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# NAVIGATING TRANSITION-RELATED CARE:

## A Guide for Parents of Gender-Expansive Youth

### INTRODUCTION

If a parent of a transgender or gender-expansive child, chances are they have had to deal with a healthcare provider who is a part of their child's gender identity. Yet, a recent 2015 study conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality revealed that 24% of respondents reported having to seek medical providers who are transgender. Each lack of knowledge is a major barrier for many gender-expansive people and their families, particularly when family members do not have the perspective themselves.

The good news is that comprehensive gender clinics are going in many places across the country. These multidisciplinary centers are often housed in large health centers or hospitals and offer a variety of affirming providers in one location, including a mental health provider, an endocrinologist, a social worker, a psychologist, and an educational specialist. The team makes sure that there are different options depending on the needs and scope of the clinic. At a clinic, parents and their families are supported by a care coordinator or patient navigator, who can ensure that each individual, including adolescents, and affirming. Gender clinics are also typically able to connect patients with peer support groups and other community resources. In most cases, a gender clinic can also connect patients to other legal services (including support with name and gender marker change) and reproductive health options of the area of daily life including school and work.

Still, however, many parents of transgender youth across the country are struggling to find access to comprehensive clinics. In addition, many parents, families may struggle to find a single provider who is open to affirming. For those families who manage to connect with affirming providers, they will likely have to be the coordinator of their child's care for themselves, often through their pediatrician or primary care provider. This guide will help families navigate gender-affirming and non-related care for their children from the initial search to the delivery of services. While this resource will not offer clinical advice, it will discuss nationally recognized resources in order to deal with and address transgender youth, their families, and their providers.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
To find a comprehensive gender clinic in your area for gender-expansive youth, visit [HRC's interactive map](#).

There are many paths on the journey that is gender exploration, and the most critical element of any path is parental support. Remember that gender exploration may not lead a child to identify as trans; rather, gender exploration is a healthy and critical process for *all* children, cisgender and otherwise. Because no medical interventions are part of this journey prior to puberty, parental support during this period of life means ensuring social support and facilitating social transitions for those who choose them.



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## FINDING THE RIGHT PROVIDERS

For families that are able to access a nearby comprehensive gender clinic, a care coordinator, a patient navigator, or in some cases, a social worker will direct you to the provider in your child's network (typically a behavioral health specialist) and guide you along the path forward.<sup>4</sup>

If you do not have access to a nearby clinic, you may still be able to reach someone in your region for support; many clinics receive calls from all over the country and may be able, in some cases, to have a telehealth service that is accessible to you. If you are a kid in a community with a strong support team, your "provider roadmap" can help you and your family find a comprehensive clinic. Ask each and every healthcare provider, including your pediatrician, about each provider's knowledge and competence in gender-affirming care. Some providers may publicly advertise that they offer transgender population care, but many do not have the experience of working with transgender youth. Other providers may advertise LGBT experience, but really only have experience with LGBTQ+ (especially men and boys). Consider reaching out to a provider over the phone, or visiting them in person at a child's school, a cafe, or a community center, such as:

Approach the human rights organization you are looking for in your area?

My child identifies as a [non-binary] and is [13]. Have you worked with others who identify in his age of life before?

Do you have general training in working with children and/or adolescents?

How comfortable and experienced are you with helping transgender people like my child access physical transition-related care, like hormone therapy, or surgery?

Do you have access to a list of local gender-affirming services or specialists in case there are elements of care that you cannot provide?

How comfortable and competent is your support staff in working with transgender youth and their families?

Does your billing office have experience in submitting claims for gender-affirmation patient care?

*“Last year when [our child] was struggling with depression, we looked for a therapist that could assist with cognitive behavior therapy (that wasn't available at [the hospital]), and it took me 8 months and calls/emails to more than two dozen in our area to find a good fit. Half who listed on their websites or Psychology Today's website claiming to work with trans folks admitted they really didn't. And most who did wanted to talk to her about her gender, almost to confirm she really is trans, rather than on the reasons we were seeking care.”*

— Debi Jackson, mother of a transgender daughter



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With a bit of effort each, you'll find a wide array of Facebook groups and other online communities for families of transgender, including [Tan Chance Healh](#). The effectiveness of local information and support for parents and caregivers. If you find a highly recommended provider who has a long history, he should be able to provide a history of nearby services that have the approval of local LGBTQ centers should be able to do the same. In addition, the editorial review of an information provider is hosted online, including [Tan Gender Care Linking](#) and [Tan -Heal h](#). It is important to note that not all providers listed in online directories have been established reliable services; you should still plan to do independent research on a provider you find in the list. Consider visiting Seattle Children's website on "[Choosing a Men's Health Provider](#) for more general guidance on selecting a men's health professional.

Unfortunately, in some cases, families may not find a local clinic or information provider who can provide their child's needs. Parents faced with this concern can consider making their initial appointment for their child's health care. For example, a family living in a mall, a local community health center or information provider may be able to make one or two appointments, he or she can accept to be blocked or home and even have the prescribing specialist provide their local primary care provider (PCP) in managing ongoing care. This also offers an opportunity for local providers to be established as an gender care basic, and a primary care provider of the local health. If a child's PCP is open to learning about gender-affirming care, he or she may be an option for emotional and in-person training including Fen's Health National [LGBT Health Education Center](#).

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## ELEMENTS OF TRANSITION CARE

Before families can initiate their child's transition care team, they must understand the elements of an individualized gender-affirming care plan. For each child, the health care provider, family, and community members of experience and need are guiding their identity and expression. Many children implement their safe pace in which they explore gender and may find that the safe and comfortable in their gender and expression of themselves. Other may identify through a different gender and may be a result of social or physical gender transition.

For children, pre-adolescent and early adolescent, gender transition is mainly a social process and may include a legal process as well. For those in the early age of puberty, puberty blockers may be helpful in medical intervention. The elements of gender transition for a child may include gender-affirming hormones, hair removal, and a variety of gender expression. **There is no one set way for a child to transition and it varies from child to child.**

To learn more about the most common steps in gender transition, see the chapter below and visit HRC's website, "[Supporting & Caring for](#)

[Before Family Transition](#) (1/CCa) be helpful (process and management) 41 90.TJO-1d[(below and in H)-42 0



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## COMMON STEPS IN GENDER TRANSITION

	Examples	Ages	Reversibility
<b>Social transition</b>	Adopting gender-affirming hair, clothing, name, pronouns, electronic mail, and other facilities	Any	Reversible
<b>Puberty blockers</b>	Gonadotropin-releasing hormone analogs, cyproterone acetate, and hormone therapy	Early to late	Reversible
<b>Gender-affirming hormone therapy</b>	Testosterone (for hormone-affirming female-to-male) and estrogen (for hormone-affirming male-to-female)	Adolescence (with appropriate supervision)	Partially Reversible
<b>Gender-affirming surgeries</b>	“Top surgery” (to create a male-typical chest appearance) “Bottom surgery” (surgery on genital or perineal area) Facial feminization surgery	Adolescence (with appropriate supervision) and Adult**	No Reversible
<b>Legal transition</b>	Changing gender and name recorded on birth certificate, school records, and other documents	Any	Reversible

\*\*Note: Surgery protocols vary by region, and age of eligibility for surgical procedures may vary based on the surgeon and insurance company policies. While some surgeons may offer surgery for gender-affirming people as young as 13, insurance will likely not cover the procedure until the individual is at least 18 years old. Where possible, consider consulting with a fertility surgeon to determine how best to address child needs and insurance coverage.

### Behavioral Health Specialists

Behavioral health specialists (including licensed clinical social workers (LCSW), psychologists, psychiatrists, marriage and family therapists, among others) are a critical piece of the journey toward gender-affirmation for gender-affirming people. Many interdisciplinary gender clinics will evaluate and engage children, in particular, pending medical consultation with a behavioral health specialist (often a child psychologist) before beginning or considering physical intervention.

The responsibilities of behavioral health specialists in gender-affirming care often include:

- Creating a safe and open environment for the people who experience gender, and others who may be experiencing;

- Assessing the ongoing potential for a person to determine their need and readiness for intervention, social support, and the role of family, and the role of support groups in creating a home;

- Working with the individual and family to address different paths forward in social and/or physical transition. This can help ensure that ongoing potential for realistic expectations for the outcomes of blockers, hormone, and surgery;



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## WHO GIVES CONSENT?

In most circumstances, both the child and his or her family can accept or be blocked and someone else can act on their behalf (either a legal representative or a behavioral health professional). If a child is under the age of consent, his or her process will look different because of different health care settings: some will only require the informed consent of one parent or guardian, while others might require the consent of both. Parents do not always agree with their child's health care or medication or aid in their transition process. If a family confronts his or her child and his or her health care provider cannot be reached, the best path forward is to engage a family therapist who is experienced in gender identity, and can alleviate the impact of the transition on the child. In some cases, when parents cannot agree, and a court has ruled that a family therapist has not been effective or it is not possible, legal advice may need to be sought to ensure the optimal gender care for a child or youth.

## PARENTS AND MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: A TEAM APPROACH

Many parents will find themselves looking for a provider who is open to supporting an gender youth, but who has the expertise to do so. This may mean that the need for more information on the clinical aspects of an gender care, but the alternative may be more of a gendering youth or making a social role (even if self-initiated).

For example, the same may be true for healthcare providers who are looking to learn more. The expertise can provide doctors, nurses, and front-line staff training on the road map of an gender care, and offer a more holistic view in the context of an gender identity and health disparities. Many health care providers do not have the expertise to look for an open-minded provider and will need to modify their Electronic Health Record (EHR) system to accommodate an patient, particularly legal gender markers, pronouns, and chosen a name; they can just do so.

## NAVIGATING INSURANCE COVERAGE

For many families of gender-expansive youth, the greatest challenge in accessing gender-affirming care is determining their insurance will not cover the medical and potentially surgical intervention. Because health insurance is largely independent of each other, navigating the process can be complex and individualized; however, families are not always able to afford the best location. While it is illegal for insurance companies to discriminate against transgender people, they are given the ability to decide if they will cover medical costs for all of the transition process.

For example, the same may be true for those in need of support. The National Center for Transgender Equality offers a comprehensive guide on getting health care covered, along with a helpful "know your rights" page.



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## PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: COORDINATING CARE AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

If a patient is unable to access a comprehensive gender clinic, it is likely to find themselves doing the work of coordinating multiple providers. By the time a child is in a teenage, if he or she is not going home to help and seeking gender-affirming therapy, he or she is likely to be seeking a behavioral health provider, a primary care provider, and/or an endocrinologist, and a surgeon.



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## CONCLUSION

As transgender care is integrated into medical schools, more and more transgender people, children and teenagers are accessing the comprehensive care they need. However, even in areas with public transgender-affirming providers, families of transgender people still need not feel alone in their journey to access care. Thank you to our national and local community and legal advocacy organizations, online forums and support groups, and healthcare training centers, healthcare providers, enabling social and physical affirmations for all. In embarking on this journey, the parents of a transgender child or teenager, will continue to need practical knowledge and assistance, paving a path forward for our transgender community.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keeling, M., Moore, L., & Anang, M. (2016). *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.
- <sup>2</sup> Minton, G., Adkins, D., Conard, L. A., Ehrenfeld, D., Elliott, T., Harkin, L. A., et al. (2016). *Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children*. Washington, DC: Human Rights Campaign, American College of Obstetrician Gynecologist, and American Academy of Pediatrics.
- <sup>3</sup> "Gender Dysphoria." (2013). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- <sup>4</sup> Lambert, C., Hopwood, R., Keoghlian, A., Goldhamer, H. (2018). *Creating a Transgender Health Program at Your Health Center*. Boston, MA: National LGBT Health Education Center.
- <sup>5</sup> Miranda, L., Lee, M., Whittington, C. (2018). *2018 Gender-Expansive Youth Report*. Washington, DC: Human Rights Campaign Foundation.
- <sup>6</sup> Health People 2019, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health. Washington, DC: U.S.
- <sup>7</sup> "Know Your Rights: Medical." (2019). Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.
- <sup>8</sup> Deitch, M. B., Ed. (2016). *Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Nonbinary People*. San Francisco, CA: Center of Excellence for Transgender Health.