referrals. You can also search the internet for "transgender," the name of your state, and therapy (e.g. Transgender Michigan Therapy).

Keep in mind that a personal referral is usually the most reliable source, especially if someone who knows you can refer a therapist they know well. Ideally, your therapist has experience working with transgender people and/or issues around gender expression and identity. Realistically, however, few therapists have experience working both with transgender people and families. Seek out a therapist with a good reputation who understands issues of family diversity and family systems. The best way to find a good fit for you is to talk to the therapist — ask if they are familiar with and/or comfortable with transgender issues. Your therapist may have little experience with transgender issues, but they should be committed to supporting you and learning more. Remember, it is not your responsibility to educate your therapist about transgender issues. There are resources available for them — such as *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant People and their Families*, by Arlene Istar Lev, LCSW, CASAC; or *Transition and Beyond: Observations on Gender Identity* by Reid Vanderburg, MA, LMFT. See our *Transgender Family Resource List* in the back of this guide for other books, movies, and publications related to transgender families.

It can take some time and effort to find a therapist that fits with you. If you meet with a therapist and they seem judgmental or too focused on your parent's gender identity, this is a red flag. A good therapist will be respectful of your parent's gender identity and not try to blame all of your concerns on your parent. They should also be sensitive to your experience, acknowledging the impact that your parent's transgender identity has made in your life. Trust your instincts -- does this person seem to be in tune with your feelings? If not, you should look for a therapist who can provide what you need. A therapist that your parent likes may not be the best fit for you.

Beyond finding a good therapist, you can also read books or watch movies about transgender people and KOTs - see the resource list at the end of this guide. If your school has a GSA (gay straight alliance), that may be a safe space to find community and support. You can access COLAGE community through our online discussion lists, local chapters, and annual regional events. As people with transgender parents, we can learn from each other, support each other, and feel empowered in the knowledge that we are not alone.

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE THE GOOD GUY ALL THE TIME. IF YOU'RE UPSET, SOMETIMES IT'S WORTH IT TO LET YOUR PARENT KNOW. IT'S GREAT TO BE SUPPORTIVE, BUT DON'T FORGET THAT YOU'RE HUMAN TOO.** - BRANDUIN S., AGE 15

# COMING OUT AS KOT

**"THEY ARE STILL YOUR PARENT AND LOVE DOES NOT NEED A LABEL. BE STRONG IN YOUR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER AND PEOPLE OF VALUE WILL ACCEPT AND RESPECT YOU AS YOU ARE." - SUSANA R., AGE 40**

## Talking About Our Families

**"ADVICE TO OTHERS: DO NOT EVER TELL YOUR GRADE 5 CLASS ON MOTHER'S DAY THAT YOUR MOM IS A MAN - OR YOU'LL HAVE TO LIVE WITH PEOPLE BUGGING YOU FOR THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS. TELL PEOPLE YOU TRUST INDIVIDUALLY, AND THEY ARE USUALLY VERY REASONABLE ABOUT IT." - ELIZABETH M., AGE 23**

As the children of transgender parents, we are often challenged to explain our families to other people. You may have to explain why your mother has a beard or that the other woman who picks you up from school is your father. School can provide some unique challenges. Check out the resource section on COLAGE's website for "Tips for Making Classrooms Safer for Students with LG BTQ Parents" and "How to Make a Difference in Your School".

Sometimes we need to keep things about our families private, especially if our parent is not out as transgender. If your parent is undergoing transition, people may ask you questions about your parent and you can choose how to answer. Remember, you can always choose not to answer people's questions. Your family should have a conversation about how visible your parent wants to be with their transgender identity. Like we said before, this is a transition for everyone, and it's important that everyone feels like they are heard.

**"IT FEELS A LITTLE CONFUSING TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO ME. SO I WISH THEY DIDN'T ASK ABOUT IT." - KEVIN B., AGE 7**

Just as our parents choose when to come out about their transgender identity, you now have the choice of when or whether to be out about your family. Remember, this is your decision to make. Talk to your parent about how out they want to be in your community and let them know how out you want them to be. If you feel uncomfortable with your parent picking you up from school presenting their new gender expression, tell them. It may be hard for a transitioning parent to hear, so you may want to ask another adult to help you have this conversation. Not all of our parents want to be out, so it's a good idea to check in with them about whether it's okay to be out to friends, neighbors, or teachers. This can also be difficult if you want to be able to get support by talking to your friends about the transition and your parent prefers to be closeted. Try to find compromises as a family so that all of you can feel safe and supported.

**"DON'T BE AFRAID TO TELL YOUR PARENT THAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, OR AREN'T READY TO DEAL WITH, WHAT'S GOING ON." - LESLIE Q., AGE 24**

Coming out can be quite liberating and also pretty scary. Do you have a good friend who you trust with your feelings and private issues? You can have a direct conversation with them or invite them to meet

your parent. Public venues, such as writing for the school paper or talking to local media, can also provide opportunities to come out. Look for supportive allies, such as teachers or other supportive adults. If your school has a GSA (gay straight alliance), you can often find support by joining that type of group. They can be there for you if other people have negative reactions to your parent's transgender identity. You can also find support through COLAGE - we have email discussion lists, local chapters, and resources for people with LG BTQ parents.

**"MY OTHER MOM DIDN'T MAKE ME WHO I AM BY TRANSITIONING.- BRANDUIN S., AGE 15**

Whether or not you are out about your parent, sometimes it can feel like there is a lot of attention on your parent's transgender identity. There are so many aspects to each of us - personality, interests, talents, and more. Your parents influence some parts of you, but everything about you is not determined exclusively by them. You will continue to learn, grow, and develop your own identity. While people may be really focused on your parent's identity, you can remind them that you are your own person, an individual with a unique set of experiences and interests.

**"OUR FAMILY MAY NOT FIT YOUR NOTIONS BUT THAT DOES NOT MAKE US ANY LESS REAL AND DESERVING OF INCLUSION AND RESPECT.- SUSANA R., AGE 40**

## Passing

**"SINCE VIRTUALLY NO ONE KNOWS THAT I DO, IN FACT, HAVE A TRANSGENDER PARENT, THE ONLY CHALLENGES I HAVE FACED THUS FAR ARE INTERNAL.- LESLIE Q., AGE 24**

Some of our parents pass in society, meaning that people view them as their preferred gender and do not think that they are transgender. Many transgender people decide to be "stealth", meaning that people do not know that they are trans. Calling a transwoman "Dad" in public can effectively out your parent as transgender. Some KOTs have to keep their parent's transgender identity private in order to protect the family. So, how do you explain your relationship with your parent? KOTs may refer to their parent as their uncle or aunt, or as a step-parent.

If your parents stay together, people will probably see them differently than they used to. Maybe you used to have two moms and one of your parents transitioned from female to male. Now, your parents appear as a straight couple in public. They may be treated with heterosexual privilege that they didn't have when people saw them as a lesbian couple. On the other hand, maybe your parents were in a straight marriage and your father transitioned from male to female. Now, your parents are seen as a lesbian couple and may experience homophobia. The way that people perceive of our parents, whether they are single or in a relationship, makes a big impact in the way that they are treated in society.

**"BEING TRANS DOESN'T MAKE THEM WORSE PARENTS, IT IS JUST THE REACTIONS OF OTHERS YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL OF.- ELIZABETH M., AGE 23**

Sometimes, our parents ask us to keep their transgender identity private. It may feel challenging to keep information private. Talk to your parents about who you can talk to about their identity. Having a transgender parent can feel really lonely and not being able to talk about it can be hard. Even if you can't be out in your community, you can find community online through COLAGE. Join our KOT email list to find other people with transgender parents who you can talk to about your family.

"I WAS CLOSE TO MY MOTHER AND I ALMOST FELT LIKE SHE WAS LEAVING ME. [WHEN] SHE TRANSITIONED, HE WENT STEALTH TO KEEP KIDS FROM TEASING US AND THAT WAS HARD BECAUSE THEN HE REALLY WASN'T AROUND."  
- CAMERON V., AGE 22

## Transphobia and You

"TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AREN'T FREAKS, THEY ARE OUR PARENTS." - EMMA S., AGE 14

We know that Emma's quote is true, but have you ever felt like your parent is a "freak"? When you first found out that your parent was trans or saw them present in their chosen gender, did you feel uncomfortable or confused? If you did, you aren't the only one who has felt this way. Many of us respond to our transgender parent in some negative way. We'll talk more about some of the reasons why in just a minute, but first, let's look at some reactions from KOTs:

"THERE WERE SO MANY EMOTIONS... ANGER, LOSS, SELF-PITY (HOW COULD MY FATHER DO THIS TO ME?!), AND FEAR!!!" - COLLEEN M., AGE 44

"MY MOTHER SAT ME DOWN AND TOLD ME SHE HAD BEGUN THE PROCESS OF TRANSITIONING. IT IS A DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET, EVEN THOUGH AT FIRST THAT'S ALL I WANTED TO DO." - LESLIE Q., AGE 24

"I STILL CAN'T COME TO TERMS WITH HAVING 2 'MUMS'. I STILL CANNOT SEE MY DAD DRESSED AS A WOMAN, DESPITE HAVING KNOWN FOR 5 YEARS!" - PHILLIPPA W., AGE 54

Some of those statements were probably hard to read. Maybe you have thought or felt similar things. It can feel pretty scary and shameful to have these types of feelings about our parents. Acknowledge your feelings without judgment and know that many feelings are natural responses to situations. It's okay to think, "I wish my parent wasn't transgender". There are probably a lot of complicated reasons why you feel this way. Just because you have these feelings doesn't mean you hate your parent. Rather than being overcome by the fear and guilt, you can move through these feelings to a place of acceptance. Knowing that you aren't the only one who has felt this way is a good first step.

Now let's examine where these feelings could have come from. Take a look around at the society and community in which you live. What messages are you receiving about gender? We live in a society that enforces certain ideas of acceptable gender presentation. Just like other people, we learn 'normal' ways of being male or female and are rewarded when we fit into these categories. We are taught that a mother is a woman and a father is a man, that a man in a dress is some kind of joke and a woman with a beard belongs in the circus. Our trans parents' identities directly conflict with these messages.

**TRANSPHOBIA** is the mistreatment, discrimination, and oppression faced specifically by transgender people. Transphobia, like homophobia and gender-based discrimination, affects our families and our lives in a number of ways. Because our society tends to recognize only two narrowly-defined options for

gender identity – masculine man or feminine woman – those who fit within those categories are rewarded. Unfortunately, many people are afraid of and/or hostile toward people who do not fit into these gender roles.

People treat men and women differently, so when they can't determine someone's gender, or when they think someone is violating the "rules" about gender, they don't know how to interact with them. Sometimes, this confusion leads to harassment or violence. Transphobia is a real threat to our families. When our parents are not safe, we are not safe. We depend on our parents to love us and provide for us. If they are unable to secure a job, be safe from violence, or be themselves, that impacts us as their children.

**I WISH THAT BAD PEOPLE WON'T TRY TO KILL THE TRANSGENDER MOM JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE DIFFERENT FROM EVERYBODY ELSE. I WISH THAT IT DIDN'T MATTER TO OTHER PEOPLE THAT I HAVE A TRANSGENDER MOM. - MATTHEW B, AGE 9**

Beyond the threats to our parents, we also encounter transphobia in our daily lives. Classmates, teachers, or community members may do or say inappropriate things related to or about our parent. It's important to have allies in these situations who support us and our families. They can help us stand up against transphobia. Check out the *Coming Out as KOT* section as well as COLAGE's online resources for more about coming out at school and in your community.

**DON'T TELL KIDS AT SCHOOL, THEY'LL TEASE YOU. - KITE W., AGE 8**

We live in a society that punishes people for being transgender. By participating in the culture, we are constantly bombarded by negative messages about people who don't fit into the "normal" gender roles. Some of these messages seep into our own ideas about the way the world is and the way that people should act. Many of the negative feelings about our transgender parent are tied to the transphobia that we have internalized within ourselves. There are many forms of **INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION** - when people who are part of or are connected with an oppressed group feel disgust toward the oppressed part of themselves. As people with transgender parents, we may find ourselves thinking negatively about transgender people or we may police our own gender expression to fit certain cultural expectations.

**ONE MUST LEARN THAT THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, AND NOT JUST FEMALE/ MALE. BE PATIENT AND UNDERSTANDING. BE OPEN ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS AND NEVER FEEL ASHAMED. - SKYELA H., AGE 29**

The good news is that we can move through our internalized transphobia to find the value in ourselves and our family experiences. Try this exercise for sorting through your feelings, recognizing which pieces are connected to your interpersonal relationship with your parent, the dynamics of your family, and your own internalized transphobia. Being honest with ourselves can feel really scary. As you go through these questions, be gentle with yourself and give yourself credit for going through the process.

### **REFLECTION EXERCISE**

Think about a time when you felt uncomfortable about your parent's gender presentation/identity. Ask yourself: Why am I feeling uncomfortable? Take that answer and ask, why? Keep asking why - until you get a deeper understanding of your feelings. Anytime you have these sorts of negative thoughts, practice asking these questions. Eventually, you will be able to recognize the root of certain thoughts or feelings you may have.

Okay. Take a deep breath and give yourself a pat on the back. Thinking about these things is not easy. Remember that it is always okay to feel your feelings. You may be upset with your parent(s) for reasons beyond their transgender identity. Some people are better parents than others - transgender people are no exception. Being transgender does not inherently make someone a better or worse parent. Since we live in a

transphobic society that already judges our parents, acknowledging the hard parts of our family relationships can be really challenging. Maybe your parent hasn't always been there for you or their coming out has led to a divorce or separation. Sometimes, it helps to have someone besides your parents to talk through these things, like a friend, therapist or other caring adult (See the *Finding Support and Community* section for tips). Remember to ask for what you need and be honest with yourself. By acknowledging the impact of transphobia in our own lives, we can improve our relationships with our transgender parents and be empowered as witnesses and participants in transgender lives - we can become allies to transgender people and heal ourselves from this form of oppression.

**"THIS WILL BE A TOUGH PATH TO FOLLOW, BUT IT'S A JOURNEY BEYOND YOUR WILDEST IMAGINATION; YET HOPEFULLY [IT WILL] CHALLENGE YOU TO ACCEPT THAT WHICH YOU CANNOT CHANGE, AND FIND WITHIN YOURSELF RESOURCES OF LOVE YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU HAD. COLLEEN M., AGE 44**

## Benefits of Being a KOT

**"ALTHOUGH MY FAMILY STRUCTURE IS DIFFERENT I HAVE PARENTS THAT LOVE ME VERY MUCH AND I AM LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE ALL OF THEM IN MY LIFE." - CAMERON V., AGE 22**

Among people with transgender parents (as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or queer parents), most people consider the greatest value of this experience to be our open mindedness. Since we live in a society that sends us negative messages about many groups of people, including our parents, rejecting the negative messages we have heard about our parents or families often causes us to reject the negative messages we may have heard about other groups of people as well. If my parent is oppressed for being transgender, I can empathize with other people who are oppressed for their identities or appearance, and I don't want to participate in making other people feel the way my parent and I have sometimes been made to feel. We are all subject to multiple systems of privilege and oppression - including racism, classism, ableism, etc - which impact our understanding of the world. Simply having a transgender parent does not mean that I automatically understand someone else's experience of racism or some other form of oppression or discrimination. I can, however, utilize my perspective as a KOT to examine the many ways that oppression and privilege impact people's lives.

**"IT'S A UNIQUE AND REWARDING EXPERIENCE." - VICTORIA T., AGE 32**

In addition to being open-minded, many KOTs find the strength in themselves to 'overcome anything'. A parent's transition is a life-altering event, and moving forward can provide an enormous sense of pride and strength. Some of us even find pride in a stronger relationship with our parent. Many KOTs describe only knowing 'half' of their parent until the parent transitions and they find a whole, loving person who is better able to be a parent. We can rejoice in knowing a healthier, happier version of our parent.

**"I LOVE LILY...WISH I MET HER A FEW YEARS SOONER. SHE IS THE BEST DAD EVER!" - COLLEEN M., AGE 44**

Learning about transgender identity and issues may also open us up to exploring how our own

behaviors have been shaped by society's expectations for us based on gender. When people try to tell us that we can't do (or must do) certain things because we're a boy, girl, man, or woman, we know that these are stereotypes that may or may not hold true for our lives.

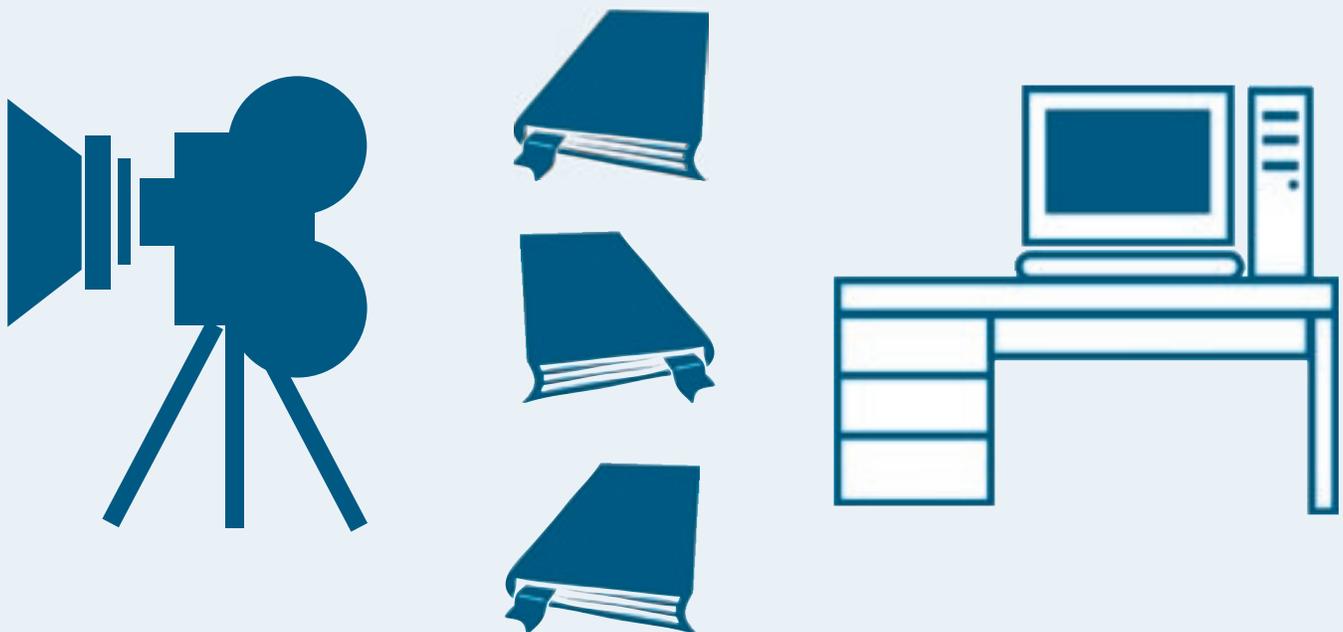
**"AS THE CHILD OF A TRANSGENDER PERSON, I HAVE FOUND GREAT VALUE IN WITNESSING MY PARENT'S TRANSITION FROM MALE TO FEMALE. I HAVE A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION. ULTIMATELY, MY DAD HAS SET AN EXAMPLE FOR ME TO TRULY BE WHO I AM, SIMPLY BY BEING HERSELF." - MONICA C-L, AGE 27**

**Thanks!**

**"TRULY BEING ABLE TO BE YOURSELF IS INCREDIBLY LIBERATING AND A GREAT SOURCE OF JOY - PEOPLE SEE THAT AND APPRECIATE IT." - DOUG S, AGE 29**

Thank you for reading the KOT Resource Guide. To connect with the Kids of Trans program, find KOT community, and get involved please contact [kidsoftrans@colage.org](mailto:kidsoftrans@colage.org).

The following section includes resources, which are also available on our website - [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org). *Transition Tips for Parents* includes some useful information for transitioning parents. Our *Legal Q&A for Kids of Trans Parents* provides valuable information about the legal aspects of transgender parenting as well as a list of transgender-friendly legal services. The *Transgender Family Resource List* provides you with many books, movies, publications, and online resources about transgender parents and their children. Finally, our resource *Not So Gay: Differences Between KOTs and People with LGB/Q Parents* highlights some of the unique aspects of having a transgender parent, to help you and those around you better understand your experience.



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## Transition Tips for Parents

**SEE THE TRANSITION AS NOT BEING ABOUT THE [PARENT] GOING THROUGH CHANGE, BUT THE WHOLE FAMILY GOING THROUGH CHANGE. EVERYONE NEEDS SUPPORT.**  
- STEVE VINAY G., AGE 48

Since there are very few parenting resources available to transgender people, we have included these best practices for transitioning parents. Of course, there are other issues involved in transgender parenting. See our *Transgender Family Resources List* for publications, websites, and parenting organizations.

Coming out to family is a major issue for transgender people and can be a difficult process. Please keep in mind that **THE ENTIRE FAMILY TRANSITIONS**, not just the transgender parent. Every member of the family needs time and support to adjust to the changes of a gender transition. The process of acceptance can take a while and is often ongoing. **YOU CAN LET YOUR CHILDREN KNOW - THROUGH LANGUAGE AND ACTION - THAT, NO MATTER WHAT, YOU WILL STILL BE THEIR PARENT.**

As a parent, remember that your children come first and your transition comes second. Transition is an inherently self-focused process, as you align your body and appearance with your gender identity. The best way to be a responsible parent during transition is to **MAKE YOUR CHILDREN A MAJOR PRIORITY THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS**. Sometimes this means that you have to compromise your ideal time frame for your transition in order to keep relationships with your family healthy. We suggest working with a transgender-competent therapist to deal with your own issues before coming out to your kids. **THE MORE COMFORTABLE YOU ARE WITH YOUR DECISION, THE EASIER IT WILL BE TO ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS AND SUPPORT THEM THROUGH YOUR TRANSITION.**

**HOW YOU TELL YOUR CHILDREN IS CRITICAL.** Try to avoid coming out around the holidays or major family events, when there is often extra pressure and expectations. You can **HAVE THE CONVERSATION IN A SAFE SPACE WITH PLENTY OF TIME**, where the conversation can't be overheard and where they will feel comfortable continuing the conversation.

Knowing your kids and the way they process will help you decide just what to say. If you are nervous, you can write it down first or practice with a friend. **COME OUT TO THEM IN AN AGE-APPROPRIATE WAY** that fits with their personality. It's best to keep your sentences short and concise to **AVOID OVERWHELMING THEM WITH TOO MUCH INFORMATION** (such as details about surgeries or hormones). People's responses will vary - some children will ask a million questions and others will have no reaction at all. Keep in mind that they may not want to talk about it right away or may just want some space to think things over. They may show intense emotions because this is big news. Do not take it personally if your kids are having a hard time at first. Regardless of their initial reaction, you can **MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE FOR FUTURE CONVERSATIONS**.

Many times, this is a monumental event, in that it changes the way your child sees the world. Throughout the transition, it's important to acknowledge that **THIS IS A PROCESS FOR EVERYONE** and that feelings are okay. If possible, you and your spouse/partner (or ex-spouse/ex-partner) should **CREATE A UNITED FRONT** to support your children through your transition, especially if you are separating or divorcing. Continue to be a responsible, caring parent and **REMIND THEM THAT YOU WILL LOVE THEM NO MATTER WHAT**. You can also provide your children with transitional objects, such as a letter or card, something they can hold onto to remind them that you will always be their parent. Many KOTs fear that they will lose their parent during or after transition. By **BEING A CONSISTENT AND LOVING PRESENCE IN YOUR CHILDREN'S LIVES**, you can maintain valuable relationships.

Children benefit when you **INVOLVE THEM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**. Try to give them advance notice about decisions you are making and how they may impact your appearance, your day-to-day lives, or your family.

When possible, make some decisions together. **RESPECT YOUR CHILDREN'S WISHES ABOUT HOW, WHEN, AND TO WHOM THEY COME OUT ABOUT YOU**. We encourage you to **GIVE THEM A SAY ABOUT WHAT TO CALL YOU** and how involved you will be in their public lives. If the decisions your child is making about these issues are hard for you, discuss your feelings with other adults, trans parents, or therapists, rather than expecting your child to take care of you.

Your child may benefit from additional support throughout your transition. You can provide them with options of other supportive adults to talk with, such as a therapist or family friend. **ENCOURAGE THEM TO CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE WITH LGBT PARENTS THROUGH COLAGE** - either locally or through the internet. As a parent, you can help them understand that there is so much difference in the world and everyone is explaining their own difference. Ultimately, that is the gift of having a transgender parent.

**"WORRYING ONLY DOES SO MUCH, AFTER WHICH IT ONLY SOURS RELATIONS, ROTTS POTENTIAL, AND UNDERMINES DREAMS. LAUGHTER GETS YOU THE REST OF THE WAY."  
- JONATHAN F., AGE 24**

Visit [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org) to:

- Connect your children with other people with trans parents through our KOT email discussion list, Pen Pal program, or a local COLAGE chapter
- Access our other resources for LG BTQ Parents and their children

Contact the Kids of Trans program: [kidsoftrans@colage.org](mailto:kidsoftrans@colage.org)



# Legal Q&A for Kids of Trans Parents

## 1. WHO IS A PARENT?

As a practical matter, a parent is a person who takes care of the daily, ongoing and long-term needs of a child, as well as a person who directs his or her moral, social, cultural, spiritual and educational upbringing. Oftentimes, a parent is a person who is also genetically related to a child (usually the father) or the person who gave birth to the child (usually the mother). That is not, however, uniformly the case. Children come into families in a variety of ways. Some children are born into a married or non-marital family unit and others are adopted. Still others develop relationships with a parent or parents over time. There is no one-size-fits-all for families.

The legal definition of who a parent is does not always match the practical reality of a child's life. Some states only recognize as a parent persons who are related to a child by blood, through marriage to the birth parent, or by adoption. An increasing number of states recognize "de facto" or "psychological" parents, persons who have formed a parent-like bond with a child or functionally served as a parent. However, not all have done so; there is usually a very high standard set for individuals to meet the definition, and the status does not always come with the full range of legal rights available to fully legal parents.

## 2. HOW DOES BEING TRANSGENDER AFFECT A PERSON'S PARENTAGE?

Being transgender should not ordinarily have any effect on one's legal parentage. It may change the way that a child relates to his or her parent but it should not change the way the legal world views the relationship between parent and child.

## 3. ARE THERE WAYS THAT A PERSON WHO IS NOT LEGALLY REGARDED AS A PARENT CAN CREATE A LEGAL RELATIONSHIP TO A CHILD?

For someone who is not related to a child by having given birth to him/her, through genetics, or by being married to the birth parent, the adoption process is the gold standard for ensuring that one's parental role is respected by other people. For those who do not adopt, in some states it is possible that a court would recognize the developed relationship (as a de facto parent, psychological parent, or through some related doctrine), but that is far from guaranteed. Attorneys who work with contemporary families strongly recommend that anyone who is a parent and wants to ensure respect for that relationship go through a formal adoption process. In some states, another alternative may be to get a court to issue a parentage judgment, which provides comparable rights to that of an adoption.

## 4. WHAT IS CUSTODY AND VISITATION?

When the relationship between parents breaks down, courts often get involved in dealing with questions about how decisions will be made that involve children, and how parents will share time with their children. This is true both for both marital families going through a divorce and for non-marital families where the parents cannot agree on parenting responsibilities and benefits.

Custody is a term that typically refers either to with whom the child will live (physical custody) or who will have authority for making major decisions regarding a child's medical care, education, religious upbringing, and other decision (legal custody). Visitation refers to the time a non-custodial parent will be able to spend with a child. Some states have gotten rid of the language of custody and visitation altogether and use parental rights and responsibilities instead.

## **5. HOW DOES BEING TRANSGENDER AFFECT A DETERMINATION OF CUSTODY OR VISITATION DURING DIVORCE OR DISSOLUTION OF THE PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP?**

Being transgender should not alone affect a court's determination of a parent's custody or visitation in a break-up. Unfortunately, many courts share the bias and prejudice that is generally pervasive in our society. We have certainly seen courts put restrictions on transgender parents that would not be imposed upon non-transgender parents. For example, one court restricted a transgender parent (a genetically male parent with a female identity) from expressing a female identity around the child. One court went as far as terminating a transgender parent's legal relationship with a child and allowing neither custody nor visitation. These examples, however, are not typical of how most courts treat transgender parents and their children during a divorce or a break-up.

More typically, we know that parents do not always act in the best interests of their children when they are going through a break-up. Sometimes because they feel both scared and desperate, a non-transgender parent may try to appeal to prejudice and bias to argue that a transgender parent should not get custody or have a limited visitation schedule. We have heard of non-transgender parents arguing that having a relationship with a transgender parent may be confusing, disturbing, or stigmatizing to a child.

We know that many of these arguments unfortunately sometimes resonate with judges and decision makers who may not know much or anything about transgender people. For this reason, we strongly encourage any transgender person going through a contested court proceeding to contact someone with expertise about transgender issues to be involved in any assessments of a child that a court will consider.

It may also be worthwhile to independently provide a court with information about what it means to be transgender and the fact that being a transgender parent has no adverse impact on children. Provided a parent is not a physical risk to a child, fostering a healthy relationship with both parents through any emotionally difficult time (and beyond) is important for all children, regardless of their parent's gender identity.

## **6. WHAT IS THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD STANDARD?**

In all cases, courts determine how parents share custody and visitation based on a standard called the Best Interests of the Child standard. This is a very imperfect way that courts have to assess how children should best be cared for by two parents who are breaking up. Using this standard, courts take into consideration factors including the roles of each parent prior to their break-up, the age of the child, and the ability of each parent to provide for the physical and emotional care of the child. Especially for older children, courts are very interested in learning what the child's wishes are. Very often a person called a "guardian ad litem" is appointed to represent the interests of the child in the legal proceedings.

## **7. DOES A TRANSGENDER PERSON'S TRANSITION AFFECT THEIR MARRIAGE OR ABILITY TO MARRY?**

Every state (except Massachusetts) allows only different sex couples to marry. In those states, as long as someone is a different sex than the person they marry at the time they marry, their marriage should be lawful for the duration of their lives, regardless of whether or not one spouse transitions. There are no reported legal decisions calling into question the validity of a person's marriage simply because one transitions after entering into an otherwise heterosexual marriage.

On the other hand, when people transition prior to a marriage, some recent cases have created legal complications for transgender people. It is difficult to generalize in this area because of the variability of state laws. Anyone who is transgender and considering marriage is well-advised to seek legal counsel to be sure that they understand the full implications of how one's legal life will be transformed by entering into a marriage.

Transgender people who have transitioned before getting married should change their gender marker on as many documents as possible before getting married. Once married, the couple should hold themselves out to the world as a married couple and complete all forms and documents as such.

## 8. HOW CAN TRANSGENDER PARENTS FIND A TRANS-KNOWLEDGEABLE ATTORNEY?

There are an increasing number of places where trans-parents can go to find legal assistance or referrals that are transgender friendly and knowledgeable. Here are some of those places:

- Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD) at 800-455-GLAD (4523) [www.glad.org](http://www.glad.org) (inside New England)
- Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (5 Regional Offices) [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)
  - New York—212-809-8585
  - Los Angeles—213-382-7600
  - Chicago—312-663-4413
  - Atlanta—404-897-1880
  - Dallas—214-219-8585
- National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)—415-392-6257 or 1-800-528-6257 [www.ncrights.org](http://www.ncrights.org)
- ACLU's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Project—212-549-2627 [www.aclu.org/lgbt/index.html](http://www.aclu.org/lgbt/index.html)
- GayLawNet [www.gaylawnet.com](http://www.gaylawnet.com)
- Many state and local bar associations have lists that identify LGBT-friendly and experienced attorneys
- Local organizations
  - Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom (BALIF)—San Francisco Bay Area—415-621-3900
  - Gay and Lesbian Lawyers of Philadelphia (GALLOP)—215-627-9090
  - GAYLAW
    - District of Columbia—202-638-1501
    - Maryland—410-514-7051
    - Virginia—866-548-0873
  - Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Chicago—773-404-9574
  - Lesbian and Gay Bar Association of Greater New York (LEGAL)—212-459-4873
  - New Jersey Lesbian & Gay Bar Association—908-830-1005
  - Sylvia Rivera Law Project—New York—212-337-8550 X3
  - Transgender Law Center (Primarily California)—415-865-0176

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## Transgender Family Resources

If you are a youth or adult with one or more transgender parents, we hope the following resources will give you opportunities to connect to community and find resources to support you. This list is also helpful for transgender parents and families looking for resources, support or advocacy opportunities. Please do not hesitate to email [kidsoftrans@colage.org](mailto:kidsoftrans@colage.org) for more information about our Kids of Trans Program. An updated version of this resource list is available online at [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org).

## Groups and Organizations for Transgender Parents & Their Children

### **COLAGE**

COLAGE is a national movement of people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents. We build community and work toward social justice through youth empowerment, leadership development, education, and advocacy.

Programs include: local chapters, online communities, visibility and support resources, Pen Pal program, the Just For Us publication, youth activism development, local and regional events, and national education and advocacy.

The COLAGE Kids of Trans program offers workshops and presentations at national and regional events as well as resources and programs specifically for people with one or more transgender parent/s. (415) 861-5437. Fax: (415) 255-8345 [kidsoftrans@colage.org](mailto:kidsoftrans@colage.org), [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)

- Kids of Trans program: [www.colage.org/programs/trans](http://www.colage.org/programs/trans)

- Pen Pal program:

[www.colage.org/programs/penpals/](http://www.colage.org/programs/penpals/)

- 2nd Gen program (LG BTQ Q people with LG BT parents):

<http://www.colage.org/programs/2ndgen/>

### **FORGE - FOR OURSELVES: REWORKING GENDER EXPRESSION**

FORGE is a national education, advocacy and support umbrella organization supporting FTMs, partners, family member, and allies. Materials addressing racism, positive sexuality, violence, and transition. Many resources for building healthy families, resolving problems in relationships, and parenting skills. [www.forge-forward.org](http://www.forge-forward.org). 414-278-6031

### **PFLAG**

Maintains more than 450 affiliate chapters across the country. Some include members of the Transgender Support Special Outreach Network. Parents, Family, Friends of Lesbians and Gays, (202) 638-1101 Fax: (202) 638-0243 PFLAG's transgender network (T-NET) can be found at <http://pflag.org/TNET.tnet.0.html>

### **NATIONAL CENTER FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY**

NC TE works for the advancement of transgender people using collaboration, education, and empowerment. 202-903-0112. [www.nctequality.org](http://www.nctequality.org)

### **NGLTF - TRANSGENDER CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT**

NG LTF is a national progressive organization working for LG BT civil rights. Their Transgender Civil Rights Project works to increase the number of state, local and federal laws that prohibit discrimination based on gender expression and identity. 202-393-5177 <http://thetaskforce.org/issues/transgender>

### **NCLR**

NCLR advocates for the legal rights of transgender people in the area of parenting, custody/visitation, second-parent adoption, and other important issues. They also provide legal information and referrals. Call 800-528-6257 or visit [www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org).

## TRANSGENDER LAW AND POLICY INSTITUTE

A non-profit organization dedicated to engaging in effective advocacy for transgender people in our society.  
<http://www.transgenderlaw.org/>

## Email Support Groups

### COLAGE ON-LINE COMMUNITIES

Moderated online lists for youth and adults with LGBT parents to build community, get support, and meet new people. Join an age-based list or sign up for the recently created Kids of Trans list. Just sign up on the COLAGE website <http://www.colage.org/programs/online>

### ACTP YAHOO GROUP

Moderated email group for adults (18 and over) with transgender parents. Email [Zephyr117@comcast.net](mailto:Zephyr117@comcast.net) to sign up.

### GENDERQUEER AND TRANSGENDER PARENTING LIST (GQTGPARENTING)

An inclusive community for parents and prospective parents who are transgender, transsexual, gender variant or genderqueer. Their homepage also features a resource list for transgender parents.  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GQTGParenting>

### TSPARENTING YAHOO GROUP

Moderated email group for transsexual parents. You must request to become a member.  
Web Site: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TSParenting>

## Internet Resources And Articles

### COLAGE

Check our website for updates from the Kids of Trans program. Also, check out back issues of our newsletter, Just For Us, especially the ones focusing on gender and schools which each include sections about transgender families. You can request copies of the newsletter by emailing [colage@colage.org](mailto:colage@colage.org), or visit: [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)

### FTM INTERNATIONAL

An international organization serving the FTM community. FTMI\_AFLOAT is a listserv for significant others, family, and friends of FTMs. <http://www.ftmi.org>

### FLUFF THE BUNNY

A children's story about a bunny's journey of gender discovery. <http://home.comcast.net/~fluffbunny/fluff.html>

### GENDEROLOGY

A directory of transgender resources on the world wide web. <http://genderology.com/>

### GIANNA ISRAEL'S GENDER LIBRARY: FAMILY

by G. Israel, Articles by a therapist giving advice to transgender people and their families, including a few essays for transgender parents about coming out to their children.  
[www.firelily.com/gender/gianna/sections/family.html](http://www.firelily.com/gender/gianna/sections/family.html)

### LINDA'S TRANSEXUALITY RETREAT: LINKS AND INFORMATION FOR TRANSEXUAL PARENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Website with links to various transgender family websites. The best links provide personal stories from a few trans families. <http://www.lasimpson.org/PARENTS.html>

### LIVE JOURNAL COMMUNITY - TRANSGENDERED PARENTS AND PARENTS-TO-BE

This is a LJ community for transgender people and their partners who are parents, parents-to-be or are trying to conceive. You need a LiveJournal account to join this group. [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)

### **MY FATHER, SHE...**

A blog created by the son of a transgender parent who was publicly fired from a private college when she transitioned. There are posts from the son and both parents. <http://blog.myfathershe.com>

### **MY HUSBAND BETTY MESSAGE BOARDS**

Message boards created and moderated by Helen Boyd, a author of My Husband Betty, with a focus on partners. Includes a forum devoted to raising kids. Users must log-in to view message board contents. <http://www.myhusbandbetty.com/community/forumdisplay.php?f=34>

### **MY MOMMY IS A BOY**

Article discussing issues of transgender parenting with advice for parents coming out and mention of COLAGE Kids of Trans program. (Title taken from the children's story 'My Mommy Is a Boy' which can be ordered at <http://jcarsner.tripod.com/id23.html>) News story at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=4536604&p.=1>

### **THE QUEER ISSUE, TWO DADS WITH A DIFFERENCE-NEITHER OF US WAS BORN MALE**

P. Califia-Rice. Village Voice. June 21, 2000. <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0025/califia-rice.php>

### **A SEAT ON THE SOFFA**

A blog written by Monica Canfield-Lenfest about her work to increase visibility and develop resources for people with transgender parents. <http://supersoffa.blogspot.com>

### **SUSAN'S PLACE, TRANSGENDER RESOURCES**

A good place to search for Transgender information, articles, groups and so on. website: <http://www.susans.org>

### **TRANSFAMILY**

Homepage of Transfamily of Cleveland, a support network created by the parents of a transgender person. This website includes links, email lists, books, and other resources for family members of transgender persons. [www.transfamily.org](http://www.transfamily.org)

### **TRANSPARENTCY**

A great website, dedicated to the protection of transgender people's right to be a parent, and their love for their children. [www.transparentcy.org](http://www.transparentcy.org)

### **TRANSEXUALISM FAQ FOR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS, FRIENDS, FAMILY AND ALLIES**

A Trans 101 for people close to someone undergoing a gender transition. <http://www.tsfaq.info/cgi-bin/index.cgi>

### **WITH CHANGE, ACCEPTANCE IS KEY: TWO BROTHERS SHARE HOW THEY COPE WHEN THEIR FATHER DECIDED TO BECOME A WOMAN**

Lane DeGregory. St. Petersburg Times. April 15, 2007. [http://www.sptimes.com/2007/04/15/news\\_pf/Floridian/With\\_change\\_\\_acceptan.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2007/04/15/news_pf/Floridian/With_change__acceptan.shtml)

## **Books and Publications**

### **DRESS CODES: OF THREE GIRLHOODS--MY MOTHER'S, MY FATHER'S, AND MINE**

N. Howey, Picador USA, NY. 2002. The adult daughter of a straight mother and transgender father provides a memoir of moving observations, that captures the experience of growing up with a transgender father in suburban Ohio.

### **FAMILIES LIKE MINE: CHILDREN OF GAY PARENTS TELL IT LIKE IT IS**

A. Garner. Harper Collins. 2004. This book interweaves the author's personal experiences of growing up with a gay father and straight mother, with those of other adult children of LG BT parents, based on 8 years of activism and over 50 interviews. Features several adults with one or more transgender parent/s. A bigail's website also featured archived advice columns to LG BT parents. [www.familieslikemine.com](http://www.familieslikemine.com)

### **I HOPE THE BLOOD NEVER WASHES OFF YOUR HANDS: TRANSGENDER PARENTING CROSSING THE LINES**

by Loree Cook-Daniels, in *Home Front: Controversies in Nontraditional Parenting*, edited by Jess Wells. Alyson Books. 2000. An essay by the partner of an FTM parent who birthed their son, which examines the social challenges of transgender parenting.

### **LOVE MAKES A FAMILY: PORTRAITS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PARENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Peggy Gillespie. University of Massachusetts Press. 1999. A book filled with loving portraits and stories of LG BT families.

### **LUNA.**

J.A. Peters. Little, Brown, and Co. 2004. A young adult novel written from the perspective of the sister of a transgender youth. Appropriate for ages 12 and up.

### **OUT OF THE ORDINARY: ESSAYS ON GROWING UP WITH GAY, LESBIAN, AND TRANSGENDER PARENTS**

N. Howey, and E. Samuels (ed). St. Martin's Press. New York, NY. 2000. A unique anthology of stories written by teens and adults with lesbian, gay, and transgender parents. This is the largest collection of essays by people with transgender parents and is highly recommended for teens and adults.

### **THE TIES THAT (DON'T) BIND: TRANSGENDER FAMILY LAW AND THE UNMAKING OF FAMILIES**

by Taylor Flynn, in *Transgender Rights*, edited by P. Currah, R. Juang, and S. Minter. U of Minnesota Press. 2006. This essay provides an overview of family law as it has been applied to transgender parents.

### **TRANSFORMATIONS: CROSS-DRESSERS AND THOSE WHO LOVE THEM**

Mariette Pathy Allen. Dutton. 1989. Portraits of cross-dressers, some of whom are photographed with their children.

### **TRANSFORMING FAMILIES: REAL STORIES ABOUT TRANSGENDERED LOVED ONES**

M. Boenke. Waterford Press. 1999. Thirty one stories by spouses, parents, children, and friends exploring the journey, struggle, and delight of having a transgendered loved one.

### **TRANSGENDER EMERGENCE: THERAPEUTIC GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH GENDER-VARIANT PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Arlene Istar Lev. LCSW, CASAC Haworth Press. 2004. A guide for therapists working with transgender clients and their families from a clinical and theoretical perspective.

### **TRANSGENDER TAPESTRY**

A magazine focused on transgender living, featuring an advice column by therapist Ari Lev that often discusses family issues as well as an extensive resource section. Published by the International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE). <http://www.ifge.org/Category15-All.phtml>

### **TRANSITION AND BEYOND: OBSERVATIONS ON GENDER IDENTITY**

R. Vanderburgh, MA, LMFT. Q Press. 2007. A book for therapists, family, and transgender people that explains the many issues of gender transition, written by a trans therapist. One chapter focuses specifically on coming out to children. <http://www.transtherapist.com>

### **TRUE SELVES: UNDERSTANDING TRANSEXUALISM FOR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COWORKERS AND HELPING PROFESSIONALS**

M. Brown, and C. Rounsley. Jossey-Bass. 1996. Practical information to help people close to a trans person to understand transgenderism.

### **TRUMPET**

J. Kay, Pantheon Books, 1998. Fictional work that describes how a widow and a adult son cope when the FTM father dies and his transsexuality becomes public.

## Movies

### **THE ADVENTURES OF PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT**

A road movie about three transgender women driving through Australia. Toward the end of the film, one character meets her young son. 1994. Written and directed by Stephan Elliot.

### **THE ADVENTURES OF SEBASTIAN COLE**

A coming of age indie film about a teenager who lives with his transgender step-parent and engages in risky behavior. The parent's coming out scene is fairly realistic, but there is an unrealistic death that may be difficult for some viewers. 1998. Rated R. Written and directed by Tod Williams.

### **ALL ABOUT MY FATHER**

This documentary is a touching portrait of a well-respected doctor and cross-dresser in a small Christian community in Norway, told with warmth and nostalgia by the only person who could make such a film -- his son. 2002, Norway. Directed by Even Benestad.

<http://www.nfi.no/english/norwegianfilms/show.html?id=16>

### **IN MY SHOES**

A documentary film directed by Jen Gilomen and produced by the COLAGE Youth Leadership in Action Program. This film follows the lives of five youth from LG BT families and includes one youth being raised by her transgender (FTM) guardian. This is a great tool for raising public awareness of issues impacting COLAGErs.

<http://www.colage.org/inmyshoes>

### **MYTH OF FATHER**

This documentary by Paul Hill provides an intimate look into the lives of Paul's family as they relate to his MTF father. 2003. <http://hillyboob.com/MOF/MOFMain.htm>

### **NO DUMB QUESTIONS**

A film by Melissa Regan. This documentary follows three young girls' conversations about gender and acceptance when they learn that Uncle Bill will soon be Aunt Barbara. This is a good resource for talking to younger children about a family member's transition.

[www.nodumbquestions.com](http://www.nodumbquestions.com)

### **NORMAL**

An HBO film directed by Jane Andersen and starring Jessica Lange and Tom Wilkinson. This movie follows husband and father Roy through his coming out and transition, addressing the reactions of his wife, co-workers, and two children. <http://www.hbo.com/films/normal/>

### **SOUTHERN COMFORT**

This tender documentary follows Robert Eads, a female-to-male transsexual, through the final year of his life as he battles ovarian cancer. One of Robert's adult sons is interviewed about his mom. 2001. Directed by Kate Davis. <http://www.nextwavefilms.com/southern>

### **TRANSAMERICA**

The critically acclaimed film starring Felicity Huffman as a transgender woman who discovers she is the father of a grown son and embarks on a cross-country road trip. This movie explores issues of family, passing, and secrecy, and is intended for an adult audience. 2005. Directed by Duncan Tucker.

### **TRANSPARENT**

A documentary film by Jules Rosskam about 19 female-to-male transsexuals living in the United States who have given birth and, in all but a few stories, gone on to raise their biological children. 2005. <http://www.transparentthemovie.com>

## YOU DON'T KNOW DICK: COURAGEOUS HEARTS OF TRANSSEXUAL MEN

A documentary film featuring six transmen reflecting on their experience of transition from female to male. One of the men has three grown children who are interviewed, one of whom is still struggling with her parent's transition. 1997. Produced and directed by Candace Schermerhorn and Bestor Cram.

## Scholarships

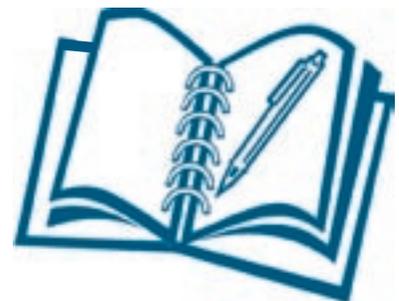
### LEE DUBIN SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORED BY COLAGE

The Lee Dubin Scholarship is for students who have one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents. The scholarship is to help fund undergraduate students who have a demonstrated ability in and commitment to affecting change in society and have financial need.

<http://colage.org/programs/academic/leedubin.htm>

### THE TRANSGENDER SCHOLARSHIP AND EDUCATION LEGACY FUND

This scholarship is available to transgender students who wish to pursue a career social services, health care, religious instruction, teaching, or law. The requirements and deadline information is listed below. Scholarship applications are available online at: <http://www.tself.org> (781) 899-2212 TSELF e-mail: [carrie@tself.org](mailto:carrie@tself.org)



# Not So Gay: Differences Between KOTs & Children With LGB/Q Parents

People with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents share many similarities and differences. Our families are unique, but we find a certain commonality in our experiences. People with transgender parents have a lot in common with people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer parents. There are, however, some specific aspects of having a transgender parent that other COLAGErs do not experience. It is important for us to acknowledge the distinct experiences of certain segments of our community in order to better understand each other and celebrate the diversity of all queerspaw.

## **SEXUAL ORIENTATION VS. GENDER IDENTITY**

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer identity is based on sexual orientation, or the gender that someone is attracted to. Everyone has a sexual orientation. Transgender identity is based on gender identity, or one's own understanding of being a man, a woman, or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity. A person's gender identity is almost always visible (even if their gender identity is sometimes or often misinterpreted by others), but a person's sexual orientation is not always visible. Whereas sexual orientation affects a parent's relationship to potential partners, a parent's gender identity impacts how they relate to the world at large. A parent's sexual orientation and a parent's gender identity thus impact their children in different ways. (For example, if I am in public with my gay parent, people may not know that they are gay. Whereas if I am in public with my transgender parent, people may suspect that their gender expression differs from their assigned sex.)

## **SOCIETAL AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE**

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer people have made incredible progress over the last few decades in increasing visibility and acceptance in society. Transgender people have also made progress, but have been less visible and less accepted than gay and lesbian people. While transgender people are becoming more visible, the fact that they have children is less widely known. In contrast, most Americans are aware that gay and lesbian people may have children. Visibility for our families can also be challenging within the LGBTQ community - for example, a family of two women and two children is easily read as a queer family whereas transgender parents might be read as (or identify as) straight, sometimes complicating our access to LGBTQ community.

## **LEGAL PROTECTIONS**

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer people have more legal protections than transgender people. Many states have anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws regarding sexual orientation, but not gender identity and expression. Depending on the state, transgender parents can also face immense challenges in court custody cases, leaving children vulnerable to being taken away from or legally estranged from a parent.

## **TRANSITION**

Many people with transgender parents witness their parent's transition from one gender to another. A parent may change their pronouns, name, appearance, and mannerisms during the transition. This may be a major challenge for KOTs, who go through a transition of their own in relation to their transitioning parent. As we witness our parent change their gender, we may grieve the loss of our parent's former self. We struggle with understanding and/or re-establishing our relationship to our parent as they become who they need to be. There are also assumptions about surgeries, hormones and other medical states of transgender people. As KOTs, we are often forced to hear or answer invasive questions about the medical processes, genitalia or other details about our parents.

## **PRONOUNS AND NAMING**

We are taught that mothers are women and fathers are men. Having a transgender parent challenges this assumption. KOTs may call their mother "he" or their father "she". Adjusting to new pronouns takes practice, so when a parent transitions, switching pronouns can be a big challenge. Some parents change their name, as well, to reflect their new identity. A parent who transitions from female to male may no longer want to be called "Mom" in public. Children often relearn how to refer to their transgender parent in ways that feel comfortable for both the parent and the child.

## **TRANSPHOBIA IN THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY**

As people with transgender parents, KOTs often encounter transphobia in the world. Sometimes, lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer people are transphobic toward our families or other transgender people. Just because someone is LGBTQ (or has an LGBTQ parent) does not necessarily mean that they understand transgender issues. Even in gay-friendly spaces, we may hear negative comments about drag queens or other trans folks. You can respond to these comments by reminding people that many LGBTQ people are often targeted for their gender expression, which is the basis of discrimination against transgender people, too.

**DO YOU HAVE A TRANSGENDER PARENT? WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

**VISIT [WWW.COLAGE.ORG](http://WWW.COLAGE.ORG) TO:**

**CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE WITH TRANS PARENTS THROUGH OUR KOT  
EMAIL DISCUSSION LIST OR PEN PAL PROGRAM**

**FIND A LOCAL COLAGE CHAPTER NEAR YOU**

**JOIN OUR SPEAK OUT PROGRAM**

**GET IN TOUCH WITH THE KOT PROGRAM AT [KIDSOFTTRANS@COLAGE.ORG](mailto:KIDSOFTTRANS@COLAGE.ORG)**



# About My Family

# ABOUT COLAGE

## COLAGE MISSION

COLAGE is a national movement of children, youth, and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ) parent(s). We build community and work toward social justice through youth empowerment, leadership development, education, and advocacy.

## COLAGE VISION

We envision a world in which those of us with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents or families are connected to a broad community of peers and mentors, are recognized as the authority of our experiences, belong to respected and valued family structures, and have the tools and support to create and maintain a just society.

We envision a world in which all families are valued, protected, reflected, and embraced by society and all of its institutions; in which all children grow up loved and nurtured by kinship networks and communities that teach them about, connect them to, and honor their unique heritage; and in which every human being has the freedom to express sexual orientation, gender identity, and self.

We envision being part of large movements to transform school systems, social services, mental and physical health systems, media, legislatures, legal systems, and all religious institutions to heal from and end all forms of oppression, discrimination, bigotry and hatred.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Monica grew up in Vermont and attended college in Boston before moving to San Francisco in October 2007 to complete an eight month Kids of Trans Fellowship with COLAGE. She discovered COLAGE while writing her thesis "She's My Father: The Social Experience of Children with Transgender Parents" and has been involved as a Family Week facilitator, COLAGE Boston chapter co-coordinator, and coordinator of the Kids of Trans program.

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