

## Companion Document #2

*Providing Safe Spaces for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: Guidelines for Gender Identity Non-Discrimination*

WORKING WITH PARENTS OF TRANSGENDER IDENTIFYING YOUTH

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PARENTS OF NON-TRANSGENDER YOUTH



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# Working with Parents: Parents of Transgender Identifying Youth

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Finding out that one's child identifies or seeks to identify as transgender is not easy for any family. Parents' hopes and dreams for their children's future are shaped by cultural and religious beliefs that may be at odds with their child or adolescent's gender identity/expression. Many families do not know what to do to support their child, nor do they understand the issues involved in raising a transgender child. School personnel understand that acceptance is a process, not an event, and consider their words carefully and respectfully.

On occasion parents are reluctant to allow schools to honor student requests to change their names, pronouns, or clothing to reflect their gender identity. Current law does not require schools to disclose to parents that their child has made such a request. It is, however, typical of the school-parent relationship that schools respect and seriously consider parent wishes. When the wishes of the family conflict directly with the wishes of the student, schools work to help the family seek outside support to resolve the conflicts and maintain familial strength.

## **Talking Points for Administrators in Conversations with Family Members:**

- This is not an easy discussion for any parent. We respect your beliefs and want to be able to support you **and** your child.
- At the request of your child we agreed to use his or her chosen name/pronoun, or allowed your child to dress as he or she sees fit here at school. This was in a sincere effort to show your child that we respect and support him or her.
- Of utmost importance to us is providing a physically and emotionally safe environment in which your child can learn.
- Our school has always worked to support the needs of individual students in a variety of ways. Supporting your child's expressed needs is a primary mission of our school.
- Consistently using a student's chosen name and pronouns models and sets expectations for our school community. This is done in an effort to help your child feel cared for and accepted by teachers, administrators, staff members and students.
- This is the same child we have taught and cared for- just using a different name and pronoun. Our esteem for your child and for you has not changed.
- We respect that gender identity issues can be difficult for families. As a school we must remain neutral in this issue as you and your family seek outside assistance from community providers who understand gender identity issues so that you may resolve any differences this issue may create.
- Your child's emotional health is important to us and we know that family acceptance is among the strongest indicators that your child will stay emotionally strong and healthy (share the statistics on page 7, *Family Rejection and Health Risks* in this section).

- We would like to meet with you again after you have sought some outside assistance for your family. Here are some resources you may want to use to find community support as you navigate this issue with your child (share resources on pages 5-6 in this section).

## Working with Parents: Community Members and Parents of Non-Transgender Youth

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Adapted from *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools*, Gender Spectrum, 2014

Cisgender is the term used when one's gender identity is in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth. A small minority of the population (currently thought to be about 1 percent) identifies differently. This difference can cause discomfort, fear, and skepticism in others due to a general lack of knowledge and understanding around gender identity. It can be expected that community members may have some concerns when they hear that a transgender student attends their child's school. Schools and school system employees approach all families with the assumption that families love their children and want them to have a good life. Family values are shaped by cultural and religious beliefs and need to be respected. Often information allays much of the fear felt by the community.

### **Talking points for conversations with concerned families/community members:**

- This is not an easy discussion for most of us. We respect your beliefs and want to be able to support you and your child.
- Of course we can not talk about any individual student, just as we would never talk about your child. Personal information about our students, including their gender identity, is private.
- We want to assure you that the safety of all of the students at this school remains our highest priority. If your child is feeling unsafe, we need to know about it.
- Having a student identify as transgender does not make our school any less safe that it has always been.
- Our school policies and procedures are intended to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment free of discrimination and harassment for all students. This includes our transgender students as well as those students who are not transgender.
- We function under mandated federal regulations in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX protects all students, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students from sex discrimination and prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sex in educational institutions, programs, and activities that receive federal financial assistance.
- Our Local School System discrimination policy (review your local policy or guidance documents prior to this discussion) also guides our work with transgender youth.

- Our expectation for all of our students is that they respect the privacy and physical boundaries of other students. If the behaviors of one student are making another student feel unsafe, that is an issue we take very seriously and we have policies and rules in place to address those issues.
- If you are concerned, for example, about bathrooms we can easily allow your child to use the nurse's restroom. If this is a locker room issue, we can work it out-we can get your child a more private area to change or arrange for your child to have early access to the locker room. We want to have our entire student body feel safe and welcome.
- Sometimes having information and knowledge about a topic helps with the fears and worries we all have. Here are some web sites and resources you might find useful (see pages 5-6 in this section).
- We welcome you to continue to share your concerns with us in the future but need you to respect our commitment to the non-discriminatory treatment of all students in our school.

# Resources and References

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## Local Resources

**Maryland Resource Guide,** <http://freestatelegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Resource-Guide1.pdf>

Resource Guide for LGBTQ+ Youth Maryland

This comprehensive resource guide lists Maryland resources for support groups, health and wellness, legal and advocacy, places of worship, community centers, identity groups, education, transitional housing and hotlines.

**Maryland PFLAG Chapters** [www.pflagmd.org/](http://www.pflagmd.org/)

look under Area PFLAGs

Local chapters across Maryland include Frederick County, Baltimore County, Howard County and Chestertown, with new chapters starting up in other

**Maryland State Department of Education Guide**

[http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/studentschoolsvcs/student\\_services\\_alt/](http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/divisions/studentschoolsvcs/student_services_alt/)

*Providing Safe Spaces for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: Guidelines for Gender Identity Non-Discrimination.* A technical guidance and assistance document designed to provide suggestions for consideration for school systems and administrators who may want to develop their own transgender policies, procedures and/or guidelines.

## National Resources

**Family Acceptance Project**

The Family Acceptance Project provides educational materials and resources for families with LGBT children and youth, and new research on helping families support their LGBT children. FAP is developing model services to help ethnically diverse families increase family support for their LGBT children. These services are based on FAP's research and are provided in English, Spanish, and Chinese. This new family-related approach for families with LGBT children will be shared with communities across the United States and with groups in other countries. <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>

**Gender Spectrum**

Gender Spectrum provides information and support for parents and families and has an annual conference for families with gender-variant and transgender children. <http://www.genderspectrum.org>; <https://www.genderspectrum.org/explore-topics/parenting-and-family/>

**PFLAG**

PFLAG (formerly Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is a national organization with state and local chapters that provide education, information, and support for parents and families with LGBT family members. <http://www.pflag.org>; <http://community.pflag.org/transgender>

## **TransYouth Family Allies**

TYFA empowers children and families by partnering with educators, service providers and communities, to develop supportive environments in which gender may be expressed and respected

<http://www.imatyfa.org/resources/parents/>

## **Articles, Books and Resources**

Ryan, C. (2009). *Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Children*. Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Children. Catlin Ryan

Ryan, C. (2009). *Supportive families, healthy children: Helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children*. San Francisco, CA: Marian Wright Edelman Institute, Family Acceptance Project TM, San Francisco State University.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children*. HHS Publication No. PEP14-LGBTKIDS. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

<http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP14-LGBTKIDS/PEP14-LGBTKIDS.pdf>

*Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults*. Caitlin Ryan, PhD, ACSW, Stephen T. Russell, PhD, David Huebner, PhD, MPH, Rafael Diaz, PhD, MSW, and Jorge Sanchez, BA. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*. Volume 23, Number 4, November, 2010. Pp. 205-213.

[http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/sites/sites7.sfsu.edu.familyproject/files/FAP\\_Family%20Acceptance\\_JCAP\\_N.pdf](http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/sites/sites7.sfsu.edu.familyproject/files/FAP_Family%20Acceptance_JCAP_N.pdf)

Brill, S. A., & Pepper, R. (2008). *The transgender child: A handbook for families and professionals*. Berkeley, CA: Cleis Press

*Our Trans Loved ones: Questions and Answers for Parents, Families and Friends of People Who Are Transgender and Gender Expansive*. <http://community.pflag.org/document.doc?id=921>

## **Family Rejection and Health Risks (Ryan et al., 2009)**

**LGBT young adults who reported high levels of family rejection during adolescence were:**

- **8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide**
- **5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression**
- **3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and**
- **3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse**

**-compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection**

## **Family Acceptance and Well-Being (Ryan et al., 2010)**

**Family acceptance helps:**

- **protect against depression, suicidal behavior, and substance abuse**
- **promote self-esteem, social support, and overall health**

# Vocabulary

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Parents who acquire the language to understand their transgender child may feel less confused and frustrated.

The key concepts and vocabulary used in this document include:

- **Cisgender**- refers to persons whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender** –the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex.
- **Gender Expression** –the way in which a person behaves in order to communicate gender. Expression includes things like manner of speech and word choices, manner of dress and hairstyle, the wearing (or not wearing) of cosmetics, and other distinctive markers of gender.
- **Gender Identity**-the internalized knowledge and sense of who you are as a male or a female or as non-binary. Because gender identity is internal, it is not necessarily visible to others.
- **Gender Non-Conforming**- students whose interests and behaviors are outside of typical cultural norms for each of the genders. Other terms that can have similar meanings include gender diverse, gender variance, or gender expansive.
- **Non-Binary**-students who identify as a melding of both male and female, neither male nor female, or somewhere else on the gender spectrum.
  - Some students may identify as “genderqueer”. This should not be confused with a derogatory term. Genderqueer denotes a number of different identities including: having an overlap between masculine and feminine genders; having two or more distinctive genders; having no gender at all (agender/nongender); and, other more personal experiences of gender that may be fluid.
- **Sex** -the genetic and anatomical characteristics with which people are born, typically labeled “male” or “female”.
- **Transgender**-describes a person whose internal sense of gender and identification do not match the sex the person was assigned at birth.
- **Transition**-the process through which transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one typically associated with their sex assigned at birth.
  - Social transition may include changing names, pronouns, hairstyle, and clothing.
  - Pharmacological transitions may include taking medication to block hormones of the birth sex and applying hormones of the identified gender.



- Medical transition may include medical procedures such as gender affirming surgeries.
- Not all transgender individuals seek medical care as part of their transition. As with all medical information, this information is confidential and the privacy of the student should be respected.