

TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE CHILDREN: BEYOND THE MYTHS



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INTRODUCTIONS...

<http://www.hrc.org/blog/watch-moms-for-transgender-equality>

WHAT DOES “TRANSGENDER” MEAN?



Transgender: an umbrella term to describe a person whose gender identity differs from their gender assigned at birth.¹ Some First Nations people use the more complex term “two-spirit.”



WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY?

GENDER IDENTITY:

Our profound, individual experience of our own gender; a complex and core aspect of an individual's sense of self.¹⁻⁶ Gender identity is also considered an integral element of the human right to self-determination, dignity, and freedom.¹⁻³

No one can tell you your gender identity.
It is who you know yourself to be.



Gender identity is complex, but appears to be based in our biology.⁷ History has taught us that the belief that human beings are simply "blank slates" for gender has tragic consequences.⁸

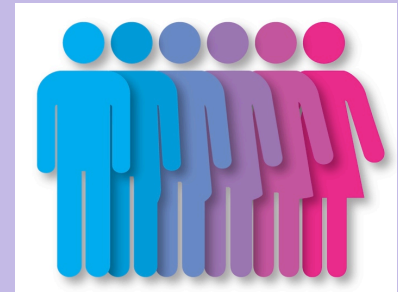


MYTHS

MYTH #1:

“YOU ARE DEFINED BY YOUR CHROMOSOMES”

Our language gives us two categories.
But biology is much more complicated.
Biologists have been arguing for
decades that, like gender, sex is a **spectrum**⁸⁻¹⁰



Chromosomes, anatomy, hormones,
cells (and brains!) vary widely, and sometimes clash.^{9,10}

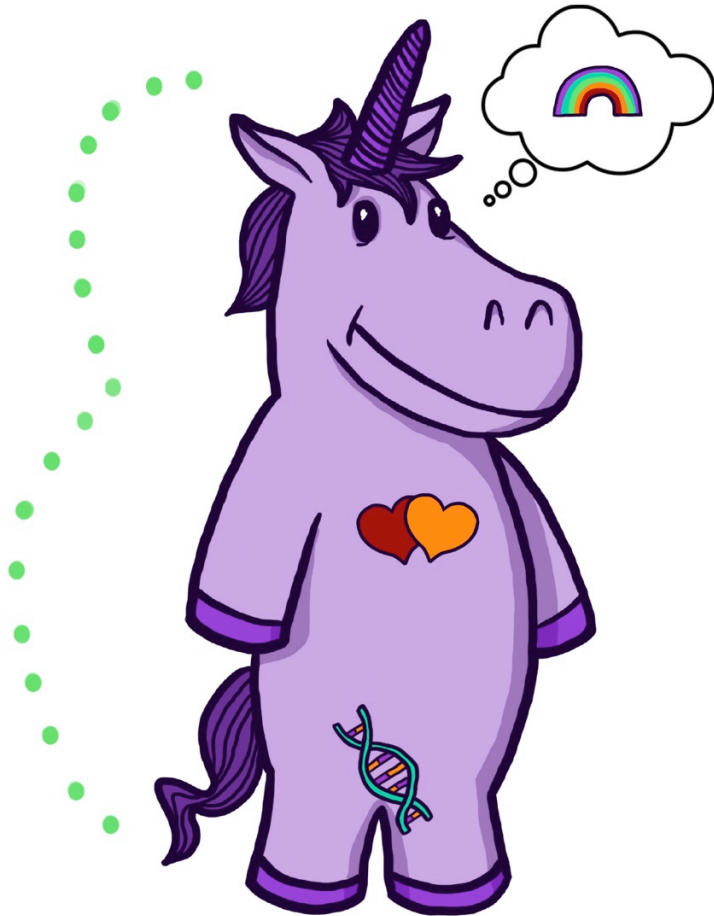
Radio Clip: <http://www.nature.com/news/sex-redefined-1.16943>

A recent review of the biology of sex concluded that no one aspect
of our biology can decide our sex:

**“In other words,
if you want to know whether someone
is male or female [or otherwise],
it may be best just to ask.”¹⁰**

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Equality Resources



Gender Identity



Female/Woman/Girl

Male/Man/Boy

Other Gender(s)



Gender Expression/Presentation



Feminine

Masculine

Other



Sex Assigned at Birth

Female



Male



Other/Intersex



Sexually Attracted To



Women

Men

Other Gender(s)



Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To



Women

Men

Other Gender(s)

To learn more go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan

MYTH #2: "BEING TRANSGENDER IS A DISORDER"

A Shifting Paradigm: From Disorder to Diversity

Pathologized for decades in the DSM as a mental illness, we now know that gender diversity is a normal, healthy part of the diversity of the human species.^{2,5,11,12}

Transgender people existed throughout history and live today in all parts of the world.¹²



An estimated 1% of the population may be transgender.¹³

MYTH #3: "KIDS ARE TOO YOUNG TO REALLY KNOW WHO THEY ARE"



Many trans people have described awareness of their gender identities from a very young age.¹⁴

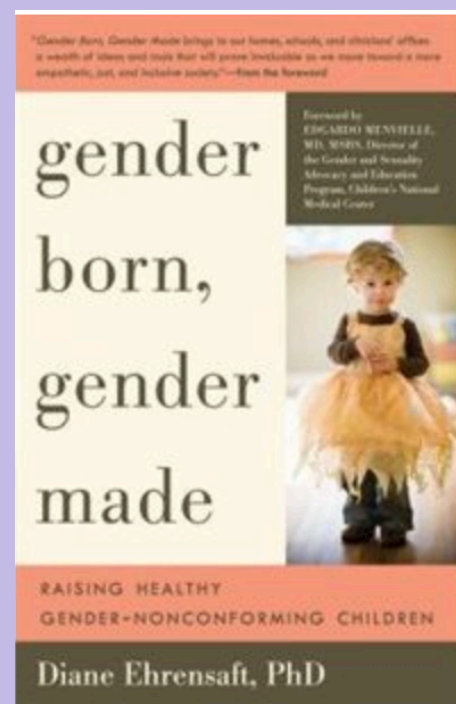
The American Academy of Pediatrics states that most children have a stable sense of their own gender identity by the age of **4 years**.¹⁵

It is often at this age that young transgender children try to express their sense of discomfort with their assigned gender.^{4,5}

DR. DIANE EHRENSAFT

on the origins of gender diversity

<http://www.kidsinthehouse.com/teenager/sexuality/transgender/where-gender-non-conformity-comes-from>



MYTH #4: "IT'S JUST A PHASE!"

Children enjoy imaginative play, and many kids may go through a phase of resisting gender-stereotyped expectations.

This is why it is important to remember
the difference between
EXPRESSION and **IDENTITY**.



Kids who simply enjoy play or dress different from gender stereotypes are usually not transgender: they usually continue to identify with their assigned gender.⁵

Terms such as gender creative, gender independent, gender expansive, and gender non-conforming may be used to describe any child who expresses their gender differently.

"BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A CHILD IS TRANSGENDER?"

Some people use the term transgender to describe a child who **persistently identifies** as a gender other than how they were assigned at birth.^{4,5}



We don't need to "figure out" if a child is transgender.
We don't need to guarantee a child's future identity.

We need to listen to what children tell us about who they are, so that we can understand how to best support them for what they need right now.^{5,11,16}

Support is key: it reduces anxiety and promotes emotional regulation associated with healthy brain development.¹⁷

MYTH #5: "THOSE KIDS ARE JUST CONFUSED"

Psychological research shows that
transgender children are
NOT pretending or confused.

Trans children's gender identities are
just as consistent and deeply held
as that of cisgender children.

A ground-breaking cohort study
found that on both self-reported
and implicit measures of gender identity,
trans girls are indistinguishable from other girls,
and trans boys are indistinguishable from other boys.¹⁸



<http://kuow.org/post/when-do-kids-know-they-re-transgender-younger-you-d-think>

DR. KRISTINA OLSON

"Sometimes we hear from parents that the parent says, 'Well, you could just be a boy who likes to wear dresses,' and the kid says, 'No, it's not the dress. I am a girl!' ...That seems to be the crucial difference between a boy who likes a girly things and a boy who is saying, 'I am a girl.'"

In other words, not every kid who explores or experiments with gender is necessarily transgender, but when they do assert a gender identity, it's a very authentic experience."



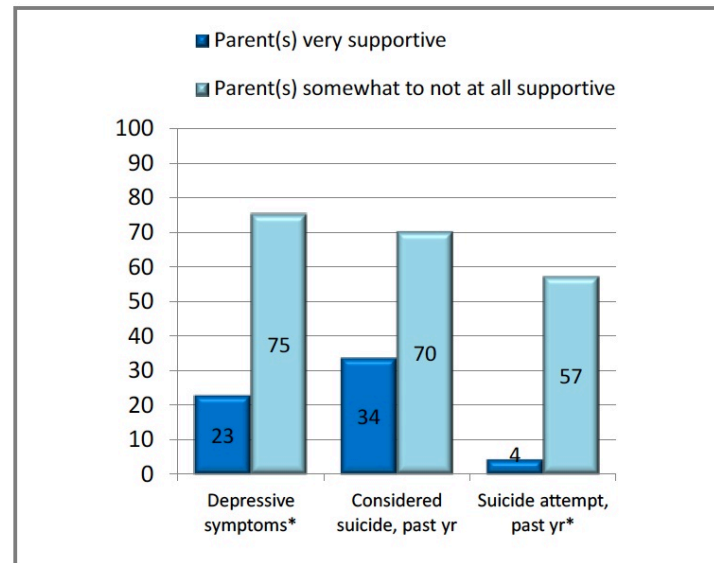
Dr. Kristina Olson
Psychological Scientist
Social Cognitive
Development Lab
University of Washington

MYTH #6: "THIS SHOULDN'T BE ENCOURAGED"



Interventions that try to force children to deny their gender identity are now considered harmful, unethical, and an abuse of power and authority.^{2,11}

Figure 2. Proportion of trans youth age 16-24 years in Ontario experiencing negative health and life conditions, by level of parental support



* = statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$)

Strong parental support from parents reduces trans youth's attempted suicide rates by **93%**.¹⁹

MYTH #7: "KIDS ARE TOO YOUNG TO TRANSITION... WHAT IF THEY REGRET IT?"



"Since she's transitioned, she's just blossomed. It's a beautiful thing to see your child be true to who they are."

We are making our community facilities more friendly, safe and open to everyone—including transgender and gender variant people.

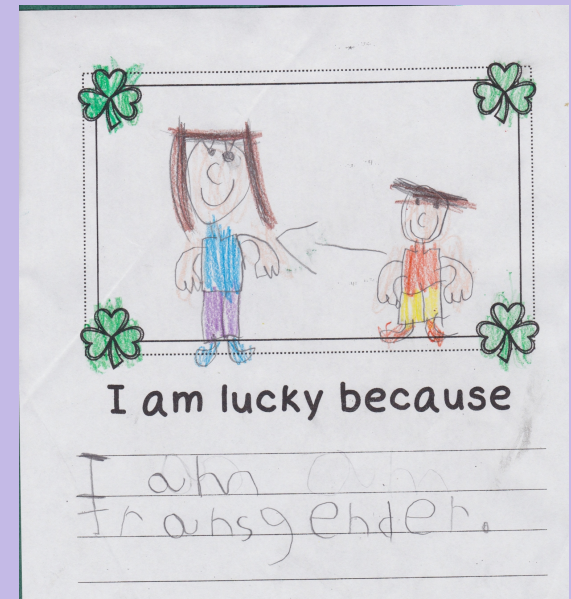
**Don't stop and stare,
stop and think.**

To learn more visit vancouver.ca or call 311



: Being able to express their own gender identity can **greatly improve a transgender child's mental health.**
4,6,16,20

Parents can support their child to take steps to socially transition: changing pronouns, name, clothing, or haircuts, according to the needs of the child.



What is the **risk** of supporting a child's gender identity?

<http://morningafter.gawker.com/crystal-cole-lives-part-time-as-a-girl-part-time-as-a-1696312567> (Second Video Clip)

WHAT ABOUT BLOCKERS AND HORMONES?

- ✓ Adolescents can take **reversible** hormone blockers to delay puberty by several years. This can press the "pause" button on puberty and offer them time to mature.²¹⁻²³
- ✓ **Not all trans people want to medically transition.**
- ✓ Older adolescents and adults who do wish to medically transition have the option of hormone therapy.
- ✓ Research has shown that both hormone blockers and hormone therapy can greatly improve trans adolescents' well-being.^{21,22}

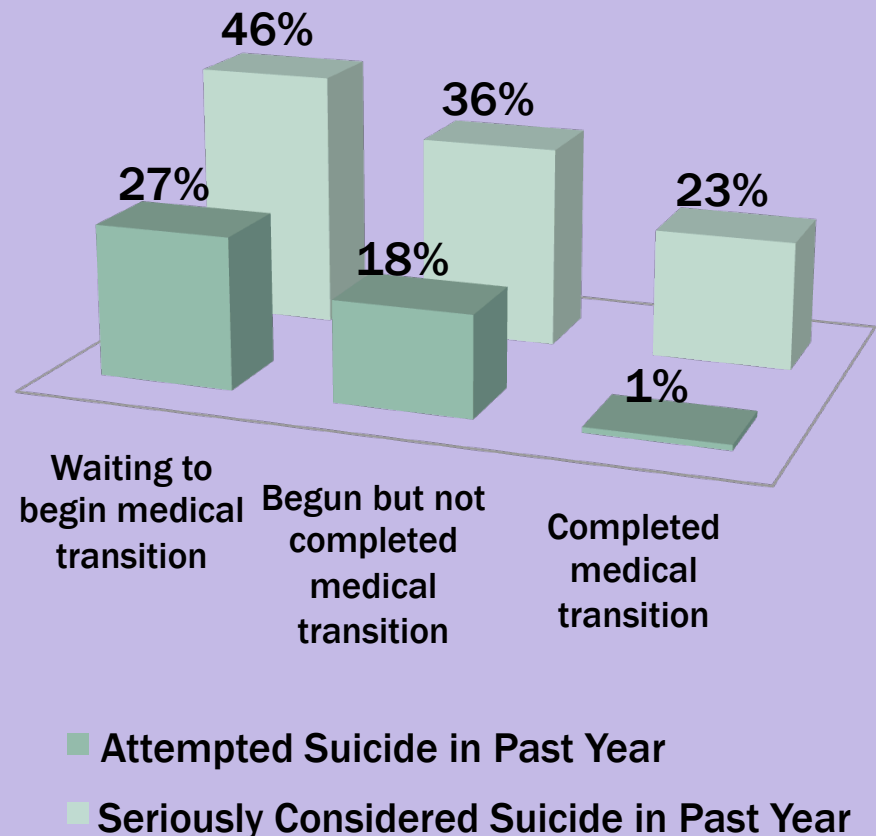


MEDICAL TRANSITION: THE RISK OF WAITING

The dysphoria (discomfort and suffering) that some trans people experience can be a matter of life and death.

When the decision is made to medically transition, it can be urgent. The **waiting** time for medical transition is the period of highest risk of **attempting suicide**.²⁴

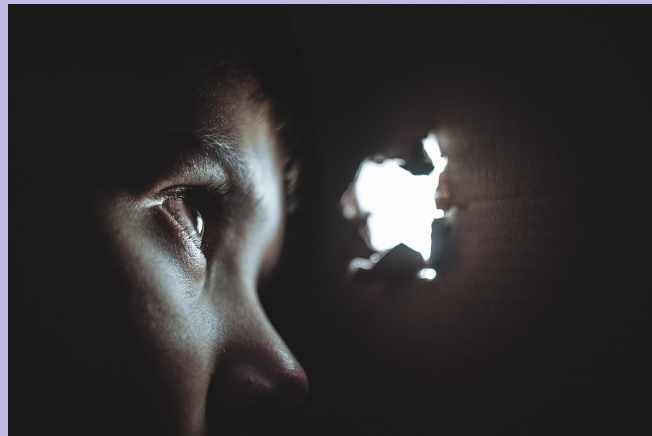
TransPULSE Study Results²⁴
Trans Youth in Ontario, age 16-24



MYTH #9: “BUT I’VE NEVER MET A TRANSGENDER KID.”

You may have worked with young children for a long time without recognizing a transgender child.

Transgender children are an invisible population.²⁵



Some children may not recognize their gender identity until later in life.

Other children may spend their childhood hiding the way they see themselves from everyone they love.^{5,26}

**Today, these trans children
will show you
the way they see themselves,
through their own eyes.
May I please introduce...**

***With gratitude to members of
Canadian Parents of Gender Creative Kids/
Parents des enfants transgenres Canada,
and their wonderful children!***

Mathieu, 2



Sarah, 3½



Emery, 4



Sofia, 5



Ben, 11



Emma, 16

As a child, Emma enjoyed Lego, computer games, hockey, science, and electric guitar. She insisted on having very long hair, and continually resisted the idea of dividing kids by gender.

As puberty began, she experienced a year of **mounting distress**: anxiety, school refusal, self-isolation, emotional vulnerability, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

At age 15, alone one day, she realized that she needed to face the fact that she was actually female. In retrospect, she recognized that she had not felt right in her body since age 8, and that male puberty was troubling her.

Emma was **elated** as she came out to her parents, family, friends and school community. Once she saw that people would **support** her to live in a way that was **congruent with her gender identity**, Emma's **well-being improved dramatically**. Her dysphoria was relieved with hormone blockers that paused the later stages of male puberty. Emma is now a happy teenage girl who excels at school and happens to be very good at computer games and the electric guitar. She aspires to be a scientist.



Ryland, 6

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAHCqnux2fk>

"FIX SOCIETY, PLEASE."²⁷



Leelah Alcorn, age 17

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated like I was, they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights.

My death needs to mean something."

RESOURCES

PARENT SUPPORT GROUP



National, confidential, bilingual on-line peer support group for parents of gender diverse and transgender children and youth.

For more information, e-mail parentsoftranskids@gmail.com or visit <https://www.facebook.com/canadianparentsofgendercreativekids>

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CHILDREN'S GENDER DIVERSITY

Families in Transition Guide, CTYS (2nd ed.)

<http://www.ctys.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/CTYS-FIT-Families-in-Transition-Guide-2nd-edition.pdf>

Gender Creative Kids Canada <http://www.gendercreativekids.ca>

Rainbow Health Ontario <http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca>

Gender Spectrum (U.S.) <http://www.genderspectrum.org>

Supporting Transgender and Gender Creative Youth (2014),
by E. Meyer and A. Pullen Sansfaçon

The Transgender Child (2008), by S. Brill & R. Pepper

The Gender Creative Child (2016), by D. Ehrensaft

CHILDREN'S BOOKS CELEBRATING GENDER DIVERSITY

Jacob's New Dress

<http://www.amazon.ca/Jacobs-New-Dress-Sarah-Hoffman>

I Am Jazz

<http://www.amazon.ca/I-Am-Jazz-Jessica-Herthel/>

10,000 Dresses

<http://www.amazon.ca/10-000-Dresses-Marcus-Ewert/>

The Boy who cried Fabulous

<http://www.amazon.ca/Boy-Who-Cried-Fabulous/>

My Princess Boy

<http://www.amazon.ca/My-Princess-Boy-Cheryl-Kilodavis/>

It's Okay to Be Different

<http://www.amazon.ca/Its-Okay-To-Be-Different/>

Be Who You Are

<http://www.amazon.ca/Who-You-Are-Jennifer-Carr/>

When Kathy is Keith

<http://www.amazon.ca/When-Kathy-Keith-Wallace-Wong/>



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<http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/joint-statement-affirmation-gender-diverse-children-and-youth>

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<https://nowtoronto.com/news/leelah-alcorn-fix-society-not-trans-people/>

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