



Some Queer Over the Rainbow

Rainbow Counseling & Consultation LLC Quarterly Newsletter: March 2022

How Will Transitioning Affect My Kids?



by JJ (Jessica Jarrard), LMHC

When most people think of stage in life in which transgender people transition socially, images of teens and young adults tend to come to mind. Few people think of parents transitioning, but it is increasingly more common. Multiple national surveys indicate that 35-38% of transgender people are parents, many of whom transition after having children. This leads to a common question among trans parents in therapy: How will my transitioning affect my kids?

The answer to that is, like it is to most complex questions, is it depends. Research across the board on this topic indicates that a parent's transgender status has no impact on a child's sexual orientation, gender identity, and achievement of developmental milestones, contrary to popular anti-trans parental rights arguments. *Cont, p 2.*

RAINBOW COUNSELING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Trans Femme Virtual Therapy Group

Thursdays at 6pm EST, Starting March 24



Are you transgender or questioning your gender identity?

Do you want to explore femme, non-binary, or fluid gender identities with support of like minded people?

Rainbow Counseling & Consultation is hosting a virtual weekly Trans Femme therapy group for adults (18+) led by trained and openly queer therapists. Cost is \$80 a group; sliding scale options are available to those that qualify.

Please contact JJ (Jessica Jarrard), LMHC at JJ@rainbowcounselingservices.com for more information and evaluation for admittance.

Learn more about this group, p. 2



**Welcome
Hannah
Vanderمولen,
Rainbow
Counseling's
new Master's
Level Therapist!**

Learn more about Hannah, p. 3



How Will Transitioning Affect My Kids?

Continued from page 1

However the quality of the relationship you have with your child and their reaction to the transition can vary widely based on many factors. Based on [Stotzer, Herman, & Hasenbush's review](#) of the research and data collected on transgender parents from 1970-2012 from 51 studies, the following factors are likely to affect how a parent's transition will affect their children: the quality of the relationship you have with your child, level of acceptance/support from other involved caregivers, level of acceptance/support in community you and the child live in, the child's age, access to resources, and laws and courts governing parental rights. As a therapist who works with both transgender parents and children of transgender parents, another factor I would like to add is how the transgender status gets disclosed to the child and the series of events leading up to disclosure that may positively or negatively effect the parental relationship and transition process.

The quality of the relationship a parent has with their child is a very important factor as found in all the studies that measured this factor. Based on my clinical experience, this is the most important factor. Simply put, if you have a good parental relationship with your child before transition, you are much more likely to maintain the relationship with your child or enhance it after transitioning. If you have a strained, tense, or absentee relationship with your child, you are more likely to experience... Cont p. 3

TransFemme Therapy Group

Continued from page 1

The TransFemme Therapy Group is an ongoing weekly group for people with feminine transgender identities, non-binary people, gender fluid or gender queer people led by trained and openly queer therapists. The purpose of the group is to exchange helpful information amongst peers, build support, learn CBT and DBT based skills for coping with gender dysphoria and increasing gender euphoria, learn and practice communication skills to use with people in your life, and to learn skills for managing stressors that come with being trans or everyday life. There will be topics and therapy skills taught by the therapists running the group each week or outside speakers brought in to educate people on particular topics of interest to the group.

Those interested in attending the group can present however they feel comfortable in the group. The group is virtual over a secure tele-health platform. The group occurs every Thursday night at 6pm EST starting March 24th. The cost is \$80 to attend a group; sliding scale if you are interested in attending this group, please contact JJ at JJ@rainbowcounselingservices.com

Rainbow Counseling Presents at PosiFest:

JJ will present "*From Shame to Pride: Celebrating your Identity*" at PosiFest, a positive psychology festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. JJ will present over zoom at 2pm EST on March 3/5/22 at this hybrid event; get your free tickets at [PosiFest](#)

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Continued from page 2

...continued or more strain, tense, or dis-engagement after transition. If your relationship is in the latter category, I encourage you to question if the relationship with your child (who may be an adult) is salvageable and worth delaying transitioning for in order to build a better relationship first. This is not always possible. Even if it is, the parent's mental health needs regarding transitioning may outweigh the investment of spending a lot of time and energy trying to mend a strained relationship with a child that may have little chance of mending. Thus this is very individualized assessment for every trans parent to make, realistically looking at their relationship with their child.

Another very important factor is acceptance and level of support for the transition from the other involved caregivers, particularly the other parent. This is an especially important factor if the non-trans parent has primary custody of the child. If children see acceptance and support of the transition modeled by their primary caregivers they are much more likely to do the same and see the benefits of their parent transitioning. If they see strife between their parents regarding the transition, they are much more likely to experience their parent's transition as painful, particularly if their primary caregiver or other family members are using "splitting" tactics to pit the child against the trans parent. Cont p. 4

Rainbow Counseling & Consultation
is Presenting at PosiFest March 5!



Meet Hannah, Our New Therapist

Continued from page 1

Hannah Vandermolen, a Masters Level Clinician, has been working in the mental health field for 4+ years. Hannah has experience working in corrections, addiction and recovery, and in residential treatment for children and adolescents with complex mental illnesses. Hannah's areas of specialization include dual diagnosis issues in adolescents and adults, trauma, depression, anxiety, psychotic disorders and the LGBTQ+ population. Her approaches include using evidence-based therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and Motivational Interviewing to help promote personal growth and self-esteem building.

Hannah holds an M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Valparaiso University and a Graduate Merit Scholarship. She also received a B.A in Psychology & Sociology: Criminology and was awarded the Presidential Scholarship.

Book your no-cost phone consultation with Hannah today;
hannah@rainbowcounselingservices.com.

Please note that although lack of support from extended family members will make the transition a little harder for your child, it is the level of support their other primary caregiver(s) have that affects them much more.



The first concern of most transgender parents I work with is “Will my child get bullied for my transition?” That primarily depends on the community in which you live in and your relationship with people in the community involved in your child’s life, like their teachers and friends. Despite how liberal or conservative your child’s school system is, do you have a good relationship with their teachers and administrators? Do you have a friendly (but not too friendly) relationship with their friends? Their parents? Their health care providers? Do you have a positive reputation in the community in which the child lives? If you don’t, this does not have to prevent you from transitioning, but you want to proceed with extra caution to address these difficult community relationships and talk to your child about them to reduce negative impact. If you have positive relationships in the community that might accept or support your transition, the child will see this feel that acceptance or support themselves by the nature of their relationship with you.

One factor brought up in a few of the studies was age of the child at time of disclosure of the transition. Contrary to

popular belief, to wait til the child is “older so they will understand more”, the younger the child was, the easier it seemed for them to adjust to and accept their parent’s transition. Developmentally, this makes sense; younger children are easier to adapt to change particularly as most children don’t have a very strong and consistent sense of their own or other’s gender until age 4 or 5. This is an age child psychologists often see increase in gender expression in play and adherence to same-sex peer groups. (This is also the age you unsurprisingly start to see difficulties with adhering to same-sex gender norms among children that later realize they are transgender). Though none of the studies specifically dive into what age is best to disclose transition, I would argue based on what we know of developmental stages, disclosing before or around age 4 or 5 may be easier for them to adjust to. If your child is older than that, that does not mean transition won’t go over well with them; it just may take longer for them to get used to viewing you as your new gender and adapt to using new pronouns or parental names like *Mom* or *Dad*. We often forget in the process of transition that others are transitioning with us to understand and build new habits regarding the transition. The older someone is, the harder It generally is for them to change habits and how they view you, but it is totally possible for them to change these.

Another reason why age may play a factor is more correlative; the younger a child is, the more likely their parents are still together. With divorce and separation being common, older children may experience more difficulty with a parent’s transition particularly if they primarily live with the non-trans parent as discussed



above. In addition, a child whose parent transitioned while they were young will probably have coped with any lack of community support by developing friendships and building community with people who are accepting of their parent's transition. This will make this easier for them during their pre-teen and teenage years, when their friendships and sense of community become more stable and psychologically important.

Access to resources, such as good physical and mental health care, legal aid, and general parenting and economic resources is something that will affect the parent's ease of transition, and this will have trickle down effects to the child. If a trans parent cannot get the medical care they need, including trans related health care and therapy if desired, this will affect their ability to parent well or with ease. If they can't get legal representation or resources this could affect their parental rights and ability to fight discrimination. If their transition prevents them from being eligible for needed social services or affects their employment, this will affect the child. For example, early in my career, I once had a client who was a trans parent who needed admittance to a homeless shelter or housing program, but their name on their IDs not matching their name on their birth certificate prevented them from getting admitted to programs they applied to. This led to temporary separation of this parent from their child and their partner while they sorted this out. Before disclosing your transition to your child, it may be wise to assess your need for these resources and get or look into getting access to them before disclosure. This also should not prevent transition, but it will make it easier for the trans parent and their child. It is

also important to note that this factor really only affects transgender parents of average or less wealth; affluent transgender parents can avoid most of these concerns because money can usually buy access to needed resources that should be a human right (for example, Caitlyn Jenner).

There is one factor to be aware of that may require research and preparation on your part: how laws and courts governing parental rights might view transgender parents in your area. This varies widely state to state and country to country so I suggest you do some research before disclosure even if you are confident you and your partner(s) involved in child rearing will never break up or your child's school system won't discriminate against you or your child. What is the precedence in your state and area for trans parents in cases in which they argued for parental rights or against discrimination? Do you know good sources of legal aid? Taking a look at ACLU's or Lambda Law's guidance on this is a good place to start (click on images below):



Lastly, one factor I want to add based off my experience counseling both transgender parents and the (now) adult children of transgender parents: how the transition gets disclosed and events leading



up to it are very important for how the child will react to the news. Contrary to popular beliefs about “coming out” being a one-time big event, there are a bunch of smaller events usually leading up to coming out, and coming out is a repetitive process that can be different in different settings. For example, there’s coming out by slowly changing your gender presentation. Children are not blind to this (though if they are young enough they probably don’t think much of it). There’s coming out by dropping a lot of little verbal “hints” and repeatedly talking to your children positively about transgender people and providing age-appropriate education about gender identity and sexual orientation. There’s coming out to close friends and family and other involved caregivers to the child before you come out to your child—which I highly recommend doing before you come out to your child. It already may be difficult for a child to process their parent changing genders, putting the onus on them to keep it a secret or talk about it with other people you could have spoken to about it is an unnecessary burden for them. Also how a transgender parent “comes out” is important. Don’t treat it like it is a shameful disease, treat it like it is: this is a joyful thing to share with your child and other people in your life because it helps you be who you really are and you are happier this way. If other primary caregivers are supportive of the transgender parent, having them involved in this conversation will also be helpful for the child to see unity and support amongst people important in their lives. If they can’t be involved due to lack of support or other reasons, that child needs to be informed sensitively about why they may not want to talk about this with these people or how to

prepare for the difficulties they may face about it with this person (be careful not to make other caregivers look bad in the process; the child probably loves them no matter how much you don’t). Basically the more positively you can present this news with the least amount of conflict will go a long way in helping the child adjust to this information.

This may be a lot to think about in the process of transitioning when there already is an overwhelming amount of things to think about. However, I’ve never met a parent who regretted not going about this in a careful, planned way compared to parents who end up disclosing their transgender status without much of a plan (often before they were ready due to circumstances). Therapy is a good place to help you build that plan and possibly even execute it. For example, the therapists at Rainbow Counseling have facilitated family sessions in which people have come out to various family members; it can help to have a trained moderator especially if you are worried about how it will go or if you lack support. If you want any further help or guidance on this, please contact me at JJ@rainbowcounselingservices.com.

Looking for other resources for LGBTQ+ people? Check out our resource page at our new website:



Be Seen, Heard, and Understood