A Trans Formative Conversation

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Parents agree—talking to children about sex and sexuality is never easy, and that conversation is often just as hard on the kids. But when a child or teen thinks he or she might be transgender, the "birds and bees" routine just won't cut it. These tips will help parents discuss gender and sexual identity with their kids.

What does "transgender" mean?
"Transgender" is an umbrella term referring to people who self-identify with or express themselves as a gender that differs from the one they were assigned at birth. Gender identity is completely separate from sexual orientation.

If my child thinks he or she is trangender and approaches me for advice, what should I keep in mind?
If children think they might be transgender, they may feel alienated from their peers. According to Kristin Guilonard, DO, MPH, a pediatric primary care fellow at the Medical College of Wisconsin, it's important—first and foremost—for parents to create a safe haven and to reiterate how much they love their kids for who they are. "Parents need to let their child know that feeling different isn't bad, and that there is nothing to be ashamed of," she says.

But what if my child isn't comfortable approaching me about the topic?
"To talk about sex and who kids are, the tradition has always been, 'Well, kids will come to you with their questions.' But that's not always the case," Guilonard explains. "If you get rid of your own stereotypes or your own negative reactions to other people who may be living this lifestyle, and you do it openly in front of your kids, your children will feel more comfortable to come to you. Let them know that there are lots of different ways to be a girl and there are lots of ways to be a boy."

For more information, parents can visit TransYouth Family Allies at imatyfa.org.

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