

# Transgender

## An Introduction for Parents & Youth Leaders

### Understanding transgender

- Transgender: 'An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.'<sup>1</sup>
- Relies on two key concepts:
  - Gender: Internal sense of being a man or woman (also 'gender identity', 'experienced gender').
  - Sex: Identification as male or female based on physical anatomy and genetics (also 'biological sex', 'assigned sex').
- Gender dysphoria: Medical diagnosis when disconnect creates distress. Important to recognise that gender dysphoria can be a very real, genuine, painful experience.
- Emerging gender identities/non-binary identities: Increasing variety of experiences, especially among younger people. Some identities are non-binary (neither a man or a woman), some are fluid (gender identity not static). Dysphoria present in some, but not all, cases.

### The current situation among young people

- Huge increase in young people identifying as trans, seen in referrals to NHS GIDS and in increasing number of detransitioners.
- Rightly raising significant questions: Why the increase? Why has there been a switch from more boys to more girls being referred? Why are so many young adults detransitioning? Are the current standard treatments the right ones?
- Two very different ways of understanding the situation:
  - Diversity perspective – Relies on gender identity theory. Internal gender reveals who we truly are and so transitioning is the right response. Increase is just the result of more visibility and safety for people to come out.
  - Disability perspective – Gender dysphoria does not reveal true identity; it is an experience of disability/suffering. Many factors can contribute to the experience of gender dysphoria (e.g. mental health conditions, autism, internalised homophobia, gender stereotypes, social influence). Better to address contributing factors to avoid invasive, life-altering medical/surgical interventions. Increase is because trans has become popular explanation for teenage dis-ease.

### A Christian Perspective

- Biblical teaching aligns with science to support a disability perspective.
- Diversity perspective relies on internal identity – we are who we feel ourselves to be inside – but this doesn't work. Where is the authority behind such a view? And we wouldn't say it for all internal feelings.
- Only solid, secure, stable basis for identity is God. We are who God says we are.
- God says he has created us male or female (Gen. 1:27) and this is revealed to us through our bodies in their ordering towards reproduction (Gen. 1:28). Identity is given by God. It is therefore supported by an authority and cannot change. This is good news for us.
- Shifts our perspective. Trans experience is not about identity but about suffering. Key question becomes: How do we help people to seek a lessening of this suffering and/or to navigate life in the midst of suffering?

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<sup>1</sup> 'Glossary of Terms', *Stonewall* (<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms>).

## Discussion

Take some time to discuss these questions.

- What's been helpful so far?
- What questions do you have?
- What's been your own experience of this topic?

## Preparing

- How do we prepare children and young people to navigate our cultural context?
- **Identity** – Affirm identity as received from God, not discovered within. Affirm the goodness of the body.
- **Stereotypes** – Recognise that gender stereotypes are generalisations, not universals, and observations, not guidelines. Identity given by God frees us to be *how* we are without changing *who* we are.
- **The internet** – Many young people identify as trans after learning about it online and feeling it offers an explanation and solution to their dis-ease. We need to think about internet safety and have good conversations about what our young people are engaging with online and how they evaluate that.
- **Community** – Many young people say the online trans community finally gives them a context where they can belong, be themselves, be honest, and ask questions. We need to make better, alternative in-person communities.

## Walking

- How do we walk with a young person identifying as trans?
- **Love** – Always our priority. Help them know they are loved however they identify, whatever they do, whatever they reveal. Maintain relationship as a safe place to be honest and to explore.
- **Listen** – Listening is loving. It expresses value. Listening also allows a better understanding of the situation.
- **Use common sense** – Don't switch off your common sense. Apply good parenting wisdom. You are more equipped for this than you think you are.
- **Engage with God** – Pray. Try and engage with God together. Don't make pronouncements, facilitate young person questioning and reaching their own conclusions. Accompany on the journey.
- **Avoid transition** – Transition is best avoided for teenagers because of medical risks and likelihood of natural resolution. Explain decisions with evidence. Don't be controlled by fear created by weaponising of suicide. Be careful when accessing medical services – remember many take the diversity perspective. Be clear on your position and focus on potential contributing factors, more than on gender.

## Recommended resources

### On trans

Andrew Bunt, *People Not Pronouns* (Grove, 2021)

Preston Sprinkle, *Embodied* (David C. Cook, 2021)

Living Out – [livingout.org](http://livingout.org)

### For parents

Seagraves & Leavine, *Gender: A Conversation Guide for Parents & Pastors* (Good Book Company, 2018)

Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate* (The Good Book Company, 2017), chapter 11 'Speaking to Children'

Transgender Trend – [transgendertrend.com](http://transgendertrend.com)

Bayswater Support – [bayswatersupport.org.uk](http://bayswatersupport.org.uk)

### For children and teens

Rachel Rooney, *My Body is Me* (Transgender Trend, 2015)

Preston Sprinkle, *Living in a Gray World* (Zondervan, 2015)

Rebecca McLaughlin, *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity* (Crossway, 2021)