

My Child is Transgender: Ten Tips for Parents of Adult Trans Children

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Matt began his transition from female to male in 1997, and since that time, he has educated thousands of people across the country through his speaking engagements, trainings, books, and blog. He provides keynotes, workplace and organizational training, and consulting on trans issues.

Introduction

When I started my transition from female to male in 1997, I did everything my therapist asked me to do – I cut my hair, stopped wearing makeup, changed my wardrobe, and went to work on developing a more “masculine” public persona (not all trans people come by their authentic gender expression naturally – socialization is a very powerful phenomenon). There was, however, one thing that I didn’t do — I didn’t tell my coworkers or subordinates that I was transitioning. That might seem like a minor oversight compared to everything else that was happening, but it was, in fact, a huge mistake. I didn’t foresee the damage that this “slight omission” might cause around the office. I had no idea that the rumor mill was grinding out tales of my imminent demise from cancer, and that everyone thought that I had cut my hair and stopped wearing makeup because I was undergoing chemotherapy.

The truth is that I was afraid – afraid of judgment, afraid of rejection, afraid that those whom I supervised would not want to work for me anymore, and those whom I worked alongside would refuse to work with “a transsexual.” My fear kept me from doing the most reasonable, rational, and logical thing – coming out as trans and preparing the people I worked with for this major change in my life that would also affect them. A month or so after the drastic change in my appearance, I thought it wise to let my small staff of nine know what was happening. I gathered them all in a meeting room, made my announcement, then sat back to wait for the fallout – the disgust, the complaints, and, quite possibly, the resignations. Instead, what I got was this: “We’re so relieved that you’re not dying that we don’t care what you do!” This is the good news. Your child is not dying. He or she has simply come out to you as transgender and possibly announced an impending transition.

Simply come out? You think this is simple?

Compared to many other types of news – like death – yes. No, it wasn’t simple for your child to come out to you. He or she has probably been planning this moment, struggling with this moment, and fearing this moment for weeks, months, or even years.

No, it wasn’t simple for you to hear it. You might have suspected, until now, that your child was gay or lesbian. Your child might have even told you as much. Or you might have thought that your child was somehow “different,” but you couldn’t quite put your finger on it. You might have even surmised that your child was trans, but hearing the words spoken out loud is not the same as a creeping suspicion in the back of your mind that you can allow yourself to ignore. Or maybe this was an utter surprise for you that came completely out of the blue.

No matter what you knew, or thought you knew, before the news came to you, all bets are off now. Everything has changed. And that is not simple at all. When you think about your child transitioning from female to male or from male to female, it might seem like a death to you – the death of the person you loved and raised and thought you knew so intimately. But the child you love is not dying. In fact, the child you love is finally coming to life – a full, open, authentic life that will serve him or her far better than the years of secrecy and hiding that might have come before it. The child you love is still there. The child you love has always been there, and that child has always been transgender. It’s just that you didn’t know before, and now you do. The difference is not in your child. The difference is in the new knowledge that you have about your child, how you see him or her, and how your life will be now that you are aware that you have a son instead of a daughter or a daughter instead of a son.

Your child is not dying. He or she is just starting to live. And while it really is a cause for celebration, not grief, you might not be there just yet. That's okay. You're going through a transition, too – and just like your child, you'll have to take your transition a step at a time. This little book is just one step. It's time to start.

(A note with regard to pronouns: Because of the clumsiness of constantly saying “he or she” and so on, “he” will be used sometimes and “she” will be used sometimes in this book. We're talking about your child. You can fill in the correct pronoun, which is, as we'll discuss later, the pronoun that fits the gender with which your child identifies.)

Tip 1: Lose the Blame

This is not your fault. You did nothing wrong. You weren't a bad parent (or maybe you were sometimes, but it didn't cause this). There is nothing you could have done to prevent this.

While we don't know for sure what causes incongruity between gender identity (the gender a person believes him- or herself to be) and biological sex (a person's body – chromosomes, genitalia , and secondary sex characteristics), we do know that it is not a result of environment, parenting practices, or any other factors imposed from the outside. There are several theories, including brain differences and levels of exposure to certain hormones at certain stages of fetal development, and the most feasible explanations point to biological factors – factors that you, as a parent, did not control.

But the “why” really doesn't matter all that much, does it? The reality is that your child is transgender. How it happened is not important. What he is going to do about it is. And, for many people, the recommended solution is transition. If your child is announcing to you that she is going to transition, it is likely that she has already seen a therapist and is working with that therapist on her transition plan, or is at least in the process of making some decisions about it. She might be coming out to you first in the hope of getting your support through this difficult time, or he might have already started taking hormones and wants to tell you before the physical changes become apparent.

Regardless of where your child is in the process, she is not punishing you by transitioning. He is not “getting back at” you for bad decisions you might have made, for unfair discipline while he was growing up, for a divorce, or for anything else that might have taken place that was problematic for him in childhood.. Your child is making the decision to transition because, for her, it is the only option.

It's true that there are people who have a gender identity/ biological sex mismatch and who do not transition, but those who do transition do so out of medical necessity. Once you realize this, you will be able to let go of any guilt or blame that you might be feeling.

It's also possible that, once your friends find out what's happening (more on friends later), they might be tempted to ask (or just blurt out), “What did you do wrong?”

In addition to looking for a different group of friends, realize that they could be asking this because they want some reassurance that something did indeed cause this, and it's something that they haven't done, so it won't happen with their children.

One of the reasons that we like to assign blame is so that we can reassure ourselves that we are free of it, and, therefore, safe. It's the reason we're far more interested in the obituaries of people our age than

we are in those of people twenty years older than us. We want to find out what those dead people did wrong and reassure ourselves that we aren't doing it – or that if we are doing it, we're doing it in some different way.

So don't accept that blame. You're answer to "What did you do wrong?" is "Nothing."

Tip 2: Acknowledge Your Loss and Move On

Yes, I know I said in the Introduction that this isn't a time for grief. I said that your child is not dying. And I even hinted that this is not a loss. But it can easily feel like a loss, especially if you weren't prepared for the situation or had no prior warning. And although you're not losing your child, you are losing some of the things that you used to do together and some of the things that made your relationship what it was.

You might be losing the ability to go shopping with your child and try on clothes in adjacent dressing rooms. You might be losing the ability to go shopping for your child and pick out things that you once thought she would like. You might be losing the ability to share in certain activities or interests.

If your child does not want old memories dredged up in family conversations, you might feel as if you are losing not just the freedom to discuss those memories, but the actual memories themselves. If you are asked to take old photos off the walls or the mantel, or to put away mementos and keepsakes that decorate your child's former room, you might feel as if that past is being erased.

But none of that is true. You still have those memories and that past, even if your child prefers to truly leave it all behind him. After transition, some people are happy to sift through childhood photos, watch holiday videos, and share old family stories. Others prefer to leave the past in the past and concentrate on forming new memories and planning new activities that are more in sync with who they are.

Regardless of what happens, it's okay to feel some loss – and some nostalgia for the "old days." But don't we often feel that way anytime there's a change? Our lives are filled with change, and throughout it all, we often feel the pull of the past or long for the comfort of "the way things used to be."

But if we're really honest with ourselves (and how often does that happen?), we can admit that, while those times seem like a Norman Rockwell painting in retrospect, they weren't all that special when they were actually happening. At the time, they were often just another day. And, believe it or not, it's possible that what you're going through right now will actually become one of those larger-than-life nostalgic events sometime in the future (okay, maybe waaay in the future – but it could happen).

The thing about those old memories of your child, though, is that although you see them as wonderful, your child might or might not feel the same way. I remember my past as a female fondly, for the most part, but I know other trans people who do not share that view.

This doesn't mean that these memories are all false or worthless. This doesn't mean that these memories are a lie. They still happened, they're still yours, and you have a right to enjoy them in your own mind. But don't let your nostalgia blind you to the wonderful thing that is taking place right now – your child is outwardly becoming the person that she always was on the inside. Your child is finally going to be able to live an authentic life and be true to herself.

The person with whom you had those memories still exists – he’s right there in front of you. And that’s really all that matters. So acknowledge the loss that you might be feeling, and then prepare for new memory making , new adventures, and new experiences with the person you’ve always known but just didn’t realize that you did.

Tip 3: Listen to Your Child – Really Listen

One of the best things that has happened – besides your child finally finding the path to an authentic life – is that he’s come to you to talk about it. And the most important thing that you can do is listen.

It’s tempting to respond immediately with your shock and surprise. It’s tempting to break down in agony, to argue, to reject, dismiss, deny. But if you have the presence of mind to withhold judgment, opinion, advice, or condemnation, you and your child will have a much better outcome (more on this in Tip 4, coming up).

This is probably the most painful and difficult conversation that your child has ever had with you. She is, quite possibly, tearful, terrified, and maybe even physically ill. The courage that it takes to approach you with this subject is monumental – if you can’t think of anything positive or supportive to say, do, or think at the moment, you can at least admire that.

If you (and your child) were lucky enough that you responded by saying , “It doesn’t matter to me. I love you and support you no matter what,” then you get to pass Go and collect \$ 200.

But regardless of your initial response, the best thing you can do now is to remain calm and hear him out whenever he wants to broach the subject. Don’t just nod and wiggle and think about what you’re going to say next. Think about what he’s saying right now – because he’s telling you who he is. And the fact that he wants you to know says more about your relationship than any gift that he’s given you in the past, and any gift that he might give you in the future. He is giving you the gift of knowing his authentic self. And you have to listen to find out who this person – your child– truly is.

Let her talk. Let her unload everything that she’s ever wanted to say. Let her explain to you how she sees herself, how she has always seen herself, and what her plans are for addressing that identity. If she brings up transition, which she likely will if she’s coming out, it’s tempting to want to know everything about what she plans to do – hormones, surgery, name change, when, what, why, where, how. You’re brain will be spinning and you’ll have a rush of questions that you’ll want to ask – but don’t. Not just yet. This is her conversation, and it’s her decision to determine how that conversation will go and where it will lead.

On the flip side, maybe you don’t want to hear any of it. Maybe you’re not ready for all the gory details just yet, but he is more than ready to tell you. At that point, you have to be honest and say, “I want to hear everything that you have to say, and I want to support you in whatever way I can, but I need to take this a step at a time. I need to digest the information that you’ve already given me. I need to process X, and then I’ll be ready to process Y and later Z. Can we set up some times to talk further?”

While at this point, your child’s situation , his pain, his excitement, or any combination of the things he might be feeling are paramount, they don’t necessarily take precedence over your need to feel what you are feeling and to deal with the news and all that it involves in bite-sized chunks. Transition is a process, and, sometimes, finding out about it is a process, too.

Tip 4: Make Amends – and Make Them Now

If you're reading this book, it's probably because your child has already come out to you and you've had your initial conversation. In your case, maybe it didn't go well, particularly if you weren't anticipating it. Maybe you said some things that you wish you wouldn't have said and not said some things that you wish you would have. Maybe you asked some questions that you wish you wouldn't have asked and not asked others that you wish you would have. It's over. Put it behind you now. There will be many more conversations.

Maybe the conversation went so badly that there is now a rift between the two of you. You can heal that rift if you want to. This is a very sensitive time in your child's life, as well as in your own, and both of you might have said things and reacted (or overreacted) in ways that you wish you could now take back. You can't – but you can move forward. There are several things that trans people fear when coming out, especially to their loved ones. The biggest one is rejection – you aren't my son/ daughter anymore, I don't want you around until you stop talking like that, find somewhere else to live, don't come here anymore.

If this has already happened, it's not too late to reverse it, but it might take some time. Rejection, disownment, denial of the relationship – these things cut deep, and they can leave permanent emotional scars. But they can also be spontaneous reactions that might not have happened with a little foresight and consideration, and you might not have had the time or the advance warning to plan for and curtail your worst responses. Now that you've had the luxury of time, you can start to regroup and gather your strength for the reparations to come.

Another fear is dismissal – being laughed at, made light of, scoffed at, and not being taken seriously. “You?

Impossible! Why, you're the most masculine man (feminine woman) I know.”

“You? Ridiculous! Where do you get these crazy ideas? Is it those friends you've been hanging around with? Did you see something on TV?”

“You? Oh, please. This is just a phase. Take some time and you'll grow out of it.”

First of all, masculinity or femininity has nothing to do with this. How your child has expressed her gender up until now could be an act, it could be an attempt at denial, it could be a physically expressed hope that this “thing” will go away, or it could be an effort to meet your (and society's) expectations. No matter how gender conforming your child has been up to this point, she is telling you that this is not who she is. And you need to believe her.

Second, no friends and no television show (not even Chaz Bono on Dancing with the Stars) will make your child transgender. No movie, magazine article, or speaker at college can change a non-trans person into a trans person. Nothing your child has seen or done, and no one your child knows – including you – has caused this. It just is.

And third, it's not a phase. It's not a fad. Your child has likely been living with this for as long as he can remember – and probably fighting it, as well. But there comes a time when the fight is gone and the

truth wins out . If your child is transgender, he will not “grow out of it.” He might have been successful at holding it at bay for a while, but, like an unwanted houseguest, it always comes back . If your child has come out to you now, it has come back one time too many, and he is ready to move forward with it.

If you have said something you regret – or that you are afraid you might regret in the future – make your explanations and apologies and work toward patching things up. It’s okay to be upset. It’s okay to be afraid. But it’s not okay to let your child’s life go on without you in it. And, yes, she does want you there.

Tip 5: Separate Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Your child is not gay. Or maybe he is. It really doesn’t matter, because sexual orientation and gender identity are two different concepts in Western culture, and in some other cultures as well. And your child’s sexual orientation, or who he is attracted to, is separate from his gender identity, or who he believes himself to be.

It’s possible that your child has come out to you as gay or lesbian prior to coming out to you as transgender, which might make things even more confusing for you as you adjust to this new reality. There might be a couple of reasons why he or she came out as, or believed him- or herself to be, gay or lesbian.

Young people sometimes confuse sexual orientation and gender identity, and often transgender adolescents or young adults believe themselves to be gay or lesbian when they are really trans. Once they get more information and start to do some real self-analysis and self-discovery, they realize that sexual orientation is not the issue. But by this time, they might have already announced their perceived sexual orientation – to their friends, their siblings, and even to you.

And, if they’re not so young anymore, they might have lived a majority of their life so far trying to fit into the gay or lesbian community, playing a “role” that was foreign to them, but was the only answer available – until they got enough information to realize why that role never really fit.

This new information that you’re receiving is not a “take back” of what you have previously been told – it’s more of the final stage in an ongoing process of self-discovery. This does not mean that every person who comes out as gay or lesbian will later come out as trans. The majority will not. Gay and lesbian people are not transgender – but some transgender people might have identified as gay or lesbian prior to realizing or acknowledging the fact that they are transgender.

It’s also possible that your child has been happily heterosexual all of her life. Remember, sexual orientation reflects who a person is attracted to, and gender identity reflects who a person believes him- or herself to be. It’s important to separate the two concepts in your head, because trans people can be any sexual orientation, and your child’s attractions might change as she transitions, or they might remain the same.

So it’s possible that a heterosexual person can end up with a gay, lesbian, or bisexual label after transition. It’s possible that a gay or lesbian person can end up with a straight label after transition. Or it’s possible that a person who transitions will reject the labels that our culture has created to categorize sexuality.

What label your child will use, if any, and who your child will be attracted to after transition might not be apparent right now, or these things might be very clear. The most important thing to remember is that sexual orientation, or who a person is attracted to, is not a choice, so the gender of the person or people your child decides to date, and the gender of the person he might partner with or marry, will reflect a natural, biological attraction. What label he gives to that attraction will be his choice. The attraction itself will not be.

Your best bet is to skip the labels and accept your child's partner into the family. People, not labels, are what matter most. This is the child you raised, and you know that she will make the right choices.

Tip 6: Gather Information

With knowledge comes power – the power to understand, accept, and move toward a better tomorrow. There are books, blogs, websites, conferences, and a host of other learning tools available that allow you to formulate a deeper understanding of your own child's experience, as well as the diverse experiences of the larger trans community.

The Internet has been a tremendous boon to both trans people and their loved ones. It has allowed isolated trans people to get information, communicate with each other, and form a sense of community and belonging. It has also provided a way for parents, family members, and other loved ones to educate themselves on trans issues.

Your child will obviously tell you about himself and his own experience. But he's going through a lot right now, and there are other people in his life who are also asking questions. He can easily tire of repeating the same stories and rehashing the same information. You can help your child and yourself by doing a little self-education.

But there is so much information out there that it's easy to become confused. Where do you start? Begin with any books, blogs, or websites that your child recommends. These are resources with which she has made some connection and that have resonated with her in some way, so these will be the ones that will help you gain insight into her personal situation. But once you have finished those, branch out and check out some other voices.

Trans memoirs have become very popular and there are many to choose from. Reading about the very similar and very different experiences of a variety of trans people will help you understand the diversity of the community that your child is entering. It will also help you see just how many different stories there are.

Books by and for parents, partners, and supporters of trans people can offer a sense of kinship, even if the experiences presented are different from your own. And general information books can give you a more in-depth understanding of trans issues and transition, which can be very helpful when you're wondering what questions to ask your child during your discussions.

Blogs and websites dealing with trans issues are an easy way to get information in short, manageable bursts. They also provide a sense of community online, because many blogs have "Comments" sections, allowing you to join in the conversation and read what others are saying about the post. Ask your child to recommend some, and then do some searching on your own. When you find a few blogs that you

like, check out their blogrolls, which provide links to other blogs. If you like one person's blog, and he or she has links to other blogs, it's likely that you will like those blogs, too.

A word of warning: sometimes mean-spirited people will come to blogs and make hateful or hurtful comments about trans people. This can be upsetting – and even scary. It's best not to engage with these people, and if you are feeling particularly fragile, just skip these comments altogether and move on to the ones that provide value. There are plenty of friendly, helpful people commenting on blogs who can offer information, support, and positive, helpful thoughts. These are the people that make it all worthwhile.

Tip 7: Stop Worrying About the Neighbors

"What will the neighbors (my friends, my coworkers, the checker at the grocery store) think?" is a common question, and you shouldn't feel guilty about asking it – to yourself, in your own head. What your neighbors think is the least of your child's worries, so don't ask her – instead, take a tip from her and make it the least of your worries, too.

You have no control over what other people think. In fact, you don't know what they think about you right now! So don't waste your time fretting over something that you can do nothing about.

The most important thing to remember is that this is not a tragedy. This is, instead, an affirmation of your child's identity. It's something to (eventually) celebrate. But keep in mind that most people's lives are not nearly so interesting, so those around you will be tempted to turn it into a drama – and for most, that temptation will be too much to resist.

So brace yourself and be prepared for the shocked looks, the too-personal questions, and the offer of a "sympathetic shoulder to cry on." Plan for the "Oh, I'm so sorry" and the "You must be devastated" and the "You're holding up so well" and the "You're so brave!" If you're lucky, maybe someone will bring you a casserole.

It's sometimes hard to keep from being offended at your well-meaning acquaintances, but avoid an immediate and negative reaction, if possible. A positive response will not only annoy them (you deprived them of their drama), but it will send the message that you are fine, that your child is fine, and that you remain the proud parent of a wonderful human being.

It's okay to call on a friend if you're struggling, and it's even okay to want a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. A child's transition isn't the same thing as that child buying a new house or even moving out of state. But for those prying eyes and ears that you would prefer to keep at bay, formulate some answers that you can haul out when necessary and that can shut the conversation down as needed.

For example:

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

"There's no need to be. I'm not."

"You must be devastated."

"I'm only devastated that my child could not have embraced her authentic self sooner."

“You’re holding up so well.”

“It’s this new anti-aging cream I just got.”

“You’re so brave!”

“Not half as brave as my daughter !” (Here, you use the gendered term that reflects your child’s true gender identity, not the term for the gender your child was raised in.)

If you happen to run across an old acquaintance who doesn’t know about your child’s transition (and that person probably lives on Mars, because interesting news travels fast), there are ways to explain without having to recite the whole Gettysburg Address (and check with your child in advance to find out how he would like this type of situation handled).

For example:

“Oh, it’s so good to see you. And how is Sally doing?”

“It’s good to see you, too. Sally is now Sam, and he’s doing just great. Thanks for asking.”

“What did you say???”

“Oh, look at the time. I’ve got to get to an appointment. It was great to see you again. I’m sure we’ll talk real soon.”

“I’m sure we’ll talk real soon.” If you don’t want to deal with it at all, or if your child has asked you not to discuss it, just ignore the question and ask something about the other person instead. People love to talk about themselves, and your friend will soon forget that she asked about your child at all as she catches you up with her life story.

The takeaway here is that you will never control other people’s thoughts, opinions, or judgments, and you have better things to do with your time than to try. When your neighbors (friends, coworkers, and the clerk at the grocery store) see that you are unfazed by this development and supportive of your child, they will soon lose interest and move on to something else.

As far as your very close and true friends are concerned, you already know what they will think – that you are as fantastic as they always thought you were. That’s what real friends are all about, and those are the ones who matter.

Tip 8: Respect Counts for Everything

If you are reading this book, you have made the wise decision to deal with the fact that your child is transgender and that he is considering – or is going to – transition. You might not be at the point yet of embracing this development, but you have not turned away from your child. Your support is admirable and appreciated – not just by your child, which is obvious, but by the larger trans community. We hold our allies in high esteem.

But what are the very best ways to support your child? There is one that stands above all others in the trans-support hierarchy – respect. This includes respect for your child’s authentic identity, respect for

her needs, respect for her privacy, and respect for her for doing one of the scariest, most exciting, and most important things she has ever done – making the decision to live as herself.

So how do you show your respect? Let me count the ways.

1. First and foremost, respect for your child's authentic identity includes using your child's chosen name and preferred pronoun. For most trans people, the pronoun of choice will be the one that reflects their gender identity in your current culture's gender system – "he" or "she" for those in Western culture. And the new name generally comes far more easily than the new pronoun.

You might find yourself using the correct name and the wrong pronoun on many occasions. Give yourself a break. This is perfectly normal. As long as you're trying, you are respecting your child's identity, and you will eventually get it. The only time this is a problem is if you are truly not trying, or if you are intentionally using the wrong pronoun in anger or spite. If that's the case, take a breather, reread this book, talk further to your child, and do some real soul-searching to determine if you're being honest with yourself about how you feel and how well you are handling this.

If your child requests that you use a gender-neutral pronoun, such as "hir," "ze," "nu," or something else, this will be even more difficult. We aren't programmed to think in these terms in Western culture, and in many other cultures as well. We aren't used to these pronouns. Even many people in the trans community struggle with gender-neutral pronouns, because they are not in our usual vocabulary. Using these pronouns on a regular basis will eventually come naturally, but for now, have patience with yourself, be extra forgiving of yourself when you slip up, and request the same things from your child.

Other ways to respect your child's authentic identity include buying gifts that reflect your child's authentic self; politely correcting others who misgender your child (this is best done in private, not in front of a group); treating your child the same way that you treat your other children of the same gender; and bringing up past memories, hauling out old photos and videos, and rehashing old times only if he wants to.

2. Respecting your child's needs is easily done as long as you maintain an open line of communication. Listen to what she's saying. Ask her what she needs from you. Ask her how she would like situations handled, such as a pronoun slip in public, running into an old friend, family reunions, and other potentially uncomfortable situations. Don't make assumptions based on what you see now in front of you or what you know of your child from the past. Ask. Then listen. Then do.
3. Respecting your child's privacy includes refraining from asking personal questions about his body (unless he has opened that door for you). It's unlikely that you would ask your grown non-trans children about their genitalia, sex life, bathroom habits, or anything else along those lines unless these are typical discussions in your household. Treat your trans child in the same way. However, he might need a sounding board about hormones and/ or surgeries. She might want you to be present during a particular surgery, and she might need someone to take care of her afterward.

So let your child know that you are available to discuss any aspect of transition that he is comfortable with, but that you will not pry. (It is fair, however, to ask what visible physical changes you can expect to see and when. It is also fair to ask about any possible health challenges, life-threatening situations, and so on, if your child has a health condition that you are concerned about.)

Other ways to respect your child's privacy include not outing him (revealing that he is transgender) to others without his permission ; not discussing the intimate details of her life or her transition with others, even if they know she is trans; and not trying to get information about him from other people, such as a best friend or partner – you are also putting that person on the spot.

4. Respecting what your child is going through involves giving her credit for being able to make the right decisions about herself and her life; recognizing that he is not always going to be happy, open, cheerful, and talkative about his experiences (nor is he always going to be sad, sullen, afraid, and confused); and acknowledging – both to yourself and to your child – that she's been through a lot, giving her credit for what she's accomplished, supporting her when she asks, and being open to the possibility that she might not always ask – so keep your parental intuition tuned up.

Tip 9: Take Care of Yourself

One thing that the loved ones of trans people often fail to realize is that they are going through a transition, too. It's not the same kind, but any change in life involves a transition period – moving from one place to another intellectually and emotionally. And while it can be rewarding and fulfilling, and you can come out a better, stronger, and happier person for it, it's still a challenge.

Even if, in the best-case scenario, you're thrilled for your child and excited about her new life ahead, you are still experiencing a significant change in your life – one that's going to require some major adjustments on your part, and one that might sap you of some physical and emotional energy. So remember to take some breaks from the situation, rely on your support system (or find one), and do some fun things for yourself.

1. Taking breaks: Transition is all-consuming at first, and those who are just starting transition sometimes have a tendency to be their own favorite topic of conversation. This will pass, but if it's getting to be too much for you, allow yourself a break – from the topic or even from your child. Even as you are supporting him, you need to ensure that your own life isn't getting away from you. You might have other children, a spouse or partner, a job, and several other areas of life that need your attention. Focusing on your own priorities can give you some needed breathing room.
2. Enlisting support: If you're having trouble dealing with your child's transition, talking with a therapist or another trusted figure might be in order. Although you don't want to violate your child's confidentiality, therapists, religious figures, doctors, and other professionals are held to strict ethical codes that require them to keep confidences. You might even consider seeing your child's therapist for some advice or referrals, particularly if he or she is a gender specialist and your child is okay with this.

The therapist will not talk to you about your child – that's confidential information, of course – but a therapist with experience in this area also knows what family members are going through and can sometimes be a great help in this regard.

Support groups for parents in similar situations can also be beneficial. If you have a PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapter in your area, that is the perfect place to start. Don't let the name fool you. PFLAG has expanded to deal with trans issues, too. If you don't have a chapter in your area, consider starting one. If you're feeling alone, there are other parents out there who are feeling the same way. Join with them. You'll be surprised what a difference it can make.

3. Having fun: What do you like to do? Plan a weekend, a day, or even an hour or two for yourself. Go shopping, take in a movie, or wander through a museum . Curl up and read a book or just take a nap. Pamper yourself a little. It's not selfish. The better you feel, the more support you will be able to offer your child, now and in the future.

Remember, transition is a process, not something that happens overnight , so you've got plenty of time.

Tip 10: Learn to Let Go

You've accepted your child's transition. You've talked to him, gotten information, and enlisted support.

You're adjusting to the name , the pronouns, the physical changes – or at least you're preparing yourself for the changes to come. But there's still one big problem – you're worried about your child.

You're worried about his health – hormones and surgery certainly carry some risks.

You're worried about her safety – there are so many stories in the news about trans people being attacked and even killed.

You're worried that he might lose his friends or partner and that he might not be able to replace either – after all, he's trans.

You're worried that she might lose her job – and, if she does, who will hire her? How will she support herself?

Will he end up homeless, unemployed, unloved? Does he know? Is he prepared?

Of course there are risks to any medications or medical procedures. Trans people – especially trans women, and particularly trans women of color – are at high risk of assault. Transition can negatively affect friendships and relationships. There are high rates of unemployment and homelessness in the trans community.

All these things are true. But life holds no guarantees. Bad things can happen to anyone, trans or not, and we can't stop living because of it.

Your child is very aware of these risks. He has thought about all these things, and he has determined that the need to transition outweighs any possible risks he might face. She is an adult and it's time to let go, like you have (or have tried to) with all your other concerns about what can happen to loved ones out in that big, scary world.

Remember, you raised this person. You might have made some mistakes along the way, as all parents do, but you did the best you could, and you probably did a pretty good job. So trust your child and trust yourself – trust that you have equipped him or her with the good judgment to make the right decisions and with the tools to carry them out.

Best of luck to you and your child on your respective life journeys. Don't forget to enjoy the ever-changing scenery.

For extra help or information, please visit my award-winning blog and website at tranifesto.com . For additional support, look for a PFLAG chapter in your area and check out TransYouth Family Allies (primarily for parents of younger children and adolescents).

Kailey, Matt (2012-05-24). My Child is Transgender: 10 Tips for Parents of Adult Trans Children (10 Trans Tips) (Kindle Locations 355-356). Tranifesto Publishing. Kindle Edition.