

What Does It Mean to be Transgender

A Transgender Guide for Families

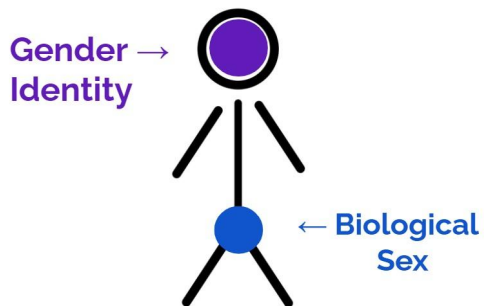
Your initial response upon hearing that a family member is transgender can range from shock and disbelief to curiosity and compassion.

Arming yourself with **credible and accurate information** about *gender identity* and what it means to be *transgender (trans)* is the best place to start your journey of understanding and acceptance.

What does it mean to be transgender?

People who identify as “transgender” experience an internal sense of self as male or female- called *gender identity* - that differs from their sex assigned at birth. An estimated **1.6 million people** in the U.S. (13+ yrs) identify as trans.

For most of us, our gender identity and biological sex align. For example, you experience yourself as female (male) and this experience aligns with your physical female (male) body.



For a transgender individual, gender identity and biological sex are *misaligned*. Persistent feelings of distress and discomfort resulting from this misalignment is referred to as *gender dysphoria*.

What is Gender Affirming Care?

Gender affirming care refers to the variety of psychosocial and medical interventions that can help trans men and women mitigate gender

dysphoria and live more authentically. In the U.S. today there are 60+ comprehensive gender identity clinics, many at major medical centers like the Cleveland Clinic, that provide high levels of care for trans individuals (see wpath.org).

What does transition look like?

Each trans person embarks on a self-determined journey of change. One person may **adopt a new nickname, change pronouns, and present differently**. It will take some time and practice for you to change how you address your loved one. If you slip up, simply apologize and correct yourself. As long as you are respectful, a little humor can ease the transition for everyone. “Oops! I did it again! What I meant to say is ‘she’ enjoys writing poetry.”

Many trans persons seek **counseling (therapy)** with a qualified professional to help mitigate feelings of distress, explore transition options, and receive on-going emotional support. You may also benefit from therapy, especially if you are struggling to understand and accept your loved one.

Another transition step is to start **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)** under a doctor’s supervision. Physical changes (e.g., losing or adding muscle mass) are gradual and may take up to a year or more for full effect.

Many (not all) transgender men and women may seek **surgical reassignment**. The benefits of surgery for improving the quality of life for trans people are well established.

The decision to update **identity documents** is up to the individual. The legal process is usually determined by the person’s jurisdiction.