

Understanding Transgender – What Parents Should Know

**STRONG
FAMILY
ALLIANCE**

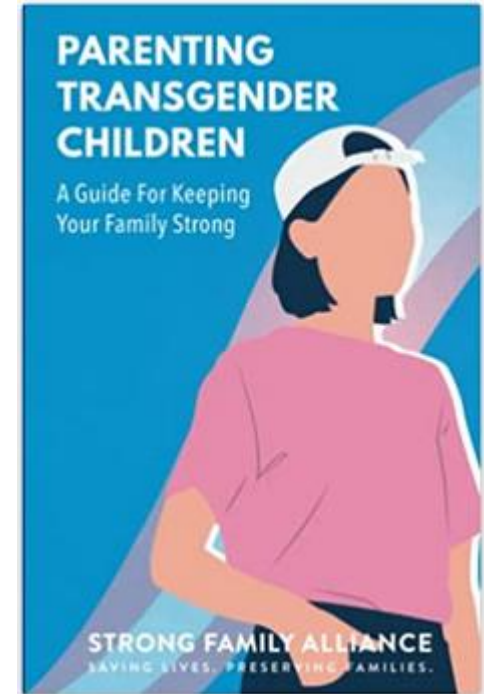
www.strongfamilyalliance.org

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What's Changed Over Time

STRONGFAMILYALLIANCE.ORG

- Focused on families struggling as a child comes out
 - 1) helping parents become informed allies
 - 2) helping children come out safely
- Huge growth:
 - 2017 = 2K visits
 - 2022 = 102K visits
- Doubled content in 2022: Transgender main focus
 - Growing number of searches around transgender terms
 - Toxic political climate



Available on Amazon
<https://shorturl.at/fGT491>

Two Presentations at CONVO

Understanding Transgender

Oct. 12 – 1PM

What Parents Should Know

- Recent research
- Common Parent Experiences
- Actions that Help
- Actions that Hurt
- Friendships, Relationships, Dating
- Tough Questions
- Basic Ways to Support Your Child

Oct. 13 - 1PM (2nd Floor, Conf Rm #4)

What Parents and Allies Should Know

- Recent Research
- Terms to Understand
- Myths That Stigmatize Trans People
- The Coming Out Process
- Areas of Transitioning
- Ways to Really be an Ally

Recent Research: Survey of Trans Individuals

MARCH 2023:

Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) and
Washington Post produced
The Washington Post/KFF Trans Survey in
America

<https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-the-washington-post-trans-survey-trans-in-america/>

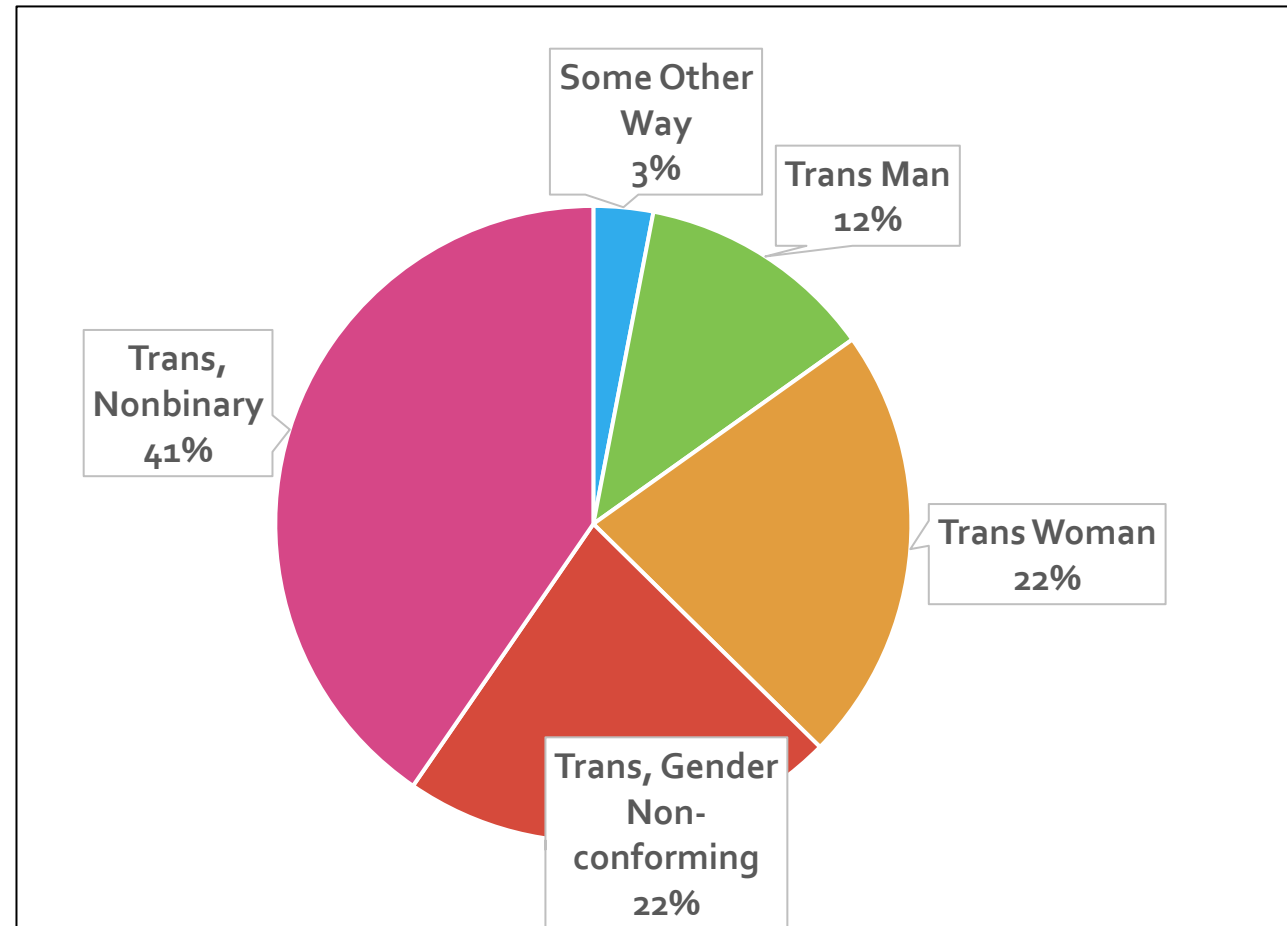
Key Findings

- Transitioning can mean a variety of things
- Individuals transition to their comfort level
- Most trans respondents did NOT have transition related surgical treatments.

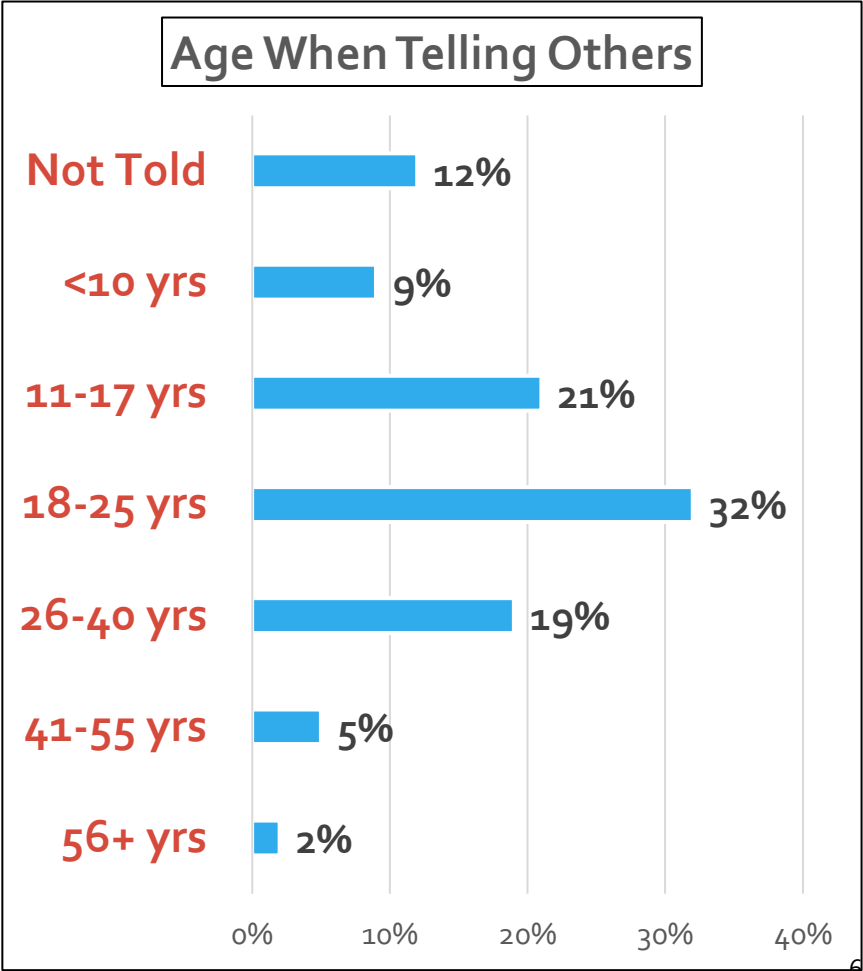
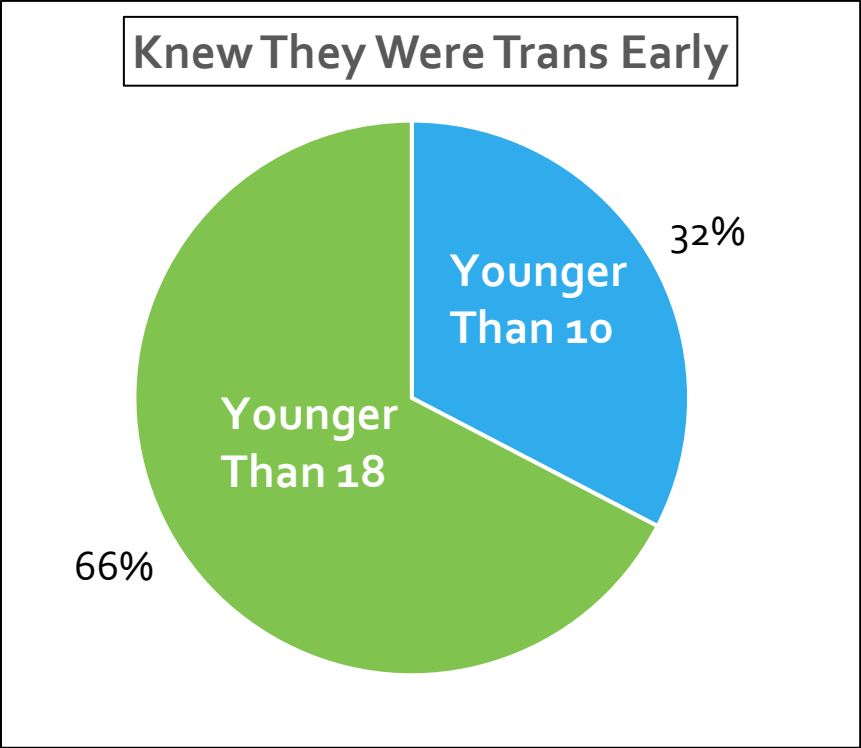
Forms of Transitioning

- **77%** - Changed their type of clothing
- **76%** - Changed hairstyle/grooming to match their identity
- **57%** - Used name different from birth certificate
- **31%** - Used Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or puberty blocking hormones
- **16%** - Had gender-affirming surgery/ surgically altered their appearance

Most Trans Adults View Themselves as Nonbinary

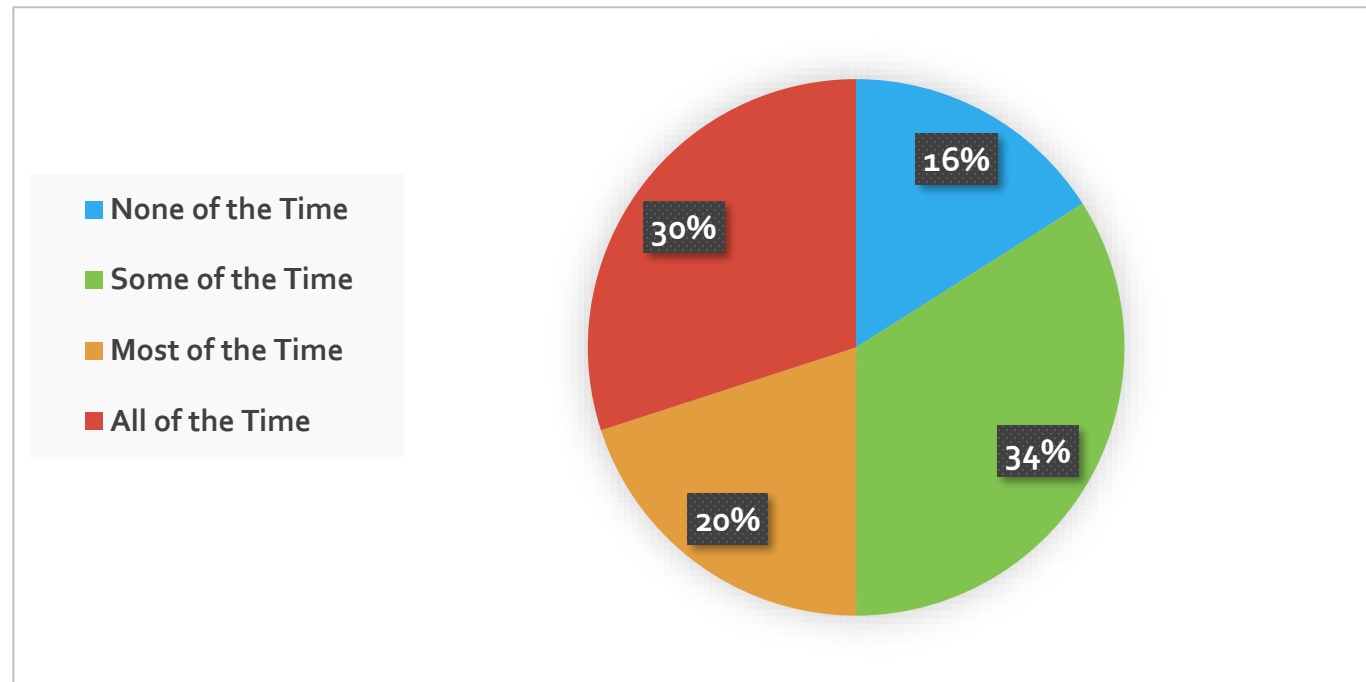


Trans Adults Experience



Daily Life of Trans Adults

Currently, how much of the time do you physically present as a gender (such as a man, woman, or nonbinary) that is different from the one assigned to you at birth?





Daily Life of Trans Adults

Hardship is Real and Ongoing

- 64%** Been verbally attacked
- 40%** Had unnecessary or invasive questions at work
- 25%** Have been physically attacked
- 21%** Fired or denied a job or promotion
- 17%** Refused service by health care provider
- 13%** Evicted or denied housing
- 21%** Trans people of color evicted or denied housing

The Parent Journey

There is a Journey for Parents as Well

- Journey of understanding and learning
- Levels of acceptance and comfort
- Different experiences
 - Vary by age of your child
 - Vary by situation
 - Vary by proximity

Some Common Experiences or Stages

- Not purely an intellectual struggle
 - Matters of the heart – an emotional journey
 - Friction within the larger family or community
- Do not happen in same order
- Some may pass quickly, others slowly
- May not happen just once

“I’m 5 years into parenting an LGBTQ+ child, but I continue to learn. The issues change over time (safety, bullying, health, dating, college, roommates, partners, etc.) but I find I get better at it. What was hard at first has become so much easier. And finding good resources is such a gift.”

~A Father’s story from the Parent Stories page

Common Stages

Stage 1 – Denial

- Initial denial/disbelief very common
 - Ranges from complete surprise to occasional wondering
 - Even after a child comes out parents may wonder if this is true

The difficulty:

- Few focus on understanding transgender until it's personal
- Facing what being transgender means for you/your child

Stage 2 – Grief

- Sadness about a loss
 - The child we “knew”
 - An imagined future
 - Death of dreams
- It takes effort to create a new view & transform dreams
 - Fundamental hopes/dreams endure
 - A good partner, health, career, family, community

“I did a lot of grieving over the loss of the image I had of my only son in my mind and heart. I had to deal with the loss of my previous perception of our relationship and the loss of my expectations of the future... Eventually I found friends, relatives and colleagues I felt safe to talk with about this change in our lives. I also chose to get some therapy to help myself process my feelings and to be the best parent I could be to our daughter.”

~Mother of a transgender daughter

Common Stages

Stage 3 – Blame/Guilt

- The huge question of “Why?”
 - Did we do something wrong?
 - Blame the child for changing, forcing us to readjust
 - Blame friends, partners, other LGBTQ
- The difficulty:
 - Big learning curve ahead
 - We are protectors and guides
 - Crops up repeatedly when our child struggles
- The bigger difficulty – the blame from society
 - YOU must have done something wrong
 - You allowed media, discussions, books
 - The assumption of allowed indoctrination

“As we began to share her truth, with her blessing, we learned what the important people in our lives think – and the majority of them reacted in love to the news. We discovered that we no longer cared so much about what the non-supportive people think.”

~Mother of a transgender daughter

Common Stages

Stage 4 – Fear

- Fear of what we don't understand
 - Many unknowns
- Fear Reactions from others
 - Telling what may be a difficult truth
 - Fear for ourselves and our child
- Fear of being judged
 - Losing friends, family and faith community
- Fear of gossip
- **Some fears are dangerous:**
 - Hatred, violence, & discrimination in society
 - It's important to be their safe place
 - Hostile friend or family member
- Fear crops up repeatedly when our child struggles
 - It looks like worry

*“I used to think you
worried too much...
but now I understand.”*

~My daughter at 30

Common Stages

Stage 5 – Anger

- We may feel anger at:
 - Society or governments for allowing /promoting discrimination
 - Ourselves for not recognizing the truth sooner
 - Our child for family upheaval
 - Other family members who do/don't understand
 - God for allowing this
 - “Why me?” and “Why my child?”
 - Our faith community for rejecting or condemning
- Important to deal with your own anger
 - Don't direct it at your child = Carry your own emotions
- Information can combat anger
- Don't expect your child to educate you
 - Seek books, resources, counseling, family/friends (maybe)
 - [TransFamilies.org](https://www.transfamilies.org) – online meetings for parents & youth

“The greatest freedom for me came when I realized that (her) being transgender was not a defect but a gift in my life...I have grown closer to my daughter and seen her becoming happier every year. This journey had made me a better father and a better person.”

~Father of a transgender daughter

Common Stages

Stage 6 – Self-Realization

- Realizing we must change, not our child
 - Redraw the family picture
 - Support our child and the family they will create
 - Connect with loving family/friends
 - Find a nurturing faith community
 - Learn and help others
- Building a safe space where they can create a good life and become their best self
- **Stage 7 – Acceptance**
- Loving them just as they are
 - Everyone has their own pace and path
 - Every additional person who accepts/supports provides more strength, safety, and community
- The litmus test: Are they happier, healthier, more eager for life

“Our child was bright, happy and outgoing until he reached 6th grade and then suddenly, he became withdrawn, inwardly focused and depressed... We took him to see a psychologist who couldn’t figure out what was going on. Many transgender kids can’t handle the pain that accompanies having a body that doesn’t match the brain...”

We are so grateful Ashley stayed alive until she figured out where the pain was coming from. Seeing her happy now... We have all become so much closer. She has a loving spouse and is becoming the person she was created to be. This is the greatest joy a parent can have.”

~ Father of a transgender daughter

Parent Actions that Help

Will You Always Love Me?

- The most important issue
 - Often unasked
 - “Of course...” attitude is not enough
 - Warmth, respect, displays of physical and emotional affection
 - Even while you are struggling
 - More important now than ever

Keep Talking – and Listening

- Silence can feel like anger or make subjects taboo
 - News items, characters in TV/film, a friend, a conversation
- LISTEN – you need to know what your child is facing
 - If they can come to you first, they are safer
 - You don’t have to have answers, just be there for them
 - Use open-ended questions – don’t pry
- Practice W-A-I-T
 - Why Am I Talking?

*“You can be your
child’s anchor,
their safe place.
Don’t ever drop
your end of the rope.”*

~
Dr. Phil

Actions That Help

Make Sure Your Child Feels Affirmed and Supported

- Refrain from arguing, suggesting alternatives, or explanations
- Continue to include them in family activities
- Try to get to know their friends and romantic partners
 - Popcorn & movies, sponsor a team/activity, carpool, provide refreshments at an event, attend everything and reach out to kids/parents
- Help them find their community
 - Isolation leads to loneliness and despair
 - Help them find support organizations, attend with them if appropriate
 - Not just LGBTQ – Finding connections & acceptance
 - Teams, schools, clubs, service projects, community activities
- Faith connections can be enormous help or harm

Actions That Help

Use Their Preferred Name

- One of the biggest struggles
 - Changing the name of someone they have know for so long
- Names symbolize who we are
 - Important in every culture
- For parents can seem like a dismissal of the love in the birth name
 - Honors a loved one, affirms culture, meaningful to parent, etc.
 - Plus years and years of habit

Actions That Help

Use Their Preferred Name

- Because names are significant this matters
 - Chosen name symbolizes hope of change or view of themselves
 - Birth name is who they were, not who they are
 - It simply doesn't fit – or it may be painful to them as a reminder
 - Maybe just a name they love or dozens of other reasons
 - Chosen name helps them step into their true identity
- It's important to them
- Tip: might help to think of it as a nickname at first
 - Make continuous and serious efforts to use the chosen name

“Our finding just shows how much teens value their parents. When we asked...what actions they saw as showing support, parents talked about ..the gender clinic, getting them connect to resources. But what the majority of adolescents wanted most was for parents just to use their preferred name and pronoun.”

*~Tandy Aye, M.D.,
Stanford Medicine
Associate Professor of
Pediatrics (2012)*

Actions That Help

Understand the Social Cost

- Being called by the wrong name
 - Quick apology – a small social infraction
- Transgender individuals - this happened for years
 - Daily, over and over, no apology, no correction
- Handle mis-naming as you would for anyone else

Understand “dead-naming”

- Use of the former name seems disrespectful
 - A denial of who they are, an attack
 - A mean of bullying, insult and outing

Use Their Preferred Pronoun

- Pronouns symbolize how others see us
- Perhaps the hardest change as our language is so gendered
 - Do all you can to honor their request

Actions That Help

Understanding They/Them

Some trans and non-binary object to gendered pronouns

- He, she, her and him
- Requires them to identify as either a man or woman
- Neither feels accurate
- Feels grammatically difficult
 - Common when we don't know the gender of a person
 - “The UPS driver was here. They left the package on the porch.”
- Do your best
 - The constant effort shows acceptance

Actions That Help

Help Your Child Envision and Believe They Can Be a Happy Adult

- Model acceptance and optimism
- Accepting families make a difference (<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu>)
 - 92% of LGBTQ youth believed they would have a good life
 - 69% wanted to be a parent
- Help them build on natural strengths
 - Activities, sports, clubs, animals, arts, etc – learning skills and strengths
- Ask about their dreams
 - Education, work, “if you could do anything”
 - Build a mental picture
- A positive view of the future can counterbalance current struggles

Actions That Hurt

Rejecting the child's word

- It's just a phase, etc.

Refusing to use their name/pronouns

- I know your name, I've know you all your life!

Hitting or physical abuse

- You deserve what you get!

Hurting with Words

- Name calling, shaming (you embarrass us, you shame our family)
- Comparisons (why can't you be more like...")
- Teasing in public, embarrassing them
- Rejection (withdrawal or refusal to accept)
- Extreme criticism (I used to be so proud of you, but now...?)

Actions That Hurt

Excluding from Family Activities

- “Your Aunt won’t understand...it’s better if you stay home”

Blaming Your Child When Discrimination or Bullying Occur

- “If you worked a little harder to blend in...”
 - Your child is the victim.
 - Do not use their identity as a reason bad things happen

Using Religion Against Them

- “It’s a sin....”
 - Building a belief that neither God nor believers can love them

And More...

Friendships, Relationships & Dating

Let the trans individual set their boundaries

- May prefer not to come out to avoid conflicts.
- May prefer to keep their identity private to allow participation
 - Often become more open based on their changing appearance or a situation that feels important to them.
 - Support them all you can.

Don't assume every relationship is romantic

- They may have come out to some friends but not others
- **Play by the Usual Family Rules for Dating**
- As much as possible take transgender out of the equation
 - Try to stay with the usual way your family handle dating
 - Curfews, acceptable places to go, permissions required, etc. can be consistent for everyone

Relationships & Dating

Be Prepared for Heartache

- Parents worry about the hardship of finding a partner
 - It's a challenge for everyone

"I was so confused and afraid when she started dating in high school. I was terrified she'd have a bad relationship or get used or settle for someone just because they were LGBTQ. Thank heavens we had older kids, so we tried to use the same rules, but it was still hard.

It was years before I realized all those things happen to every kid: bad relationships, breakups, manipulative, friends. I just tried to be there for her, whatever happened. But some of it was hard."

~Anonymous Mother from Texas

Tough Questions – Relationships & Dating

Should I Tell Other Parents My Child is LGBTQ?

- No. Your child gets to control who knows
- They can tell their friends or not
- You must ask permission
 - Check in if needed (Are you out to ___?)

Should I Tell the Other Parents Their Child is LGBTQ?

- Unless the other child has told you, you don't know
- The other child may not be ready
 - Still adjusting to their own identity
 - It may not be safe
 - They may prefer to be in the closet

Tough Questions – Telling Others

I need to talk! Can I tell my friend/sibling/etc.?

- You're outing your child
- Your child has a relationship with them too
 - Is your child comfortable with them knowing?
- Find a counselor or support group
 - PFLAG and TransFamilies.org have online groups
- Eventually they'll notice differences
 - It can become obvious
 - Some people adjust by themselves
 - There are times to tell – when you are calm
 - Check in if needed (Have you said anything to ___?)

Tough Questions – Telling Others

How do I decide to whether to tell people?

- Let your child decide who knows
 - They will feel the scrutiny, comments, or gossip
 - When they are more confident, more people will know
 - Check in even in adulthood
- Come out as an ally
 - The more open they are, the more open you should be
 - Keep pace - don't push them but don't hold them back
 - Talk about your journey, minimize explaining your child
- Manage the “second closet”
 - Keeping the child's identity private from others in the family/community
 - Can be positive if your child needs privacy
 - Highly negative if your child feels it as shame

Tough Questions

Should I encourage my child to stay 'in the closet' for safety?

- Their decision – support their choice
- 2015 Study
 - Hiding did not keep them safe
 - More victimization and depression
 - Being out strongly associated with self-esteem

How do I handle my church?

- A family decision – support the child
- Being rejected by the church can be traumatic
 - Impacts self-image
 - Can destroy their faith
 - Consider finding a supportive church
 - Represent your own faith daily

Ways to Support Your Child

Every Ally Makes a Difference

Support candidates who are allies

Get a bumper sticker/yard sign showing support

Join an advocacy group

Ask your book club to read something positive

Help with local and larger LGBTQ organizations

Chamber of Commerce

School Clubs

Fundraisers

Push back on negative comments

Be public when your child is public

Thank You for Caring

**FIND THE BOOK AT OUR EXHIBIT TABLE
OR ON AMAZON**

<https://shorturl.at/fGT491>

REVIEW IT PLEASE!

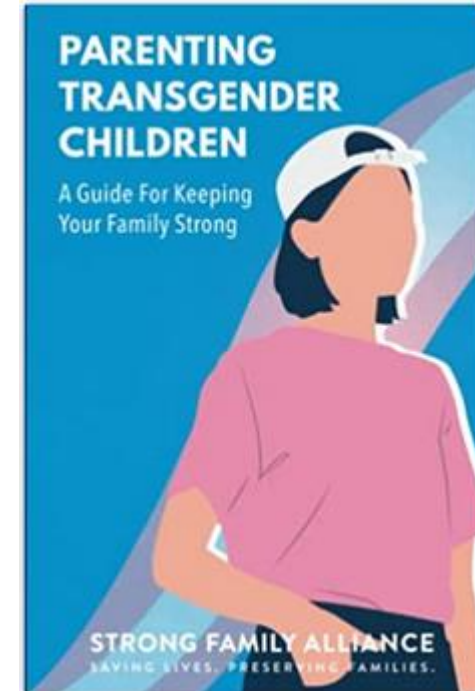
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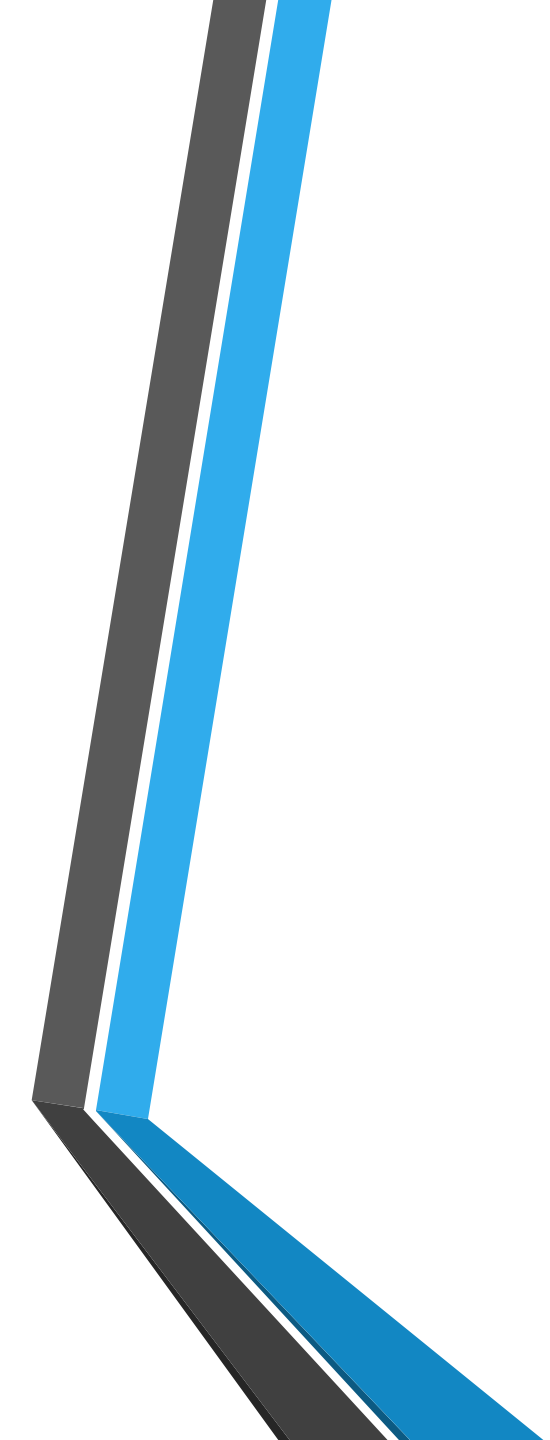
Nearly 1/4 of web

Visitors speak SPANISH

We translated the book &

Translated the web pages





**DEDICATED TO
THOSE WHO DECIDE TO LOVE,
WHATEVER THE STRUGGLE**

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