

Families in Transition:

Useful information, tips and advice for families of trans young people, parents and carers



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland

Welcome

This is a guide to help you support someone you love who is trans.

For over 20 years at Belong To, we have been talking to parents and family members of trans young people—answering questions, sharing information and letting them know how they can be there for their child.

We know that it can be tough on a parent when their child comes out.

Your child may have come to you and let you know that they are unsure and questioning their gender identity or that they are trans. They may have come to terms with their gender identity and felt comfortable enough about it to ‘come out’ to you. Now it’s your turn to deal with this the best way you can.

You may be worried about their future, whether they will meet someone, get a job and be happy. During our time supporting LGBTQ+ young people, we have seen people thrive and flourish, especially those who have a parent who stands with them and offers love and acceptance.

The fact that your child is willing to share this with you and be open about who they are shows how much they trust you as their parent and want to be fully themselves in the family home. Being able to fully share who they are and being accepted for this has a hugely positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Often, when letting us know about telling their parents, LGBTQ+ young people describe the weight that comes off their shoulders by not having to hide who they are anymore. The lifting of such a weight which can include stress, anxiety and fear of rejection, often brings with it a sense of belonging, acceptance and connection.

Give yourself time to come to terms with the new situation. While you do this, be mindful that your child needs your support now more than ever. Take time to consider what to say and the impact it will have on your child.

Some family members want to know why their loved one is transgender, look for something or someone to blame and ask questions themselves like, “What did I do wrong?” It is important to remember that this is not a lifestyle choice. You didn’t do anything wrong and there is nobody or nothing to blame. Nothing can make a person trans in the same way nothing makes a person cisgender. You can’t make someone into someone they’re not, but you can support them and help them to accept themselves for who they are.

We put this guide together with the help of parents who have engaged with our Family Support Service at Belong To. I want to thank them for their advice, and I hope that this guide can provide you with some information on how to support your child and yourself.



Moninne Griffith

Moninne Griffith (She/Her)
CEO, Belong To



Helpful Terms

Understanding LGBTQ+ language and terminology is an important step in supporting someone who comes out.

LGBTQ+ terminology might be new to you and may feel a little overwhelming. The most important thing to remember is that you don't need to know it all. Most people want to use LGBTQ+ inclusive language, but they are not sure where to begin. By learning some of the key concepts and understanding what the letters in LGBTQ+ stand for, you can feel more confident in discussing LGBTQ+ topics.

Terms change over time and some people prefer certain words to others. The terms here are relevant and accurate at the moment. Their meaning and definition will gradually change, and new terms will be introduced. If a term comes up that you aren't familiar with, it's ok to ask what this means or to ask an individual what term they prefer to use.

Helpful Terms

Gender Identity	Our personal sense of our own gender.
Transgender/trans	A term describing a person's gender identity that does not match their assigned sex at birth. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe some groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression.
Sex Assigned at Birth	The designation of a person at birth as male or female based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones).
Trans Man	Someone who is a man but was assigned female at birth and identifies as trans. Some trans men socially and/or medically transition in order for their body to better reflect their gender.
Trans Woman	Someone who is a woman but was assigned male at birth and identifies as trans. Some trans women socially and/or medically transition in order for their body to better reflect their gender.
Non-binary	People whose gender identity is neither exclusively woman or man or is in between or beyond the gender binary.
Queer	An umbrella term used to describe people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Queer was used as a slur against the LGBTQ+ community for many years and still can be. However, the word has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ communities and many now embrace the term. Check if someone is comfortable with this term before referring to them as queer.

Gender Expression	How we show our gender through our clothes, hair, etc. This is different to gender identity. Gender identity refers to how we feel inside, and gender expression is how we present ourselves outside.
Gender Dysphoria	Distress resulting from a difference between a person's gender identity and the person's assigned sex at birth, associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics.
AFAB	Assigned female at birth.
AMAB	Assigned male at birth.
Sexual Orientation	Our sexual and romantic attraction to other people. Trans is not a sexual orientation. Trans people can have any sexual orientation.
Cisgender	Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
Pronouns	The words used to refer to a person other than their name, e.g. he/she/they.
Deadnaming	Calling someone by their birthname after they have changed their name. This term is often associated with trans people who have changed their name as part of their transition.
Binding	Compressing one's chest to create a more androgynous or masculine appearance. Binding is done with a chest binder designed specifically for this purpose. Binding can have negative impacts on the physical health of an individual and it is advised to talk to a healthcare professional about this.
Tucking	Tucking is a practice used by some transgender women and gender-nonconforming individuals to minimise or hide the bulge of their genitals, creating a flattening and more typically feminine appearance.





Transitioning

Transitioning is a process through which trans people change their gender expression to match their actual gender identity, rather than the one assigned at birth.

Transitioning is a totally unique process for everyone and can range from minor changes (such as names and pronouns) to more long-term changes (such as surgery and hormones).

There is no one way for a trans person to live their life or transition. Some people will try out some of the smaller changes and see how they feel.

Social Transitioning

This may involve changing appearance, such as how someone dresses, their hair or make-up. It can also involve use of facilities such as bathrooms and changing rooms that reflect their gender identity.

Part of coming out can be asking people to call them by a different name or use a different pronoun. A pronoun is a word used when we are talking about someone without using their name. For example, instead of saying, “Sarah is running late because Sarah needed to go back to Sarah’s locker,” you might say, “Sarah is running late because she needed to go back to her locker.”

The pronouns that someone uses are often connected to how they understand their gender. Common pronouns include they/them, she/her and he/him. If you don’t know what pronouns someone uses, it’s best to ask. Some trans people refer to the name they were given at birth as their ‘birthname’ or ‘deadname’.

Legally Transitioning

Legal transition involves a person legally changing their name and gender on official documents such as passports and birth certificates.

Legal Name Change

If a person just wants to change their name, but not their gender marker, a deed poll must be executed. A deed poll is a signed declaration by a person. The person who signs it is held to whatever the statement contains from that point on. For example, deed poll for a change of name means a person is then legally only known by their new name and declaring that they are abandoning their old name.

For young people aged between 14 and 17 years, consent is needed from both parents/guardians to execute a deed poll. To find out how to execute a deed poll, visit citizensinformation.ie or get in touch and we can offer you support.

Applying For A Gender Recognition Certificate

The 2015 Gender Recognition Act allows individuals over the age of 18 to self-declare their own gender identity by applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate. Where a certificate is issued, a person's gender becomes their gender on legal documents going forward. With a Gender Recognition Certificate, a person can apply to change their gender marker on documents including their passport and birth certificate. If a person wishes to change their name as part of the Gender Recognition Cert process, they do not need to execute a deed poll. They can add their preferred name to the application form. The application form is available from www.welfare.ie.

For 16 and 17-year-olds, it is possible to apply for legal recognition, however the process is more complicated. Parental/guardian consent is required, alongside a certificate from two medical practitioners.

A person must then apply to the Circuit Family Court with this consent and an application form. More information is available from www.teni.ie or from courts.ie under the family law section.

Medical Transitioning

Medical transition involves taking medication and/or having surgery. Some trans people opt for medical interventions—and some don't. This may include the use of hormone blockers, hormone replacement therapy or surgery. As with every part of the journey, it is an individual choice.

Making the decision to medically transition can feel overwhelming and scary, and most people have no idea where to start or how to support their family member.

Under 17 Years

At the time of print, there is no public trans healthcare available for individuals under 17 in Ireland. There are a small number of private clinics who will provide private trans healthcare for young people in Ireland. These services include assessments, hormone blockers and hormone therapy. You can find information about these services online.

Over 18 Years

Those 17 and over can access the National Gender Service in St Columcille's Hospital in Loughlinstown, Dublin. In order to access this service, you need a referral from a GP. Once referred, an individual will be placed on a waiting list for a Team Assessment from the National Gender Services. The waiting list is currently estimated at 4-10 years for new referrals. Due to waiting times, some individuals opt for private care abroad.



All information here is accurate at the time of print. However, this is an evolving landscape, so for more detailed, up-to-date information about the types of transitioning, please get in touch with **Belong To**.

Supporting Yourself

You may be reading this guide because you want to support your child. But you also need to support yourself.

Your Emotions

When your child comes out as trans, it is normal to experience a range of emotions.

It is okay to be upset, to be confused and to feel scared. Parents have told us they feel anger and sometimes shame. This may be completely unexpected and new to you. You may have a lot of questions and feel as though you must solve everything by yourself. This is not the case. We are here for you.

You are not alone in this experience. These are common feelings for parents who have heard the news that their child is LGBTQ+. We've worked with many parents who feel guilty for not knowing or feel overwhelmed by a whole new topic, terminology and world. For some parents, this news is at odds with their religious beliefs or personal values and can cause internal worry as they struggle with their faith and love for their child.

It is important for you to have a space where you can feel these emotions and begin the process of working through them.

Again, you are not alone in this. There are parents in every county in Ireland who have experienced some of these feelings upon hearing the same news. They have worked through the feelings, learned more and got support so they can be there for their child and truly accept this themselves.

Feelings of Grief

Some parents feel a sense of loss that the person they knew so well seems to have changed. Others feel a deep sense of shame and worry for their child's safety or what the neighbours and other family members will think. Grieving is a healing process. Take your time with it. It happens in stages. Talk to your partner, friends or professional support. No child turns out exactly how a parent wants. Every child emerges into their own identity and that can be challenging for parents and carers.

Minding Yourself

You need to be minded too. This is a big change. Allow yourself to feel the different emotions that are coming up for you. Don't rush to get to the 'right' place immediately. Let yourself go through your emotions. Support from other people—for example, parents, friends or a therapist—will help you manage your feelings. Learn more about our Family Support Service and visit www.belongto.org to find local peer support groups and more information on LGBTQ+ identities.

The Wider Family System

This news can impact the relationship between parents or carers and the wider family. It is okay if you are not on the same page at the same time. Keep talking to one another about how you are both feeling and how you can best support your child. Share what you are learning with one another.

Include Other Family Members

Siblings, grandparents and aunts and uncles may also experience questions and struggle as a family member transitions. Share some resources to help them understand trans identities. Encourage questions and dialogue to strengthen family relationships. Consider how family dynamics may have shifted with this change. Continually check in with your child about what feels right for them.

Telling Family and Friends

Check in with your child before you tell anyone else, including family and friends. Respect what your child has shared with you. Take your time with it. Your child has thought about this before coming to you. You can take time to let this land for you and your family. When you and your child are ready, chose wisely who you tell so that you are building up a support network in collaboration with your child.

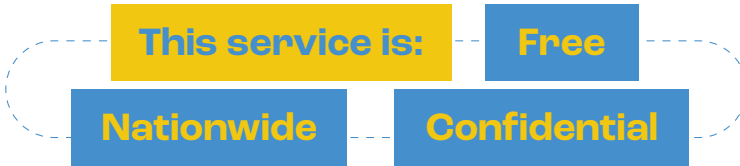
Educate Yourself

Take some time to learn about trans topics and terminology. There are great books and resources that will help you understand this topic. Visit www.belongto.org for resources and videos to help you understand this topic. There is a lot of damaging and harmful information related to trans identities online and even in published books. Please check your sources and educate yourself with respected resources that believe that trans identities exist. No matter how much you learn, don't assume that you know more about this than your trans loved one—they are the expert on their identity.



Family Support Service

At Belong To, we offer a family support service for the parents and carers of LGBTQ+ youth.



Our Family Support Service offers one-to-one support for the families of LGBTQ+ young people across Ireland. We can meet you in-person or online and share information and resources. Our Family Support Worker will also answer online queries and help you with information to support yourself and your child.

You don't need to have things sorted out in your head or even know what questions you want to ask. We know that it can be a really emotional and sometimes lonely time for parents. We are here for you with information, advice and, most importantly, a listening ear.



I was feeling overwhelmed and alone, but the Belong To Family Support Service connected me with resources and support I never knew existed. It was a lifeline for our family.





Contact the Family Support Service



Call > **01 670 6223**



Email > **family@belongto.org**



Web > **www.belongto.org/family**



Supporting Your Child

With the help of parents of trans young people, we have included some ways you can support your child during this time of transition.

When Your Child Comes Out

Ideally wait until your child comes to you instead of initiating this conversation. Young people can be anxious and sensitive, especially during adolescence. Let them know you are accepting of trans identities by indirectly communicating an openness to this, rather than demanding a conversation. Don't go for the perfect reaction—we are all human. If you make a mistake, go back and let your child know—you need space to grow too. Lead by good example—be honest and be present. Do your best and talk and listen to your child.

What To Say When Your Child Comes Out

Say thank you. They have shared their trust and been vulnerable with you. There are a lot of things you may be thinking and feeling, and you can ask them if it's okay for you to come back with questions and feelings, and the same if they want to share more with you. This is an ongoing conversation between you and your child.

Coming out as trans can be a scary experience for a young person. Many trans people are scared that if they come out, they will be rejected by loved ones. Sharing this information is a huge step and shows that you are important to them and that they want to be open with you.

Accept Their Identity

It is likely that your child has spent a long time contemplating their gender identity before letting you know. Rejecting this, telling them it is a phase or telling them they are too young to know can be harmful. Recent research from Trinity College Dublin tells us that the most common age a young person knows that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer is 12. For individuals who are trans, this can be even younger.

You may be feeling upset or shocked but remember how vulnerable they are in this moment too. Create a space where that person can be honest and open about their gender and what steps they want to take next. We know there are better mental health outcomes for young people when they feel accepted and loved by their family members, especially their parents.

Names And Pronouns

Using new names and pronouns may be difficult at first and you may become overwhelmed at the thought of getting it wrong. Try not to misgender your family member by using their old pronoun or call them by their previous name ('birthname' or 'deadname') if they have changed their name as part of their transition. This may happen accidentally—if you make a mistake, apologise and correct yourself. Questioning their gender identity can be extremely hurtful and have long-lasting emotional effects.

Follow Their Lead

As a family member, it's important to listen and talk to your child about how they feel and how they want to transition. They are the expert on how they feel and what works best for them. Try not to make assumptions about what they want. This includes whether they want to transition, change their appearance or tell other people.

Keep The Conversation Going

Encourage your child to explain how they feel and what it means to them to feel that way. If you don't understand, ask them to break it down for you. Keep communication lines open and check in regularly. Teenagers can find it difficult to open up about their feelings but remind them regularly that you are there if they need to talk.

Be Honest

If you are struggling, be open with your family member. Let them know that you are doing your best—but you are playing catchup. They have had time to learn about trans identities and process this—you may need some time to do the same.

Be Open

If you see that your family member is very distressed, let them know you're there for them. Ask if there is someone else that they would like to talk to, perhaps suggesting they speak to a professional who is aware of trans identities. Our youth workers at Belong To have a lot of experience supporting trans young people. We also offer a free crisis-counselling service with Pieta. Please get in touch with us if you would like more information about this.



Some days your child will be in great form, and other days they will come home from school having dealt with transphobic remarks—so be that listening ear. You might not be able to solve their problems, but at least you're there for support. That's half the battle.

Yvonne



Support at School

Young people spend a lot of time at school. As a parent, you will want them to feel safe and supported in this space.

Sometimes trans young people can find school challenging, so it is important that they receive any support they need to be themselves and thrive in school. Support can vary from school to school.

There are incredible schools across Ireland that work really hard to make their spaces inclusive and safe for trans students. On the Belong To website, you can find a list of all of the schools who have completed our LGBTQ+ accreditation programme.

Informing The School

Have a number of conversations with your child about whether they want to share their identity with their school. Let your child lead on what feels safe and right for them.

Some staff members will have a deep understanding of trans identities and others won't, so you may be required to share some basic information about what being trans is and what your child will need from the school. Let the school know that professional training is available for educators, such as Belong To's free e-learning course aimed at educators. More information is available for schools at www.belongto.org, or you could ask them to get in touch with Belong To or TENI for support and information.

Transition Plans

If your child does want to let their school know that they are trans and intends to begin a social transition at school, we recommend that you have a conversation with the school about developing a transition plan.

This is a plan that is co-created between the young person, their parents and school staff (which may include the principal, year head, guidance counsellor, or other key members of staff). Transition plans include a plan for pronouns, name changes, school uniforms and the use of toilets and changing facilities. A transition plan looks at if/how other students are to be informed of the change and if/how the change will be communicated to the wider staff team. It should look at whether there is a need for staff training and education on the topic and also align with relevant school policies and procedures (including the Anti-Bullying Policy and Code of Behaviour).

You can think of a transition plan as a checklist of questions to be discussed from time to time as a group. The answers may change as time progresses — for example, the young person may initially only want some staff and students to be aware, and this might progress to them wanting the whole school to know. The transition plan acts as a framework for these discussions and makes sure nothing important is missed.

Names And Pronouns

Together with your child, let your school know how important it is to call your child by their new name and pronouns in day-to-day interactions. Changing a student's name or gender on the school register is a decision the Board of Management makes, but this should not impact everyday use of your child's name of choice. Meet with a representative from the school with your child and let them decide if/how they want to let staff and students know about a name or pronoun change.

Bathrooms And Changing Rooms

Students should be able to access toilets and changing facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Many trans young people avoid these spaces as they don't feel safe. Being able to access gender-neutral toilets can be particularly important as someone transitions. Talk to the school and your child about their needs relating to spaces.

Uniforms

Many schools have gendered uniforms, which can cause challenges for trans students. All students, including trans students, should follow their school's uniform policy and any policies on use of make-up, appropriate dress, jewellery, etc. However, trans students should be allowed to wear a uniform that is consistent with their gender identity. For some schools this will be easier than others, as many offer variations in their uniform (e.g. trousers, skirts and tracksuits).

In single-sex schools, varied uniform options may not be available, and specific accommodations will be necessary for a student who transitions. At a minimum, there should be a gender-neutral option. If you are unhappy with how a school handles their uniform policy, you can make a formal complaint (see the 'Making Complaints' section).

Transphobic Bullying

Some trans people experience bullying because of their gender identity. This is known as transphobic bullying and it is never acceptable. As of September 2025, every primary and post-primary school in Ireland must lay out measures to prevent and address bullying behaviour. According to *Bí Cineálta*, the anti-bullying procedures set out by the Department of Education, transphobic bullying must be specifically named in a school's anti-bullying policy.

As part of this policy, schools must specifically outline their measures for preventing transphobic (and homophobic) bullying. If your child experiences transphobic bullying at school, they should report it using the school's bullying reporting procedures. If this does not resolve things, talk to their year head or principal. If this is still not helpful, you may wish to make a complaint (see the next section, 'Making Complaints').

Making Complaints

If you and your child are struggling to get the support they need at school, you may consider making a complaint. Request a copy of the school's complaints procedure and to follow the steps in it. This may include writing a letter to the school's Board of Management and stating what the requirements are for your child (e.g. name and pronouns to be used and respected, and for your child to wear trousers). If you have tried all of these things and are still not happy with the response from the school, you can go to the Ombudsman for Children (www.oco.ie) with your complaint.

Many schools across the country have supported trans students, whether they transitioned before or during their time in the school. Most educators are supportive of all students, including LGBTQ+ students, but might not feel like they have the resources and training they need. Belong To can provide supports for staff in relation to training, curriculum resources, policy development, promoting LGBTQ+ wellbeing and more.



Support for LGBTQ+ young people is always available from Belong To.

Support Services for LGBTQ+ Youth

Since 2003, Belong To has provided a range of services for LGBTQ+ young people.

We create spaces with and for LGBTQ+ youth so they can come together, find community and have fun! We also offer a range of support services for times when your child needs deeper support for their mental health and wellbeing.

Dublin Youth Groups and Youth Projects

At Belong To, through groups and seasonal projects, we provide a space for LGBTQ+ young people to develop friendships, get support and belong. Our qualified and experienced youth workers welcome, support and encourage new young people to participate in the youth groups at their own level of comfort. Youth workers meet with young people where they are at – in a caring and supportive manner. Activities range from pizza nights and special events to arts and crafts and information nights on a range of LGBTQ+ issues – determined by the group members. All groups and activities are free of charge. Visit www.belongto.org to learn more.

National Network of LGBTQ+ Youth Groups

Youth groups nationwide provide a space for LGBTQ+ young people to develop friendships, get support and belong. It's not always easy to find other LGBTQ+ folk and an LGBTQ+ youth group is a good place to start.

Your child can meet other LGBTQ+ young people, share their experiences, hang out and chat. We support a number of LGBTQ+ youth groups that are run by our friends at organisations such as Crosscare and Foróige. Find out more at www.belongto.org/find-a-youth-group

Crisis Counselling with Pieta

Working with Pieta, we provide a free crisis counselling service for LGBTQ+ young people who are based in Ireland. Our therapists are friendly, welcoming and will listen to you in a safe, non-judgemental space and work through whatever is worrying your child. This service is available free of charge to LGBTQ+ young people aged 12-23 based in Ireland who are self-harming, thinking of suicide or bereaved by suicide. All Pieta therapists are fully qualified and accredited psychotherapists. Each session lasts for 50 minutes, and your child may receive up to 12 sessions for crisis counselling and up to 30 for bereavement counselling. Visit www.belongto.org to make an appointment.

Drug and Alcohol Service

We offer a dedicated drug and alcohol service for LGBTQ+ youth. We know from research that LGBTQ+ young people have higher rates of drug and alcohol misuse than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. The service is free, confidential and non-judgemental. This is a space for young people to bring any concerns they have around their drug and alcohol use and they can talk to our dedicated Drug and Alcohol Youth Worker.

We will listen, offer support and if needed, refer your young person to a specialty service for further support. We operate from a harm reduction model. This means supporting people to manage their use of drugs or alcohol so that it is safe. We are not going to judge or stigmatise any young person.

“It was great to talk to somebody who had a better understanding of what the challenges are that our child was facing. We really appreciated the help and guidance.”

Parent who engaged with Belong To's Family Support Service

**Reach out for advice,
support or information**



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