

So Your Child is Transgender . . . Tips from a Momma Bear.

1. When did you commit to love your child no matter what? When you found out you were pregnant? When you felt the toes digging into your ribs? When they* were first laid on your chest, still slimy? Grab hold of that love for your child and let it guide you through this process. This is your chance to be your child's best ally and advocate, and if you stay true to your love for your child, you will do fine. Take a deep breath, recommit your love for your child, and face this thing head on.
2. This is real and permanent. This is not a phase. This is probably the underlying issue that has caused so much drama with this child. You may have been through cutting, an eating disorder, depression, anxiety attacks, mood swings, defiance, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. You may have wondered, "Why is my child so unhappy?" You may have felt desperate to find a solution for your baby. Well, you might not like it, but you found it. Face it straight on, full face forward. Educate yourself.
3. Educate yourself. Find your local experts and schedule a consultation, even if it means meeting them by skype. Tell them your kid just told you they are transgender and you don't even know what to ask, "so start talking . . ." They will know what you need to know. Look up transgender on the internet. Find support groups like PFLAG. Find professional groups, like LGBT bar associations, or an LGBT Chamber of Commerce. Talk to other parents and to people who are transgender. Learn.
4. Talk with your child. As you are going through this process, keep a dialogue going with your kid. Talk to them about your latest realization, or about your fears. This is a journey you can take together, beginning right now, with you sharing your inner feelings with them, opening the door for them to share with you.
5. This is your child's journey. It's not any easy one, yet it is necessary for your child to have a happy life. Part of the support your child needs most from you is affirmation and validation. This means using their requested pronouns and their new name. It's hard, so practice it. I practiced in the car, with tears streaming down my face, "I have a son. His name is Zander. He is a young man." Man, was it hard. Sometimes, we have to do hard stuff. It's best to just do it; it gets easier faster that way.
6. This is an opportunity for you and your child to really bond. Your child needs your love and acceptance, and your support and guidance. This is scary for them and they need your help more than ever. Be there for them. Share the journey with them. They will appreciate your love and support more than you can know. Let them know they are safe sharing their journey with you, and you will be the one they call when anything significant happens. If you want that, they need to feel safe sharing with you, and for that, they need to see your sincere support. Your child needs you now more than ever, and if you are there for them, you will be cementing a bond like you have never felt. You

are the parent, it's your job to take care of your kid and your relationship with your kid. Take this amazing opportunity!

7. **Coming In to Come Out.** We have to come in before we can come out. Coming out is when we start to tell others that we are different. Coming in starts when we start to realize there is something different about us. We then explore the concept until we figure out what it is and deal with it and finally come to terms with it. Once we have come to a certain level of understanding and discomfort, we come out. This is the stage your child was in when they told you they are transgender. Now you are just starting coming in. Let them know you need a couple of weeks (at least) to catch up!
8. **You are going to grieve.** I grieved losing the mother-daughter relationship, which I considered such a unique bond. When I shared this with Zander about a week after he came out to me, he replied, "I'm still exactly the same person, only happy and authentic." Now, we are closer than ever before. I grieve for the future that I'd envisioned and that won't be, for the woman my child was going to become, for the grandchildren I won't have . . . Let yourself grieve. You have to go through it get through it. Cry. Feel. Feel the fear for the hard road ahead for your child. Face it head on. And move forward.
9. **Transitioning is a journey, for your child and for you.** Your child is likely still exploring their gender identity. Give them room to explore. Often the pendulum swings far to one side before settling in the middle, so give your child the safe space and time they need to explore their gender identity. We in America think in binary terms of male and female, but there is so much in between. Let your child figure out where on that continuum they feel comfortable. This may take years. Give your kid the support they need to go on this journey. You follow them on this path. Be there to give them guidance when they need it, to back them up when that's what they need, and to love and validate them. Your being there will bolster their self-image, their feelings of self-worth and self-confidence. Being there on this journey with your child gives you the satisfaction of feeling essential in your child's life.
10. **You want your child to be happy and your love and support is one of the most important things to make them happy.** I recently attended a workshop in which I learned that the extremely high rate of attempted suicide in the transgender population (ranging from 40% to 58% in differing studies) more nearly approximates the attempted suicide rate in the general population when they have the support and love of their parents. You make the biggest difference for your child. Love them and support them, and keep them alive.
11. **Network with grown up trans people.** I joined LGBT bar associations and started meeting transgender and LGBT attorneys who were willing to share some of their experiences with me. One of the things that has impressed me the most is the reaction when I tell them that I became a member of the LGBT community when my son came out to me as transgender. They often tell me that I am a great mom for supporting my child so much. I get hugged. I've even been called the supermom. Their consistent reaction tells me that many of them did not get support from their parents and that they really wished they'd

had it. This was a valuable lesson that would not have been driven home so hard if I had learned it differently. Another thing that I figured out by talking to my grown-up trans people is that they have always been the gender of their identity, they just didn't always know it. Zander was always a boy, we just didn't know it. I was confusing myself by trying to use female pronouns for "when he was a girl" and male pronouns for the present. Well, he never was a girl, we just thought he was. So now I use he/him/his, even for the past when we thought he was a girl. It's much easier, now that I've figured that out and adjusted my thinking. And don't forget, that is his past, too. This also helps me not "out" him unintentionally. It's very important not to out your child in the wrong place or in front of the wrong people.

12. Hook your kid up with other trans people. H.A.T.C.H. is a Houston area youth group, ages 13 to 21 (they "hatch out" when they turn 21) that is sponsored by the Montrose Center. They meet three times a week and have one hour of social time and one hour of small group "therapy" each meeting, plus one hour of education once a week. www.hatchyouth.org. The Montrose Center has just started H.A.T.C.H. Jr., for ages 8 to 12. Gender Infinity is a local Houston organization that creates an affirming space for trans people (especially kids) and their families. They have family gatherings quarterly and sponsor a two-day conference once a year. www.genderinfinity.org. PFLAG is a national organization for the purpose of providing support and networking for families of LGBT people. There are several monthly meetings around Houston. www.pflaghouston.org; www.pflag.org.
13. Parent from your heart. It feels good to openly support your child, so do it. If it feels right in your soul, don't worry about what the rest of the world thinks. You might get criticism at work or church or from your family. I would hope that they, too, would support their children once they educated themselves. If not, that is sad. You are doing your personal best to parent your child, and you can be proud of that, regardless of what others think. They have not walked in your shoes and they just don't know. If you let your heart and soul guide your parenting, you will feel good about it at the end of the day.
14. Look for the serendipity! You get what you look for!