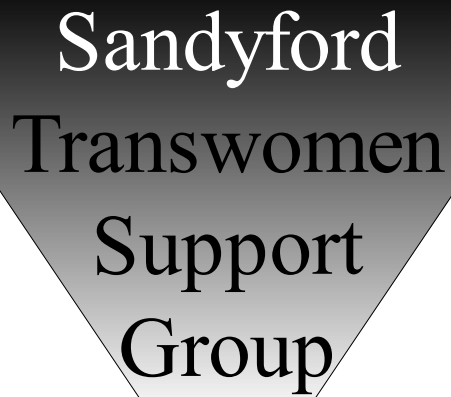


A family member or friend has told you that they are

Transsexual



Sandyford
Transwomen
Support
Group

So: –

Your Son, Daughter, Dad, Mum, Sister, Brother, Granddad, Grandmother, Uncle or Aunt or indeed friend, has just told you that they are Transsexual.

First things first – don't be alarmed – there is nothing to be afraid of. This little booklet will hopefully dispel any fear, anger, embarrassment, that you may have. Your relative or friend, has not changed as such, for deep within, they are the same person.

A wee bit of biology may help here. We all know that men and women, boys and girls are different. They don't look or behave the same. Externally, the appearances of the sex of our bodies – the genitalia – what's between our legs, are the signs we all know about. Internally, the organs of reproduction are also different.

On top of this, scientific research has identified that small areas of the brain are also different between men and women. This research has also shown that the differences in the brain are programmed before birth, and those differences are believed to be associated with the feeling of being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. This feeling is called Gender Identity.

Your family member or friend, up until now, has tried to fit into the expectations of you and society as a whole, and behave, think and to fulfil what is called the Gender Role of their external appearance.

When someone close to you tells you that they are transsexual, it means that they have a **Gender Identity Disorder**, also be known as Gender Dysphoria. They experience anxiety, uncertainty and have persistently uncomfortable feelings about the sex that they were born with. They have a great desire, feeling and need and believe that they have a gender identity that is different from their anatomical sex.

To fully understand gender dysphoria and transsexualism, it is important to set out what the terms sex, gender, gender identity and gender role mean in terms of this condition. The definitions of each term are detailed below.

Sex - in this article, sex refers to male or female, the biological sex that you were born with. It is determined by the sex organs (gonads), which are testes in males, and ovaries in females.

Gender - in this article, gender refers to the feeling of being either male or female (or in very rare cases, neither or both). Your gender can be determined by your public persona, your interactions with others and, since the Gender Recognition Act 2004, your legal status.

Gender identity - this refers to your personal sense of knowing which gender you belong to, or the way you see yourself. For example, if a person sees themselves as male and identifies themselves as such, their gender identity is male.

Gender role - this refers to the outer image of being male or female, and is largely determined by culture and society, as well as the way that others see you. Your gender role is determined by things like the kinds of clothes that you wear, the way that you behave, and how these things allow others to see you as male or female.

For people with gender dysphoria, there is confusion between their sex, their gender identity and their gender role. They feel that their gender identity does not match the sex that they were born with, and they may prefer to take on a gender role that opposes the stereotypical image of their sex.

To do this they will need medical treatment to bring their body more in line with their feelings. This process called transition, can take a long time. It involves dressing and behaving differently to what you were accustomed to. They will also start using a new name, with which they will have to notify the likes of employers, banks and/or building societies, utility suppliers.

Your family member or friend will need your support during this time. It is not always easy for them as they have to deal with a lot of issues.

You will most likely maintain and strengthen your relationship with them, if you:

- Try to recognise how important your love, acceptance and support are to them.
- Try to remain warm and affectionate, even if you experience discomfort with the situation at present.
- Try to listen, without judgement, anger, argument or confrontation.
- Try to learn more about their situation and struggles – show that you care enough to make an effort to read, ask questions and educate yourself.
- Try to communicate. Don't shut them out. Keep talking to them even if at first your conversations are mainly about your fears.
- Try to trust that what they are doing is right for them, that they have not made decisions lightly but after years of consideration.
- Try to use their preferred name and pronoun correctly and treat the person in with their gender identity.
- Try to appreciate that their basic character, temperament, and personality will most likely remain the same as before.

Please remember - It's not your fault

The first and most important thing to remember when discussing or discovering that a friend or family member is transsexual is that their being transsexual is *not* your fault. People either are transsexual or they aren't and if they are, it is a condition that they are born with; it does not develop due to you being a bad family member or friend or you being a bad influence on them.

Also - They are still the same person

Another very important thing to remember is that your transsexual family member or friend, is not a completely different person. Their favourite colour is the same, they still like the same foods, do the same activities. This is an addition, a change of one aspect of their identity.

And that - Pronouns are still important

If your transsexual family member or friend asks you to use a certain set of pronouns and a different name, it is respectful to do so. Likewise, it is very hurtful to continue to use the 'old' set and the 'old' name, even if it doesn't seem that way. Understandably, the change can take some time; the effort is usually much appreciated. Usually, it is seen as better to simply correct a slip of the tongue and move on in the sentence, rather than stopping to apologise (and therefore drawing attention to it).

Very important is - Confidentiality

It cannot be stressed enough that everyone has a right to privacy. A person's transsexual status should always be treated with the same high level of confidentiality as any other sensitive personal information.

Some transsexual people may be happy to have certain people know they are transsexual, but not others. So even if they appear open about their status, leave it up to them to decide who they wish to tell. Revealing someone is transsexual ('outing' them) not only violates their right to privacy, it also places them at risk of discrimination and harassment. It can sometimes even place them at risk of physical or sexual assault.

Please - Avoid inappropriate questions.

Each transsexual person is not obliged to be a public spokesperson for the whole of the transsexual community. So don't expect them to want to talk about the subject anywhere at any time. If you have questions you want to ask, which you think are appropriate, phrase them politely and carefully and choose a suitable time. If the person says that they would rather not discuss something, then don't pressurise them or else they will end up unwilling to talk about anything.

For further information you can visit the following websites:

www.parentsenquiryscotland.org

A group of parents, with LGBT offspring, who provide support and information, for anyone who knows, or is related to a trans person.

www.gires.org.uk

A UK site with plenty of useful information.

www.gender.org.uk/WOBSMatters

Women Of the Beaumont Society are women who operate a helpline from their personal experiences and knowledge of being in a relationship with a gender dysphoric person and can therefore empathise with their callers.

www.transparency.org

An American site.

It was founded by a transgender parent and is dedicated to the transgender parent and their children, and committed to the fight to protect and honour the precious relationship between them.

www.colage.org

An American site.

Colage is a national movement of children, youth and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents. They build community and work towards social justice through youth empowerment, leadership development, education and advocacy.

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