

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 who 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 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 themselves. The stress can be very hard and lead to depression and suicide. Too often counselors are unfamiliar with transgender issues.

Things are getting better for transgenders however. There are positive portrayals of transgendered 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 Students, both gay and straight, in High Schools and Colleges are more supportive of their transgendered 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 Lesbian/Gay/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 (211) 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
www.ifge.org, info@ifge.org

Trans*topia
www.youthresource.com/community/transgender/index.cfm
Information by and for young transgender folks.

Intersex Society of North America (ISNA)
P.O. Box 3070 Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3070
(734) 994-7369
www.isna.org, info@isna.org

Trevor Helpline: 24-hour toll-free helpline for GLBT youth
staffed by trained counsellors (800) 850-8078

OTHER NH GLBT-POSITIVE RESOURCES

So. NH HIV/AIDS Task Force	(603) 595-8464
PFLAG NH Helpline	211
Youth Support Groups:	
Concord Outright	(603) 224-2407
Manchester Outright	(603) 537-7004
Seacoast Outright	seacoastoutright.org
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

Brought to you by PFLAG-NH (Parents, Friends, and Families of Lesbians and Gays), a national organization with 4 chapters in New Hampshire:

Concord • Plymouth
Keene • Seacoast

Support

To cope with an adverse society

Education

To enlighten an ill-informed public

Advocacy

To secure equal rights for all

PO Box 957
Concord, NH 03302

<http://pflagnh.org/>

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WHO ARE TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE?

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

WHAT KINDS OF TRANSGENDER PEOPLE ARE THERE?

Transgendered people come in many varieties. While some cross gender behavior, for example sewing and cooking for men and contact sports for women, have become more acceptable in society, presenting yourself 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. Transgendered 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.

Transgendered 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).

Transgendered individuals include:

- Crossdressers, most often heterosexual men, who derive satisfaction from dressing as members of the other sex. This is done part time, 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 gendered individual.

Intersexed 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 and surgery is often done to make their bodies "normal." Intersexed 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 gays and lesbians and still others transgendered 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 transgendered 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 as gay men.

Sexually active transgendered 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.

Transgendered 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 becoming sexually intimate.

WHOM SHOULD I TELL?

More and more lgbt 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.