

As you heard about the harms of gender transition for minors in the past few lessons, you may have been wondering how to talk with your gender dysphoric child about this. How can you keep your child from these dangerous treatments but still show them unconditional love?

Strategies to Grow Your Relationship with Your Gender Dysphoric Child

Strategy 1: Remind them of your love

This should be a no-brainer, but when your child or teen is acting out, as a parent, you can easily forget to say things like, “Nothing you do can change my love for you.” Kids and teens with gender dysphoria often feel shame or rejection, and you should do what you can to keep them from feeling either of those from you.

It’s important to remember that love doesn’t mean affirming an alternate gender identity. There are many things to affirm about your child other than their chosen gender. Here are some ideas.

- *I love you even if you don’t fit in.*
- *You don’t need voices telling you to change who you are.*
- *You were made exactly right (or beautiful).*

Strategy 2: Keep the conversation open

Your child’s trans or nonbinary identity doesn’t mean that your relationship is over! In fact, now is the time for even more interaction with them.

Here’s how:

- First, ask genuine, open-ended questions and listen to the answers. Direct, open-ended questions like “What lets you know you are a boy?” or more general get-to-know-you questions like “What do you do to relax?” are both appropriate. It’s very important that you ask these questions in a non-judgmental way. Let your child know that you love them and hear their thoughts even if they disagree with you.
- Second, spend time with your child, or with the whole family. Doing activities together can help conversations be more natural and maybe more meaningful.
- Third, when your conversations turn to vulnerable topics and you need to say or do something hard, explain why. Keep in mind that these sorts of “hard” conversations should be as few and far between as possible. And they should always happen in non-confrontational ways without arguing or yelling, at least from you.
- Fourth, think about your tone. There’s a spectrum here from matter-of-fact to subtle. Your child’s emotional attachment to their trans identity, as well as your own personality, are both factors in this decision. For example, if you’re already a very matter-of-fact person, you probably need to counteract that with extra sensitivity.

Strategy 3: Give freedom within boundaries

This refers to age appropriate freedom, of course, and you will need wisdom for how to navigate specific areas of freedom or restriction. In general, it will help your relationship to give your child as much leeway as possible.

1. *You can offer to help buy them clothes they are more comfortable wearing.*
2. *Another example is to let them get a haircut or hair dye that better fits their personality.*
3. *Encourage in-person gatherings with their friends, and offer to host them at your home.*
4. *Some families have found that letting their child choose a gender-neutral nickname can help them feel more comfortable in social settings.*

The older your teen is, the more difficult it may be to navigate freedom and boundaries, since their freedom will naturally increase. Try to lean into any trust you have built with them. This certainly doesn't mean using manipulation or threats to get your way. Instead, respectfully ask them to listen to your ideas, emphasizing that you love them and want the best for them. Tell them honestly how you feel, and ask them to compromise. Neither of you will get everything you want, but that's the point of freedom within boundaries.

The teen years can be so tough for your child and for your relationship with them. Keep reaching out in love, and do your best to follow the three strategies we discussed. With time, most parents experience improvement in their relationship with their child.

Another group of medical conditions that may be a factor in gender dysphoria is disorders or differences of sex development. They are very rare. One of them, called congenital adrenal hyperplasia, can cause females to have abnormally high levels of testosterone, similar to PCOS.^{3,4,18} Finding out the specific condition that may be contributing to an adolescent's gender dysphoria may help them understand and accept their unique body.⁵

As you can see, there can be a lot of factors in gender dysphoria. Whatever you're thinking about these factors in your child's life, try not to blame yourself. And don't blame your child either. You're in the right place to find help.