

Same Gift, Different Paper

Supporting your loved one
through their gender
transition

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Introduction

If you are old enough to remember Encarta, you'll know what I'm talking about. If not, just take my word for it.

In the 90s, back when TVs weighed more than you did, there were these boxes. Apparently, they were called BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board) boxes.

These BARB boxes were attached to the television sets of certain families and recorded their viewing habits. The Broadcasters' Audience Research Board somehow decided that each BARB household represented around 5,000 real households.

Now, I don't understand their thought process. I'm just going by what my research (and my mum) told me.

I understand having to generalise, and I get that they couldn't roll out the BARB boxes to every household in the country. But I still don't understand the numbers. What I do understand is this:

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A TYPICAL FAMILY.

It just doesn't exist, and everyone knows that!

I'm talking rubbish about boxes and TVs for a reason, I swear. One family does not represent 5,000 other families in the same way one trans person doesn't represent 5,000 other trans people. Every trans person is unique, but the generalisation is so ingrained in even the most apparently tolerant of us. Myself included. I was guilty of generalising trans people until my then-wife came out to me. I was accepting of the entire trans community, but I was guilty of assuming that all trans people want hormones or surgery. That they all wanted to "pass," like that was the ultimate goal, when in fact trans people are so much more than that.

Are you exactly the same as anyone else? No, of course you're not. You're an individual, a unique person whose experiences, memories, and desires are yours and yours alone.

When my husband, Charlie, began his gender transition journey, I knew he was going to change. That was a given, and I was fully prepared for that. What I didn't realise was how much I was going to change. What I also didn't realise is how little support there is out there for the partners and loved ones of Female to Male (FTM) trans people. The few resources that were available were stretched so thin that they weren't reaching those who needed them.

So I decided to create my own resource. Obviously, it's a general guide, not a manual. Every gender transition is unique to the trans person and their loved ones. Just because you're not the one taking hormones, having surgery, or changing, doesn't mean you don't need advice from time to time! If you're supporting your

loved one through a gender transition, you need help, and you *deserve* it. My husband is the person going through the gender transition, and a couple of parts are specific to a romantic partner or spouse. But the rest of it applies across the board to anyone you may be supporting.

When I started writing this, I wanted to be honest about how totally overwhelming the process can sometimes be. Not just for the person transitioning, but for everyone around them. The range of emotions you can go through at the beginning is pretty staggering. And of course nobody prepares you for that, how could they? Even though it happens every day all over the world, to you, it feels unprecedented.

This isn't a rule book. I'm not telling you what to do. I'm telling you how to support. One of the earliest lessons I learned was that if Charlie had a trans-related problem, I couldn't solve it. I couldn't even begin to resolve that issue for him; it was something he had to do entirely by himself. Not knowing how to help someone you love is a horrendous feeling. I just hope what I say can help make it easier for you and for them.

I will be writing primarily about the experiences of a loved one going through a female-to-male (FTM) transition process here. I have deliberately left out male-to-female trans people as I have no personal experience of supporting someone through that journey. There might be crossovers, but I am not qualified to talk about that, so I won't.

Chapter 1: Gender Roles, Identity and Expressions

I am not here to debate how many genders there are or anything like that. I don't get to decide anything about someone else's gender or how they identify. Nobody should. But some deeply sinister, and sadly famous people seem altogether too interested in what's going on in people's underwear.

In short, other people's genitals are none of my business. They never have been, and they never will be.

If you don't know much about the transition process or the trans community as a whole, you're not alone. I knew nothing when my husband, Charlie, began his journey. And even with three years under my belt, I've still only just scratched the surface. It's okay not to know stuff; it doesn't make you a bad person. You might have seen this coming, you might not. I had kind of a heads-up, so maybe I was at an advantage. Who knows? My point is, the process isn't linear. You can't even really call it a learning curve; emotionally, it's more of a rollercoaster.

Gender

We're programmed by society from the word go to expect certain things from certain people. And 99% of the time, those things are way off the mark. Even now, there are still some people who believe there are pink roles and blue roles. As if life is as simple and clean cut as all that. Maybe people want to believe these things because it makes it easier for them; it makes their world smaller and easier to control. Or maybe they want to believe them because they don't have the emotional intelligence to consider any other possibilities. I think it's a bit of both.

Either way, gender is essentially a set of unwritten rules surrounding how you should behave when you possess certain genitals.

These rules can change depending on where you live and in what time period. But certain things are expected of you. The most obvious examples are that women should be nurturing and have babies, and men are supposed to be tough and be the provider.

I grew up in the 90s, and men were expected to be one of two things:

Lads

Or

Metrosexuals

Lads

If you were a “lad” in the 90s, then you were expected and encouraged to do the following:

- Binge drink on an alarmingly regular basis (if you know how you got home, you didn't drink enough)
- Be really very loud. I cannot stress that enough, lads were loud as fuck.
- Be physically and sexually aggressive.
- Have as many female sexual partners as possible.
- Be obsessed with football. No other sport mattered to a lad.
- Travel in packs of four or more.
- Degrade women in public.
- Talk crap about your significant other when they're not there.
- Only have a shower if you're going somewhere.
- Think aftershave was an appropriate substitute for personal hygiene.
- Call a woman a slag or slut if she DIDN'T sleep with you (that one still happens)
- Believe that beer was for men, wine was for women.
- Shout “waaaaay!” if a member of bar staff drops a glass.
- Call anyone who didn't do all of the above gay.

These things were not only expected and encouraged, but you would be actively mocked if you didn't regularly do them. The lad's rules were established and inflexible. Two hobbies were allowed: going on the pull and playing football. If you engaged in anything else, you were labelled a “metrosexual.”

Metrosexual

In the 90s, the term metrosexual basically referred to a man who washed his face more than once a week. The Oxford dictionary definition is as follows: “an informal term for a heterosexual man who lives in a city and shows a strong interest in fashion, shopping, and his personal appearance. The word, which emerged in the 1990s, describes a typically urban man dedicated to fastidious grooming, beauty treatments, and stylish clothing, often mirroring traits previously associated more with women or gay men.”

Gender Roles and Expectations Change

And thankfully so! It's now accepted and encouraged for men to care about their appearance as much as anyone else. The male grooming industry is worth over ninety billion dollars worldwide, and the product ranges are amazing.

I think this change illustrates the fact that not only is gender a social convention, and not something we're born with. It also shows that expecting an entire group of people to behave in the same way across the globe is ridiculous and unreasonable. People are individuals and deserve to be treated as such. Times change, and expectations shift.

Gender Identity

A person's gender identity can have nothing to do with their sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is how someone feels, how they experience their gender within themselves. For example, Charlie's sex assigned at birth was female, but that's not how he felt. He's always felt more male, even as a child. When he was younger, people described him as a tomboy, and whilst that would apply to some people, it never sat right with him. Just because a young girl acts or dresses in what people consider a boyish fashion doesn't necessarily mean they're transgender. It's far more complicated than that, which is why gender identity is deeply personal to every individual.

For some people, gender identity lines up neatly with the sex they were assigned at birth. And for others, it doesn't, and that incompatibility can be confusing and scary.

When people dismiss gender identity as “just a phase,” or worse, a “trend,” they're overlooking the lifelong feelings many trans people describe. Charlie didn't suddenly

“decide” to be a man one day; he’d spent his whole life figuring out something that never fully made sense to him. I can’t even begin to imagine the fear, depression, and anxiety that he and many trans people must experience being trapped in a body they don’t belong in.

I have always felt that my outside matched my inside quite well, so I’ve never felt any incongruence there. The technical term for that is *cisgender*. It simply means my gender identity aligns with the sex I was assigned at birth. Or as I like to put it, “the hardware matches the software.” I’ve never had to question whether people would see me as the gender I know myself to be, and I’ve never had to defend it. That’s a kind of privilege I didn’t really think about until Charlie’s transition made me aware of it.

My main problem is with the assumptions that people make about being female. People still seem to believe that you are either a total tomboy or a “girly girl,” as if women can only exist in two totally separate spheres. The truth is, gender expression is fluid and deeply personal. A woman can love football and makeup in the same way a man can love flower arranging and DIY. None of these things defines our genders; they simply express our personalities.

Gender Expression

People often confuse gender expression with gender identity, but they’re not the same. Gender identity is internal; it’s how and who you know yourself to be. Gender expression is external; it’s how you choose (or sometimes are forced) to show that identity to the world. Some people’s gender expression matches their gender identity, while others keep it more ambiguous or fluid. Sometimes that is a choice, and sometimes it’s for safety.

Because gender expression varies so wildly from person to person, it’s hard to fit it all in. In a nutshell, none of it’s wrong, but sometimes it’s different.

What FTM Means

The term female-to-male means someone who was assigned the sex of female at birth, but this does not match their gender identity. They identify as male.

Being FTM doesn’t mean someone used to be a woman and became a man; it means they’ve always felt they were a man, even if nobody else could see them that way at first.

For a trans person, there's a mismatch between the sex they were assigned (in this case, female) and their gender identity (male). That conflict can cause a deep and sometimes all-consuming discomfort known as **gender dysphoria**, which isn't about hating your body as much as it is about feeling out of alignment with it. The best way I can describe it is as follows: Think about someone you can't stand, I mean, you really don't like. Someone who makes you feel so horrible about yourself that you don't even want to be anywhere near them. They've been like this for your whole life, always picking at you, never leaving you in peace. Then imagine that every time you looked in the mirror, that person was who you saw looking back at you. Just imagine how that would make you feel.

Chapter 2: Dealing With Common Misconceptions

I want to clear up the most common misconceptions surrounding trans men before we start. As I said, I was guilty of some of these, but I now realise that my rigid way of thinking was totally erasing the individuality of trans people. I was putting trans people in the tiny, neat boxes that people have tried to put me in my whole life. The ones I fought so hard against.

Every trans person is as individual as you or me, and sadly, some people don't like that. Because if you don't fit into their boxes, then they label you as somehow weird or different, or even a threat. Once again, I have stuck to trans men here as that is in my area of experience.

They're Pretending to be Male

They were pretending to be female. Now they're just living their truth openly rather than hiding it. People who say this kind of stuff are either just hateful or deliberately missing the point. When my husband (Charlie) started telling people he was trans, his "friend" said this: "Can't you just wear men's clothes and shoes? Isn't that enough? Why do you have to do this?"

When a trans man lives as his authentic self, he is not in some kind of costume! If anything, he's taken one off; the costume was his female clothes.

They All Want To Transition

Not everything in a trans person's life is about surgery and hormones. They're human beings just like everyone else with goals and dreams. Some people do fully transition; they take hormones, have surgery, and totally change their appearance. And some people don't. One is no better or "more trans" than the other. Every journey is totally personal and should be respected as such.

The LGBTQ+ Community is a Safe Space for Trans People

For some reason, I don't know why, I assumed that it would be. I realise now I was having an uncharacteristic amount of faith in people. A mistake I won't make again. Not all people, but a significant number of people in the LGBTQ+ community are

incredibly transphobic. I would say they should be ashamed of themselves, but some of these people clearly have no shame. Like I said, not everyone, but I quickly learned that sometimes the call was coming from inside the house.

Testosterone Will Make You Aggressive

Another thing I wrongly assumed! We're taught from a really young age that testosterone and aggression go hand in hand. And there was so little information available about prescribed testosterone for trans men that the lie lived on. Medically prescribed testosterone will not cause anger, even to cis males. In fact, it has been shown to lower anger levels and aggression in cis men. But in trans men, increased aggression is NOT a side effect.

Trans People Are A Threat to Society/Women/Children

When a cis person commits a crime, they are the criminal. They are a danger to society/women/children. Just them. It was an individual acting alone, and nobody else is responsible for their actions. When a trans person commits a crime, suddenly, all trans people are criminals. And yes, some trans people *are* criminals. Being transgender doesn't automatically make you a good person. Because once again, trans people are individuals, but this illustrates perfectly how society refuses to believe that. Trans people are not a threat simply because they exist. I said that being trans doesn't automatically make you a good person, but it also doesn't automatically make you a bad person either. Most trans people are just trying to live their lives authentically without fear of ridicule or violence! How is that threatening?

They Hate Women

Just because someone knows they're not a woman doesn't mean they hate them. In exactly the same way, just because someone knows they're not gay doesn't mean they're homophobic. Trans men don't hate women, they're just not women. It's not about running away from being female, it's about running towards being male.

Transitioning Will Totally Alter Their Personality

Another myth I had carried around in my head. I assumed Charlie would turn into an entirely different person in a bad way! Again, that's where that false testosterone/aggression link comes into play. Yes, he's changed, but all those changes have been highly positive for him. He is happier, more at peace with himself, and his confidence has skyrocketed! He's still the same kind, loving person I married; he just looks different. The gift is still the same; all that's changed is the wrapping.

They're Only Doing It Because It's Trendy.

Seriously? Do you honestly think that people would put themselves at risk of

- Discrimination in almost every aspect of their lives.
- Verbal abuse
- Alienation from friends and family
- Ridicule
- Violence
- Murder

All because they want to be trendy? Grow up. People don't do this on a whim! If you know someone who is transitioning, this has likely been a constant internal battle their entire lives!

The chances are, they have asked themselves the following questions:

- Should I tell anyone?
- How will they react if I tell them?
- What if my partner leaves me?
- What if my parents/friends/family stop talking to me?
- Will people be able to tell?
- Will I get fired?
- Are people going to make fun of me in the street?
- Will I be safe?
- What if I get kicked out?
- What if I lose everything I've worked my whole life for?

- How will my kids react? Will they accept me?
- What if someone attacks me? Will the police care?
- If I don't get fired, how will people react at work?
- What if they bully me?
- Is there anyone I can talk to?
- Is there any help available?
- Will the LGBTQ+ community accept me?
- Will the straight community accept me?

So, to assume someone's doing this for attention or because it's "cool," to be transgender is pretty ridiculous. Transgender people have always existed, and they will always exist.

There are probably far more inaccurate assumptions made about trans men. But I've included these ones as I think they're some of the most common.

Chapter 3: What To Do When Someone Comes Out to You

When Charlie sat me down one evening and told me he was transgender, it was no great shock to me. In fact, he asked how I was being so calm about this. I explained that it was because I had seen this coming for a few weeks now.

Not everyone gets clues as I did. I had time to adjust and mentally prepare myself for the changes that were going to happen. But as I said, everyone's coming out is different. Some people leave clues, some don't; there's no right or wrong way to come out. People have to do it when it's right for them and them alone.

If and when someone comes out as trans to you, try to make sure you:

Just Listen

Try not to interrupt. I know it's hard, but they need to be heard right now. They're feeling incredibly vulnerable and need to feel like they're in a safe space. Again, try to avoid asking questions until they've finished what they're saying. Please understand they have something they need to tell you because in their mind, it's now or never. The person telling you this, no matter who they are, could have been rehearsing this for months, even years. Let them say what they need to say.

Try To Avoid Enormous Reactions

Even if it is a shock to you, try to remain as calm as possible. Reacting with shock can immediately cause someone to think they made a mistake by telling you. This person showed a tremendous amount of trust in you by sharing this deeply personal information. Don't make them regret that. You might be nervous and unsure, but not half as much as they are right now.

Say Something

When someone comes out to you, especially if it's something you already suspect, it can be hard to know what to say. You want to acknowledge it enough to respect the gravity of the situation without making it seem like you think it's too big a deal. That's a difficult tightrope to walk! So what are you supposed to say? I'll start with some things you definitely shouldn't say.

Are You Sure?

This does not come across as love or support; it comes across as disbelief and judgment. Trust me, they would not tell you if they weren't sure! The likelihood is they've probably been torturing themselves trying to think of how and when to tell you for a very long time! So yes, they're sure, no need to ask.

I'll Never Get Used To Calling You That

Loosely translated, that means I'm not even going to try. Yes, it might be hard to remember at first, but it will get easier with time. I can't speak for anyone else, but as long as slip-ups are accidental, my husband, Charlie, really doesn't mind. Deliberate deadnaming and misgendering are different. But everyone makes mistakes.

This is Just a Phase You're Going Through

No, trust me! If someone has got to the point of telling you they're transgender, they haven't been thinking about this for five minutes. They've spent hours, months, maybe even years trying to figure out what it is about them that just doesn't feel correct. That phrase is dismissive, disrespectful, and narrow-minded.

Why Didn't You Tell Me Sooner?

I totally understand asking this, and it's a valid question that has entered your mind. I don't think it's deliberately hurtful, but it will come across that way. Someone has to feel totally safe within their circle and within themselves to tell someone. So the short answer is, they weren't ready to.

Are You Going To Get A Penis?

Are you going to act like a penis? Seriously, I've never once had a friend or family member ask if I planned to have any kind of genital surgery. **BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE TOTALLY INAPPROPRIATE AND NONE OF THEIR BUSINESS.**

Trans people are not defined by the number of surgeries they've had. I've said it before, and I'll keep saying it.

Everyone is Transgender Nowadays

No, no, they're not. Transgender people have always existed and will always exist, no matter how much you try to erase them.

Saying this to a trans person basically tells them that you think they're doing it to be trendy and cool. You're clearly not taking this seriously, and they know that. Don't be surprised if you don't hear from them again.

You'll Always Be [deadname] To Me

Again, don't be surprised if you don't hear from this person again. If you said it to me, I would definitely give you a wide berth. They're telling you they're changing, and you're telling them you will NEVER accept these changes.

I've gone through what you should most definitely not say. Here are a few suggestions on what you could say instead:

- Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me that
- If you don't mind my asking, how do you identify now?
- I will do my best to call you by the right name and gender, but I'm sorry if I slip up.
- This must have been emotionally exhausting for you.
- I'm so proud of you for being true to yourself.
- I'm really glad you've told me now.
- If you ever want to talk about what you're going through, I'm here for you.
- I don't really know much about the transgender community, but I am here if you need me.
- I love you for who you are

Do Your Research

I thought I knew a reasonable amount about the trans community before. In reality, I knew less than nothing. And that's okay, it's okay to not know things about a community you have no alignment with. What's not okay is making assumptions and

generalisations based on zero knowledge. If you genuinely love someone and want them to be who they actually are, you'll learn what you need to know. If you love them enough, you'll find a way; if you don't, you'll find an excuse.

Suspend Your Beliefs

I've heard people say with pride that they would kick their child out if they were gay or transgender. PRIDE. You call yourself a parent? How dare you! Being a parent is not a right; it is a privilege. You absolutely do not deserve that title.

It does not matter one single bit whether you believe your child is transgender or not. They do! This isn't about God, Jesus and everyone else out of the equation, including yourself. This is about your child and nobody else.

I'm not saying you have to immediately go out and put them on hormones and surgeries. But at least explore their feelings and support their journey of exploration. Kids are people, whether you want to believe it or not. They're not extensions of you; they're people with their own minds and their own feelings. And they are as worthy of support as anyone.

Accept That There Will Be Changes

Whether they transition or not, some things will change. And if you want to keep this person in your life, you need to accept them. At the end of the day, it's your decision. You can choose not to accept the changes. But that won't stop them from happening. All it will do is create distance between you and that person.

Don't Tell Anyone Else!

This should be a given, but sadly, it's not. I don't care if they are your friend, your spouse, or even your child. It is not your place to tell anyone else. They told you something in confidence, and betraying that confidence could put them in very real danger. Acts of violence are committed against members of the trans community every single day. Don't make it worse.

You're Not Losing Anyone

I refuse to use the word grief when it comes to gender transitioning. Grief is for people who have died. People throw that word around like it means nothing. But to say you're a "trans-widow" or you've "lost" your child is an insult to both the deceased and the bereaved. You might believe that you're losing the real version of them. But that wasn't the real version of them; this is.

Accept You'll Get It Wrong Sometimes

Charlie says that he doesn't really mind accidental misgendering or deadnaming, because he knows people make mistakes. But the difference between accidental and deliberate is glaringly obvious and can be spotted a mile off.

Be A Safe Space

The world is actively hostile towards trans people. They get enough people questioning their right to exist in public. Don't you dare question their right to exist in private.

Ask How You Can Support Them

People don't automatically know how to handle these situations, and that is okay. In fact, it's important to acknowledge the fact that you don't know how to handle this. But make it clear that you want to learn. Ask them if there is anything you can do to help them. There might not be, but the fact that you asked will mean a lot to them.

This isn't about forcing you to "accept" trans people like your acceptance is some kind of a gift to them. You either do or you don't. What it is about is basic human decency. Not even human decency, dog decency. When you accidentally refer to a dog as the wrong sex, you immediately correct yourself and apologise. If you fail to do this when you misgender a trans person, then you're not even giving them the same respect you would give a dog.

Chapter 4: Inappropriate Questions & Comments

Some people ask questions to learn, some ask to pry. Others ask questions to inflict their opinions and feelings onto others. Not everyone who asks you these questions is being deliberately hurtful. Some are, but not everyone. You will probably be able to spot the difference between these three groups quite easily. If you can't, you'll definitely learn.

The questions you're asked will depend on your relationship to the trans person in question. But these are some pretty standard questions that I've been asked and heard people asking.

So What Does That Make You Now?

This one is mainly for those in intimate relationships with a trans person. Once again, I understand why that question entered your head. But it's obviously none of your business. Some people have a desperate need to stick a label on everything, and that's what they're trying to do to your relationship. It's nobody else's concern how you identify, and you don't need to explain yourself to them.

What Do You Think Of All This?

All what? I get where you're coming from, but there are far nicer ways of asking that question. It might not be the worst question in the world, but there's definitely a highly judgmental undertone behind it.

Why Would They Do That To Themselves?

Why would they make changes to align themselves with who they genuinely are? Thus, creating a happier, more confident person? No idea, mate.

Aren't They Too Young For That?

Are you asking me or telling me? Nobody gets to decide what someone else feels or knows, or at what age that happens. If a child says they want to be a doctor when they grow up, nobody tells them they're too young to possibly know that.

Can I tell [insert name of huge gossip]?

No! Make it clear that it is not okay to tell anyone. That is not their information to spread around because it will make them feel important or interesting. Also, make it clear that if other people do find out, you'll know where it came from.

Don't You Think It's Wrong, Though?

Again, was that a question or a statement? Clearly, you think it's wrong, but don't try to project your feelings onto other people.

Are You Still Attracted To Them?

Again, a natural question. But again, none of your concern.

How Can You Stay With Them?

Because you love them? Because they're a wonderful human being? Because they're happier than they ever have been, and that's all you've ever wanted for them? Once again, it's a total mystery.

What If They Regret It?

And what if they don't? What if it makes them less depressed, less anxious, more confident, and more positive? What if it makes them happier, healthier, and more at peace with who they are as a person? Nobody asks about that.

So, What Will They Have To Do?

I genuinely understand wanting to ask this question. And if you want to explain it to someone who genuinely wants to learn, then great! But it isn't your job to educate them; it's their job to educate themselves. You'll be able to tell who is asking this to learn and who is just wanting information to pass on.

Are You Going To Miss Who They Really Are?

This *is* who they really are.

People feel entitled to know certain things that are none of their business. And sadly, they're not shy about asking. You are under no obligation to answer anything you don't want to. But **always** ask your loved one how much they're comfortable with other people knowing. I cannot stress that enough. Not everyone is a safe space; never assume they are.

It's not all about inappropriate questions; you'll get loads of inappropriate comments, too! In fact, you'll probably hear more of these! Some people love to stick their nose in where it's not wanted, and they never miss a chance to offer an opinion that nobody asked for.

I Could Never Be With Someone "Like That"

Then don't be! Problem Solved. If your partner comes out as transgender, you're under no obligation to stay. I don't judge anyone who didn't stay when their partner came out; it's an incredibly personal thing. Charlie said that he never would have blamed me if I didn't stay. His words were: "It's not what you signed up for."

I Just Don't Understand It

Nobody's asking you to understand it, just accept it. I don't fully understand the feelings trans people experience because I don't experience them myself. But I accept and respect those feelings. If you don't understand, then learn, educate yourself. Sadly, though, a lot (most) people don't *want* to understand anything about the trans community. They're more than happy with their ignorance.

I Don't Go In For All That Pronoun Nonsense

Direct translation = "I have no respect for anyone who isn't like me in every way, and I am proud of that." You can't fix stupid, but you can walk away from it mid-sentence.

It's Not Natural

Okay, so if we're talking natural here, we need to eradicate a few things from society:

- Glasses
- Hearing aids
- Birth control
- Corrective surgery of any kind (including gastric)
- Central heating
- Toilet paper
- Aeroplanes
- Cars
- Phones

These are just a few examples; the list goes on for quite a while! It might not seem natural to you (I don't really care), but it feels like the most natural thing in the world to the person going through it. And stop pretending all natural things are good. Do you know what else is natural?

- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Tsunamis
- Earthquakes
- Floods
- Volcanic eruptions
- Droughts
- Blizzards
- Storms
- Poisonous snakes/spiders/sea creatures/frogs, etc
- The venom of the Slow Loris
- Poisonous mushrooms
- Venomous snails
- Mosquitos
- Bed bugs

Again, the list goes on and on.....and on.

I Don't Get Why People Make a Big Deal About it

Because it *is* a big deal to them, it's wonderful that you've never had to question your gender identity. I'm happy for you. But don't project that assumption onto anyone else. And sadly, it's a big deal to some evil people. Hundreds of trans people (particularly trans women of colour) are killed every year for one reason only: because they were trans. They dared to exist in the world as their authentic selves, and they were murdered because of that. So, yeah, it's kind of a big deal.

This Must Be Really Difficult For You

Again, not the most horrific question you could ask, but please don't make assumptions. You might be saying this out of compassion, but it's not coming across as well as you think it is. Yes, it might be difficult, but it might not be. To be honest, I never found it difficult, so when people implied that it was, I found it rude. It's not your place to assume what's going on in my house. But that one's just me; other people might not find that so offensive.

The Bible Says It's Wrong

Then don't read it.

I'm Not Going To Call HER That

Isn't it great when the rubbish takes itself out? You don't have to go through a complicated process of figuring out who has common decency and who doesn't. They wear their badge of shittiness with pride. Revelling in the thought that they've hurt the feelings of someone who had the nerve to be different from them. Good stuff.

Aww, Why? She Was So Pretty!

First of all, why? Are you actually asking that person why their loved one is transgender? Because that's an essay question, and I'm not sure you'd even understand the answer.

People like this think women owe it to them to be attractive.

I Always Knew

No, you didn't. And stop trying to make it all about you and your ego. It's transparent, unhelpful, and untrue.

You're So Brave

Once again, no! People who put their lives on the line are brave! People who run into burning buildings to save other people are brave. Also, people who exist as their genuine selves even though they know they risk violence and murder. Those people are brave. The word "brave" actually carries weight. Don't throw it around like it's meaningless.

Some of these aren't the worst thing you can say, they're not. I understand that. And some people are genuinely asking because they're curious. They want to know more

so they can get it right and expand their knowledge and empathy. Others are just asking because they're nosey and they want information to pass on. They feel entitled to this knowledge, and they think you should listen to their opinion. I actually think they believe you're **obliged** to listen to what they say. Obviously, you're no more obliged to listen to them than they are to listen to you.

Chapter 5: Dealing With Honest Mistakes & Deliberate Disrespect

People who have deliberately misgendered someone think they're so clever. They're picking on a clearly vulnerable person and trying to make them feel inferior in front of others. Wow, what a legend they must be! The pathetic thing is, they think they look smart and superior, when in reality, they look like a mean-spirited, hateful bully. You're picking on someone who's minding their own business and doing nobody any harm.

Deliberate misgendering is obvious; it's easy to tell who is just trying to be hateful. In the same way, it's easy to tell if it was accidental. Mistakes happen, and most people realise that; it's how you handle them that is the most important thing.

Don't Ignore It

The temptation might be to gloss over it and pretend it never happened. And you might just be trying to avoid drawing attention to it. But it comes across as though you don't care that you did it. And if you're reading this, then hopefully you do care. Be honest, there's no shame in **accidentally** getting it wrong.

But Don't Go On About It

It's another balancing act, like a lot of things in life. Yes, acknowledge it, but all that's necessary is to correct yourself, apologise, and continue with the conversation.

"Sorry, HE, as I was saying....."

Learn From It

If you're not learning from it, then you've never been sorry you did it. If someone does it a few times for the first few months, that's natural. There's an adjustment period where everyone needs to show a little sensitivity and leniency. But if it's three years down the line and they're still deadnaming and misgendering, they're definitely not trying. If you care enough, you'll try to get it right. I don't care how bad your memory is.

Don't Make Excuses

They might be valid to you, but to the person you're misgendering and deadnaming, they're just excuses for not respecting them. It's not about walking on eggshells, no matter what the TERFs and gammons tell you. It's about basic courtesy.

Correct Your Brain

If you think about that person and use the wrong name or pronouns, correct yourself in your head. I had to do it at first with my husband (Charlie). I had to repeat the words he, his, him, and Charlie to myself all the time. And in 3 years, I can count on two fingers how many times I got it wrong. Practice might not make perfect, but it certainly helps.

Accept Their Correction

Please don't be one of those people who lash out because *you* hurt someone's feelings. You're not my mother. Just because someone corrects you, it doesn't mean they're attacking you. So don't get defensive or belligerent, just accept the correction and move on.

Correcting Other People

This is a slightly more complicated problem. Ask your loved one if they want you to correct anyone who misgenders or deadnames them, or if they would rather do it themselves. If your loved one isn't with you, ask them how they want you to respond to deadnaming and misgendering in your absence. Between you, you'll be able to come up with a game plan.

It's not always easy, believe me. Especially when you know someone is doing it deliberately. But try to remain as calm as possible. If your loved one isn't there at the time, you're acting on their behalf; be worthy of that.

Deliberate Disrespect

Never in my darkest days did I think I would agree with anything Ann Widdecombe said. I think she's one of the most hateful, closed-minded, and bigoted people on the planet. But she **once** said something I agree with. And it was only once, I cannot stress that enough.

“Nobody has the right to live their lives being protected from offence or from insults or from hurt feelings. It is an occupational hazard of living in society.”

Should people have the right? Yes! But they don't. And to expect to live your entire life without ever being insulted or getting your feelings hurt is unrealistic. But if you deliberately hurt people's feelings, then you're a bad person. It's as simple as that.

Some people are just plain awful. They spend their lives deliberately making other people feel miserable and afraid. Sometimes I wonder if they get to their deathbed, will they think that was a life well spent? Or will they realise that their existence made the world a little worse every day? I hope it's the latter.

But you can't control what other people do or say; the only person you have control over is yourself. So your reaction to what other people say is far more important than the loathsome nonsense they're spouting.

What You're In Control Of

You have three choices when someone deliberately disrespects your loved one. You can either

1. Escalate the situation
2. De-escalate the situation
3. Walk away

I'm probably supposed to tell you to always walk away. But it's unrealistic and would be hypocritical of me. When your loved one is being disrespected, certain feelings

are generated. I'm not saying you should let those feelings get the better of you. I've done that, and it's not at all helpful. I'm saying they exist, and you can't turn them off.

Let's say someone was being rude to your child, who is a trans person. To tell a parent or guardian to walk away from that is a big ask. So, if you can walk away, I totally admire you and respect your mental strength. If not, I get it.

Escalate The Situation

Not something I recommend, but we've all done it in some way. We've all opened our big mouths when we shouldn't have and made things worse. Try to avoid this if you can. I know it's tempting to just say what's on your mind. But remember what I said about the fact that you're acting on behalf of someone right now, and you need to be worthy of that responsibility.

You can't fix hate, as much as you wish you could. If someone has hate in their hearts, it's always going to be there. It can't be reasoned with, and it can't be educated. Or at least it won't be because it doesn't want to be. Hate is quite happy in its own little ignorant bubble.

Don't beat yourself up if, at some point, you get into an argument with someone. You're not a bad person; you didn't stoop to their level. You just did what you felt was right to protect a person that you love. But arguing with transphobic, closed-minded morons is a waste of your time and energy. That goes for the comment section, too.

De-Escalate The Situation

If you can. If you think you or your loved one might be in danger, then you need to get out as soon as possible. Your safety and that of your loved one is the number one priority at all times. There's no debate about this. I said this wasn't instructional, but this is an instruction. If you're in danger, get out.

If not, then there are a few things you can try. I'm not saying they'll always work. But if you want to try, then have at it,

Stay As Calm As Possible

Transphobes are bullies, and bullies are looking for a reaction. Robbing them of a reaction robs them of any perceived power. They're goading you, and if you react, they win. They want you to shout; it would make them happy because then they would know they were getting to you. Don't make them happy. Think before you speak and never raise your voice above a normal conversation level.

Attack The Words, Not The Speaker

You don't want to be the bully here; that really is stooping to their level. You're better than that, and you're better than them. You're not the one deliberately saying vile things about an innocent person. Challenge or address what they've said. Try to resist making judgments about that person's character, no matter how true they might be.

Be Clear

This is not a debate. You're not reasoning with them, you're telling them. You're letting them know that their words are not acceptable and you will not tolerate them. "This isn't a discussion; what you're doing is unacceptable."

Religion

There's always that one person who brings God or Jesus or whoever into it. The only people who like religious bullies are other religious bullies. Don't get dragged into a religious debate; you'll only get accused of being a bigot yourself. And sadly, religious bullies are far greater in number than trans allies. Make it clear that you've shown them nothing but respect and you expect the same in return.

Walk Away

You can't and won't change their mind because they don't want their mind to be changed. These people are not interested in debating or even listening. What they

are interested in is bullying and intimidating. I said you can't fix hate, and I stand by that. You can't fix it, but you can walk away from it.

Stay Safe

The most important thing in any situation is to protect the safety and peace of mind of you and your loved one. You won't be able to achieve this by getting into an argument or a hostile confrontation. All you will do is put both of you in what could be very real danger. If it comes down to being safe or being right, it's an obvious choice.

Chapter 6: What Support Looks & Sounds Like

There's a running joke in Britain that men don't want Lynx deodorant and body spray sets for Christmas. For those of you who don't know, Lynx is a brand particularly associated with younger men, and it's known for being... pungent. Think Sex Panther and you're halfway there. It's one of those gifts that you might buy for a young man you hardly know, but you can't turn up empty-handed.

So, I was surprised to learn that Charlie actually **wanted** one of those sets for his first "out" Christmas! I was thinking about buying him some fancy designer aftershave, but he wanted a £5 gift set.

He explained that these sets are so associated with men/boys, that he secretly always wanted one his whole life. So, of course, he got both. My point is that support can be shown in weird and unexpected ways. It looks and sounds different for everyone, but there are some basic things you can do to support your trans loved one.

Listen

Don't try to fix, and don't judge. Everyone needs to be heard at times. You might think that there's no point in them confiding in you because you don't understand or you can't fix anything. But it isn't about that, it's about knowing that even though someone might not have a clue what they're going through, they care enough to be there for them. It's also about just getting certain things out of your brain! Not knowing what to do for the best is difficult and doesn't really get much easier. But listening is the easiest and most helpful thing you can do right now.

Don't React As A Reflex

If they're feeling bad about themselves, don't just instantly tell them they look fine. They won't believe you anyway. Think before you respond. If they ask whether their shoes look "girly," look at the shoes and be honest. Charlie always tells me to be honest about his appearance because I'm not helping him if I lie to spare his feelings. If I lied and said, "No, you can't see your binder through that T-shirt," and he found out that you could, he would feel worse, and trust would be broken.

You might not understand their concerns, and they might not seem like something you would ever worry about. But they're worrying about it, and to them, their concerns are very real. Please take them seriously.

Ask What You Can Do To Help

Once again, it's okay not to know. It's not okay not to care. If they're having a rough time, ask if there's anything you can do to help them. The answer might be no; in fact, it probably will be. But the fact that you asked and didn't ignore it or immediately try to fix it will mean a lot.

Let them know that you're there if they need you.

Research With Them, But Don't Take Over

If they're looking for answers about anything online, ask if they want help. And if they do, help them! But try not to take over; they need to be in charge of this journey. The last thing they want is someone coming in and taking the reins.

Pay Attention

If they're not big on talking, try to pay attention to their actions. You know how they normally act, so keep an eye out for any changes in their behaviour and respond accordingly. If they seem down, let them know they don't *have* to talk to you, but you're there if they *want* to.

People often say they miss the signs, but that's mostly because they're not looking for them.

Try to stay as calm as you can; their mood will likely be fluctuating, so a level and consistent presence will be a grounding comfort.

Be Patient

If you don't, then you will cause problems for both of you. This isn't a project; there's no end date and no schedule. And progress isn't linear; there will be good periods and bad periods. Just as you think they seem happier, they can come crashing down

again. The same as anyone can. Your mental health isn't linear; you have good and bad times. And their gender identity is linked closely to their mental health at this point, so fluctuation is normal.

They may change their mind about certain things; in fact, they likely will. There will be inconsistencies and flip-flops because they're still figuring things out. I hate using the term as it's been hijacked by douche bags, but they're finding themselves.

Small Acts Work Wonders

Not long after Charlie started on testosterone, I was shopping for some new lotion for myself. Looking around the store, I spotted a men's shaving brush and a tub of shaving soap. Having seen the high-speed hair growth he was experiencing, I got them. Seriously, the hair growth was so fast it was genuinely quite remarkable! When I showed him later that day, I had never seen someone so happy with something so apparently insignificant. It cost about £7 in total, if that. But even though I just saw it as something necessary that he would need very soon, to him, it was an affirmation. It was the fact that I saw him as a man, and just picked something up while I was shopping. It was normal, which it always had been to me. My point is, sometimes the smallest action, purchase, or even phrase can make a massive difference.

Help Them Identify Triggers

Keep an eye on what seems to worsen their discomfort or distress. It can be situations, objects, or even people. If they come away from interactions with certain people and they're clearly upset, acknowledge that with them. Work through it and ask what you can do to help the situation the next time it occurs. Or whether or not they want your help in avoiding certain people. And yes, avoiding people is okay if they make you feel like shit! I don't care who it is. This rule applies to everyone on the entire planet. I don't care if it's your own mother; you don't have to put up with abuse from anyone!

Encourage Professional Help

I think before anyone makes any kind of massive change, they should talk to a qualified counsellor or therapist. Whether it's plastic surgery, moving to another country, or starting their gender transition process. People think therapists are there to dissuade people from these things. But they're not; they are there to support them

while they're doing it. The counselling sessions from Charlie's gender clinic have been worth their weight in gold.

Self-Worth Is Not About Appearance

Try to encourage them to focus on something other than how they look. It will not be easy, I can promise you that. And you can't blame anyone for focusing so heavily on their appearance. It's probably felt wrong for as many years as they've been alive. But focusing entirely on how they look is a definite shortcut to depression.

It's Not Vanity Or Self-Obsession

It might look that way, but you're not in the wrong body. You don't know what it's like inside their head. They've spent their entire life feeling totally wrong, now they have the chance to feel right, so of course they want to look "right." And the chances are, they want it to happen now. You know it can't, but imagine how frustrating that experience must be. I would be an utterly unbearable person to live with if I had to experience that!

Get Help Urgently

If they're experiencing ANY suicidal thoughts, do not wait. Early intervention is key here.

Even if someone can't do anything to help you, knowing that they care enough to ask and be there for you is all it takes sometimes. At least that's what Charlie says to me. But you can't just show up emotionally when it's convenient for you. If you're going to offer support, offer consistent support.

Chapter 7: Dealing With Rejection

I have very little faith in people, so when Charlie first came out as trans, I assumed there would be a few people with a few problems. I thought I knew who the biggest troublemakers were going to be. It turns out I was way off the mark; the two people I thought would cause the most friction became his biggest cheerleaders. And the one person I thought would be Ally of the Year turned out to be Wanker of the Week.

Supporting your trans loved one through rejection isn't easy on them or you. They have to go through the pain of rejection, and there's not a bloody thing you can do about it. You just have to watch their heart and spirit get trampled on by people they trusted, and people you thought were decent.

Everyone's reactions will be different, but there are a few important lessons you'll both learn along the way.

Remember That People Will Surprise You

Some in a positive way, others, not so much. There will be people you think will be fine, even supportive, and they'll really let you down. Charlie's friend of 25 years was one of these people. I honestly thought she would take it in her stride, but she was a total knob about it. And as much as I never cared for the woman, I thought she cared for Charlie, and the way she behaved really pissed me off.

The closer your loved one is to someone, the more a rejection is going to hurt, and like me, you'll probably get furiously angry because you expected better from this person. But you have to sit on that anger as delicately as if it were going to hatch. Because going off at them won't help anyone, not even you. It feels like it will, but believe me, it will only make things more complicated. It's a difficult experience if you're a protective person, but shouting the odds is only going to make your loved one look bad by association.

Don't Try To Change Anyone's Mind

You won't succeed, and to be honest, I don't think you should. If someone's initial reaction is rejection, then that's how they genuinely feel. That's at their core, and it's the truth of who they are. It's really tempting to try, especially if they were particularly close to your loved one. But it's pointless, they've made their decision, and it might

not feel like it now, but they're the ones who have lost out. They're missing out on a brilliant, wonderful person in their lives because they let their hateful nature win. You can't argue with stupid, but you can cut it out of your life like a paper doll.

They Might Want To Try Again With This Person

And you've got no choice other than to support them. You might not understand their decision, but it's not your decision to understand. It's really hard, because you know, in reality, if it didn't work the first time, what would make it work the second time around? But it's their choice to try. You don't have to get it, and you certainly don't have to like it. What you do have to do is be there when it all goes wrong again. No "I told you so," or anything like that, just remember how much they're hurting right now. They put their heart on the line again, and that A-hole stamped on it... again. It's really important to remember they tried again for a reason, because they obviously care about that person and want them in their lives. And the more you care about someone, the more the rejection is going to sting. Just be there to wipe away the tears; it's all you can do.

Be The Support They Need

The world is a hostile place for trans people, and as much as some people will surprise you, many won't. When people don't show any support for them, you need to double down and be their entire support system. It's not easy, it's exhausting, and it requires a lot of research, but they're worth it.

Look online for ways to support them, and think about the little things you know they will like. It might not seem like much, but even small acts of kindness can remind them that they have someone in their life who cares deeply for them.

Don't Badmouth People Who Reject Them

Once again, it's tempting as hell to launch into a torrent of abuse, but don't. They don't need to hear that right now; the only thing they need at the moment is your support. If they start badmouthing, agree with them, but don't go over the top, even if you mean every word. It's so hard, especially if you're like me and have some choice words to say. But it won't help the situation at all; it won't make them feel better. They'll still be feeling the pain of rejection, but now there's anger in the mix too. Just try to steer the conversation in a different direction. They don't deserve the airtime,

quite frankly. They've stolen enough of their mental peace and energy; don't let them take any more.

Be Firm

People think they're allowed to spew their hateful words without consequence. They genuinely believe they should be able to say whatever they like, and people just have to be okay with it. But you don't, if they ask why you're not talking to them, tell them. Explain in no uncertain terms how you feel, maybe even throw in, "*I'm not even angry, I'm just so disappointed.*" You don't have to make a scene or be unpleasant, but leave no room for misinterpretation.

Don't Force Optimism On Them

Don't say anything like "They'll come around," because they might not. In fact, they might never come around again. And secretly, they know that, they just don't want to admit it yet because it's a bit too painful right now. Phrases like that minimise the loss they've just suffered and give false hope where none really exists. Be as gentle as you can, but it's important to be realistic.

Remind Them That The Rejection Isn't A Reflection Of Their Worth

If you reject someone because they sit anywhere on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, you're not a nice person, no matter which way you slice it. You can hide behind your religious beliefs or your opinions all you like, but when it all comes down to it, you're hateful. They haven't chosen to be trans, but you've CHOSEN to reject them because of it. You rejected them because they're different, that's it. And you can justify it until you're blue in the face, but it's literally as simple as that.

Stress The Importance of Chosen Family

They say you can't choose your family, but you can. In fact, you should. You're under no obligation to stick with people who don't have you or your loved one's best interests at heart. Why should you? Because you're related? It's nothing more than a genetic accident that you're related to these hateful scumbags. You were thrown together in circumstances you couldn't control back then; you *can* control them now. There will be people who were family that get stripped of that title, and someone unrelated will be handed that privilege. Chosen families are often the best kind.

There's Very Little You Can Do

And it's incredibly frustrating and upsetting. All you can do is be there to comfort, support, and love them when people they thought had their back, stab them in it. If you want people to show support, the only person you can actually guarantee will do that is you.

Chapter 8: Testosterone Changes

As I've mentioned once or twice, medically transitioning does not make you more transgender than someone else. It doesn't make you better, nor does it make you worse. Everyone has their own reasons for not medically transitioning, in the same way they have their own reasons **for** doing it. Those reasons are nobody else's business but theirs, so no, you shouldn't ask why they're not taking hormones.

And again, as I've mentioned before, I haven't specifically included MTF trans people in this series as I have no experience in living alongside their transition. I don't know enough about the changes a trans woman might experience when taking hormones, so it's not my place to talk about it.

In this chapter, I will be talking about the changes I saw in my husband when he started taking testosterone. All information has been cleared by him, and he has given full permission to share it.

Whether it's gel, injections, or patches, if someone is adding a hormone to their body, they're changing the balance on the inside. Naturally, this is going to start reflecting on the outside. Every person will respond differently, and at different rates. These are some changes I've noticed over the past three years.

Changes in..... Odour

I'm putting it as delicately as I can. Everyone has their own unique smell, and you probably won't even realise that until or unless it changes. To put it bluntly, he stopped smelling like a girl and started smelling like a boy. Body odour got more noticeable, and even his pee smelled stronger. Before you ask, no, I wasn't deliberately smelling it! It simply couldn't be avoided. And it wasn't just me noticing the change in the way he smelled. Our cat stopped going anywhere near him for a while. She still knew who he was, but the change in smell was making her a little wary. But she soon settled down and got used to it. And the changes levelled off after about a year, I think. It will be different for everyone, but I would recommend medicated deodorant to avoid feeling self-conscious. I used it anyway, so I already knew how good it was!

Rapid Hair Growth

He's a naturally hairy person from a very shaggy bloodline. Something he hated when he was younger, but now he fully embraces. If you stand close enough and listen carefully, I swear you can actually hear it growing. I knew some hair would come; it was testosterone, of course, it would make you hairier. But I was not prepared for the speed at which that would happen. Obviously, everyone is different, and some people hoping for hair won't be as fortunate as he was. There are hair growth treatments out there, but use them with caution, and be aware that they can exacerbate the acne that people new to testosterone are already prone to.

Acne

As someone who suffered with acne and spots for years as a teenager, I desperately wanted to help him when he had flare-ups. I saw how they would put a massive dent in his blossoming confidence. We tried all different creams, gels, lotions, and even diets. But the testosterone was putting him through a kind of puberty, and as most of us know, during puberty, zit happens. Everything we tried just seemed to make it worse, and he decided it was simply something he would have to put up with for a while. Drinking more water helped him quite a bit, so if you're struggling, stay hydrated. I'm not saying it will help, but it certainly won't hurt.

Hunger

I used to think my older brother, who could eat an entire loaf of bread in one day, was just a greedy bastard. Until my husband went on testosterone, and I became a giant talking sandwich. He'd never had much of an appetite before; in fact, I was always having to remind him to eat! He suffers from migraines, which are closely linked to his blood sugar levels. I learned early on in our relationship to carry a snack in my handbag if we went anywhere for more than a couple of hours. The appetite change was fast, and it wasn't greed; he was genuinely hungry. His head would start hurting if he didn't eat. Never gained a pound, though, not that I'm jealous. I think staying hydrated is important again. I know I'm not your mum, but it can help you avoid overeating if that's something you struggle with (like me)

The Voice

This was the change I was most worried about. But it was also one of the most important things to him, and a source of massive dysphoria. He worked in retail and would frequently get misgendered over the phone. I loved my “wife’s” voice and was so worried about it changing. But when I saw how much being misgendered would upset him, I knew I had to get over myself. I had told him my worries about his voice initially, and he made me a video so I always had his old voice. And it’s occurring to me as I write this that I haven’t ever listened to it since the day he made it. So, it obviously wasn’t as big a deal as I thought it would be. I think it’s important not to cling to things or resist change in these situations because you don’t know how much YOU will change alongside your loved one.

Skin Texture and Colour

I never even thought about this as a change that would happen. I don’t know why. Men and women can have very different skin textures. The only way I can describe it is that he has “man skin” now. Pre-testosterone, his face was smooth and soft, and the change in texture was slow, but noticeable. The colour change was something that only really occurred to me last year. But I pulled up an old picture, and his skin is at very least three shades darker. He has a similar skin colour to mine now, and one of my parents is Indian!

Be aware of changing skin, and if you want to help, do some research. Skin requirements change when the skin itself changes. What will work at the beginning of their transition might not be appropriate a few years in. Charlie still has to change face creams at least twice a year.

Facial Features

He had a little button nose before testosterone. I was jealous because I hated my nose for years as a teenager, I couldn’t care less now, if you don’t like my nose, don’t look at it. Problem solved.

But his nose looks much wider, his lips are less full, and his brow seems heavier than before. His face shape has definitely changed, but it’s hard to tell to what degree that is because of the beard. His entire head looks bigger, which I’m glad about, as he was very self-conscious about it at first. Different haircuts, beard styles, and even eyebrow shapes can all make a massive difference in helping someone feel more confident. If you want to help boost someone’s confidence, look for a haircut that will make the most of their head or face shape. If they want to make their

head look bigger, Google “men’s haircuts to make head look bigger.” Every situation is unique, and you’ll know what will work for your loved one.

Tempremant

I mentioned in a previous article how I thought starting testosterone would turn my husband into an angry man. I couldn’t have been more wrong if I’d made it my mission. He was calmer, more sensitive, and more importantly, happier. His confidence was nonexistent before; he had no faith in himself, his intelligence, or his abilities. I won’t say it skyrocketed, but it grew a little every day. He started to do things he would never have dreamed of before, the most noticeable of which was taking a management position at work. He’d been offered the role twice before and turned it down. It was around five months after he started testosterone that he was asked again, and he accepted!

There are a few more changes, but these have by far been the most significant ones. And as I said, every transition is different, so your loved one might experience these, they might not. They might also experience very different changes, but I can’t speak about what I haven’t witnessed. Things will be changing, and you might be a little apprehensive, but honestly, it’s best to just go with it. You’ll think I’m being blunt here, but these changes are going to happen with or without you. It’s your choice.

Chapter 9: Coping With Worry

I worry like it's my full-time job; I never used to, but apparently, with age and various trauma comes debilitating anxiety. So there we go, buckle up, kids. And, if, like me, you overthink like you're getting paid to do so, there are a few things that can kick that into hyperdrive. Someone you love coming out as trans is one of them.

When Charlie came out as trans, I dreaded people's reactions. At the time, we lived in a place I thought was as rough as a dog's arse. But compared to where we live now, it was practically a utopia of enlightenment and acceptance. As well as being a gentleman, Charlie is a gentle man; he hates confrontation and will avoid it at all costs. And as most of us know, people are very rarely afraid to "confront" (bully) members of the trans community. This idea terrified me, because I wasn't there to protect him. Now, intellectually, I knew he didn't need my protection; he'd managed to survive 30 years on this earth before we even met. But that didn't stop me from wanting to shield him from every evil in the world.

If you love someone, you want to protect them; it's instinct. We look after the people we care about most because we want to keep them around. And worrying when your loved one comes out as trans is totally natural. Not because you think there's anything negative about it, but because you know there are some horrible people in this world. But as much as you're worrying right now, they're probably worrying 150 times more. Coping with that worry and carrying it everywhere you go isn't easy, but you can't let it make you crazy. You need to stay as strong as you can, so when they worry, they have someone they can turn to.

They Might Be Worrying About Rejection

The biggest fear most people have is rejection; we don't just want to be accepted, we need it. Even if we try to tell ourselves differently. The need for acceptance is a basic survival instinct; there's safety in numbers, and they probably feel incredibly singular right now.

There could be a million questions going through their mind right now:

Will I be safe?

Will people still like me?

Will they even accept me?

How will my life change now?

What will I do if I need help?

You probably have the exact same worries for them, and the worst part is, you don't know the answers. All you can do is watch and wait; you feel like a spectator in their life, and it's really difficult for many reasons. The main one is that you want to steer everything in a positive direction; you want everything and everyone to be okay. But the truth is, sometimes it won't be; some people will be evil, and you know that, it's why you're worrying.

Coping with their worry is easy; you know you're going to be supportive and be there when they need you. Handling your own worry is what's eating you alive.

I can't tell you how to get rid of all your concerns because I don't know what they are; every experience is personal. But I can localise them.

Worrying About Other People

There is only one person on this earth you have control over, and that's yourself. You can't control what anyone else does, and you need to accept that. Some people are going to be horrible to your loved one. And as much as that burns you up, you can't do anything to stop them because you won't know until it's happened. Accepting that you have absolutely no control is the only way to ease your worries, even a little. It sounds counterproductive, like doing that will make you worry more. But it won't, there's a strange kind of peace that comes from accepting that sometimes, other people are just terrible.

When one of these terrible people makes life difficult for your loved one, you can't control what they do. But you can control what *you* do, you can be there to support, to comfort, and to love. And more importantly, to remind them that there are decent people in this world.

Worrying About Changing

Just because someone wants something doesn't mean the idea of getting it doesn't make them nervous. Going through any kind of change, whether it's social, medical, or legal, can be scary. And if they're medically transitioning, their body that they've known for years might suddenly become a stranger to them. Changes will begin to happen that are confusing and a little unpredictable. It can be a very uncertain time, and reassurance is key, and that can only be provided if you know what you're talking about.

Before any gel or needles touch their skin, do your homework. Make sure they're getting their hormones from a reputable, safe source, and research everything you can. The likelihood is, they'll be a lot more willing to overlook potentially negative effects than you will. That's only natural; they're finally getting what they've always wanted, but you need to know any danger signs. Partly for safety reasons, but also for reassurance. If they come to you with something, you need to know enough to be able to tell them that what they're experiencing is normal or common.

Worrying About Not Changing

For Charlie, this worry was far greater than any concerns he had about changing. Testosterone gel offered some changes, but for ever-impatient Charlie, things weren't happening fast enough. I got where he was coming from; I'm very much the same. If I make a decision, I want things to start happening right now. And when they don't, it's very easy to worry that they never will. Again, knowledge helps here; there's no set timeline because every transition is different. But to be able to say, "lots of people don't experience [insert required effect] for a long time, there's nothing *wrong* with you. It also allows you to help them make informed choices about potentially changing hormone delivery systems, which can have a dramatic impact on results.

To Help Handle Their Worries

Try to be as supportive, present, and attentive as you can. They might not come to you at first, but you'll know when something is wrong. Ask; if they don't tell you, then don't push it. Just let them know that you're there for them whenever they need you. It's important not to try to force someone to talk; it normally has the opposite effect, and that's the last thing you want. Research is key here; you need to know what you're talking about as much as possible. You can't help at all if you don't know anything; you'll never know everything, but it's important to have as much knowledge as you can. For both your sakes.

To Help Handle Your Worries

Accepting that you can't control what happens is hard, but it's absolutely crucial. You're in charge of you, that's it. Worrying about what other people *might* do is a massive waste of time and energy. That's time and energy that could be spent in much more productive ways. You need all the mental peace you can grab; everyone does. Don't let anyone else rob you of it, especially not people like that.

The trans community is vulnerable, and when someone you love is vulnerable, you're going to worry. There's nothing that can be done to totally eliminate that, but it doesn't have to dictate your entire life, or theirs. You need to look after yourself as much as you need to look after them.

Chapter 10: Cost & Paperwork

When Charlie came out as transgender, I knew a few things would happen. I knew he would change a certain amount, I knew some people would be arseholes about it, and I knew I was going to worry myself into an early grave. What I didn't know, what I had no notion of, is how much paperwork is involved in being transgender! During the early stages of his transition, it seemed as though there were endless forms for him to fill in and research for us to do.

Whether it was finding a gender clinic or changing his driving license, there was admin to be done. And as we all know, where there's admin, there's an admin fee.

Thankfully, I enjoy doing three things:

1. Research
2. Finding the best possible price for things
3. Making lists

So I've made a list of the things you may need to research (particularly if your loved one is medically or socially transitioning), the paperwork you'll need to fill out, and some of the possible costs involved.

Research and Cost

If, like most places in the UK, your GP refuses to offer gender affirming care, you may need to look for a private provider. And I totally understand that the words "private medical care" strike fear into the hearts and wallets of most of us. I also understand that the word "affordable" means different things to different people. The medical care you receive will depend on your budget. Charlie is under a gender clinic for £70 per month, which includes subscription charges, prescriptions from a licensed pharmacy, and home delivery of two vials of testosterone.

Before I mention the name of said clinic, I want to say that neither of us is in any way professionally affiliated with them, nor are we being paid to mention them. I just want to put their name out there for two reasons:

1. Other people will be able to access more affordable gender affirming care.
2. I genuinely don't think I'd have a husband to write about if it weren't for them.

GenderGP is an online gender clinic that operates in 28 countries. Their services range from counselling to prescribing, and even voice coaching (check their website for the full list of services). All professionals are licensed in their own countries, and whether you agree with their policies or not, it's all above board. If you're looking for tailored, affordable, and proven care, I would check them out.

Always make sure your hormones are from a safe and reputable supplier; there are so many dodgy scumbags out there who would sell you something lethal without a second thought. Even though you might think you're saving money, **IT IS NOT WORTH THE RISK!** These chemicals will be entering your bloodstream; they absolutely need to be 100% safe. You'll also need regular blood tests, and your medical provider should insist on them. You're altering your chemistry at a fundamental level; this needs to be monitored.

Surgery is a different beast altogether; it's not "affordable," and it's something most people will need to save up for. But it's important to research things like payment plans, insurance coverage, and down payments. It's also crucial to look into clinic and clinician reviews; you can't go into something as huge as surgery unprepared, you need to know as much as you possibly can. I know everyone's experience will be different, but you need to be aware of the potential risks.

Look into recovery advice and follow it to the letter. It's there for a reason! I had surgery a few years back to remove a large benign tumour from my stomach. I didn't follow the recovery advice, which caused permanent nerve damage as a result. Be smart and safe, don't make the same stupid mistake I did.

The cost of surgery will depend on what you're having done and where you live, but in the UK, you're looking at a bare minimum of £9,000 for top surgery and £15,000 for bottom surgery.

Paperwork

- Driving license
- Passport
- Birth certificate
- Rental agreement
- NHS/Medical records
- Work payroll
- Work name badge
- Bank accounts
- Credit cards
- Utility companies
- Phone network provider
- Pet/home/car/life insurance providers

These are all things that had to be changed after Charlie registered his new name via deed poll. This is the legally recognised way to change your name in the United Kingdom. From the research I've done, it seems to be relatively easy compared to somewhere like the USA. It was a simple form; he just needed two credible witnesses to sign it and to pay the admin fee of £25 (about \$33). That was probably the quickest, easiest, and cheapest part of the entire process. Everything else seemed to be a lot more...involved, especially when it came to medical records. It was an incredibly frustrating time for Charlie, as, like most people, he's not a fan of paperwork at all. So be prepared for slightly frayed tempers during the paperwork phase! Try not to judge too harshly. I'd be pissed off if everyone I spoke to asked me to fill out a five-page form. And then the next person I spoke to told me that was the wrong f***ing form! (I'm not joking, that happened more than once).

If you want to help during this process, your scope is limited, but one thing you can do is be organised. Especially if they're not, take everything with you if you're going somewhere. Seriously, if they tell you to choose two things from a list of paperwork to use as ID, take four. It's not overkill; you don't want to get all the way there and fall at the first hurdle for the sake of two pieces of paper. Better to have them and not need them than need them and not have them. Preparedness is everything during the paperwork phase!

For the most part, you won't be able to make calls or fill out forms unless you're officially named and allowed to do so. But if your loved one is getting frustrated, ask how you can help. There might be nothing you can do, but they'll appreciate you asking.

There Will Be Wankers

Sometimes it will be because they're transphobic, but sometimes it will be because they're jobsworths. I don't know if that's just a British phrase or not, but a jobsworth is an official who sticks rigidly to rules even at the expense of common sense or basic human decency. Either way, it's an overwhelming time for your loved one, so you may need to step in and be firm if people are getting unpleasant. Again, remember that you're speaking on behalf of them and act accordingly. I don't care how tempting it is, kicking off will only make things significantly worse, plus it will stress your loved one out. Try to remain as calm as you possibly can.

As I said, you won't be able to do too much at this point. It's all phone calls and forms. But your support will be crucial at this stage. It's psychologically, emotionally, and financially exhausting, so just be there when they need you.

Chapter 11: The Importance of Communication

What nobody ever tells you is that when the love between any two people is under pressure, communication becomes even more important than it already was. Even more important and infinitely more difficult. You're both becoming different people, and you're changing in ways that neither of you understands. It can be a scary, confusing and overwhelming time **for both of you**.

Start With Listening

I know it's not exactly revolutionary stuff. But real listening isn't nodding along while mentally adding things to your shopping list. It's stopping what you're doing, focusing, and letting them speak without immediately trying to solve something or offer advice. Transitioning comes with a lot of internal noise, and what your loved one needs is someone who isn't adding to the chaos. You don't have to have answers; you just have to listen.

Some days they'll want to talk at great length about identity, dysphoria, hopes, and fears. Other days, they'll want to announce one thought, and that will be it for the day; just go with it. Your job is to be available, not psychic.

Asking Questions

Asking questions is good; asking *all* the questions is bad. You're supposed to be having a conversation, not performing an interrogation. A useful rule of is this: if you wouldn't want someone to ask **you** this question, don't ask someone else! It's not hard. If you think you'd be annoyed or offended, keep it to yourself.

Asking:

- "How are you feeling about everything today?"
- "Would you like me to use that name straight away?"

or

- "Is there anything I can do that would make this easier?"

Is thoughtful and supportive.

Asking

- “How far are you going with all this?”
- “So what does that make you now?”

or

- “When will you look like the gender you are?”

Is knobby and disrespectful.

When your loved one shares something vulnerable, the only correct response is validation. I think the two phrases I say the most to Charlie when we’re talking about anything trans-related are:

- “That makes sense”

And

- “I’m sorry you’re feeling that way. Is there anything I can do to help?”

Don’t Forget You

Your feelings matter too, and pretending they don’t will only lead you down a very dark path, trust me. But before you unload everything onto a person who’s already trying to navigate dysphoria, transphobia, and enough paperwork to start a decent-sized bonfire, think before you speak. If you’re scared, confused or worried, please talk about it, but do it responsibly. Avoid phrases like, “I just don’t get it,” even if you don’t. It sounds dismissive, and like you’re fed up hearing about it. Try something like “I’m trying my best to understand, but I’m struggling with this. Can you help me clear a few things up?”

Taking A Tone

93% of communication is non-verbal, with tone of voice accounting for an unsurprising 38% of the actual intended message. So don’t just choose your words carefully, choose the tone too. It’s not easy, half the time I don’t think I’m copping an attitude, but Charlie’s not the only one to have told me I am!

Transition can be a lonely experience, and the world is not known for being kind or accommodating, particularly to trans people. So say the positive things out loud, the

ones you think but don't always express. Tell them that you're proud of them and the confidence they're showing. These things matter, and honestly, none of us, trans or otherwise, hear enough kind things

Finally, never assume you know what they want; you're not psychic, and they don't expect you to be. Ask what they need from you, and if they ask what you need from them, tell them! It eliminates guesswork, which only leads to frustration and resentment.

Remember: You Are On the Same Team

It's easy to forget this when emotions are high, and your life together feels uncertain. But you're not opponents, you're a team working towards the same goal, you just have very different perspectives about it. That's not a bad thing, it's a great thing actually. It can offer a well-rounded view and create an environment of understanding, empathy, and support.

There will be misunderstandings and difficult conversations. And there will definitely be days when both of you are exhausted, and everything anyone says is taken the wrong way. But if you approach each other with genuine curiosity instead of defensiveness, compassion instead of judgement, and a willingness to keep trying, communication becomes not just a manageable task, but a bonding experience.

Supporting a trans loved one isn't about perfection; it's about presence. It's about showing up even when you don't have the right words. It's about caring enough to ask, and listening enough to learn. Start from a place of love, and you can't go too far wrong.

Chapter 12: How to Handle Your Emotions Without Making It All About You

Most people are capable of feeling and understanding emotions. But what you do with these emotions determines whether you grow as a person, or whether people start avoiding you because every conversation illustrates the fact that you have severe main character syndrome. Handling your emotions isn't about suppressing them or pretending you're fine when you're not. It's about learning to carry your feelings without dropping them like lead weights on everyone else's heads.

This is a skill many adults think they have, but absolutely do not. It's the difference between *having* feelings and *weaponising* feelings, and the difference between being honest and being self-absorbed.

If your loved one has just battled a bad-tempered GP receptionist, been discriminated against at work, or had a dysphoria spike bad enough to ruin their whole week, that is not the moment for you to announce that you feel neglected or nostalgic for their old voice. Those feelings might be real, but they're not urgent; their well-being is.

Think of it like a triage system; a crisis takes priority. Your concerns can wait twenty minutes, or twenty hours, or until next week if necessary. This isn't martyrdom; it's basic empathy and human decency. Don't add dishes to an already full sink.

Not every passing feeling deserves an announcement or a conversation. When you treat every sensation as significant, you train yourself to believe that you're fragile and that other people must immediately adjust to you. The world doesn't work like that, nor should it... for anyone, cis, trans, nonbinary, **anyone**. Ask yourself whether what you're about to pile onto someone else is something you've actually tried to deal with privately. If you haven't, you're not expressing; you're outsourcing.

Own your reactions instead of apportioning blame.

You are responsible for your tone, your behaviours, and the way you show up, even on your bad days. Emotional responsibility isn't about perfection; it's about recognising the gap between what you feel and what you do. The moment you start pinning your reactions on someone else, "You made me angry," "You caused this,"

you've stopped being emotionally honest and started being emotionally lazy, manipulative and abusive.

Owning your emotions means acknowledging them *before* they spill into blame. You can say, "I need some space, can you give me a minute to process?" without needing someone else to fix it or absorb the fallout. It places you back in control of your own behaviour instead of making other people tiptoe around you.

Feelings aren't facts. Remember that!

I'm terrible for this and constantly have to remind myself: Just because I think something is true doesn't mean it actually is! Anxiety can sound like certainty, bitterness can sound like justification, and anger can make a great impression of mental clarity. Your brain is extremely good at convincing you that your emotional state is an objective reality.

When you confuse feelings with facts, you don't just misinterpret situations; you rewrite them in real time, and then you argue with people as if they're wrong for not living in your version of events. You assume motives, you catastrophise, and you react to what's happening in your head rather than what's actually happening in the room.

A lot of people confuse emotional expression with emotional dependency. You don't need to confess each insecurity every time you feel it. Learn to soothe yourself without demanding emotional labour from everyone around you. Otherwise, the people in your life start to dread your "I just need to be honest" speeches because they've learned it means they're about to be conscripted into your personal therapy squad.

Learn the difference between expressing emotion and expecting accommodation.

People can care about your feelings without reorganising their behaviour around them. Emotional expression becomes emotional domination when you expect the world to reshape itself to prevent your discomfort.

Healthy expression: "I feel overwhelmed right now; I need a minute."

Unhealthy expression: "You need to stop doing that because it's upsetting me."

One is about communication. The other is about control.

The minute you feel hurt, ignored, or insecure, your impulse might be to react. To tell someone immediately or narrate your feelings in detail to everyone who'll listen. That's the kind of impulsivity that turns manageable moments into dramatic disasters. Discomfort isn't an emergency; it's just a signal. If you treat it like a crisis, you'll behave like you're in one.

People who can tolerate uncomfortable emotions quietly, the ones who can sit with themselves until the wave passes, have calmer lives and healthier relationships. Not because they don't feel things, but because they don't demand immediate relief at any cost.

If you walk into a room and assume that your emotions should determine the tone, the pace, and the subject of conversation, you're not being expressive; you're being **entitled**. Everyone you speak to has their own world full of worries, pressures, and chaos, including your loved one. You're not the only person going through something significant.

When you treat your emotions as the only important thing in the world, you try to make other people background characters in their own lives. And shockingly, people don't like that.

Be clear, not dramatic.

Metaphors, catastrophic language, and cryptic comments don't help anyone understand how you actually feel. They just create an atmosphere of tension and drama. The only way to communicate properly is with clear, calm language.

Clarity is a gift to both you and the people around you. It turns emotional chaos into something that can actually be worked with. Try to simply say what happened without assigning motives or inventing meaning. You can be upset and still be wrong in the same way you can be angry and still need to apologise. Emotion does not give you immunity from accountability.

People who handle their emotions well understand that you don't get a behavioural pass because you're having a shitty day. You can have unpleasant feelings without lashing out, and you can be sensitive without being demanding.

Self-control is not emotional suppression; it's emotional maturity.

Practical ways to regulate

- Ask yourself what the feeling might be about, not who caused it.
- Decide whether this needs to be said out loud or just processed internally.
- If you speak, use clear statements instead of stories or accusations.
- Take responsibility for your reactions, tone, and timing.
- Avoid venting as a default.
- If you need comfort, ask for it directly instead of fishing for it.
- Give others space to have their own feelings without competing.
- Revisit the issue later when emotional intensity has settled.

Ask if someone has the capacity to deal with your stuff before unloading it on them. If they don't, that's not rejection, it's a reminder that they're human too.

Learn to self-soothe.

Self-soothing is not ignoring your feelings; it's developing the ability to calm your nervous system without needing another person to act as your emotional life support. That might include something like taking a walk, using grounding techniques, journaling, or simply giving yourself time before responding.

You will still have bad days, and you'll still overreact sometimes. The point isn't to become a robot. It's to become someone who recognises when they're starting to spiral, and pulls themselves back.

You're entitled to feel everything you feel; nobody's saying otherwise. What you're not entitled to do is turn every feeling into a spectacle that everyone else is forced to deal with. Nobody is.

Chapter 13: Boundaries and Respecting Autonomy

Most people talk about boundaries without knowing what they actually are: imposed limits that protect your time, energy, and well-being. Boundaries aren't about controlling anyone else; they're about taking responsibility for yourself.

And respecting autonomy, both your loved ones and yours, is the backbone of every healthy relationship. If you can't do that, you turn into someone who either bulldozes people's boundaries or dissolves into whatever they want. Neither version is positive or sustainable.

The first thing people misunderstand is that boundaries are not demands, and they're not negotiations. A boundary is something you set for yourself, not something you impose on someone else. "Don't speak to me like that, or I'll leave the conversation", is a boundary. "You're not allowed to speak to them," is control. If your boundary requires someone else to alter their behaviour to keep you comfortable, it's not a boundary; it's emotional manipulation disguised as self-protection. A real boundary is actionable by you and you alone. It's a line you draw and a consequence you follow through on. It's not a speech, a threat, or a dramatic announcement.

Respecting autonomy is the part most people skip; you can't demand autonomy for yourself while trampling everyone else's. You can't shout about your right to space or individuality, then get offended when other people claim those same rights. Autonomy goes both ways, or it doesn't exist at all. This applies to everyone, regardless of gender identity.

When someone you love comes out as trans, everyone suddenly imagines themselves a main character in the transition story; parents, partners, siblings, friends, even that one colleague who thinks they're the world's best ally because they used to watch *The L Word*. People start narrating their feelings like they're the ones going through this.

This is where boundaries and autonomy become absolutely essential. Not optional, not kind, but essential. Because nothing derails a transition faster than well-intentioned people who haven't figured out the difference between *supporting* someone and *managing* their life for them. Something I had to learn and still have to remind myself of from time to time!

The most basic principle is this: **your loved one is in charge of their own transition.** Their body is not yours to manage, and their decisions are not yours to make. You don't get to decide what they should do medically or how far they should go. Your job is not to steer, you're not even there to navigate. You're on music duty, you're not planning the drive, but you can set the vibe, so choose your anthems wisely.

A lot of people cross boundaries because they're scared. They want their loved one to be safe, healthy, and happy. And that's perfectly reasonable!. But fear doesn't give you permission to micromanage someone else's identity. You can worry about surgery without demanding that they slow the pace of their transition. And you can stress about their safety without insisting they dress a certain way. Your anxiety isn't a free pass to bulldoze their autonomy.

Boundaries protect them from being smothered, but they also protect you from becoming emotionally burnt out. If you're trying to be their caretaker, personal assistant, and therapist, you will collapse, and they'll feel guilty for it. Respecting autonomy means you don't saddle them with the responsibility of managing your emotional well-being on top of everything else they're already juggling.

One common mistake people make is believing you're entitled to personal details because you're being supportive. You are not owed updates about hormones, surgery plans, timelines, or body-related decisions. If they choose to share, great; if they don't, that's not betrayal, it's privacy.

Boundaries go both ways; you also get to set your own. Supporting someone through transition does not require you to be on call 24/7. You can absolutely say:

“Unless this is urgent, can we revisit it tomorrow?”

This isn't abandonment; it's sustainability. Burning yourself out isn't allyship, it's martyrdom, and no one asked for that.

If you're the partner of someone transitioning, you're allowed to have feelings. What you are not allowed to do is weaponise those feelings to restrict their autonomy. Telling them you're overwhelmed is fine; telling them they can't transition until you're ready is definitely not.

A lot of cis people cross boundaries without even noticing, because trans people are used to having their boundaries ignored by **everyone**, from family members to medical professionals. They probably won't tell you every time you overstep, especially early on, because they're already bracing for judgment. This is exactly why you need to pay attention. If they go tense, quiet, or change the subject, you've made them uncomfortable.

Signs you need to adjust your boundaries:

- You're offering solutions they didn't ask for
- You feel entitled to details they haven't voluntarily shared.
- You're offended when they make decisions without consulting you.
- You feel disrespected when they set limits.
- You interpret their autonomy as rejection.

If you recognise yourself in any of these, take a breather. You're not a villain for doing these things; you're a human being. But you're also not the protagonist of their transition, so reel it in.

Respecting autonomy also means respecting self-definition, even if their identity shifts, and their pronouns change. Transition is not one tidy revelation; for some people, developing an understanding of themselves is a lifelong process.

Chapter 14: Supporting Through Medical Transition

Supporting someone through hormone therapy or surgery isn't about turning yourself into the expert or the hero of their transition. It's about offering grounded, practical support without drifting into intrusion. It's not an easy balance to strike, but it can and must be done.

Hormone therapy is not a quick fix or one single decision; it's a long medical process involving appointments, prescriptions, and side-effect monitoring, as well as emotional/physical and psychological adjustment.

Supporting your loved one through this starts with understanding that hormones affect everyone differently. Some people feel dramatic emotional shifts; others don't. Some people have physical changes within weeks; others wait years. And some immediately feel euphoric, while others feel uncertain. It's important not to project your assumptions about what you think is happening. Ask what they're experiencing, and what they actually want help with. If they don't want to talk about a particular change, then you have to respect that.

Because this stage often involves navigating healthcare gatekeeping, slow systems, and trans-specific barriers, you can help by reducing friction rather than trying to fix their emotions. Two examples include:

- Offering help with transport to appointments if they want it.
- Taking notes during consultations if they ask, so they can focus on what the clinician is saying.

If someone says they're fine going alone, don't push, even if it worries the life out of you. It's difficult if you want to protect them, but if they've said they want to go alone, then you have to respect that. Smothering them will only push them away.

Side effects can be frustrating, uncomfortable, or embarrassing for your loved one. And a supportive approach means not spotlighting changes like voice cracks, mood fluctuations, body hair, or swelling. If they bring it up, listen. If they don't, assume it's private and treat it as none of your business. They're not a scientific or psychological experiment demonstrating how hormones work; they're a person managing something extremely complex.

Surgery support is its own unique category of responsibility. Preparing for surgery means taking care of logistics, forward-planning, post-op care, and dealing with medical professionals who may or may not understand trans healthcare. If they've chosen you as someone they trust, take that seriously. But again, support, don't control.

You might help them sort out practicalities such as recovery equipment, appropriate clothing, medication schedules, or prepping their home for their restricted mobility. This is where people tend to overstep; don't start reorganising their space or dictating how they should recover. They have to decide what feels comfortable, even if you think they're rushing it. It's not up to you; you need to follow their lead.

If you're supporting someone after gender-affirming surgery, understand that healing is slow, often painful, and certainly not linear. There may be swelling, bruising, fatigue, or days when they feel frustrated or even furious with their own body. Your role isn't to cheerlead every single moment or insist that they should be happy now. That's not supporting, it's stifling, and it's really annoying! Let them have their whole emotional range, even when it contradicts what you expected.

Post-operative care can involve intimate or sensitive tasks. Please remember that **consent is mandatory every step of the way**. And if they need someone else to assist with wound care or post-op checks, that's not a rejection of your support; it's a boundary you need to respect.

Emotionally, this period can be really complicated; dysphoria might decrease, but anxiety could potentially increase. Some people feel pure joy; others feel totally numb. Don't minimise their physical or psychological pain by insisting it will all be worth it in the end. Just try to hear them without imposing your interpretation of what's happening.

What people need most is stability: someone who can bring them meals when they can't cook, help with basic errands, or keep track of what needs doing. And even after the immediate healing window closes, your support still matters. Hormones and surgeries both create long-term adjustments. Genuine support means giving your loved one the space to grow into themselves without policing the speed at which that growth takes place.

Chapter 15: Supporting Through Dysphoria

One of the hardest things when it comes to helping someone suffering from gender dysphoria is accepting that you can't fix it. You want to make it better, but there's very little you can do to help. Gender dysphoria is not a mood or a phase; it's an intense and relentless mismatch between who your loved one is inside and who they appear to be to everyone else. When you're close to someone dealing with gender dysphoria, your job is to support, and that's pretty much all you can do.

People often assume support means constant reassurance or grand emotional gestures. But those things don't really help in the quiet moments, and those moments are the hardest of all. Dysphoria isn't soothed by inspirational speeches or meaningless affirmations. It eases when their environment stops making things worse.

To start, you have to understand that dysphoria is unpredictable. It can flare up for a number of reasons or for no reason whatsoever. They may just wake up feeling this way; it happens.

You won't always be able to see it coming, and you might not understand why this moment hits so hard. But honestly, you don't need to understand. What you do need to do is respond without argument, analysis, or rationalisation.

People dealing with dysphoria are often held to totally unfair emotional expectations. They're expected to be endlessly patient, explain themselves perfectly, and remain grateful even while navigating a society that would actively deny them the right to exist. The last thing they need is someone monitoring their emotions as if they're overreacting or being fragile. If they tell you something feels wrong, accept it as reality. You don't get to decide what is or isn't dysphoria.

When dysphoria hits, it drains energy and positivity fast; everything feels like a monumental effort that just isn't worth it. You can support practically by stepping in where it helps and stepping back where it doesn't. For example:

- Taking over a simple task like picking up groceries or dealing with admin when they ask for help, because their mental energy is gone.
- Creating a calm, pressure-free environment where they don't have to perform or make excuses for needing space.

It's important to remember that dysphoria is not the same as insecurity. Insecurity asks for reassurance and believes it. Dysphoria deflects any attempts at reassurance at lightning speed. You can tell someone they look great, but if their distress is rooted in feeling out of alignment with their own body, compliments can't address that. Support means listening to what they're actually describing rather than what you assume they're saying to you.

Some people want to talk through dysphoria; others don't. Once again, your job is to follow their lead. Ask what they need in that moment, and if they don't know, don't press the matter. Sometimes the best support is just existing nearby.

A common mistake people make is treating dysphoria as a problem to solve, which is difficult if, like me, you're a problem-solver by nature. You can't logic it out of existence, and you can't create a master plan that prevents future episodes. Dysphoria is shaped by experience, hormones, memories, trauma, social context, realities, and barriers. Trying to intellectualise it usually leaves your loved one feeling misunderstood, dismissed, and alone.

Respecting autonomy matters as much as anything else. Dysphoria can make people feel disconnected from their own body, and the last thing they need is someone else taking control of the situation. Let them set boundaries, even if they shift daily. If they say they don't want to be touched, believe them. If they say they need company but not conversation, follow that. If they want to change the subject, change it. Don't interpret their boundaries as a personal rejection or a critique of your support.

There will be times when their dysphoria expresses itself as frustration, irritability, or withdrawal. This is not a moral failure or a relationship crisis. It's the result of your loved one carrying something that totally eliminates all positive thoughts.

Part of supporting someone with dysphoria is learning to be okay with your own discomfort. You might hear things that challenge your assumptions about gender, identity, or psychology. You will witness emotions that feel raw and unfamiliar to you. And you will feel utterly helpless during all of this. But your discomfort is not the priority; managing your reactions quietly and responsibly is part of being supportive. They shouldn't have to comfort you when they're already struggling.

Some days, support means being proactive: making sure their name and pronouns are respected in shared spaces, helping them navigate a hostile workplace, or advocating for them when they're exhausted. Other days, support means being invisible: giving them space, privacy, and the dignity of handling things their own way.

You also need to accept that dysphoria doesn't disappear the moment someone starts transitioning, gets hormones, or schedules surgery. Transition can ease it, but it doesn't erase the societal pressures, internalised expectations, or daily (sometimes micro, sometimes not so micro) aggressions that keep dysphoria alive. Long-term support means staying consistent even if you think the process should be getting easier. Progress is never linear; everyone's allowed bad days without having to justify them.

Supporting your loved one through dysphoria is a long game. There will be days when things are manageable and days when everything feels unbearable again. Your role is simply to be a stable, grounding presence who respects boundaries, reinforces autonomy, and removes unnecessary burdens. It's not nearly as hard as it sounds.

FAQs About Gender Dysphoria

• What *is* gender dysphoria?

It's the distress that comes from the mismatch between someone's gender identity and the gender they were assigned at birth. It's not confusion, it's not a phase, and it's not an opinion. It's a recognised medical and psychological experience that can range from nagging discomfort to suicidal thoughts.

• Does everyone who's trans experience dysphoria?

No. Many people do, but some don't.

• What triggers gender dysphoria?

Pretty much anything that shoves someone back into the box they didn't choose. Misgendering, using the wrong name, certain clothes, their own body, paperwork, being forced into gendered spaces, the list is endless. But sometimes there's no clear trigger at all.

- **Is dysphoria constant?**

For some people, yes; for others, it comes and goes. It can appear suddenly and vanish just as quickly, or simmer quietly for hours. Think of it like chronic pain: sometimes it's a dull ache, sometimes it's a sharp stab, and sometimes it can ruin an entire life.

- **Can I fix their dysphoria?**

Short answer, no. But what you *can* do is lower the impact and make the experience less isolating.

- **Does transition help?**

For many people, yes; social transition, hormones, surgery, and using the correct name/pronouns all tend to reduce dysphoria. But it's not a switch; transition helps, but it doesn't erase the world's hateful rhetoric.

Practical Ways to Support Someone Through Gender Dysphoria

- **Validate without analysing.**

You don't need an essay. Stick to:

"That must feel awful,"

"I'm here if you need me."

or "What do you need right now?"

You can't go too far wrong with phrases like this as long as you mean them.

- **Make their environment gender-affirming.**

Help them find clothes, gender-affirming toiletries or accessories. These things can make a massive difference to the way your loved one feels.

- **Don't take their bad days personally.**

Dysphoria is internal turbulence, not a commentary on you. If they're quiet or withdrawn, it's not rejection; they're just surviving right now.

- **Use practical language, not pity.**

Try: “What can I do to help?” instead of “I feel so bad for you.”

- **Be reliable with pronouns—even when no one’s watching.**

Consistency builds safety. If they know you’ve got their back in every room, that’s huge.

- **Keep your reactions steady.**

If they tell you something vulnerable, the goal is calm support, not panicked intensity. They shouldn’t have to comfort *you* for their dysphoria.

- **Respect their autonomy.**

Don’t push transition steps, don’t question timelines, and don’t act like you know their gender better than they do. Your job is support, not management.

- **Celebrate the wins they care about.**

Did a stranger gender them correctly? It might not seem like much to you, but to them, it matters more than anything. Celebrate *their* milestones, not the ones you think matter.

- **Be patient.**

Dysphoria isn’t solved in a week, or a year, or sometimes ever. You’re in long-term support mode, not quick-fix mode. Patience is one of the most meaningful forms of love there is.

- **Keep learning—quietly.**

Go and educate yourself *without* making them your personal search engine. The more you understand, the less emotional labour you drop on them.

- **Show up.**

Even if you can’t do anything you consider helpful, your presence itself is grounding. Sitting nearby, watching a film together, making a cup of tea, these are tiny lifelines.

Privacy and Safety

Privacy and safety are two things you'll start thinking about the minute your loved one comes out as trans, whether you want to or not. It's like something switches on in your brain: one part practical, one part hyper-protective, and one part "who the hell do I need to keep my eye on today?" But supporting someone through transition isn't about wrapping them in cotton wool or turning into a paranoid bodyguard (again, guilty). It's about creating a buffer space between them and a world that still hasn't quite caught up.

Let's start with privacy, because this is usually where people get it very wrong. When someone comes out to you, that information is theirs. Not yours to share and not yours to accidentally mention in conversation because you got flustered or thought the other person already knew. If someone trusted you with their gender identity, they've handed you something incredibly personal. Treat it as confidential information, because it is and should be exactly that.

If you're not sure whether something is private, assume it is. Ask before sharing, before mentioning, and before even alluding to anything.

"Is it okay if I say this?" will always be better than "I slipped up; I didn't think it mattered." It ALWAYS matters.

Now, for safety, which, unfortunately, you're going to have to think about far more often than you want. Trans people deal with an exhausting amount of incidents, and I'm being incredibly polite with that word. Everything from snide comments to outright harassment, from bureaucratic bullshit to violent assaults. You can't prevent every awful interaction; all you can do is be aware of their possibility.

This does *not* mean marching around like a bodyguard or starting fights with anyone who looks at your loved one in a way you don't like. Safety is quieter and far more effective when it's subtle.

- It's choosing inclusive spaces when you can.
- It's stepping in calmly but firmly if someone is getting hostile.
- It's knowing when to remove your loved one from the situation instead of escalating it.

Sometimes safety is practical: walking to the car together at night, staying on the phone during a stressful journey, or accompanying them to appointments that historically have gone badly. Sometimes it's emotional: being the person they can message after something awful happens, so they don't sit with it alone. Trans people have to be vigilant 24/7, and while you can't take that away, you can share the load.

And then there's safeguarding, which is basically the fine line between protection and smothering. You're here to make sure they feel supported in making their own choices; you're not here to make the choices for them. Safeguarding is about creating an environment where your loved one feels safe enough to speak up if something's wrong. It's making sure they know you'll listen without judgment or lectures. It's checking in without interrogating.

Safeguarding also means helping them think through practical risks without treating them like they're incapable. Things like:

- "Do you want me to come to the appointment with you, or would that be unhelpful?"
- "Do you feel safe walking there alone?"

Notice these are questions, not instructions. You're offering support, not making decisions on their behalf.

Privacy, safety, and safeguarding ultimately come down to respect. Respecting their identity, their autonomy, and their right to decide who knows what about them. You're going to worry, particularly if you're a protective person. But you have to carry that worry quietly; you can't project it onto them. They have enough of their own worries to deal with; they can't handle yours, too.

Chapter 16: Making Comparisons

Before-and-after comparisons are one of those things people *think* are supportive or curious, when in reality, they can be psychologically damaging.

Let me be blunt here: a gender transition is not a makeover.

It's not a weight-loss journey, a glow-up, or a social media challenge; it's a life-changing, ongoing process bursting with psychological complexities. Before-and-after comparisons can feel like you're treating their past as a mistake and their present as a novelty. And no matter how well-meant your intentions are, turning your loved one's life into a split-screen transformation moment is usually more about your reaction than their reality.

First, there's the issue of the before photos. For many trans people, their pre-transition images are deeply uncomfortable. Some avoid mirrors, cameras, and even reflective surfaces during peak dysphoria. Being photographed can feel like being backed into a corner. They're not just looking at an embarrassing haircut or an unflattering angle; they're looking at a version of themselves that never felt true, one that was associated with pain, confusion, and often suicidal thoughts. So when you bring out an old picture without warning, it's not cute nostalgia. It's a flashback to a chapter they didn't choose.

And then there's the *after* part of the comparison. Most of us love a big reveal, I know I do! I think it comes from growing up in the 90s, when they often had makeover specials on talk shows.

But when you frame your loved ones' transition as a big ta-da moment, you risk centring your own fascination instead of their potentially brutal and unpleasant reality. They're not an exhibit; when you do this, you reduce them to their journey, to their changes. And they're a whole human being with thoughts and very deep feelings!

Even positive comparisons can be complicated; some trans people enjoy seeing their transition progress; others can't stand it. Some love before-and-after photos; others feel physically ill at the thought. This is why blanket rules don't ever work because everyone's experience is different. Your job is to understand your loved one, not all trans people.

I think the main issue here is consent and context.

If your loved one initiates the comparison, then that's their choice. They're controlling the narrative, and they're choosing what to show and when. You can respond with enthusiasm because the door was opened by them.

But if you start the comparison without knowing whether it's something they're comfortable with, you're taking control away. You're deciding the terms of engagement with *their* past, which is something no one should do for anyone else.

The safest default is the simplest:

Don't bring up the past unless they bring it up first.

I think it's important to remember that comparisons can feed dysphoria. Even positive ones.

Here's why:

- They highlight physical features your loved one may already be hyper-aware of.
- Even well-meaning comments like "Your jawline is so different now!" can accidentally draw attention to something they're insecure about.
- They reinforce the idea that certain changes *should* have happened by now.
- Transition timelines vary wildly, and hormones don't work instantly. Comparing any stage of their transition to another stage can trigger frustration, fear, impatience, or self-doubt.
- They can make it feel like you only approve of their identity when the physical results make sense to you.

That doesn't feel like support; it feels like a condition of acceptance.

There's another layer here: sometimes family members make comparisons because they are missing the past version of their loved one. And that comes with a metric ton of misplaced nostalgia; "I miss the old you."

This isn't love; it's projecting your unresolved feelings onto someone who finally feels like themselves. That's not even close to being supportive; that's pure selfishness.

If you're struggling with change, deal with that in your own space with a journal or a therapist (preferably the latter). Anywhere except onto the person who finally has the freedom to be who they are.

There is one exception to all this, and it's an important one:

Some trans people love documenting their transition!

They take photos, do comparisons, track progress, and share them proudly. In that case, be supportive in the way *they* choose. Celebrate *their* milestones, and compliment what *they're* excited about. Always follow their comfort level. If they're excited, you're excited. If they're not mentioning it, neither are you.

Just never assume that what one trans person finds empowering, another will find empowering too. There is no universal template.

Chapter 17: Useful phrases

These are phrases you will either have used already or you will use at some point in the near future. They're not rude or deliberately hurtful, and they help you show class and compassion even when others around you refuse to.

“Their identity isn't up for debate.”

Use this when someone tries to turn a trans person's existence into a philosophical rant. It shuts down the idea that trans people are public property. You're drawing a boundary: identity is fact, not a topic for recreational scrutiny.

“Use their name and pronouns. Full stop.”

This stops the conversational detour into excuses or so-called confusion. It makes the expectation clear. If someone can use the correct pronouns of cis people, they can use the correct pronouns of trans people. It's literally that simple.

“That's not appropriate for you to ask.”

Deploy this one when someone starts digging for medical or surgical information. It protects your loved one's privacy and repositions the asker as the one crossing a line, not the trans person as someone who owes anyone else answers or information.

“Their safety matters more than your opinion.”

Use this when someone is trying to prioritise personal beliefs over a trans person's physical and emotional safety. It reframes the stakes correctly. Safety is always the top priority.

“You don't have to ‘understand’ to stop being disrespectful.”

This is for the crowd who use their alleged confusion as a shield. It tells them that understanding is optional; common fucking decency isn't.

“That’s a stereotype, and we’re not doing that.”

Use this when someone repeats caricatures about trans people. It halts the narrative instantly without giving their lazy stereotype any oxygen.

“They’ve already told you who they are. Believe them.”

This works for people trying to reinterpret or challenge a trans person’s self-knowledge. It puts responsibility back where it belongs: on the listener.

“It’s not ‘preference.’ Its identity.”

Use this to correct anyone who trivialises gender as a lifestyle choice. It grounds the conversation in reality and removes the wiggle room for dismissive behaviour.

“That’s not a joke. It’s harassment.”

It strips away deniability and names the behaviour accurately. Bullies tend to recoil when confronted with the correct vocabulary for their behaviour.

“Getting it right is easy. Try again.”

This works for persistent slippers who claim they’re making the effort, but the results say otherwise. It’s firm but not rude (well, that depends on your tone, but that’s up to you!) You’re telling them that improvement is not optional.

“This isn’t about you.”

Use this when someone responds to a trans person’s experience with discomfort or emotional theatrics. It recentres the conversation on the person who actually needs support.

“They’re called boundaries, and you will respect them.”

This is useful when someone acts entitled to explanations or access. It normalises a trans person’s right to space and privacy without apologising for it.

“Curiosity doesn’t beat consent.”

People often confuse being genuinely interested with being entitled to personal information. This line draws a hard line and makes the power imbalance visible.

“If you cared, you’d listen.”

Use this when someone claims to be concerned but ignores what the trans person is actually saying. It calls out the mismatch between their words and actions.

“Their transition isn’t affecting your life in any way.”

This is for anyone who makes themselves the victim because a trans person has the audacity to exist near them. It flips the script to expose how their stinking attitude is the problem, not the trans person.

“We’re not debating basic human rights.”

Use this when someone tries to escalate into arguments about *both sides*, or any of that rubbish. It reinforces that equality should never be up for debate.

These aren’t magic cures; they won’t always make stupid people stop speaking. But they can put them on pause for at least a minute.

Chapter 18: 20 questions

These are some of the questions I've been asked and heard asked over the years. Not all of them, I've edited the list for decency and respect because some of the questions I've been asked I'd never repeat in front of you lovely people.

1. "How do I know if I should use their new name and pronouns?"

You use them the moment they ask. Not after you adjust, and not when it's convenient for you. When they ask.

2. "What if I make a mistake?"

You correct yourself, briefly, and move on. No flustered apologies, and don't make a big deal out of it. Correct → continue. That's it.

3. "Should I ask them about their body or surgery plans?"

No. If they want to tell you, they will. If they haven't volunteered the information, take that as the boundary that it is.

4. "How do I support them if I don't fully understand?"

Listen, believe them, and follow their lead. Understanding will come with time, but respect can and should be instant.

5. "Is it okay to use their old name?"

No.

6. "What if other people in the family refuse to accept it?"

You can't control what they do, but you can set the standard when you're there. Correct them, shut down disrespect, and make it clear that hate isn't "just an opinion."

7. "Is it normal for their needs to change over time?"

Yes, transition isn't linear, dysphoria shifts, comfort levels shift, and social context shifts. Just go with it, I still don't fully understand everything, and I never will. I just go with the flow.

8. “How do I handle conversations with people who oppose their transition?”

You protect your loved one’s dignity, not strangers’ comfort. Shut down misinformation, refuse debates about identity, and do not let anyone treat them like a hypothetical scenario. They’re a person, a human being.

9. “Can I ask what pronouns they use?”

Yes, ask, listen to the answer, and use the language they choose.

10. “How do I help them if they’re struggling with dysphoria?”

You take their discomfort seriously; you offer practical support like privacy, correct language, and a stable environment. Don’t analyse or minimise their feelings.

11. “Should I correct people who misgender them when they aren’t around?”

Yes, if they want you to. It normalises respect and removes the emotional burden from your loved one. If you’re only respectful when they’re present, you’re not supporting, you’re performing.

12. “How do I avoid making this about me?”

Process your emotional reaction in private. Your behaviour is what matters most, not your feelings.

13. “What if I worry for their safety?”

Channel the concern into action, not panic. Help them navigate unsafe environments, challenge hostile behaviour, and respect their autonomy in deciding what risks **they’re** willing to take. They’re the ones taking them, not you.

14. “Do I have to use their pronouns even when they’re not around?”

Yes! Your consistency shows integrity. Their identity doesn’t change when they leave the room.

15. “How do I talk about my loved one when others knew them before their transition?”

Use their current name and pronouns, and don't ask permission from the audience. If someone is genuinely confused, give a brief clarification and move on. No need for long-winded explanations; if they don't understand, they don't care enough to try.

16. “How can I support them during medical or social transition?”

Do the unglamorous work: transport, paperwork, accompaniment, defending their privacy, and advocating when systems are stressful. Practical help is far more valuable than symbolic gestures.

17. “Is it disrespectful if I have questions?”

Curiosity isn't the problem; entitlement is. Keep your questions limited to what you *need* to know to support them, not what you want to know to satisfy personal fascination. If you have questions, Google them and look for real stories from actual trans people.

18. “What if their presentation changes and I feel confused?”

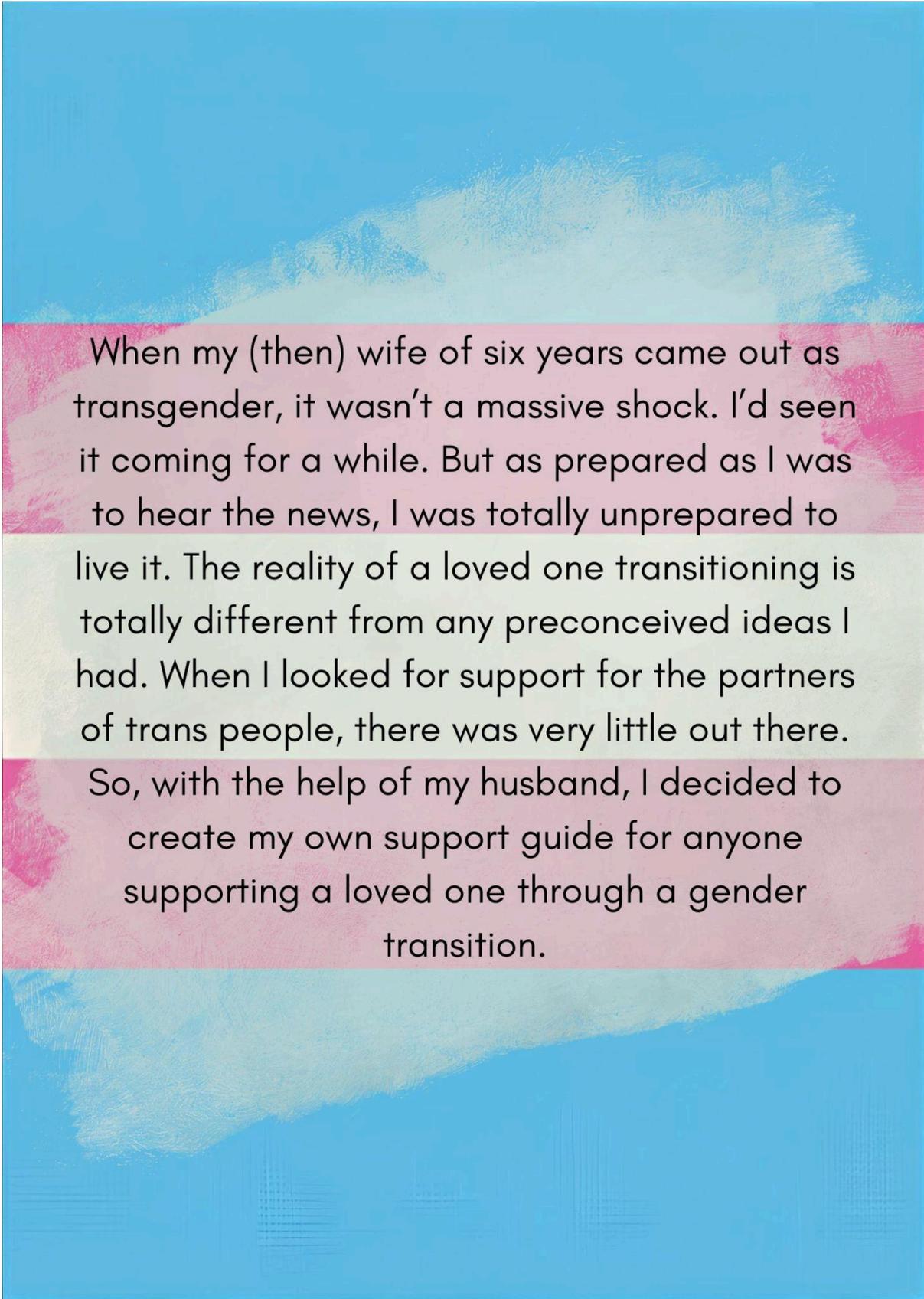
You'll get used to it! They're not obligated to maintain consistency, so you can stay comfortable. Identity and expression aren't costumes they wear for you.

19. “How involved should I be?”

As involved as they ask you to be, no more, no less. Support isn't about inserting yourself into a situation; it's about responding to their actual needs.

20. “What's the most important thing I can do long-term?”

Stay reliable, keep respecting boundaries, and keep treating their identity as non-negotiable. Consistency builds safety; safety builds trust.



When my (then) wife of six years came out as transgender, it wasn't a massive shock. I'd seen it coming for a while. But as prepared as I was to hear the news, I was totally unprepared to live it. The reality of a loved one transitioning is totally different from any preconceived ideas I had. When I looked for support for the partners of trans people, there was very little out there. So, with the help of my husband, I decided to create my own support guide for anyone supporting a loved one through a gender transition.