



SUPPORTING YOUR YOUNG GENDER NON-CONFORMING CHILD

“ For some children, expressing their gender differently may be temporary, for others it is not. ”

–Jennifer Solomon

PFLAG South Miami Chapter President
& Founder and HRC Parents for Transgender
Equality National Council Member

This guide was crafted for the parents and guardians of young gender non-conforming children to help them understand and better support their child, while empowering them in navigating common situations they may encounter. There is an increasing body of resources focused on transgender children; however, young gender non-conforming children may present, dress, play and identify differently than their young transgender and non-binary peers. Young gender non-conforming children who are supported and affirmed, and accepted by their family in general, experience higher self-esteem and better health outcomes, and are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. For these reasons, it is important for parents and guardians to make sure their home is a place where their child feels safe and loved unconditionally.

We hope that this resource can serve as a launching point for you in your journey towards understanding and supporting your gender non-conforming child. Throughout the guide, we have provided additional resources to help your family continue in your research and journey.





Check out our book list on page 6 of this resource for our Gender Non-conforming Book List that can show you more examples.

“ I’m a boy who likes girl things. ”

- Cooper, age 9

DEFINITIONS:

Sex: the biological marker assigned at birth based off of external genitalia.

Gender: one’s innermost conception of oneself, often as male, female, both or neither. It can be expressed through behavior, characteristics, and appearance.

Sexual Orientation: emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people.

Cisgender: a term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender: a term used to describe a person whose gender identity does not align with what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. This can also be used as an umbrella term by some folks for transgender, non-binary, gender expansive, and gender nonconforming people.

Non-binary: a gender identity that encompasses people who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man and woman.

Gender Expansive: conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identities and/or expressions.

What is “Gender Non-conforming”?

This is what gender non-conforming means:

HRC defines gender non-conforming as a broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations for their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. A simple and familiar example is referring to an athletic girl as a “tomboy.”

Some common terms people may use interchangeably with, or as an alternative to, gender non-conforming are “gender creative”, “genderfluid” or “gender expansive.”

This is what gender non-conforming might look like:

- + Your child desires to wear clothing that does not align with their sex assigned at birth
- + Your child becomes upset when required to wear gender-specific clothing you picked out
- + Your child is interested in toys stereotypically associated with another gender
- + Persistently, insistently and consistently asserting their preference for particular clothing, toys, or activities
- + Although transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming youth may all prefer a different gender expression or presentation, consistently identifying with their sex assigned at birth is the main difference between gender non-conforming and trans or non-binary youth

Addressing Common Misconceptions and Concerns

“Is my child gay or lesbian?”

Orientation is whom we are attracted to and gender is who we are. Young children typically don’t have sexual attractions until approaching puberty, so there is no way to be certain of orientation regardless of feminine or masculine expression in childhood; however, young children can feel affection for someone of the same gender. For example, many LGBTQ adults reflect that they “knew they were different,” or they recall having an emotional “crush” on someone of the same gender, versus a physiologically sexual feeling. Focusing on supporting your child now helps them form a positive body image, and self esteem and in no way influences their future sexual orientation, be it straight, lesbian, gay, bi, etc. Supporting your child’s gender expression and presentation is not going to make them gay.

“Will my child grow up to be transgender?”

Gender identity and gender expression are completely separate. Gender identity has to do with how someone internally identifies themselves, whereas gender expression has to do with how someone outwardly expresses themselves, perhaps through clothing, behaviors or interests. As children grow and evolve into their authentic selves, they may find they feel more whole and authentic as transgender or non-binary. Typically there are a few key times that you may see this. Early childhood



Check out these resources for more information about [transgender](#) and [non-binary](#) children.

and adolescence are some of these common times where there is significant physical and emotional growth, during which most transgender children begin to persistently, insistently and consistently assert that their true gender identity is not aligned with their sex assigned at birth.

Research suggests that gender is something we are born with, that can't be changed by any interventions. Intervening or stopping your child from expressing themselves now will not stop them from growing into their authentic identity later and, importantly: **there is no way to predict the way your child will self-identify later in life.**

Your actions now can influence your child's confidence, happiness and self-worth, and strengthen your relationship with them.

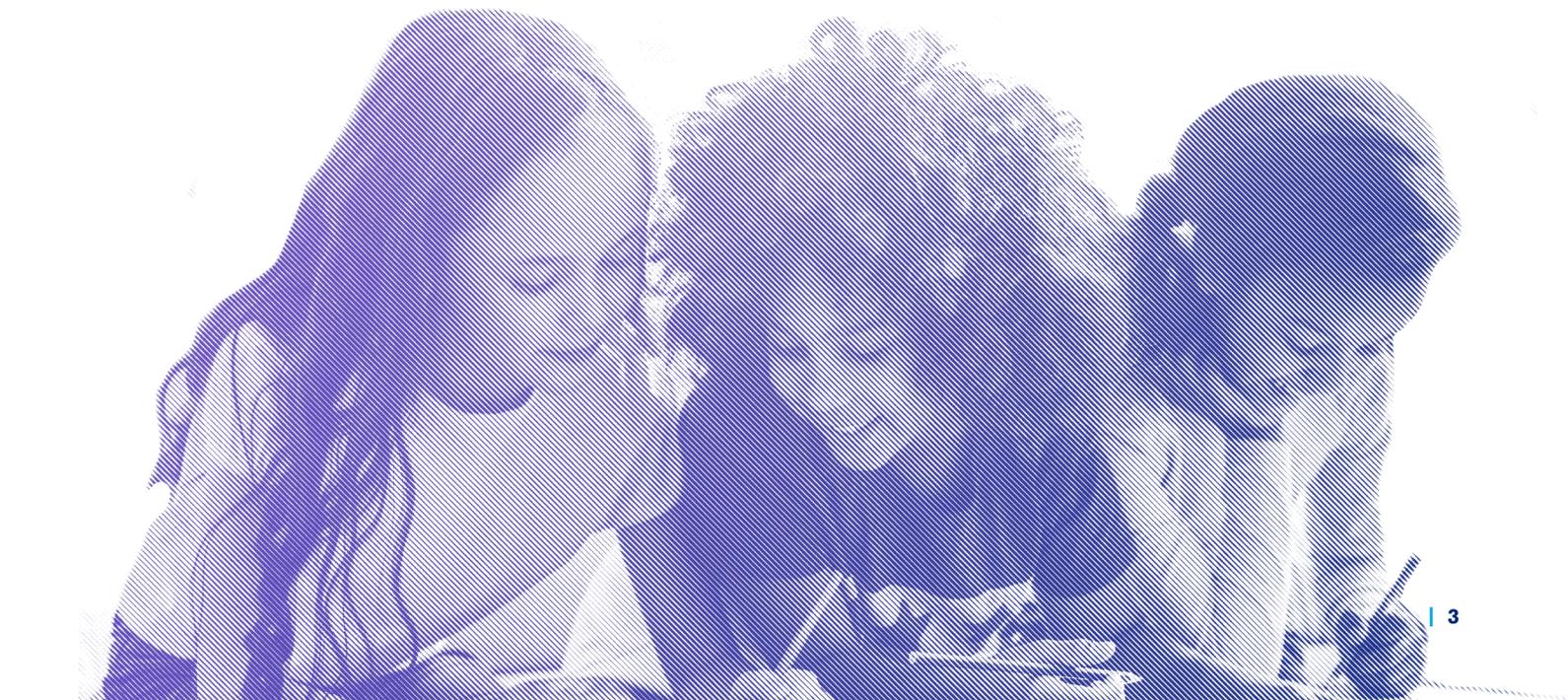
Engaging with Health Care Professionals

Parents and guardians may worry that their child's health care provider will be judgmental or misinformed about the range of gender expressions among children. In order to optimize your experience when seeking health care, whether for routine wellness checks or for emergency care, it can be helpful to review their website or materials for signs that the practice is inclusive and affirming. You can also ask questions ahead of time to determine whether the practice has experience working with LGBTQ (and specifically gender non-conforming) children.

You might also check with a local LGBTQ community center, a PFLAG chapter or a relevant Facebook parent group for a referral.

You can ask your provider if they are familiar with the American Academy of Pediatrics' [recommendations](#) specific for gender expansive/transgender youth, and assert that this is how you would like your family and your child to be treated. Having a health care professional who is educated regarding your child will be crucial for ensuring appropriate emotional as well as physical care.

Always remember that you are your child's best advocate because you know them best! Don't be shy about finding the right health care providers for your family. Some pediatricians and pediatric nurses are not up to date on the latest studies and best practices. Having the right provider will be a great support system for you.



How To Respond to Questions and Comments

You might find that people have a lot to say about your child's clothing, hair or interests — not always in a polite way or with the best intentions. Practice answering questions and responding to comments related to your child's gender expression so that you can respond more easily when the situation arises. Below are some examples of certain questions and scenarios you and your child might encounter.

Classmates

Oftentimes, your child's classmates might simply be curious and have some questions. You can turn their curiosity into impactful learning moments that will benefit your child and your child's classmates.

Classmate: *"Is *insert child's name* a boy or girl? Why is her hair short?"*

*Or: "Is *insert child's name* a boy or girl? Why is he wearing a dress?"*

Parent or Guardian: *"There are lots of ways to express yourself as a child/for children to express themselves. *Insert child's name* feels happy with this hairstyle or piece of clothing."*

Educators or Schools

Have a conversation with your child's teacher and school counselor before the start of the school year, offer [resources](#) and set expectations.

- + Be open to answering questions
- + Ensure your teacher and the school counselor will respect your child and ensure their safety
- + Provide resources for the teachers, school counselor or other school staff to help them address questions and comments from others, including students —and most importantly, to interrupt any teasing or bullying
- + Recommend modeling gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language in the classroom as well as in various school-related activities, such as physical education class or afterschool activities

Grandparents and Other Relatives

It can be daunting to explain your child's gender presentation to family, or assert your support for your child to your loved ones. For many people, there might be generational gaps or cultural reasons why they may be unfamiliar with gender expansiveness. This is also a great opportunity to remind family members that love and acceptance and courage are important values to all children. Below are some examples of how to speak with your close family members:

*"Dad, I know you love *insert child's name* and you want the best for them. This can be scary and new for you so I want to share some resources I've found that can help you understand."*

"I am raising my child in a supportive, accepting environment so that they can grow into a happy and healthy adult. Your support and love is very important to our family, so I am hopeful you will join us in our family's journey."

 HRC has an additional, [general guide](#) for engaging with grandparents about your child's gender.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

FOR PARENT AND FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS:

[PFLAG](#)

FOR EDUCATION AND CRISIS RESOURCES:

[The Trevor Project](#)

[Welcoming Schools](#)

[HRC Gender Expansive Youth Report](#)

FOR STUDENT SUPPORT GROUPS AND GSAS (GENDER AND SEXUALITY ALLIANCES):

(These organizations also provide great educational resources!)

[Gender Spectrum](#)

[GLSEN](#)

[GSA Network](#)

Keep in mind that if there are extended family members that are not on board, you may find it necessary to distance yourself and your child as a means to protect your child's well-being. Trust your child and follow your child's lead. They are the one who depends on you and your actions.

Local Community Members

How and when you respond to a person's questioning about your child's gender expression is complex. There are no wrong ways to answer, and the best advice is to ask your child what makes them most comfortable.

Sometimes, it might be easier to not address the misgendering — especially if it is a quick encounter, like with a cashier. Other times, you may want to give a simple explanation. You and your child may consider coming up with expectations around when they would like your support in correcting outsiders, or perhaps a verbal or nonverbal signal for these circumstances.

Waiter: *Hey, little guy! What would you like to order?*

Parent or Guardian: *Suzy would like the pizza please.*

Waiter: *I'm sorry. I thought she was a boy.*

Parent or Guardian: *I understand why you might have thought that, but Suzy is actually gender non-conforming, which just means that she identifies as female but feels most comfortable with short hair and jeans and a t-shirt.*

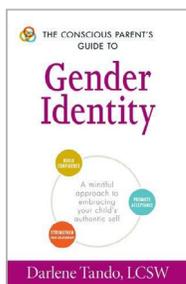
This approach validates your child and also provides you a chance to educate others. By being up front and confident, you are being a great advocate and setting an example for other parents, caregivers and community members.

You're Not Alone

Supporting and affirming your young gender non-conforming child might feel daunting at times, especially if you feel like you are the only family going through this. However, know that there are many other families like yours. According to a 2017 survey of youth by the Williams Institute, 27% of California youth ages 12-17 are gender non-conforming, ranging in how they self-identify, from very gender non-conforming to androgynous.

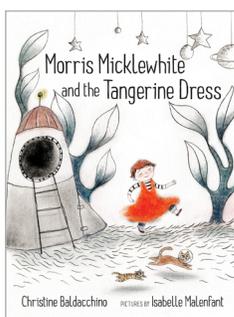
By allowing your child to express themselves in a manner that is most authentic to them, your family is reducing your child's risk of low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, boosting their positive self-and-body image and bolstering a strong bond between you as your child grows older. The 2010 study "Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults," published in the Journal of Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing, found that "family acceptance of LGBTQ youth is associated with positive mental health (Ryan et al., 2010), whereas rates of family rejection are associated with the opposite." Trust your child and support your child, and they will flourish into the wonderful young adult they can be.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING BOOK LIST



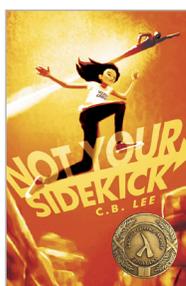
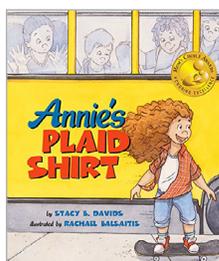
For Parents and Caregivers:

- + **The Gender Creative Child.** Diane Ehrensaft, PhD
- + **The Conscious Parent Guide to Gender Identity.** Darlene Tando, LCSW
- + **My Son Wears Heels.** Julie Tarney



For Parents, Caregivers and Elementary School Children:

- + **The Sissy Duckling.** Harvey Fierstein
- + **Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress.** Christine Baldacchino
- + **Who Are You? A Guide to Gender Identity.** Brook Pessin-Whedbee
- + **Big Bob Little Bob.** James Howe
- + **Sparkle Boy.** Leslea Newman
- + **Jacob's New Dress.** Sarah and Ian Hoffman
- + **My Princess Boy.** Cheryl Kilodavis
- + **Annie's Plaid Shirt.** Stacy B. Davids
- + **The Boy & the Bindi.** Vivek Shraya
- + **Ho'onani: Hula Warrior.** Heather Gale
- + **Julián Is a Mermaid.** Jessica Love



For Older Elementary School Children:

- + **Better Nate Than Ever.** Tim Federle
- + **Not Your Sidekick.** C.B. Lee
- + **Roller Girl.** Victoria Jamieson
- + **Steven Universe.** Rebecca Sugar