

FFLAG



HOW DO I TELL MY CHILDREN?

I'm transgender

What is FFLAG?

FFLAG is a national voluntary organisation and registered charity.

FFLAG is dedicated to supporting parents, families and their gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans loved ones.

FFLAG offers support through its website, email answering service and local parents support groups in their efforts to help parents and families understand, accept and support their lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans members with love and pride.

FFLAG volunteers are parents, carers and families of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT+) people. LGBT+ people and families still face homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in our society, which brings in its wake prejudice, bullying and alienation.

FFLAG supports the full human and civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans individuals.

FFLAG speaks out and acts to defend and enhance those human and civil rights.

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A note on language:

Language and terminology relating to transgender people can be problematic and terms which are considered useful by some people are not universally accepted. Most of the text in this booklet is direct quotation from contributors – although the quotes have been anonymised to protect identity. We have done our best to represent people in their own words.

Preface

The creation of 'How Do I Tell My Children?' was prompted by an increasing number of requests for support from trans parents who wanted to break the news to their children. This booklet has been put together by combining the experiences of transgender people and their families and friends with the knowledge and experience of FFLAG. If you want to tell your children that you are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), please see the companion booklet in this series. We know that many of the issues about coming out to your children as trans are similar for coming out as lesbian, gay or bisexual but we recognise that there are important differences too.

In our experience, even if a child's reaction is initially negative, once they get used to the idea, most children become accepting and have a good relationship with their trans parent.

Some of the words of support offered in this booklet will be more useful to you than others. Once you have read through it, we hope that you will feel more confident about talking to your family. There are links to further resources at the end of the booklet that we hope you will find useful.

If you download the digital version of this booklet from our website <https://www.fflag.org.uk/booklets-posters-forms/> you will be able to click on any links featured in this guide without having to type them into your browser.

I've got something to tell you

We know from the experiences that trans parents have shared with us, that explaining to your children that you are going to transition is something that most parents worry about, plan for and sometimes put off for many years.

The way you explain to your children and the words that you use will depend on their age and their existing relationship with you, but there have been common themes in the experiences we've collected. Most people have started by doing some groundwork to prepare their children and make sure that they will be able to understand what they are being told. Here are some of the tips they have shared:

"My wife and I have been pointing out lots of gender roles to the kids, making them aware that boy/girl stuff really isn't. We have had a few books in rotation for bedtime reading, such as 'Red: A Crayon's Story' and 'My Princess Boy.' For the next steps we'll be making a plan with my gender counsellor."

"I'm lucky enough that my wife is a psychologist and she came up with a strategy to acclimatise our kids first (ages 8, 10 and 2.) The 8 and 10 year olds were given little bits of information about transgender in short bursts over several weeks and then eventually told!"

"I have a 4 year old. I started presenting around him. He thought I was dressed nicely. Later I sat him down and told him I was a girl. I'm not super passable so he had some trouble with this. It helped that I had the support of his mama who would back up my assertions."

Some of the resources listed at the end of this booklet may be useful in setting the scene.

Age Appropriate

The approach you take will depend on the age of your children. Some parents choose to tell all of their children together; others have broken the news separately to each child, so that they could tailor the information to the needs of each child.

“With older children it’s about being truthful. Don’t lie to them because it will be found out.”

“I took a different approach with my son and with my daughter. I told my son when we were down the pub. We talked for about 3 or 4 hours. He was fine about it.”

I was really nervous about telling my daughter. I put it off for three months. One day I just went into her bedroom. She must have been about 18, she was tapping away on her phone and I said, ‘I’m sorry to lumber you with this but I’m trans’. She stopped and looked up and said, ‘I know’ and carried on tapping away on her phone.”

“With younger children it’s about introducing the ideas gradually. I told him three months before I started changing the way I dressed and made sure he knew I was just changing a bit on the outside but not on the inside.”

“B was about 3 years old when I explained to her what was going on and I engaged with her all the way through.”

The way I tackled it was to be matter of fact but gentle, only telling her things that were age appropriate. One of the things a child is going to notice is physical change, but physical change is gradual, for example, hair grows quite slowly. So I made sure she was involved in the early days so that nothing was a shock.”

“With my 6-year-old son, we didn’t tell him, we introduced it slowly. He was happy with dresses and makeup but not with the hair - he hated the wig.”

When I moved out, I still saw him at weekends. He started playing with the wig using it as a security blanket, he was trying to understand and come to terms with it.

One day I was looking after him after school and he said, ‘Daddy I have to tell you something. I love you because you are still my Daddy on the inside. It doesn’t matter what you’re like on the outside.’”

If younger children have trouble understanding your news, reading stories together and talking about the themes, using pictures and examples can really help.

Older children may also respond to books, documentaries, podcasts and social media sharing the real-life experiences of young people whose parent has transitioned. There is a list of suggested resources at the end of this booklet.

Families Differ

As with any news that will have an impact on family structure, like moving house, a new job which changes the family routine, changing school or going through a family break up, if parents can work together and be mutually supportive (whether they choose to stay together as a couple or not) it will make it easier for the children to accept the news and be reassured that both their parents are ok.

“My wife and I are still together. We take it a day at a time. We put things in place at the outset and agreed that if either of us couldn't deal with it, we could separate. We separated our finances just in case but actually we're still together. My wife struggled with it and this did affect the older children but we've got through it.”

“My daughter was about 3 years old. I included her as soon as possible. First of all I had to sort out things like my relationship with my partner and telling other family and friends but once that was sorted my main aim was to reassure her. Once my partner and I separated, the main worry raised by my daughter was ‘Will Father Christmas know which house to come to?’”

“My wife is supportive and understanding to a point, as are my stepsons, but it's on their terms. I am not really allowed to be myself at home. Even though I have legally changed my name and gender markers and everywhere outside the home I am known as my real name, at home I am still referred to by my dead name and gendered as such by everyone there; they just aren't able to handle it. While this puts a lot of stress and discomfort on me now, I put up with it because I care for them. I just wish they would care about me enough to want to try to get help to find a middle ground.”

“Having a supportive partner helps when explaining things to children, although we are now separated. I think I will always be ‘Daddy’ to my daughter which I'm OK with as she uses my female name all the time. She struggles with pronouns as her mother is no longer supportive. We are separated and she lives with her mother (who doesn't use the correct pronouns either, hence support is crucial) but I'm confident it will all work out in the end.”

“When I was coming out to my young teen kids (my wife knew for a while already) my counsellor had a good suggestion. My wife, kids and I had a family meeting and I told the kids that I was trans. I kept it pretty brief but explained the situation. The counsellor said the teens will focus on their needs and that Mum is OK. By my wife being present they got a quick visual clue that I wasn't hurting her. (Sorry I know spouse being supportive and present isn't an option for everyone.)”

“I was very lucky because my family were welcoming and positive. My wife and I separated because she was not interested in being married to a woman, but we managed to remain positive in our joint support for our children.”

“One of my children was concerned about having a step-dad because she doesn't have a positive relationship with her biological father. She also thought having two mums was cool and wasn't particularly pleased that my transition would mean the world would no longer see us as a family with same-sex parents. Transitioning to male-presenting has meant that she has been able to reframe her thinking about the role of a father and me and her have a very close, positive relationship.”

Helping them to understand

Very few children will have imagined that their parent could possibly be transgender. People often assume that realising that you are trans and deciding to 'come out' is something that only happens when you are a child or teenager and are surprised that it may be something that you discover or explore later in life. Depending on their age and their life experiences they may have some understanding of the concept of gender identity – or none at all. This will have a huge influence on how you prepare to tell them and the style that you use.

"One of the big issues is asking people to change their understanding of how everything works (sex, gender). If you're coming out as gay that's relatable; most people know what love is and whether they agree with you or not they do understand what you're talking about, but it's a different concept when you come out as trans."

"I would say I explained what was going on - I didn't 'come out' to my daughter:"

"Some people explain like a tin which has the wrong label on it, like a tin of baked beans that's been labelled peaches. Their gender is like the actual contents of the can on the inside and in transitioning they are just changing the label so that it correctly signals what's on the inside."

"I know of someone who tried to explain to a kid who didn't understand and someone else in the room just said, 'they're regenerating, like Doctor Who.' The child looked in awe; if the concept is known it may be an easy way to explain."

"My children were 18, 15 and 11 when I came out to them as a trans woman. I spoke to each of them individually, saying something along the lines of, 'I think I was supposed to have been a woman. I'm going to start dressing and acting like a woman around the house and then eventually in public:'

My 18 year old said, 'OK:'

My 15 year old asked, 'Does that make you a transgender person?' I said, 'Yes' and he said, 'Oh OK:'

My 11 year old said, 'Wow, cool!'"

The right time and place

Choose your moment. Most families have times that are right for talking and these are usually better than trying to create a moment. Sometimes events take over and an

immediate need to tell them will arise, but if possible, creating a calm atmosphere and breaking the news in a comfortable environment will help.

"If we're talking about a big issue, she finds it easier, whether we're talking about her stuff or mine, not to start it face to face, so she'll tend to WhatsApp me."

"Don't sit your children down and lecture them as this gives the impression that something bad has happened or is about to happen."

Talk to your children at their level but don't patronise them and do let them ask questions. Give yourself time to say what you want to say and give them time to hear what you're saying.

"It was pretty uneventful. I'm still not fully out yet, so sometimes I go out with my son presenting as male and he treats me the same as when I'm presenting female and he calls me [female name] no matter how I present - my dead name is one that he doesn't use anymore. I'd say for the most part our interactions are unchanged from before, except I have way more patience and engage with him more than in the past. I do think that not forcing the issue and showing him that I'm the same as always, just happier and presenting differently, helped him accept that he wasn't losing me at all."

"I talked it through with my partner first over the summer through to the autumn and then gradually introduced it as an idea to the children from September to December. I started my transition in January."

"My daughter was 6 when I came out. She had only ever seen me in either a suit or jeans so when I appeared in leggings one day she was surprised and laughed. My wife and I explained that Daddy prefers to wear women's clothing and will be doing more so from now on. She never questioned it from then on. Each time I made a step forward: skirts, makeup, trans friends, I spoke to her before - or realised that I should have - and she did the same as before; initial surprise and confusion rapidly followed by acceptance."

Do give them time to adjust to what you have just told them and make sure they know that you will be the same person after you've told them.

Give it time

All our contributors agreed that you have to give it time. Children need time to process the change and take in what it means for them. Some parents talked about the potential clash of putting your children and their needs first, when transitioning means that so much of your energy is focused on yourself. Nevertheless, being happier in themselves eventually led to better relationships with their children.

"Always give it time. Children will give you unconditional love but it has to be right for them. Give it time. It took a year and it was worth the wait. Remember you only told them yesterday, give them a chance. You may have been thinking about this for years but they weren't expecting it at all!"

"Make sure you go at the child's pace and give them time to come to terms with each step. They may not be fully accepting at the beginning so take it gradually. Think about what the child needs to hear and how much they need to know to be able to understand. They need reassurance; don't talk too much about your own stuff - focus on them."

"My transition has been over a period of many years and I went away. I spent 15 years in America. My family came over at various stages during that time and met me so I don't look or act much different from how they've ever known me, it's been more of a gradual discussion. I mean there was a lot of upset and anger, but physical changes were really more gradual!"

"My children now are very proud of me but they did not speak to me for many years. I was not considered as their parent for a long time and it's only in the last few years that we've been connecting again. All of that was about the influence of other people, family members and community inflicting their views."

"It's about gently explaining the steps that affect her life. Children don't have the vocabulary to process complex thoughts but also they don't have the complex worries adults may have so in fact it's about making sure she has the information she needs gradually along each step, and time is the best thing for sorting it out."

"My daughter, she and I had some talks about stuff. She had a friend who transitioned female to male so she wasn't new to the concept, but since my daughter lives three hours away from me I had to talk to her on the phone. I told her frankly about my feelings and my childhood. She told me it would take time to process and get used to. It was only a month or so ago that I finally went out to a meal with her as myself, presenting for the first time. She told me it wasn't any weirder than it normally was being with me. LOL! Thanks kid!"

Your children may find it helpful to speak to a trusted friend or relative, in order to have some outlet for their concerns or feelings that is separate to you. It's important that they feel able to voice any fears - but they may bottle these emotions up for fear of hurting or disappointing you. You could make this easier for them by suggesting and 'giving permission' for them to discuss this with others.

"It's been organic..... it's just happened..... it's just about being gentle..... gently does it and time is the best thing for sorting it out. Because I'm happy that benefits my daughter. My relationship with her has improved massively."

Emotions are all right

Some children really will take this news in their stride and after all your apprehension it will be a non-event. The younger generation seem to be more informed about and accepting of gender variance in general. But sometimes when it's their own parent they're still going to be upset. Whilst you know that you are the same person on the inside and this has always been a part of you, some children may feel the loss of a particular parental role in their lives. This is how some of the contributors reflected on and dealt with negative emotions:

"With families there is this assumption that your children must be upset - but I don't really understand why anybody should be upset. I'm just sharing with them stuff about who I really am. But I suppose people are more concerned about what other people think of them, not concerned about me, just concerned about themselves."

"I sat down and talked to [my 15 year old daughter.] I told her what was happening. I opened up to her and told her the truth. She asked why I had waited. She was excited and positive. But when it actually happened this reversed. When I started my transition, she became aggressive. I moved out for about a month. Now it's okay she is seeing the benefit for me and for her."

"My oldest son, he's a smart kid. He is very liberal minded and a free thinker. I hinted around with him. I think he figured out what I was getting at before I actually told him, but he was alright with things in general. Later as things got more real for him, he struggled with it. I didn't make things easier. I was going through bad times and depression with things I was dealing with at home. I wanted to be myself out in public and asked if he would be OK with that. He wasn't OK yet. I really was fine with that because I had a backup plan but my depression bled through and he saw it and it bothered him a lot. Now he is coming to terms with it. He has been around me as myself a few times and seems to be OK with it. I hope he sees how much happier I am when I am in that mode."

"With my 12-year-old son I had my wife tell him what was going on and he wasn't very happy about it. He felt sad and he didn't want to lose his Dad. There are a number of times I tried to talk with him about it and each time he quickly reached a point where he'd declare, 'Let's not talk about this.'"

Eventually I just left him alone about it because discussion wasn't really getting through. I more or less treated him the way I always have and would occasionally show him when I put makeup on, asking his opinion, or women's clothing, just trying new things in small ways and asking for his input and accepting that input even if it wasn't positive. If it wasn't positive, I'd usually say something like, 'Well this makes me feel better and happy.'

I think it took about four to six months for him to come around. I've had experiences recently where he's approached me while I was putting on makeup and he said, 'So this makes you happy, huh?' to which I said, 'Yup' and he said, 'OK good' and then he went back to talking non-stop about his toys or latest story or video game idea."

Not a choice

Some children may ask you not to come out publicly as transgender and think that you could choose not to. You might ask them how they 'know' that they are the gender they feel they are and what it would be like if other people didn't recognise and respect this. If they think about that, it may help them to understand how you feel. Some of the children's books in the Resources list might help you with this discussion.

"Feeling comfortable with myself was a process and in being open with your children there's a massive fear of rejection. I've had to learn that no matter what happens, I have to feel comfortable with myself because I'm either comfortable with myself and I'm here, or I won't be here at all."

"I'm not not concerned about my family, but fundamentally I have to be true to who I am in order to survive."

"You may need to explain that 'I can't not do this. I wouldn't be here if I didn't do this. It's not a choice.' My transition actually ensures and enables the family relationship. There are benefits for the family - Dad is happier so the family is happier."

"Be honest - I'm doing this for myself, but I'm still here for you."

This discussion can be a very positive influence in your child's life. It can open their eyes to the constraints of gender roles and show them in a very powerful way that it's ok to be yourself. Let's have hope and trust in the next generation – it's the world that needs to change, not our families.

"Now my children say it is inspirational – it shows them they can be themselves and they can speak up and don't have to conform. It gives them the ability to adapt to change and also allows them a lot of freedom."

Names, Pronouns and Language

Part of your coming out may be asking people to call you by a different name and to use different pronouns to describe you. Some children may be able to accept you but struggle to use a different name. People take different approaches to this, and you will need to work out what feels best for you and your family.

"Your first name is your choice; what your children call you is a joint decision. If they strongly object, then consider how important changing from Mum to Dad (or vice versa) really is to you compared to your child's well-being. They have to own that nickname."

"Initially, I chose a male name that was more similar to my biological name thinking it would be easier for my children. As a step-parent, they tend to address me using my name rather than a title such as 'Dad' so this was an important consideration. After a while, I then chose a different legal name but still embrace my children using the first one, because it signifies that parental relationship as different to friends and colleagues."

"Our 8- and 10-year-olds had no problems with my wife's transition but our 3-year-old was extremely resistant to switching from Daddy to Mama for her. We explained it would make her happy to be called Mama and that being called Daddy made her sad. Then whenever the 3-year-old would use the wrong name we would correct them; sometimes that led to screaming angrily that wife was Daddy, but we would acknowledge that they might be feeling sad or scared about the change, but that nothing was really changing except what we called her. It took about a month but now they always call her by the right name and will correct people if they try to use the wrong one."

"I've decided that I wouldn't push my daughter to call me something other than Daddy as I felt she would find this disproportionately disruptive. She always uses my female name. I'm just hoping the rest will just fall into place when she's a bit older."

"I think I will always be Daddy to my daughter, which I'm cool with, but she always calls me by my female name. She will explain to anyone that asks that Daddy is becoming a girl - end of!"

"I asked, 'How would you feel about having two mummies, would that be okay?' If she had been clearly upset it would have been much more difficult and I suppose we would have had to go at her pace but I was lucky; she was very accepting. Maybe that's just the kind of family we are. We've always explained if there is going to be any kind of change to family life, in an age appropriate and gentle way."

"I think my name change was the biggest thing, wanting people to refer to me by the correct name and the right pronouns. I have issues with that even today with family members. So my mum for example, she recently had a stroke - she continues to use my previous name and the wrong pronouns and she encourages everyone else and other family members to do that too and if I challenge her she says, 'I'm ill, I've just had a stroke!'"

"If you're a parent you'll know what it's like, you're just sitting down having a nice cup of tea putting your feet up or something and then there comes a shout from upstairs: 'Muumum!'"

So you go upstairs to wipe a bottom or pick something up or fix something and she says, 'I didn't mean you I meant the other one!'"

So it was quite important to choose a slightly different name, partly for practical reasons but also - she already had a Mummy. That Mummy went through a lot to earn that title, so I wasn't going to try and take that away. We tried a few things and chose a name together; we ended up with Mama."

"He's secure in our relationship. I'm still called Dad but referred to as 'she.' He doesn't have any problem with that. Sometimes school friends ask 'Why is he dressed like that?' and my son replies 'Because she is.'"

"My 9-year-old daughter still calls me Dad and probably always will - which I've got over - but it is embarrassing when she forgets in crowded public toilets."

I'm Still Your Parent

While parents worry about wider issues, your children may not see those things as big problems – but are sometimes concerned about small practical day to day issues, which you can reassure them about. Make sure they are secure in the knowledge that you love them.

"Reassurance of continued love and attention and ongoing stability of the family environment are incredibly important to children and especially to younger children."

"One key aspect is to reassure your children that you will still love them as much as you always have and that you will still be there for them as much as you always have been. The only substantial question from my younger one when I came out to my children was, 'Will we still be able to go cycling together?' On being assured that we certainly would, there were no further immediate questions, although various questions were posed over the weeks and months that followed."

"Honestly, they seemed very nonchalant. The biggest concern was, 'Is Dad still going to do the same things with me?' Which, of course, I am. We even broached the topic of, 'What if my friends' parents think it's weird or what if my friends say something?' They all came up with their own scenarios with how to deal with it, with the exception of my youngest who wasn't sure."

"My children were aged eight, ten and two; at that age they haven't learned hate. They barely skipped a beat, both girls were excellent, never any issues - they have been proud of me. I'm incredibly lucky. Perhaps in their teens they will lash out at me, but for now they remain kind and supportive and generally just immediately accepted it as 'OK cool whatever, where's my iPad?' They now refer to us both as Mum and as far as their entire new school knows we're just two mums."

"His friends have generally accepted it. There has been some bullying at school, but he defuses it. I still play football with him and Xbox."

"I think the fact that the nature of our relationship didn't fundamentally change and that I started having more happy moments and fewer angry outbursts showed him that this was a change for the better. Before I started transitioning my son nicknamed me 'Grumpy' and for good reason. I have since lost that nickname: he's always called me by my first name and these days he calls me [female name]"

"The reality is, she's a surprisingly confident young woman. She understands that just because you have a different family it doesn't change the love."

Do think about the times when there are 'expected' roles for mums and dads – and be clear in advance how your family is going to deal with those occasions. It's not just families with trans parents who have to navigate Mother's Day, the Father's race at Sports Day, traditional parental roles at weddings or other major social events – this is something that's experienced by single parent families and blended families too. But it will be hugely beneficial to your children to talk this through in advance, so they are not worrying about 'being different':

"One issue was the Father's Day assembly and we got the question 'Who's going to come to my Father's Day assembly?'"

She has a friend Jay whose Dad is not on the scene and so I said, 'Well who comes for Jay?' and she said, 'Jay's mum comes' so I said, 'Well your mum will come too then' and that was fine."

Religion and Culture

People from different religions and ethnic groups shared their stories with us. Whilst any family may struggle with this news, there was a feeling from some contributors that acceptance can be especially difficult within certain religious or ethnic communities. There is a section in the Resources page at the end of the booklet listing some organisations that offer specific support.

"I think this situation [rejection by family] is very true of communities of colour and cultures outside of the White British. If you are already marginalised for reasons of colour or culture then that community has an overbearing need to assimilate, to conform and be accepted. So, if you stand out outside the norm within that community you're adding another layer of disturbance, a further reason for your community not to be accepted, so your own group becomes hostile to you."

"Both my parents were religious so it could have gone either way, but I've seen both things happen; with some very religious people they will say, 'Well I love you and

that's that', but that's probably quite rare in our [Black] community and where religion is involved. My dad was fantastic. He said, 'You came from me and I'm good, so you must be good'. And that was about the length and breadth of the conversation."

"Things are changing with younger people. Many younger members of my family really don't care, but sometimes I see that they have been influenced by other family members. So perhaps they'd be fine with me for a long time, they have accepted me - they're young and they don't see any problem - but then they've been given information by other family members and I can see it in their eyes, they're looking around to see who knows the secret and how they should behave around me."

"Children scan the room to see who knows the secret and that's because we're taught to see each other through other's lenses, I mean you can see that with social media, we care a lot about what other people think - but actually it's very empowering and freeing to be comfortable with yourself."

"At the time we lived in a very conservative religious Jewish community and I was very badly received. Some bullying did occur, but my kids were not badly affected, thank God, and most of their friends were very good. It was the parents who were very bad, so we moved to a new school and now we are just the family with two mums and everyone thinks my kids are the coolest for having lesbian parents."

"My teenage son does not conform to male stereotypes and at times has struggled with being 'different'. Having a transgender step-dad as a role-model who is not stereotypically masculine has meant that he feels more able to embrace his true self."

Moving Forward

Explaining to your children is one step. You may also want to plan how to smooth the way for them in the outside world. If they are younger this will include informing their school; this doesn't have to be a big deal and might be as simple as emailing the school admin team to inform them of a change of name and title. Try to make it as easy as possible for children to carry on with life with as little disruption as possible.

Children are often concerned about how other people will react to the news that their parent is trans. Depending on their age, many children find their parents embarrassing in any case and just don't want any attention being drawn to them. They may not know how to cope with friends, the wider family or at school if other people make comments.

It will be very important for your children to understand how open you are going to be about being trans and to be clear about what information can be shared and who needs to know. It will also help them to understand and be reassured about how things will work with your partner and the wider family.

"You can't predict who will have a problem and who will be supportive. For example, I had some gay male friends who haven't accepted but others, unexpectedly, 'traditional' men have been supportive."

"My daughter's friends have been very supportive though. It's a different generation. They are more accepting; they treated me like an auntie when I used to pick her up from friends' houses."

"On Facebook I'm friends with my daughter. I asked her if it was ok. She'll tag me in photos, she's happy for people to see me."

"I explained to her that Pride is a protest not just a party and she said, 'Mama can I still have a rainbow?' and I said, 'Of course. You can have as many rainbows as you want.'"

"It wasn't that I wanted to drag her around and expose her to a lot of protests - I would never expose her to anything frightening or dangerous. But lots of Prides are family friendly and going to Prides helped her to see other different families and she had a really good time. She saw that she wasn't the only one with two mummies or a very tall mum."

"At the start of my transition I involved my wife and children by taking them clothes shopping with me. They were used to having two mums and were not fazed when we went into the male section. They helped me to choose some new clothes - some of which I still have and that is a nice reminder for me of a family activity marking an important change for me. My daughter also chose my new glasses, to suit a more 'masculine' presentation - she did a good job!"

"Integrate yourself into the school and kindergarten as much as possible. If your child's friends and their parents accept you for who you are because they get to know you and realise you're just a normal person, it makes life easier as the children get older, especially if you can hit that point before puberty starts."

"School hasn't really been an issue. Once everyone else knew what was going on I went in and had a discussion with the school and I framed it in this way:

*'Just to let you know my name is going to change to *** I think the rest is probably self-explanatory. Please let me know of any issues that happen at school that affect my daughter so that my wife and I can sort them out.'"*

"The only resistance we encountered was the next day my oldest asked if other kids might bully her about this. We talked for a moment about it and then she ended it saying she would just ignore any kids who do. My middle daughter just said she loves me more now because she hates boys anyway!"

Sometimes it will be you who is worried, rather than your child:

"My daughter wanted to go swimming and that threw me into a huge panic. As we were driving there she could tell that I was anxious and she said, 'Don't worry Mama, I'm with you, we're going to have fun'"

I was really really anxious in the changing rooms, wearing two bikini bottoms under my swimsuit with a skirt over that. The panic grew as I stepped out from the changing rooms and went towards the pool and I kept thinking 'everyone is looking at me everyone is staring' but of course once you get in the water, if your child can't swim, that is the priority. Don't let her drown!

And actually, nobody batted an eyelid. I've found that when you're with your child people don't stare and I think that's because there's already somebody there who's accepting and if they see that your child is accepting and happy then they can join the club."

Conclusion

Being trans is an important part of who you are, but it's only one part. We hope that having read this booklet that you feel more relaxed about breaking your news to your family.

"This fabulous booklet is so needed, and I'd like to thank FFLAG for their dedication and work creating it. As a parent of two I'm painfully aware of the struggle, anguish and anxiety trans individuals and their partners go through on the journey to tell their children about themselves. It's sometimes a time of great upheaval in our lives, a time of great personal uncertainty as we go through friends, relations, work colleagues looking for acceptance and finally disclosing the real people we are. Against this backdrop we have those that we love the most, want to protect the most: our children. We want them to be happy and flourish, we want them to be free of anxiety and be safe and so telling them we are trans feels like we are shaking the very foundations of their world. Luckily, as we can see from many of the wonderful quotes in this booklet there can be - and usually is with time - acceptance and in many cases that acceptance is gloriously absolute. Personally, I think that's because exactly the thing that makes us so anxious about telling our children - love - is the thing that carries us across so many seemingly stormy waters. With love comes respect, with respect comes understanding and with understanding comes deeper love. Wherever you are in the journey of telling your children I wish you safe and happy travels."

Bobbi Pickard, Founder and CEO, Trans in the City

The FFLAG booklets are all written by parents who have lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans children and for this booklet we have collaborated with trans parents who have generously contributed their real life experiences. We would like to give especial thanks to the Intercom Trust and Trans in the City, who publicised the project within their networks.

Further Resources

While there are several charities and organisations whose remit is to support trans young people and some, like FFLAG, offering peer support to the parents of gender variant young people, we haven't found any national UK organisations set up specifically to support trans parents and their children. But by contacting your local trans support or social group (the Transwiki directory www.transwiki.net is a good starting point to find one) you're likely to find others who have come out to their families and who may be able to offer peer support.

One local support group, based in Cornwall, Transparent Presence www.facebook.com/transparentpresence are a support page and group for trans young people and their parents; and trans people who are parents, their partners and children. They have a number of activities and initiatives which may inspire other groups.

In the US, COLAGE www.colage.org is a national organisation dedicated to supporting people with one or more LGBTQ+ caregiver, and their website is a great source of resources and information.

The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) has a section within its support pages called: 'Explaining to Children' with documents designed for younger and older children and links to further resources. www.gires.org.uk/explaining-to-children

FFLAG's booklet, 'A Guide for Family and Friends' has some basic explanatory information and a diagram that may be of use to older children.

www.fflag.org.uk/booklets-posters-forms/#toggle-id-1

The Genderbread Person www.genderbread.org has good visual tools which would be appropriate for children.

Educate and Celebrate have compiled booklists of LGBT+ inclusive reads www.educateandcelebrate.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Primary-Book-Collection-2016.pdf and have lots of other resources on their website.

Religion and Culture

Diverse Church: www.diversechurch.website is a registered charity working for the acceptance of LGBT+ people within the Christian church.

Imaan: www.imaanlondon.wordpress.com is a small, volunteer-led charity, led by and working for LGBTQ Muslims; which aims to represent the breadth of the Islamic faith and the range of identities and narratives of the LGBTQ community and our allies.

Naz and Matt Foundation: www.nazandmattfoundation.org
A UK charity whose mission is to never let religion, any religion, come in the way of the unconditional love between parents and their children.

Black Trans Foundation: www.facebook.com/blacktransfoundation Black Trans Foundation is a new non-profit organisation working for the social advancement of Black trans people in the UK.

Keshet UK: www.keshetuk.org
Keshet UK's mission is to ensure that Jewish LGBT+ people and their families are included throughout Jewish life in the UK.

Books

We share our recommended reads on our FFLAG website but here are a few of our favourites that may resonate particularly with you and your family:

Younger Children

Red - A Crayon's Story

Michael Hall

Harper Collins

Red has been given a red label – but in fact he's a blue crayon. A funny and heartwarming picture book about finding the courage to be true to your inner self is ideal for exploring this concept with younger children.

She's My Dadi

Sarah Savage illustrated by Joulies Garcia

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

An illustrated book for children aged 3-7, to aid discussion with children about a loved one's transition or about trans people in general. It covers pronouns, gender dysphoria, family diversity and misgendering and includes a Reading Guide.

Older Children

Fiction

Nothing Ever Happens Here

Sarah Hagger Holt

Simon and Shuster

The story of 14 year old Izzy and her family, and how they come to terms with her Dad's transition to female, this book was inspired by some of the interviews Sarah Hagger-Holt conducted for her non-fiction work, 'Pride and Joy'.

Non fiction

How to Understand Your Gender

Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

A practical guide for exploring who you are, with activities to help you understand gender issues.

The Gender Games

Juno Dawson

Two Roads Books

Frank, witty and powerful with some strong language, this book explores the problems gender norms inflict on all of society.

My Trans Parent

Heather Bryant

Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Real life stories from people with trans parents, collected by Heather Bryant who grew up with a trans parent. The book is full of practical advice and personal stories and also has a great list of resources to explore.

To Survive on this Shore

Jess T. Duggan and Vanessa Fabbre

Kehrer Verlag

Photographs and interviews with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Older Adults, the project also tours as a beautiful exhibition. www.tosurviveonthishore.com

Partners and LGBT+ Parenting

Pride and Joy: A Guide for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Parents

Sarah and Rachel Hagger-Holt

Pinter and Martin

A collection of stories, advice and real-life experience from LGBT parents and their children.

Some Body to Love: A Family Story

Alexandra Heminsley

Chatto and Windus

An open hearted memoir, describing her husband's decision to transition and its impact on their family; about losing a husband but gaining a best friend, and together bringing up a baby in a changing world.

I am Noah: A hybrid story

Noah Bear Nyle

An honest and open account of life as a trans person and parent to two daughters.

We Are Family: What really Matters for Parents and Children

Susan Golombok

Scribe UK

Susan Golombok is professor of family research and director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge. This book draws on research into family structures since the 1970s; she visits lesbian mothers, gay fathers, single parents, donor conception parents, co-parents, trans parents, surrogates, and donors, and, more importantly, their children, to find out if they are as well-adjusted, happy, and emotionally stable as children from traditional nuclear families. And she discovers that the answer is yes and sometimes even more so.

Films and Television

My Life: When Mum becomes Dad (Series 11, Episode 4)

What is it like when your mum becomes your dad? Twelve-year-old Tilly's mum came out as transgender when she was 7 years old. We follow Tilly as she shows us what her life is like now.

www.heysonny.tv/cbbc-my-life-4

My Generation

My Generation is an award winning film project that celebrates trans lives and trans experiences. Created entirely by trans people, about trans people, for everyone, it allows people to see more engaging, truthful and authentic representation of transgender people, and connect with them on a more human level. www.mygeneration.com

Please also check our website www.flag.org.uk which is updated with new information and local sources of help as this emerges.



www.fflag.org.uk

Confidential Helpline: 0300 688 0368

email: info@fflag.org.uk

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Registered as a charity in England & Wales

Registered Charity 1079918

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This booklet does not cover every circumstance. We have endeavoured to ensure that the information in this booklet is correct as of October 2021. It is possible that some of the information may become inaccurate over time. FFLAG resources are updated periodically and a current version can always be downloaded from our website (www.fflag.org.uk).

