



# 10 misconceptions about transidentity

Introduction to transidentity for  
parents of trans teenagers

# Summary

## Introduction

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# Introduction

You're parents of a trans teen. They gave you this document, or you found it on the internet, because you're trying to understand what's happening to you.

You have a lot of questions, doubts, fears and misunderstanding. It's normal. So does your child, and they need you.

As a parent, your role is to give them all the keys to be happy and fulfilled. To do this, you'll need to take the time to understand what's happening to help your child thrive.



**Simply because your child  
has a better chance with you than without you.**

In the rest of these pages, we'll deconstruct some of the main misconceptions about trans people, and perhaps answer some of the questions you may have.

## What does it mean to be trans?

Trans people are all people who consider themselves to be of a **different gender than their birth sex**.

For example, a child who is designated at birth as a boy who later considers herself a woman is a trans woman.

**Transidentity** is first and foremost a **personal feeling that something is wrong with the perception of your identity and the one you send back to the world**. It can lead to dissociation from one's self-image, which can range from simple abandonment (switching to "autopilot" mode) to hatred of one's body.

**The only known way to reduce this pain is through gender transition**. Transition can be described as a series of changes (physical, mental, behavioural, etc.) that allow the person to **reduce the gap between their perception of themselves and what they send back to the world**.

For example: changing name, using different pronouns, changing your wardrobe, changing your voice, taking hormone therapy, having surgery, etc. Each of these elements are **optional** and an **individual choice**.

## Where does it come from, being trans?

**Many children and parents seek to understand "why".** How did it happen, why is I/my child trans, what went "wrong"? Because understanding where transidentity comes from would hypothetically "solve the problem".

**Just know that trans people exist in all types of families, in all environments, and that neither you nor your child is responsible for or the source of their trans identity.**

Trying to understand the origin of your child's transidentity at all costs is a dead end. **It will not help your child, because there is no "problem" to solve. What is to be favoured is the future of your child.**

## Some definitions

**A trans woman** is a child who is assigned a boy at birth, and who later identifies as a girl/woman. As a woman, we use female pronouns to refer to her.

**A trans man** is a child who is assigned a girl at birth, and who later identifies as a boy/man. As a man, we use masculine pronouns to talk about him.

**Non-binary people** are not in the binarity of genders and can define themselves as neither male nor female, or both, or in between.

In opposition to the word trans ("on the other side" in Latin), people who are not trans are called **cis, or cisgender** ("on the same side"). These Latin roots can be found in the Cisjordan and Transjordan, which are regions on either side of the Jordan Valley.

→ *Lexicon and sources used in this booklet are available on the last page.*

## What do trans people look like?

You may have in mind examples of famous trans people or people whose appearance is highly visible and stigmatized.

**Most of them are trans people in the early stages of transition.** Indeed, for most people who are "transitioning", there is a period of months or years when change is underway and they have to re-learn everything (how to dress, behave, talk, take care of themselves).

During this difficult period, they may be easier targets for remarks or aggression, and particularly need help to move forward.



**After a few years, a large majority of trans people return to anonymity as soon as their life is "normal" again and their transidentity is no longer an issue for them.**

The trans population in the West is between 0.3 and 1.6% (source at the end of the document).

**So you've probably met hundreds of trans men and women who have completed their transition.**

Your grocer, your co-worker, your child's teacher may be trans without your knowledge.

These are just ordinary people who want a quiet life, probably just like your child.

Some trans people decide to remain visible because they live in a very open environment on this issue, or because they are in the media. This is the case for politicians, actors or business leaders.

*Examples on the next page.*



**Tiq Milan** is an American trans man, author, speaker, activist, and media strategy consultant.



**Laura Jane Grace** is a trans lesbian woman, singer in a band she founded.

She was the companion of Cœur de Pirate for several years.



**Aya Kamikawa** is an American lawyer, model and lecturer of Filipino origin.



**Amanda Simpson** is a trans-American woman and senior technical advisor to the Office of Industry and Security of the U.S. President's Office during the Obama administration.



**Anna Grodzka** is a 54-year-old trans Polish woman and Member of Parliament in her country.



**Chaz Salvatore Bono** is a trans man musician, actor and director. He is the child of the singer Cher.

# 1 - “I’m going to lose my son / daughter”

I saw dozens of parents "blocked" in a state where it was impossible to dialogue with them about their child's transidentity. This denial can have serious consequences for the child.

This state can be similar to the denial experienced by the relatives of a missing person. This phase of mourning has a function: to protect oneself from change.

**You are afraid for your child**, and you are afraid for your family. This is normal. As a loving parent, your wish is to see your child "normally integrated" into society.

Yes, being trans causes a life upheaval and has many physical and social consequences, **but the alternative of lying to yourself can have far more serious consequences.**

But as we will discuss later, being trans is not a choice. It is not a "disorder" that can appear temporarily as a result of emotional instability. When a person is trans, it is for life.

**If your child is confident enough to tell you about it, it is because they believe it is a matured thought, and they're sure of the diagnosis. You have to listen to them, trust them.**

The first thing you have to do to move forward is to deconstruct any preconceived ideas you may have about transidentity, so that you can communicate on a good basis.

Moving into denial and refusing to communicate will only delay the deadline, and degrade your relationship with your child. During this period when you will not communicate, your child will continue to plunge (academic failure, depression, loss of self-confidence). **Acting now** is your best option to keep your child's confidence.

**Start from scratch. Set aside everything you think you know.**

## 2 - “What if you just became more feminine / masculine?”

What you propose to your child is not to change his social gender (male or female), but to modify his behaviour, his attitude, to stick to a hypothetical need for expression of femininity or masculinity.

**In reality, trans people can behave in many different ways.**

There are trans women who continue to dress in T-shirts/pants after their transition (like cis women), and trans men who continue to wear makeup for fun (like cis men).

The reason is that trans people do not experience psychological distress because they cannot express themselves in a gendered way (male/female), but **because they are not recognized as a social gender.**

**Being feminine or masculine  $\neq$  being a woman or being a man**

**Until your child is recognized as the gender they want, it will be impossible for them to express themselves in their attitude, physique, etc.**

Your child's suffering will increase because of the impossibility of expressing himself freely, of being himself. Imagine yourself in such a predicament...

It is for the same reason, for example, that some trans people, before their transition, take refuge in a very normalized form of masculinity or femininity. **The trans person is self-censoring, consciously or unconsciously, and follows the stereotypes of his or her birth sex in order to survive their environment.**

A trans child does not have to prove to you that they are masculine/feminine enough to need to make a gender transition.





### 3 - “What if you just became gay/lesbian ?”

Sexual and romantic preferences have nothing to do with a person's identity. They are two fundamentally different things.

**To be recognized as  $\neq$  To love and be loved**

Of course, a person will live their relationship differently depending on whether they're straight or gay, **this is not a satisfactory alternative in the meantime.**

On the contrary, not being recognized by one's partner as the gender to which one belongs is a **great suffering for trans people.**

Proposing to a trans teenager to change his or her sexual orientation rather than his or her gender identity is proposing a solution that is completely beside the point.

## 4 - "But you never showed any sign!"

Many parents hide behind this preconceived idea:  
**"To be trans, you have to have always known it": it's completely false.**

This "theory" was invented by sociologists in the 90s but has since proved to be unfounded. **It's understandable that you can be trans at any age.** Just as we can discover our sexuality at any age, or a medical diagnosis that we couldn't define.

For example, it is quite common for little boys who used to play with cars and robots and have fun with "male-like" activities to discover they are trans women later in life. **On the contrary, this is the classic pattern.**

Like every human being, trans people live in normalized environments, and in order **to survive, we all adapt to the norms.** If boys play video games and girls play with dolls, it is only the product of the mental image that is projected on them: advertising, norms, societal pressure being thrown back on parents and children, etc.

Girls and boys appropriate this image, because that is what is expected of them, and that is how they are **"rewarded"** by society.

It is quite possible that your child has had furtive thoughts on the subject for a long time (or not), without ever being able to formulate it as a conscious wish. But trans people, like all children, **have lived in situations where they were forced to fit into the codes of their birth sex.** Because they are rewarded for doing so.

... And it's often later, **at puberty or during a period of high emotional stress**, when they are pushed to their limits, that they discover the truth about what really makes them feel good, about who they really are. (parental separation, exams, new job, overwork, etc.).



## 5 - "It's probably just a phase"

In a study of 3,000 trans people of all ages in the United States in 2015, 0.4% of those who began a transition realized after the fact that they were not trans. (or 12 out of 3,000 people).

The table below shows some of the reasons why people **de-transition**, i.e. go backwards in their journey. For example, a person who was just starting to be called by his new first name and then gave up. (the causes can be multiple so the total is more than 100%)

Cause for de-transition	Percentage
Parental pressure	35%
Social pressure	32%
Job insecurity	28%
Transitioning wasn't right for them	5%

The results indicate that the vast majority of trans people who feel confident enough to come out will stick with their choice on the long term.

In fact, 50% of these de-transitions were simply temporary for trans people, who waited **until they were in a more favourable environment**, in the case where the pressure was external, to make their transition.

During a transition, a trans person starts his or her process gradually. It's out of the question for a gruff man to overnight look like a pin-up girl. These processes take time and are, for the most part, reversible. **These are many steps that will confirm to them that they're on the right path.**

Even if a trans person decides to de-transition after several weeks of hormone treatment, **some or all of the effects will quickly disappear.**

## 6 - “You'll never look like a man/woman.”

### Hormone therapy

The majority of trans people take what is called **hormone therapy**. This treatment is often equivalent to that taken by postmenopausal women or testosterone-deficient men. It produces a change in the body over time that can go a long way to helping people recognize themselves as either a man or a woman, depending on their purpose.

**These treatments are reimbursed by Social Security and by mutual insurance companies, and otherwise cost only a few dozen euros per month.**



**For trans women, hormone treatment can, among other things, cause:**

- Breast growth
- A reduction of hair in certain areas of the body
- The redistribution of fat according to a more "feminine" model (buttocks, hips...)
- Thinner and less oily skin
- Other effects caused by female puberty, such as changes in body odor, eye shape, etc...

**In trans men, hormonal treatment can cause, among other things:**

- A masculinization of the bones of the face
- The growth of facial and body hair...
- Thicker skin
- A change of voice
- Fat redistribution according to a more "masculine" model (stomach, arms...)
- Increase in muscle mass and strength
- Stopping the menstrual cycle

There are several types of treatment, and your child will need to look at what they need personally.

## Risks and Limitations

As these treatments are the same as for cis women and men with hormone deficiencies (menopause, andropause), **the risks are fairly limited** (comparable to taking contraceptive pills for example) with **regular monitoring by a doctor** and blood tests several times a year.

These treatments work **regardless of the patient's age**, whether they are 15 or 45 years old.

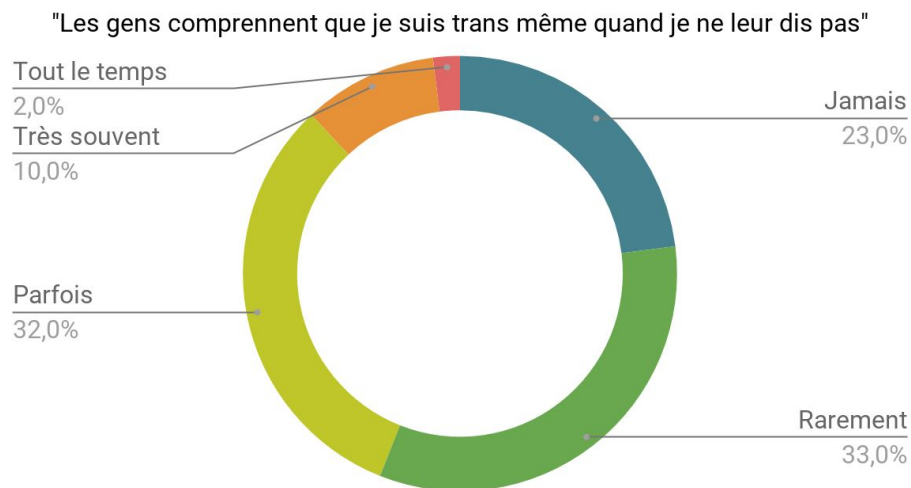
Note that, as with all women and men, these physical traits vary between people and these changes are not automatic. Trans women may continue to be very hairy in certain parts of their bodies and trans men may continue to have a menstrual cycle for example.

## What the law says about minors

Minors need a **parent's permission to start** treatment, and special treatments exist only to block the child's puberty in case it is not 100% safe. However, since the changes are **reversible for a few months**, a conventional hormonal treatment usually allows a decision to be made by then.



## “Passing”



**88% of respondents report being perceived as trans "never" or "rarely" or "sometimes".**

Most trans people go through an **"in-between" phase**, which can last anywhere from a few months to a few years, during which they may experience more violence, due to the fact that they are more visible as trans.

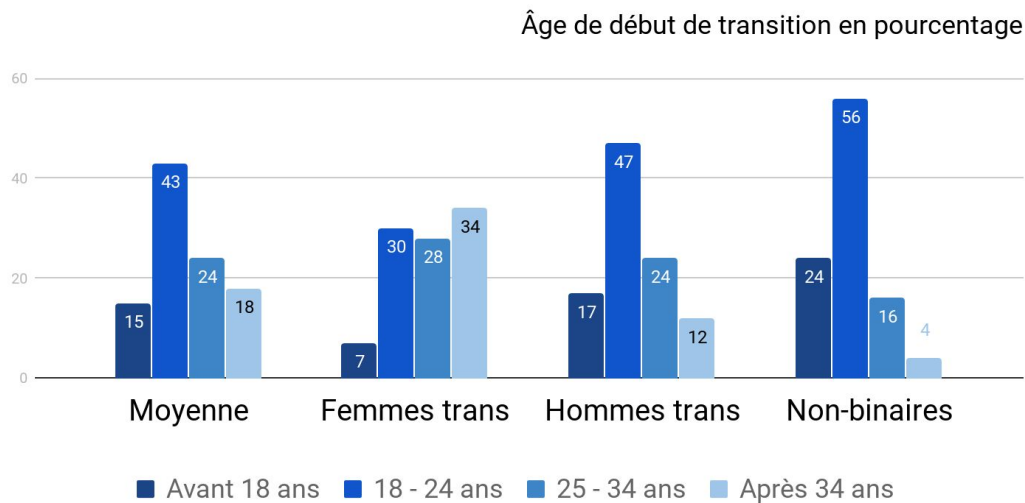
But after a few years, **most trans people get a "passing"** (i.e. they are perceived as cis men/women in their everyday life).

Moreover, note that this famous "passing" is not only related to pure physicality. It is an alchemy of several social phenomena, including clothing, gait, voice, environment, etc.. For example, a trans person who has been undergoing several months of follow-up with a speech therapist can obtain a passing even though their appearance might leave some doubt.

Finally, and this is important to note: **you don't have to never be perceived as trans to live a happy life.**

In fact, many trans people live openly as trans people long after their transition has begun, and this does not prevent them from being very fulfilled in all aspects of their lives. The world can be a violent place for trans people, **but with the right strategy it is entirely possible to find an environment in which you can thrive.**

## 7 - “You're too young/old to start”



**Trans woman:** a woman who was assigned at birth as a boy.

**Trans male:** a man who was assigned at birth as a girl.

**Non-binary person:** a person who opposes gender binarity and can define himself as neither male nor female, or both, or in between.

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The idea that all trans people know they are trans and transition **before puberty is totally wrong**. As this chart (same source as above) shows, **67% of trans people begin their transition between the ages of 18 and 34**.

Your child, regardless of age, is not too old to start. **Trans people discover themselves and find the courage to start a transition at any age, because their lives and experiences are different for each of them.**

## 8 - "But you can't be trans AND homosexual in your new gender, there's no such thing!"

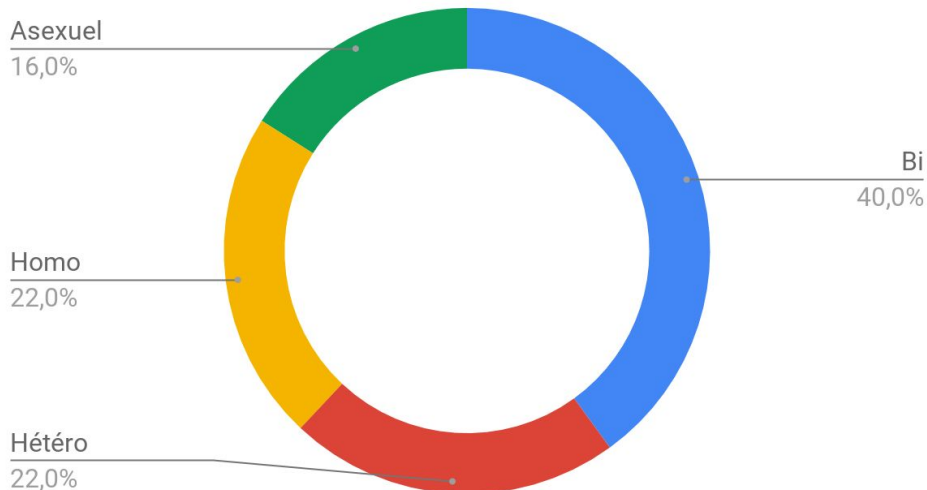
Well, as a matter of fact, you do! And not just a little. **Only 22% of trans people are heterosexual.** The majority are bisexual, which means that they are attracted to people regardless of their gender.

This is a totally false assumption. Trans population reflects a very wide range of attractions because of the variety of their backgrounds and experiences.

Finally, be aware that there is a portion of the trans population who experience a change in their sexual orientation during their transition. This may be due to the fact that the transition allows them to reveal feelings that were previously stifled by social pressure.

During the study, 50% of the trans people surveyed were in couples.

Distribution des orientations sexuelles chez les personnes trans



**Bi:** Attraction without sex preference

**Heterosexual:** Attraction to the Opposite Sex

**Homosexual:** Same-Sex Attraction

**Asexual:** Lack of sexual desire. This doesn't mean they can't fall in love and be in a couple.

This graph and these figures do not take into account the answers "Other".



## 9 - "It's just a fad"

If transidentity is considered a fad, it is because many trans people have finally managed to put a word on their feelings thanks to the Internet and social networks. The media is very much involved in the visibility of this segment of the population, which suddenly becomes very exposed.

In particular, the flashy shows on TF1 or M6, and some films that address the subject to make people talk, while the writers really didn't ask about it.

As a result, you get the impression that there are more of them than there used to be, even if that's not true. **Because transidentity, in one form or another, has always existed in all the cultures of the world.**

Until recently, there was no place in Western culture for people with atypical gender identities. But this is not true in other times and other cultures.

**It has to be said that this is a recurring phenomenon in human history.**

- [Two-Spirits](#) in native American cultures
- The [Muxe](#) in Zapotec culture in Mexico.
- The [Kathoey](#) in Thailand.
- The [Hijra](#) in the Middle East and Asia, visible in public life for hundreds of years.
- The [Mahu](#), [Fakaleiti](#) or [Fa'afafine](#) in Polynesia

In Europe, it is difficult to retrieve information beyond the 20th century, due to the massive destruction of archives concerning LGBT people during World War II. Nevertheless, there are traces of trans people in the West that history has retained.

# 10 - “You haven’t thought it through”

Let's put ourselves in your child's shoes for a moment:

They know that being trans is hard, that there are few supports, and they hear a lot of stories about teenagers who get kicked out of the streets by their parents for telling them they're trans.

They have spent a lot of time maturing this secret, turning the issue upside down to find a reason why they wouldn't be trans. **Because no one wants to be trans and suffer all the hardships and discrimination that trans people face.**



And yet...

**Their certainty, their survival instinct is stronger than all that.** To the point where they can take on this secret, to the point where they can tell you about it.

It's a gigantic weight being released. And a huge fear of the negative, even violent reaction you might have.

The fear of becoming a stranger to your parents, of no longer being welcome in your own home. And of having to wait another 10 years before you can start your real life.

**It is your duty not to take this announcement lightly.**

"It's only a phase" is a phrase you say when you hope that something will go away in time. **But for most trans people (99.6%), this "phase" lasts a lifetime.**

# Your role as a parent

**As a parent, your mission is to ensure that your child has all the keys in hand** to develop and become a fulfilled adult capable of overcoming the challenges they will face.

Your child needs your help to overcome hardships that few people experience in their lives. **Because it's worth it for your child, and because it's worth it for you.**

Without you, **your trans teen is much less likely to get through it.** You'll only be delaying the inevitable, and putting them through years of pain and suffering until they can make the transition to adulthood on their own.

**When parents are hostile to their child's transidentity, the risk of suicide attempts, psychological distress and the potential for ending up on the streets increases drastically.**

	% of respondents with a supportive family	% of respondents with an hostile family
Lived on the streets	27%	45%
Attempted suicide	37%	54%
Are currently experiencing serious psychological distress	31%	50%

Source: Annual report of trans people in the United States (2015)

Your child may already be socializing as a man/woman with friends or on the Internet. These are important moments for their personal development and self-discovery.

**With their agreement, you can help them move forward with these ideas:**

- Use their new first name if they have chosen one.
- Use the right pronouns for them (being called by the wrong pronoun can be very painful to self-esteem)
- Suggest nicknames, affectionate names affirming their new identity (my darling / my sweetheart)
- Helping your child with all those new things they need to learn: new clothes, posture, make-up, etc.

- Help them finance the medical procedures they wish to undertake. For example, trans women often need to go through laser hair removal sessions to destroy facial hair that doesn't just go away with hormones.
- Accompanying them in the coming out sessions that they will have to do with the rest of the family.
- Accompany them to meetings organized by trans associations if they invite you to do so (there are some in all the biggest cities and others).
- Be pro-active about things your child has not thought of or dared to ask you about.
- Simply be there for your child during this difficult time they are going through.
- Be happy with your child's progress.

A trans person's transition path is often quite organic and changes with each individual. **Ask your child what they plan to do and what they need, they probably have things on their mind.**

Give them time to move forward at their own pace, accept that they may take their time on new goals they have set for themselves.

It's a tremendous project they're undertaking, so don't hesitate to let them breathe.

And if not, the associations are available to answer your questions. Look for the one closest to you on the internet ;-)



# The author

I am Agathe M., a trans woman who lives in the Paris area and who's been following trans issues for over 10 years.



After realizing that I was trans during my teenage years, I began to educate myself on all the issues related to transidentity in order to ease my transition and to be able to help people who were in the same situation.

I see a lot of trans people in trouble every day, and the biggest problem is always family support. **Having a supportive family is, in my opinion, what separates a trans child who is thriving and has been able to overcome this personal challenge from a trans child who is depressed and socially failing.**

Beside my work helping trans people, I am a project manager / designer in a start-up in Paris, where I design new features for applications and websites.

...And yes, after a few complicated weeks, my family supports me fully and with my partner, they are my engines, without whom I wouldn't be as happy and fulfilled today.

Contact us: [contact@wikitrans.co](mailto:contact@wikitrans.co)

Translation: Emma F.



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# Lexicon

## **Trans woman**

A child who is assigned a boy at birth, and who later identifies as a girl/woman. Female pronouns are used to refer to her.

## **Trans man**

A child who is assigned a girl at birth, and who later identifies as a boy/man. Male pronouns are used to refer to him.

## **Non-binary**

Who do not find themselves in the binarity of genders and can define themselves as neither male nor female, or both, or in between.

## **Cis / cisgender**

Refers to a person who is not trans.

## **Transition**

Term used to refer to all processes initiated by the trans person to be perceived as a man/woman/in-between, depending on the purpose of the process.

## **De-transition**

Temporary or permanent backtracking in a transition

## **Passing**

Being seen as the kind you want. A trans woman is passing if she's perceived on the street as a woman.

# Sources

Annual report on trans people in the U.S., based on a sample of 3,000 people (2015)

<https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>

Studies based on surveys of representative samples of the population conclude that the size of the trans population is 0.3-1.6%.

<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/lgbt.2016.0013>

More definitions around the lexicon of transidentity

<https://outrans.org/ressources/lexique-outransien/>