



**POZITIVE  
PATHWAYS**



A GUIDE FOR  
**PARENTS & GUARDIANS  
OF TRANS YOUTH**

# A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS OF TRANS YOUTH



This resource was created based on invaluable input and feedback gathered by trans and non-binary youth in Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent, as well as their parents. It was kept short and simple and is just a beginner's guide! There is so much more to learn, and there are many more detailed resources available. A list of some options is included at the end! It's important to continue learning and educating yourself, but it's always good to start somewhere.

## COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Many of these words can mean different things to different people. It's always good to ask your child about the language they use to describe themselves and what it means to them!

### Sex

Sex is the biological and physiological parts of you that make you male, female, or intersex. This includes your genitalia, your hormones, and your chromosomes. Your sex is generally determined at birth, but sometimes people only discover they are intersex later in life.

### Gender

Gender is the internal feeling of being a man, a woman, both, or neither. It's socially constructed and can change over time.

### Transgender and Trans\*

When someone's sex doesn't match up with their gender (for example, if they were assigned male at birth but feel like a woman) they might consider themselves "transgender." Transgender is often used as an umbrella term for many other identities. It can be shortened to "trans" or "trans\*," which can also be used as a prefix, such as in "transfeminine" or "transmasculine."

### Cisgender

The opposite of transgender is "cisgender," or "cis." It just means that your gender and sex match up, and you don't feel any disconnect. The majority of people in the world identify as cisgender!

### Intersex

Intersex refers to anyone whose biological sex doesn't align completely with either male or female. This might mean ambiguous genitalia, having both a penis and ovaries, chromosomes other than XX or XY, or something else completely. Some intersex people consider themselves part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, but not all of them do.

### Deadname

When a trans or non-binary person starts going by a new name, their former name might be considered their "deadname." It's considered very rude or offensive to use that name if you know it is no longer used.



## Non-binary

A non-binary person is anyone whose gender identity doesn't fit into the narrow boxes of either "man" or "woman." They might feel like both, or neither. Again, this is an umbrella term, and many gender identities might fall under the general spectrum of "non-binary." "Genderqueer" is often used to mean the same thing, though personal definitions will vary.

## Genderfluid

This can refer to someone who feels like their gender identity changes over time. For example, they might feel more like a boy one day, and more like a girl the next.

## Gender Nonconforming

This refers to someone who doesn't follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on their sex.

## Gender Dysphoria

The sense of significant distress that a person may have because of a mismatch between their assigned sex and their gender identity. This can be exacerbated by the inability to look how they want or the feeling that people are not seeing them as their true gender. Not all trans people experience significant gender dysphoria.

## Genderqueer

See: Non-binary

## Gender Euphoria

The sense of powerful joy or relief that people feel when their sex and gender do match, or when people perceive them as their true gender. This can be considered a better signifier of being "truly trans" than gender dysphoria.

## Packer

A packer is an object that some transmasculine people insert into their underwear to create the outwards appearance of a bulge, as a way of relieving gender dysphoria.

## Binding

Chest binding, or just binding, is the process of flattening the appearance of breast or chest tissue by wearing a special chest binder or other methods. Binding can be dangerous if done incorrectly, but there are many safe binders available for bodies of all shapes and sizes.

## Tucking

Tucking is the process of making the outward appearance of a crotch bulge less visible by arranging the penis and scrotum between the legs and buttocks. A gaff can be used to assist in this.

## Gaff

Gaffs are special compression underwear designed to reduce the appearance of a crotch bulge and to make it easier for people to "tuck" the penis and scrotum.

# HAPPINESS

Some words you may have heard before to describe 2SLGBTQ+ people are no longer in use, and are often considered offensive or slurs by the majority of the population. You should avoid using them unless someone specifically self-identifies with these words. They include: Transsexual, Tranny, Transvestite,

Shemale, Ladyboy, and Boygirl. The word “queer” CAN be offensive, though many 2SLGBTQ+ people are trying to reclaim this word. It’s still best not to use it unless you identify as 2SLGBTQ+ yourself, or you’re using it to describe someone who self-identifies this way.

## PRONOUNS

Someone’s pronouns are how you refer to them in conversation with someone else—everyone has them! Typically, we use “he/him” for men and “she/her” for women, but when it comes to trans and non-binary people, it can get a little more complicated. Some people will just want their pronouns to reflect a different gender, and others will want to use more gender-neutral pronouns. What someone chooses for their pronouns is personal to them, and just depends on what makes them feel best!

Some people might introduce themselves to you with their pronouns so that you know which ones to use for them. You can do this too! Normalizing the act of sharing your pronouns helps trans and non-binary people to feel safe doing so. You can just say, “My name is XYZ, I use she/her pronouns.”

Below are some common pronouns and how they’re used in sentences.

### HE/HIM/HIS

“He went to the store today and bought himself new clothes. His sister joined him.”

### SHE/HER/HERS

“She loves reading, her favourite genre is mystery.”

### THEY/THEM/THEIR

“They just walked by, did you see them? Their outfit was amazing!”



## NEOPRONOUNS

These are any pronouns outside of the usual! There are many variations, and it's always a good idea to ask someone how to use their pronouns in a sentence. Some examples are:

**NE/NEM/NIR**

**XE/XEM/XIR**

**EY/EM/EIR**

## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MAKE MISTAKES

- It's common to make mistakes with people's pronouns, especially at the beginning! It's important to try to get someone's pronouns right, but that doesn't mean you need to make a huge deal out of correcting yourself. If you notice you've made a mistake with someone's pronouns, just apologize quickly, correct yourself, and move on. It's as simple as that! "Sorry, she was telling me—" Easy!
- If you notice that you keep making mistakes, try practicing at home or when you're alone! Out loud, talk about that person, either to a mirror or a trusted friend, using their correct pronouns. The more you practice, the easier it will be, and the fewer mistakes you'll make.
- It's also a good idea to gently correct others when they use the wrong pronouns for someone, even if that person isn't around to hear it. Holding yourself and others accountable makes a big difference!

## SOME PEOPLE HAVE MULTIPLE PRONOUNS!

If someone says their pronouns are "she/they," that means you can call them either she OR they, or even switch it up! Also, people's pronouns can change. They might tell you their pronouns are she/her, and then later say that their pronouns are he/him. Gender is fluid and self-discovery is continual! Just do your best to use the correct ones and respect their identity.

# LOVE

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

Below are some tips we collected from trans and non-binary youth that they wanted to share!

“Learn about different identities and pronouns, even ones that don’t pertain to your child.”

“Clothes are not specific to a single gender. People can dress however they want no matter their gender identity.”

“Keep an open mind and deconstruct your notions of gender.”

“It’s okay to ask questions!”

“Don’t volunteer information (like gender identity/names/pronouns) about your child without asking them first. They might not want everyone to know.”

“Not all trans/non-binary people want the same things when it comes to transitioning, so talking to your child about it is essential.”

“Even if your child identifies as something else after a while it doesn’t mean it’s a phase. Identity is fluid and ever-changing.”

“It’s normal for your child to question their gender/sexuality, even multiple times.”

“If someone misgenders your child please correct them, whether your child is present or not.”



## TRY NOT TO:

- **Process your emotions about your child's gender identity with your child.** It's okay to have big feelings about what's going on, to feel loss or fear, but it's important to talk through those feelings with a friend or family member or therapist, and not with your child. They have a lot going on already, and their own emotions to process, and they shouldn't be responsible for yours as well.
- **It's inevitable that you will mess up sometimes, and make mistakes regarding your child's gender, pronouns, or name.** It's okay to make mistakes, but don't process your guilt with your child, or try to get the okay from them that you messed up. Apologize, and then focus your attention on improving.
- **Question your child's gender presentation or clothing choices.** It might be confusing to you if your child says they're a boy but continues to dress "like a girl," or says they're a girl but wants to keep their hair short. Gender presentation is complex and fluid, and your child may perform their gender in ways that don't make sense to you. That's okay, and it's normal! Try not to ask questions about why they're doing it or criticize their choices. Ideas about gendered clothing are changing, and it's all a part of discovering themselves.
- **Conflate sexuality with gender.** You might assume that since your child is trans, they must be gay too. This isn't necessarily true! Sexuality and gender are completely different, and just because their gender identity is outside of the norm, this doesn't mean their sexual identity automatically will be as well.
- **Similarly, you can't necessarily go to your gay/lesbian/bisexual friends for help.** While speaking to anyone in the queer community can help with some of the things you're struggling with, the experiences of sexually diverse people will not be the same as the experiences of gender diverse people. If possible, talk to trans people about trans experiences.
- **DON'T** assume every trans person wants to talk to you about their trans experiences! Not everyone wants to take on the role of mentor or educator. Try to find people who have expressed interest in telling their stories.
- **Force your child to come out to everyone on their own.** If your child wants help coming out to family members and friends, and you are able to provide help, do that for them! It can be difficult for a young person to come out to everyone they know. Have a conversation about who they want or need to come out to, and how you can help them do that.



# ACCEPTANCE

- **Make your child figure out everything on their own.** When it comes to medication, hormones, surgery, etc., it's your job as an adult to do some of that work for them. Your child is just a regular child, who is also dealing with the added stress that comes with being a gender minority. It's unreasonable to expect them to deal with everything—do some of the legwork for them.
- **Assume what you see on TV will be your experience.** Although seeing trans representation in the media can be helpful, everyone has unique experiences and situations, and fiction doesn't always match up with reality. Keep your expectations realistic.
- **Assume your child wants “trans” as their identity.** Not every gender diverse person wants to use that label, or to make it a major part of their identity. The experience is different for everyone. Let them lead.

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 1. How do I know this isn't just a phase for my child?**

It's very unlikely that it's a phase or that your child will grow out of it. Gender identity can change over time, but it's rare for someone to change their mind entirely. Treatments to “fix” someone's gender identity are not effective, and very harmful. Allowing your child to explore and discover their gender is the best thing you can do for them.

Even if it is a phase, that's okay! There's no harm in letting your child explore their gender, whether or not it's “permanent.” There is much greater harm in not allowing them to grow and learn in a safe, loving environment.
- 2. Why does my child keep changing their identity?**

Gender identity can change over time! Your child may realize one label isn't quite right for them or decide something else fits them better. They may also be learning about different labels and identities for the first time, and realizing it describes them better. Or they might just feel differently about their gender than they used to. Self-discovery is a process, and we are constantly learning about ourselves.





### 3. Why did it happen so suddenly?

It likely didn't happen suddenly for your child. They have probably been thinking about or feeling this for a long time, and only suddenly felt like they could or wanted to tell or show you, or only recently put a name to their feelings.

### 4. How did I never notice it?

It's normal to have no idea this is happening in your child's life! Many youth keep it hidden as well as they possibly can, because they're uncertain about their loved ones' reactions or that things will change. They also might not have known it for themselves for a long time!

### 5. Why didn't they tell me earlier?

It may not be your fault at all. Even if you have shown them in the past that you are loving and accepting, the world has told them that people are unsafe and that bad reactions can happen to anyone. They also just may not have been ready. Maybe they felt like they had to be sure, or that they needed a plan in case it didn't go well. Focus on reassuring them that you're glad that they told you now, and that you're happy to know this about them.

### 6. How can I support my child better?

Learn about trans people and trans experiences from reliable sources. Show your child that you love them and that you will do everything you can to support them—don't just tell them. Follow their lead in difficult conversations and try to correct yourself when you make mistakes and work to make them less often. Advocate for them and try to make spaces safer for them. There are so many things you can do to support your child, but most importantly, accept and affirm them!

### 7. Is hormone replacement therapy dangerous?

If done safely, with a knowledgeable doctor's help, Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is very safe, and often reversible. Some changes are permanent; however, studies show that the positive results significantly outweigh any negative or non-desired effects. There are far more possible negative effects to not getting hormone replacement therapy when a young person feels like they need it, such as permanent changes that bodies go through during puberty, body dysphoria, depression, anxiety, and suicidal feelings. Talk to your child about what they think they need and help them find a professional who can help them navigate that.

# FAMILY

## WE ASKED TRANS AND NON-BINARY YOUTH:

### 1. What do you want your parent (or any parent of trans/non-binary youth) to know?

“I want them to know that it’s okay if you have a hard time processing it at first; however, the amount of time a parent takes “to process” is extremely important. They are allowed to have their feelings, and they are allowed time to adjust, but they can’t stay that way forever. Sooner or later, they need to come to terms with it and learn to accept their child openly otherwise it can harm their child emotionally & psychologically.”

“I think a lot of parents don’t take how much misgendering can hurt your child’s feelings seriously—not just in an “I’m upset because I’m not treated the way I want” way, but genuinely hurting your child emotionally in a way that can damage your relationship in the long-run if the misgendering is constant or intentional.”

“While it’s okay to sometimes miss how your child used to be as their assigned gender at birth, this isn’t something to grieve over. A lot of parents feel like they need to “mourn the loss”, e.g. “It feels like the daughter/son I knew is dead, I’m losing a daughter/son”. But that isn’t the case. I want parents to know that the child they knew is still here. That while maybe you’re just learning about their true gender, that’s who your child has been for years, even before they knew it. Your child is still the same person you know and love, they just want you to know them for who they really are. That kids just want parents to know them as their true selves.”

**“I WANT THEM TO KNOW THAT IT’S OKAY TO ASK QUESTIONS AND I ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO DO RESEARCH WITH THEIR CHILD.”**



“I want them to know that this isn’t about being right or wrong about my gender. It’s about what makes me feel comfortable and happy, that there is no right or wrong gender identity.”

“The most important thing is to not doubt or tease or challenge your kids’ identity. Treat them as who they are now. Pronouns, gender, love. You have to love every development and not get stuck on an idealized memory of your kid.”

## 2. What’s your biggest wish for your parent/any parent of trans/non-binary youth?

“I wish parents would just keep their mind open and try to accept their child in the best way possible; while it may be difficult for them, it’s a hundred times more difficult for the trans/non-binary person and what they need from them as a parent is just acceptance and unconditional love and support.”

**“FOR THEM TO SUPPORT ME.”**

“To be patient with their child; there’s a process with coming out and with starting the journey of making the correct and safe changes.”

“I hope that parents of trans and non-binary youth can put aside their own opinions for their child’s happiness.”

“That they stop using “it takes time” as an excuse to consistently deadname and misgender their trans child(ren) and other trans people.”



# SUPPORT

## SOME INFO ON TRANSITIONING

Transitioning, in the context of sex and gender, means the process people go through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. This can include a variety of things, but not everyone's transition looks the same.

Social transition refers to anything people do to affirm their gender in their social circles that can be done unofficially. This includes asking people to use a different name for you, changing your pronouns, dressing differently, wearing a binder or packer, cutting your hair, and using the bathroom that matches your identity.

Legal transitioning refers to anything more official you're doing to affirm your gender identity, that you must submit paperwork to do. This includes changing your name legally and otherwise updating your legal documents to reflect your gender, changing the gender markers on your health card, etc.

Medical transitioning refers to taking hormones or getting various types of surgeries to affirm your gender identity. This can range from beginning HRT so that your body changes, getting breast augmentation surgery, getting facial surgery, getting a hysterectomy, getting vaginoplasty or phalloplasty, etc.

Not everyone who identifies as trans will go through all or even any of these transitions. Some people are happy to live as they always have, just knowing and acknowledging their gender identity personally, or with a few close friends or family. Other people will seek out as many types of transitions as they can, legally and/or medically. This doesn't change how trans someone is, or how valid their identity is. There is often an unfair focus on medical transitions that change outward appearance, which make people feel like they can only truly be trans if they undergo these changes, and that's not true. It's not a prerequisite for being or identifying as trans.



## IF YOUR CHILD IS LOOKING TO MEDICALLY TRANSITION IN ONTARIO, HERE ARE A FEW THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

- Once a child has begun (but before they have finished) going through puberty, they can start hormone/puberty blockers, which temporarily pause puberty while they're on them. This gives a young person more time to decide what's best for them and stops irreversible changes from happening to their body. During this time, youth and their caregivers can decide, with medical professionals, if hormone therapy is right for them, and any next steps.
- In most cases, your current primary care provider (doctor or nurse practitioner) can provide HRT for you. If your provider is not familiar with HRT, there are resources they can access to learn about it, including Guidelines for Gender-Affirming Primary Care with Trans and Non-Binary Patients from Rainbow Health Ontario.

**THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT COVERS MOST TOP AND BOTTOM SURGERIES THROUGH THE ONTARIO HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN (OHIP). YOU MUST OBTAIN PRIOR APPROVAL FROM OHIP BEFORE UNDERGOING ANY PROCEDURE FOR IT TO BE PAID.**

- There is no age of consent for medical treatment in Ontario. This means a person can be prescribed HRT at any age if the person is deemed capable of understanding the benefits and risks of the medical treatment.
- Being on HRT does not necessarily mean you cannot get pregnant. While it's important for a trans person to consider fertility options if they want to begin medical transition, it should not be assumed that they cannot get pregnant and should continue to use birth control as needed.
- There are several different methods of receiving hormone replacement therapy, including shots, patches, gels, and more, depending on what kind of HRT you're starting. Talk to your primary care doctor about your options and what's right for you, as well as what types your insurance will cover.



# COMMUNITY

## RURAL/LOCAL CONTEXT

- There's an assumption that small/rural towns are going to be worse places to live for trans people than big cities—this isn't always true! It really depends on your community, and the people inside it. And even in the smallest towns, you can find individuals who are accepting and supportive.
- Even large cities like Toronto are facing a lack of services. Don't discount your town. Even if there are no trans-specific services, you might be able to find service providers who can help you and your child. You can do the legwork for your child to make sure your local health provider/therapist/etc. is affirming and safe.
- If you're looking for local supports, try to find out if your town has a local PFLAG chapter, and check if your local schools have Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs).
- It might be true that you will need to travel in order to find adequate support for you and your child. Look to your neighbouring communities, even the next larger town near you. You might find that they have more resources available, more experienced health professionals, or more groups aimed at 2SLGBTQ+ young people (or trans youth specifically).
- If you can't find any local supports, you can turn to online resources:
  - Outschool is a US-based online option for education, where students may be able to find a safe space and social groups, as well as take classes.
  - A lot of therapy and counselling can now be done online, and some websites, like Psychology Today, allow you to filter for counsellors who specialize in gender identity or queer issues.
  - Many social groups are run online, either locally or internationally, such as TrevorSpace. Search online for possible options in your area!



## **SOME LOCAL RESOURCES IN WINDSOR-ESSEX AND CHATHAM-KENT (AS OF FEBRUARY 2024)**

### **Positive Pathways Community Services**

For sexual health info, 2SLGBTQ+ youth groups, and harm reduction services (such as free needles for HRT)  
[pozitivepathways.com](http://pozitivepathways.com)

### **Trans Wellness Ontario**

For counselling, mentorships, help navigating transitioning, and drop-ins  
[transwellness.ca](http://transwellness.ca)

### **Windsor Pride Community**

For 2SLGBTQ+ youth groups, local events, counselling supports, a resource library, and referrals to support services  
[windsorpride.com](http://windsorpride.com)

### **QLINK**

For 2SLGBTQ+ social groups for young people aged 12 - 17 and 18 - 29  
[qlinkwe.ca](http://qlinkwe.ca)

### **Bill's Place**

For 2SLGBTQ+ support groups, ID change clinics, events, free clothing programs, peer mentorship, and advocacy  
[staging.jadeddesigns.ca/ckpride/bills-place/](http://staging.jadeddesigns.ca/ckpride/bills-place/)



## ONLINE RESOURCES

(AS OF FEBRUARY 2024)

### Rainbow Health Ontario

Great information about trans health care, including information on medical and legal transitioning, and information for healthcare professionals with trans patients.

<https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/lgbt2sq-health/resource-library/>

For HRT information: <https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Hormone-Therapy-FAQ-2023-1.pdf>

### Families in TRANSition

A longer, more detailed guide for parents/guardians of trans youth, from Central Toronto Youth Services.

<https://ctys.org/services-programs/pride-prejudice/families-in-TRANSition-fit/>

### Spectrum

Waterloo's Rainbow Community Space, with lots of online resources on trans and non-binary topics.

<https://www.ourspectrum.com/resources/>

Info about non-binary identities: <https://www.ourspectrum.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Beyond-the-Binary.pdf>

Respecting pronouns: <https://www.ourspectrum.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Understanding-Pronouns.pdf>

### Safer Sex for Trans Bodies

A resource about safer sex when you're trans.

[https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Trans\\_Safer\\_Sex\\_Guide\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Trans_Safer_Sex_Guide_FINAL.pdf)

### Gender Creative Kids

Resources for gender creative kids and their families, schools, and communities.

[www.gendercreativekids.ca](http://www.gendercreativekids.ca)





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