



Strategies for Transgender Parents to Support Their Children



This excerpt from the Note to Readers in Magination Press book, *My Maddy*, by Gayle E. Pitman, PhD, was written by Dr. Randall D. Ehrbar, PsyD. It provides information for transgender and gender diverse parents about how they can support their children.

A Maddy is a parent who is in some ways a blend of a Mommy and a Daddy, and is also a unique kind of parent, just as the word “Maddy,” blends the words “Mommy” and “Daddy” to make a new word. Maddy is used in some families to describe a parent who is transgender or gender diverse. Gender identities like this are often referred to as “non-binary” in that they are gender identities beyond two genders (male and female) that most people are familiar with. Some trans people have non-binary identities, while others have more binary gender identities and identify as male/men or female/women.

Discussing gender identity with your child

It is important to discuss parents’ gender identities in an age-appropriate way focused on your child’s needs.

- Use age-appropriate language, answer questions honestly and simply, and find any answers you don’t know.
- Discussing details about gender affirming medical treatment may be overwhelming for young children who do not ask for more information.
- In terms of timing of coming out, preschool-age children seem to adapt to their parent’s transition best, then adult children, and adolescents often have the hardest time adjusting.

When a parent transitions

In some families a parent “comes out” as trans after the family has been formed and children are already included in the family. A parent’s transition can be a challenging time for children, who may have feelings of grief for how their parent looked prior to coming out. Children may be unsure what their parent’s transition means for their relationship with their parent. The children and family members are also going through a process of transition or transformation. As a parent transitions in your family:

- **Emphasize that they are still the child's parent.**

It's important to let kids know through words and actions that no matter what, they are still the child's parent. Ideally it helps if spouses and co-parents can present a united front to affirm that the transgender or gender diverse parent will continue to be the child's parent.

- **Find terms that are comfortable for you and your child.**

When a parent transitions, children are faced with adjusting how they refer to their parent, which can take practice and evolve over time. It's important not to rush children to give up familiar terms for a loving parent-child bond; it may be important for children to still call their parent "mommy" or "daddy" for their own comfort and consistency.

If a parent who transitions is no longer comfortable with previous labels, the family may move away from them. Children and parents may decide to change titles to those traditionally used for the new gender. If the family now has two mothers or two fathers, the whole family may be involved in deciding how they each want to be referred to.

Different children in the same family may have different preferences or move at different paces in adjusting to these changes. Using terms of affection and parental connection that feel right for your child and making changes at your child's pace are examples of how you can demonstrate the continued importance of your bond with your child.

When a parent is already living in their affirmed gender

Sometimes transgender and gender diverse parents become parents after they are already living in their affirmed gender. In this case, the children do not experience a change in who their parent is. Parents are faced with deciding what and how they will tell their children about their gender history.

Navigating bias

Children of trans parents may be faced with navigating anti-transgender bias and may experience minority stress due to anti-transgender discrimination. You can help your child be involved and empowered in choosing various strategies to navigate anti-transgender bias. For example, children may be selective about who they tell about their parent being trans, or in how they refer to their trans parent in various situations. In other situations, they may prefer to speak up and affirm their experience as a family. It can be important for parents not to take these strategies personally. You can also help your child cope with anti-trans bias when you:

- Foster resilience
- Connect with supportive communities
- Elicit the support of your child's school
- Seek professional supports

*This is an abridged excerpt from the Note To Readers from **My Maddy**. The full note includes more information about the sections discussed here, a note on Intersex, and a list of resources.*

This Article's Author

Randall Ehrbar, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist who has focused on supporting trans people and their families throughout his career, for which he was named a Fellow at the American Psychological Association. He has also been actively involved in the World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH) and in revision of their Standards of Care for the health of trans people. He currently lives and works in the Washington, DC area and is proud to be called "Dad" by his children.

My Maddy

"Most mommies are girls. Most daddies are boys. But lots of parents are like my Maddy. My Maddy has hazel eyes which are not brown or green. And my Maddy likes sporks because they are not quite a spoon or a fork. The best things in the world are not one thing or the other. They are something in between and entirely their own."

This accessible and child-friendly story introduces children to transgender, gender fluid, and gender non-conforming/non-binary parents.