

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE YOUNG AND TRANSGENDER?

While the world is becoming a safer place for sexual minorities, it's still difficult to be young and gender variant. For other sexual minority youth, it's about whom you're attracted to. For young transgenders, it's about your basic identity, how you want to act, what you want to wear, what you are. Young transgenders still get a constant message about the sex and gender they're "supposed" to be. It can be very difficult for someone, who knows deep inside that they are really a boy or a girl, to be ridiculed or physically attacked for trying to be true to them self. The stress can be very hard and lead to depression and suicide. Too often counsellors are unfamiliar with transgender issues.

Things are getting better for transgenders, however. There are positive portrayals of transgender individuals in films and television programs. More people are out about their gender identity and are serving as positive role models. Companies, cities, and a few states have added gender identity to their anti-discrimination policies. Students, both gay and straight, in high schools and colleges, are more supportive of their transgender classmates. While it's still difficult to be a differently gendered young person, the future looks hopeful.

MAKING CONTACT

You may be ready to find out more. Start by reading. If you feel comfortable, ask the librarian in your public library. If your library does not have much on sexuality, or if you aren't comfortable requesting them in person, call the Family Resource Connection at 1-800-298-4321. Books and videos will be mailed to you at no cost, along with a postage paid mailer to return them. This service is free and confidential. Another way to obtain information is to check out the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender section of a large bookstore. The Southern NH HIV/AIDS Task Force and the PFLAG NH Chapters, in Concord and on the Seacoast, offer confidential lending libraries of gay-positive books and videos.

There are several organizations listed in this brochure that will provide you with accurate, current and specific HIV/AIDS information, along with a counselling and support.

PFLAG NH has a Helpline (800) 750-2524 and HEADREST has a teen info-line (800) 639-6095.

Both will let you talk about your feelings and will direct you to other organizations that help GLBT people.

RESOURCES

PFLAG's T-NET
<http://www.youth-guard.org/pflag-t-net/>

The International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)
IFGE, PO Box 229 Waltham MA 02254-0229
(781) 899-2212
Web: www.ifge.org E-mail: info@ifge.org

Trans*topia
www.youthresource.com/community/transgender/
Information by and for young transgenders

Intersex Society of North America (ISNA)
P.O. Box 3070 Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3070
(734) 994-7369
Web: www.isna.org, E-mail: info@isna.org
Trevor Helpline: 24-hour toll-free helpline for GLBT youth staffed by trained counselors (800) 850-8078

Other NH GLBT Positive Resources:

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| So. NH HIV / AIDS Task Force | (603) 595-8464 |
| PFLAG NH Helpline | (800) 750-2524 |
| Youth Support Groups: | |
| Concord Outright | (603) 224-2407 |
| Manchester Outright | (603) 537-7004 |
| Seacoast Outright | (603) 431-1013 |
| Nashua Outright | (603) 889-8210 |
| Headrest Teenline | (800) 639-6095 |

This brochure is based on and uses material from other Growing Up... brochures originally written by Kevin Cranston and Cooper Thompson, with help from members of BAGLY, Boston Area Gay and Lesbian Youth. This document was prepared by PFLAG NH.

GROWING UP TRANSGENDER

A BROCHURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Information for young people about their gender identity

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is dedicated to the preserving of families in loving relationships, to educating an ill-informed public and to advocating for full civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

PFLAG NH

PO Box 957, Concord, NH 03301
Helpline (800) 750-2524 (NH only)

www.pflagnh.org
admin@pflagnh.org

For information about PFLAG presentations in schools, church groups, health care & social service organizations, call (603) 528-6175

PFLAG NH thanks Southern NH HIV/AIDS Task Force for permission to reproduce and distribute this brochure.

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WHO ARE TRANSGENDER PEOPLE?

Transgender individuals are those who, in some significant way, don't fit into society's categories of masculine men and feminine women. Transgender individuals may express themselves in ways usually considered proper for the other sex, or in ways that are "outside the box". They might look and behave in ways that are a mixture of masculine and feminine, or different from either.

WHAT KINDS OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE ARE THERE?

Transgender people come in many varieties. While some cross gender behaviour like sewing and cooking for men, and contact sports for women, have become more acceptable in society, presenting your self as a member of the other sex, or as not being clearly belonging to either sex, is still usually considered abnormal.

Because some gay men and lesbian women are also gender variant, many people assume that all gender variant people are gay or lesbian. Transgender people can be attracted to members of the same sex, the other sex, or both, just like anyone else. Because of the confusion of sexual orientation and gender identity, gender variant people are often mistreated in society for being "gay", no matter what their sexual orientation is.

Transgender individuals are usually designated by the direction of the changes (temporary or permanent) in their gender presentation as male to female (MtF, transwomen) and female to male (FtM, transmen).

Transgender individuals include:

- Crossdressers - most often heterosexual men, who derive satisfaction from dressing as members of the other sex. This is done part time and often in private. Crossdressers are not interested in changing their physical sex.
- Drag queens and kings are gay and lesbian individuals who crossdress part of the time, on stage or in public. Their expression is part of their gay or lesbian identity.
- Transsexuals are individuals who are uncomfortable with their physical sex and desire to be a member of the other sex. Transsexuals usually change their bodies with electrolysis, hormones, and surgery, to fit their inner sense of self.

- Transgenderists may be any of the kinds of people listed above, but specifically, a transgenderist is someone who lives full or part time as a member of the other sex, without genital surgery, or who lives as a mixed gender or other gender individual.

Intersex individuals differ from the common male/female binary, in some physical way, in their genes, gonads or genitals. Most are arbitrarily assigned after birth, to a sex based on the size of their genitals. Surgery is often performed to make their bodies "normal". Intersex people, because of their physical differences, have other issues than trans-genders, but some of them find that the sex assigned to them at birth is wrong, and they follow life paths like those of transsexuals.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I AM

Understanding gender identity is a lifelong process for everyone, not just those who show major gender variation. Some people who are different in childhood—some tomboys and feminine boys—grow up to be heterosexual men and women, others grow up to be gays and lesbians, and still others, transgender adults. It's often not possible to tell where someone will end up. Some men who identify as crossdressers later come to see themselves as transsexuals, as do some butch lesbians, who find a truer identity as transmen. The important thing to understand is that no matter what others say, there is no right or wrong way to understand your gender identity. The best guideline is your own deepest sense of self. Only careful exploration can help you find your truth.

WHAT ABOUT SEXUALITY?

Although many people still assume that any transgender individual is "gay"—sexually attracted to someone of their own biological sex—that simply isn't true. The largest group of transgender people is composed of heterosexual men who crossdress. Other transgenders are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Even transsexuals are not necessarily attracted to members of the same biological sex. Some MtF transsexuals identify as lesbians, and some FtM transsexuals identify as gay men.

Sexually active transgender individuals face the same risks of sexually transmitted disease, including AIDS, as anyone else. The same precautions apply.

To reduce your risk of getting AIDS:

- Do not share needles from injection drugs
- Don't have intercourse where one partner uses their penis without using a condom.
- While some forms of oral sex are lower risk, a barrier-like latex or plastic wrap is safer.
- Choosing not to have sex is always OK, and is the most effective way to prevent HIV infection.

Transgender people face an additional risk in being sexually active. Some individuals, usually men, become violent when they find that their partner's genitals are not what they expected. Always be honest before become sexually intimate.

WHOM SHOULD I TELL?

More and more GLBT youth are learning to feel better about themselves. As you start to listen to your deepest feelings, and learn more about what it means to be transgender, you will begin to be comfortable with your sexuality. This is the process called *coming out*.

The first step in coming out is to tell yourself that you are transgender and say, "That's O.K." Later you may want to tell someone else, someone you trust to be understanding and sympathetic. You might choose a friend or an adult. You will probably want to meet other transgender and GLB youth for friendship or a more intimate relationship. Some youth are able to come out to their families. You need to decide whether or not to tell your family, and to choose the right time.

It is crucial to be honest with yourself. Just as self-denial costs you, coming out pays off. Most young people who accept their sexuality say they feel calmer, happier and more confident.

It is important to have someone to talk to, because it's not normal or healthy for young people to have to keep secret such an important part of their lives. Remember, Headrest has a gay-positive Teen Info Line, and PFLAG NH has a listing of safe people with whom you may talk.