



## Creating a supportive social environment

Having a supportive environment during and after transition appears to be very important for the well-being of trans persons. However, the people in the life of a trans person may also need guidance to also change during the transition process. If necessary, referral can be made to a counsellor or family therapist. These services are also offered by the Gender Wellbeing Clinic.

### How to support a trans person's partner during transition?

- Many partners live in the shadow of their trans partner during the transition. They take on the supporting and caring role and put their own feelings in second place. That is why separate guidance is often recommended: the partner must be given a space where they can speak freely and where their feelings are put first.
- Many partners struggle with, among other things, uncertainty about the future, betrayal, feelings of guilt and loss of confidence. During support, it is crucial to acknowledge these feelings and elaborate on them.
- As a result of the transition, some partners also question their own identity - "Who have I been with all these years?" In addition, there is also a new social stamp placed upon them. They are placed by society in categorized boxes - lesbian/gay, straight or bi, without defining themselves that way. Not all partners can easily cope with all these sudden changes.

### How to inform children that a parent is trans?

- Inform a child in time and at an appropriate time. Make sure you find time in the days after to come back to any questions from the child. For example, break the news on a Friday evening so that the child can come back to it during the weekend.
- If there is a wide age or maturity difference between children, it is recommended to initially inform them separately to cater for each child's maturity and understanding.
- Make sure that the topic is open for discussion and does not remain a taboo or a secret, but do not force the child to talk about it.
- Allow the child to feel different emotions during the transition and encourage them to let their feelings out. For example - You can be angry, you can find it strange, etc.
- Provide constant reassurance - the parent/brother/sister/aunt/etc. is in transition, the person is able to be their true self, but the relationship will continue and in some ways perhaps be strengthened now that the person can be their true self (Dierckx, M. et al. 2017).
- Some children are more vulnerable than others - pay attention to bullying, among other things.

### How do parents support the transition of their child?

- Provide reassurance and recognition - as a parent it is OK that you find the transition of your child difficult, but that is not the child's responsibility to manage and should be handled in separate support spaces.

- Parents have a lot of questions - Will my child come out? Will my child ever be happy? Will my child ever find a partner? Stop and reassure. Be honest and say that there is no answer to everything.
- Parents who struggle with their children's transitions should find the time to communicate to their child that they find the transition difficult and clearly explain why if the child is old enough to take this. Otherwise it is recommended that parents only show their support and deal with their difficulties in a separate space. It is important that they make it clear that their reaction is because of the difficulty for them to come to terms with the situation and not because they do not support their child in this transition. It is important that the child is not made to feel guilty.
- When parents talk openly with their children about their feelings, children will also feel safer to do this with their parents. It can also be a difficult process for them to talk about.

## How to involve the school or social group of a transgender young person?

- Make gender diversity a topic which is talked about. You can use books or educational material that you can find on various media.
- Suppose a child makes a remark - "Miss, George is wearing sparkling shoes." Indicate that there are no such things as boys or girls' things. Everybody should be able to behave in their own way. These expressions should also be celebrated and acknowledged, not only tolerated. In addition, it is important to question things to students - "Can boys not wear sparkly shoes?" Keep in mind that society is constantly reinforcing gender stereotypes, so the more diversity is made visible and celebrated, the better to compensate for all the negative messages that children have already internalised.
- Children may state that they find trans persons 'strange' or 'different'. Talk to the class about why people think it is strange or different. Such a conversation can connect people and help build mutual understandings. Explain gender diversity and the existence of trans people with the adequate terms. Avoid harmful words when talking about trans people.
- When a trans young person wants to come out to the class, it is best to discuss this with the young person in advance. Coming out to a group can be done in various ways, such as with a speech, a story book, a film clip, a documentary or a short announcement. Give fellow pupils the opportunity to ask questions but have them write them down on a note so that inappropriate questions can be filtered, and the youngster can decide for themselves which questions to answer. Be sure to clearly explain that the trans person will only answer questions they feel comfortable with and it is up to them to decide the boundaries. The trans student should decide to whom, when and how to come out and teachers and family should support them.
- Ensure that the school actively works for the prevention of bullying and that a trans youth in school knows to whom they should report bullying, and that plans are in place for dealing with incidents fairly and consistently.
- The Policy on Trans, Gender Variant and Intersex Students in Schools offers guidance to educators on how to create safe and inclusive school environments and handle student transitions.