



HOW TO SUPPORT OUR RAINBOW KIDS



Firstly, a reminder that sexuality and gender are two different things.

- Sexuality is who you're attracted to (e.g. lesbian, gay, heterosexual).
- Gender is your identity (e.g. girl/woman, boy/man, non-binary, transgender). Just because someone looks female, doesn't mean they identify as a girl/woman.

Generally a person's sexuality emerges around puberty (American Psychological Association, 2018) whereas their gender emerges around three years of age (Martin, Ruble, 2004).

As the saying goes: "never assume". If your 4-year-old 'girl' says "I'm a boy!" or your 14-year-old tells you "I'm lesbian" take a deep breath and try to put your judgments and worries to one side. How you support them will be critical to your child's wellbeing, now and in 20 years' time!

OUR FOUR TOP TIPS

If you do nothing else, following these evidence-based tips will make a world of difference.

1. Assume this is **NOT** a fad or stage. Believe them.
2. Whatever you're thinking or feeling, let them know you love them no matter what. Affirm your child and their sense of who they are.
3. Let them know that there is nothing wrong with who they are or what they are saying, and that you're there to support them.
4. A repeat! Remember that you are their most important source of support. They may have a new journey ahead (as do you) but it doesn't have to be negative.

SEXUAL IDENTITY

Who we are attracted to

If you have a child who has 'come out' (as we typically put it), those four top tips are a good starting point for accepting and loving them, just as they are. We'd also suggest:

- doing some research (see page 3); and
- letting them know you'll help with anything they need, especially at school, if there are any issues with bullying.

GENDER IDENTITY

The gender we identify with

From here, we'll use the term 'trans' to describe a person who identifies as a different gender to that on their birth certificate, and the term 'cisgender' to describe those whose birth certificate aligns with their assumed gender.

If you have a child who identifies as trans you may worry things will be challenging for them and experience some grief that they are no longer the gender you'd expected. Please be assured that you can work through this, and that it's going to be okay.

Our 'four top tips' definitely apply and the information that follows is based on the very latest research.

TRANSGENDER MISINFORMATION

You'll find plenty of negative stuff on the internet, but just be cautious about what you buy into. It's only since 2010 that predictors of positive outcomes for people identifying as trans have been researched and considered (Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, Pascale-Hague, 2011). Big sigh!

While you're likely to find information about the high rates of mental health issues for trans young people, it's important to know that this isn't occurring because they're trans. It's likely because of the cumulative impact of discrimination, e.g. bullying, reactions from loved ones and/or isolation from services (Strauss et al, 2017).

THINGS THAT CAN HELP

- Self-acceptance and potentially social transitioning, e.g. adopting the name, hairstyle and clothing of the gender they identify with (Strauss et al, 2017).
- The support and acceptance of loved ones, particularly parents (Strauss et al, 2017). This can reduce the prominence of mental health issues to the same as cisgender people.
- Try and find a support group or cultural group for your child, so they can meet like-minded peers. [RainbowYOUTH](#) has a database of fantastic support groups around the country.
- We believe it's important for everyone to nurture their mental health and wellbeing and strongly recommend [These Five Ways To Wellbeing as a start](#).
- Beyond this, those identifying as trans can also find benefit from proven mood boosters such as reading, music and the arts, having a pet, or something to care for, and fostering a sense of community – e.g. friends who are accepting, along with groups/teams they have fun with.



SHOWING YOUR SUPPORT

What does this mean and look like?

- Firstly, staying calm and accepting your child as trans. Parents who found this challenging say it's been helpful to realise that being trans is not a choice, but an essential part of their child's identity (Strauss et al, 2017).
- Encouraging your child to simply 'be themselves' – so they can feel happier, more confident and free, as they may have been living with a sense of shame and secrecy (Strauss et al, 2017).
- Using the name and pronouns they'd like you to use (e.g, she, he, they etc), and letting them dress in the way that makes them feel comfortable and being okay with whichever clothes they prefer.
- Reflecting on your feelings and seeking support from friends, family and others (e.g. your doctor, Qtopia, Lifeline, Youthline or Outline). This may include finding networks of other parents who have trans kids (either in-person or online).

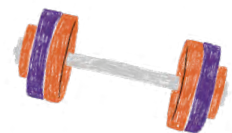
OTHER PRACTICAL STEPS

- If your child is young, speak to their preschool, kindy or school about how you can collectively support them. Or if your child is older, ask them how you can best support them with school (check out Inside Out).
- You will know this already, but broader society may not be as accepting and supportive as you. Know your stuff, link up with others, and know that standing up for the rights of your child takes courage, but can help change the world.

UNIQUE STRENGTHS

It's little wonder that "be proud" acts as a statement for the rainbow community, and as a parent you can certainly take this on too – be proud. A few of the things that are fantastic things about kids and people from the rainbow community!

- They are often brave and empathetic with big hearts.
- They have open minds.
- They have a deep self awareness.
- They'll stand up for each other and pioneer positive change for others.



Biggest thanks to the amazing team at RainbowYOUTH who contributed to this piece, and care hugely about supporting queer and gender diverse youth in Aotearoa.

We also recommend checking out be-there.nz - a great national initiative from the Youth Sector Rainbow Collective.

For more information on supporting the wellbeing of your child, head to sparklers.org.nz/parenting