



GOING PUBLIC: IS PUBLIC ADVOCACY RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

A Guide for Parents of Transgender and Gender-Expansive Youth

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HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

National Center for TRANSGENDER EQUALITY

PFLAG

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INTRODUCTION

Parents of transgender and gender-expansive children often find themselves advocating for their children in private, one-on-one settings — from speaking to another parent about playdates and sleepovers, to discussing with a pediatrician the importance of inclusive intake forms, to working with a child's school to create inclusive policies. However, some parents may find themselves advocating publicly out of choice or necessity.

No matter where you are in your journey with your child, this guide will help you with the critical decision-making behind becoming more public in your advocacy work. Inside, you will find advice from parents with a wide range of experiences, identities, and levels of visibility.

Although parents usually know their children better than anyone, you may see conflicts arise around public advocacy efforts that might be better handled by someone with more experience in that area. Thankfully, there are many helpful LGBTQ-related organizations and experts of all kinds who are eager to help, and whose voices are included in this guide. Above all, building a safety net and a strong sense of community will be essential in your journey. **PFLAG National**, an organization with chapters in every corner of the country, will offer information about how to find others with similar experiences. **The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)** has been at the forefront of changing laws, policies, and society to improve the lives of transgender people, and lends its advocacy expertise. A security expert with **Human Rights Campaign** will lay out best practices for keeping your family safe, because being in the public eye will open you and your family up to extra scrutiny from those who are unsupportive. And since you will likely be asked to share your story across various media outlets, some of which may not represent your family accurately, **GLAAD** will offer pointers on understanding the media and working with them to create positive and educational stories. As the leaders of these four organizations, we are proud that our staff have joined together to create this resource, sharing best practices in each of our fields of expertise.

Each section of this resource covers an element to consider when making the most significant decision of all: to be public or not. Certainly, making the commitment to share such personal and sensitive information with others is not for everyone. Some factors to consider as part of this decision are: Is everyone in your household on board and supportive of your child? Should you use your real name and photos? How much personal information about your child's transition will you share? Are you prepared for possible negative consequences from sharing your story? Non-discrimination protections that explicitly include LGBTQ people only exist in 19 states, and as these rights are increasingly threatened, families of LGBTQ youth can face discrimination directly if an employer or landlord is not supportive of LGBTQ equality.

Remember that, no matter what decisions you make about advocating publicly, the most important considerations are always *safety* and *communication*. Explore this guide, as well as the resources listed at the end of the publication, and start a conversation with your family about the feasibility of advocating in the public sphere.



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GETTING STARTED

Some of you may be raising children who identify or express their gender outside of the gender binary, or are otherwise gender-expansive. Others may have transgender children whose gender identity as a boy or a girl is different than the sex they were assigned at birth; and others may have children who are still exploring their gender identity and expression. This guide will use the terms "transgender" or "trans," along with "gender-expansive" to refer to all children and youth who don't identify with or present gender in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth.

In this short guide, we will not be able to speak directly to the many diverse structures of families who raise trans and gender-expansive children. Some of you may be single parents; others may be partnered. If your child has multiple guardians who are separated, or you are dealing with issues around custody, this guide will not provide legal advice — but it *will* speak to the many issues to consider once your child is fully supported by all legal guardians in expressing their identity and living as their authentic self. Needless to say, what may be true for one family may not apply to another; treat these accounts as examples, and not necessarily as directives, as this is a highly personal decision.

If your family has only recently discovered that your child is transgender or gender-expansive, you may want to begin by reading another document, "Supporting & Caring for Transgender Children," which answers many questions about what it means to be transgender and how to best provide support to a trans child.

There are many compelling reasons for saying "yes" to opportunities when you are prepared to share your story to help other people. Always remember that "going public," just like "coming out" as LGBTQ, is not a one-time experience. There is never any shame in saying no to an opportunity, even if you are already in the public eye.

Consistent re-evaluation of your decision to share your story means that communication is key. Making sure partners, children, and siblings are always part of the conversation will lead to smoother and more comfortable decision making. If multiple members of your family plan on speaking out, communication will be an essential tool in ensuring details are consistent, and represent your entire family's experiences accurately and respectfully.

Talking to Your Child

Some parents decide to advocate publicly because they have been encouraged to do so by their child. Others may be pushed into the public eye before they can consult their children.. Whatever the circumstances, it is essential that you have the permission of your child to speak up, every step up of the way. The story is primarily their own, and it will be accessible to the public for the remainder of the child's life. Be sure to check in with your child not only at the beginning of the process, but frequently along the way — your child may feel more comfortable with some advocacy opportunities than others, or may lose interest in advocating publicly over time.

It is important to speak about boundaries with your children, while at the same time making sure they know that you take pride in their story.

> *"When we were first talking to our kids about whether or not we would be public, it was really important for them to understand that nothing in our lives was something to be ashamed of. So we don't talk about secrets, we talk about private information. For us, the big conversation is boundaries: How much do you want us to do? How much do you want us to say? Do you want us to share information or images from before your transition or not?"*
> – Debi Jackson, mother of a transgender daughter

However, children may not be in a position to fully consent to decisions about media that will impact their future:

> **I think part of the consideration is the consent of the child in question.** But as you notice, it is often hard to talk about consent. They don't quite understand what's going on when we talk about going public with their story.
>
> – Adam Briggle, father of a transgender son



The Briggle Family

While some parents might choose to move forward with sharing their story publicly, other parents may decide to postpone their public advocacy until their children are older and more aware of the potential consequences of speaking out.

> *"We decided that nine years old is not the time to put our kid in front of a camera, and we didn't do that. So what we said was, 'We are gonna give you a voice. But you need to use your pen and your crayons.' And my wife's an artist, so my children started to draw out their feelings on paper, and write, and make posters, and we kept all of that. And we kept them safe. Because you can't go back once it starts."*
> – Wayne Maines, father of a transgender daughter

Partners and Spouses

You may find that it is important to you to advocate publicly with your partner, if you are both responsible for supporting your transgender or gender-expansive child on a daily basis. Some partners may be less inclined to be involved directly, but will demonstrate their support of your advocacy in other ways. "Going Public" Parent Resource Work - Google Docs may be opposed to the prospect of putting the family into the spotlight. In that situation it's important to come to consensus before proceeding with being public.

> **"My husband wanted to be less out there.** He's just a more private person than I am, so it was kind of easy and natural for me to be more out there."
>
> – Catherine Hyde, mother of a transgender daughter

Siblings

Going public with your story might bring a lot of attention to your child from you as a parent, as well as from those outside of the family. This attention can make the siblings of transgender and gender-expansive children feel ignored, or as if their stories are not as important. At the same time, remember that they are also pulled into the public eye when you share your story publicly, and youth of any age might not truly understand what the impact of being "out for life" really means. Talk to your other children, and engage them in the journey; remember that they, too, might potentially receive negative treatment in school or from their friends. Some siblings will have little to no interest in participating, while others will be eager to speak out on the experience of growing up with a transgender or gender-expansive sibling. Regardless, this decision must be a collaborative one that the whole family can live with comfortably and safely.

> *"I would say that maybe the least affected was our son, who's transgender. His 11-year-old sister struggled for a number of reasons. The big thing was the attention to the child that's transgender. We thought we took a lot of steps when we were interviewed and in stories to include her story and her perspectives, and make her a part of every one of those. But she still felt left out. And so it's important to also encourage her not just to tell her brother's story through her eyes — how she's supportive of him is important — but she has her own story, and you have to make it clear that she is an individual."*
> – Pete Tchoryk, father of a transgender son and a cisgender daughter

Certainly, not all cisgender siblings will be eager to advocate publicly with others in their family — but it is important never to lose sight of the reality that you are a parent first, and an advocate second.

> *"You have to make sure you remember that, at the end of the day, your child being trans is just another addition to your life. I make sure all four of my kids remember that Trinity being trans — that's there. But you still have to go clean your room, you still have to do your homework, and I will love you all, regardless of anything. Just being a family. Because that's what we started off with — and that's what we're going to end with."*
> – DeShanna Neal, mother of a transgender daughter

Getting Up to Speed

It is important to remember you speak from your experience, and from your experience only. However, because of the lack of representation of transgender people in mainstream media, you may be presented as a spokesperson for the entire transgender community, or an expert on LGBTQ issues. One way to resist this form of representation is to preface public comments to media with, "I can only speak from my own experience," or "For myself…."

Even if you are careful to speak only from your own experience, it is important that you learn about issues facing the wider transgender community. Use the links and resources elsewhere in this guide to get up to date on language and terminology, connect with resource groups in your area to see what issues are most important to your local transgender community, and do your best to remember how other parts of your identity — race, class, religion, education, and more — impact your family's experiences.

This idea, that many parts of our identity shape our experiences, is sometimes called 'intersectionality.' For example, a transgender person of color may experience racism in addition to transphobia. A transgender person with a wealthy family may experience privileges that come with financial security, which could soften the transphobia that person has to deal with. In general, there are likely some ways your family's story is universal: for example, the fact that all children deserve love and support. At the same time, other parts of your family's story — your experience as a particular race, or religion, or living in a certain part of the country — may not be universal to all families with transgender youth. Be mindful of which is which.

> *"When I started to think about Penelope as trans, it took me time to process that. And there was a lot of fear I had. But it's all energy — fear is energy. And when I started to put that energy toward my son and toward that community — which is now my community — that's when I had less fear."*
> – Jodie Patterson, mother of a transgender son

> *"You really can't judge a book by its cover. Just because a kid has purple hair, a nose ring, and a tattoo, doesn't mean they can't teach you some really cool stuff. And I hang out with these kids now! I can remember saying: 'What the heck's 'genderqueer' mean?' And if you ask them honestly, they'll tell you. And now I know."*
> – Wayne Maines, father of a transgender daughter

> "Sometimes I hear advocates publicly say or post a term that I've heard might be an insensitive term — like when people say 'the transgenders,' or 'transgendered.' So know what terms are sensitive, because **you definitely don't want to shut down anybody you're talking about by using or teaching the wrong terms.**"
>
> – Amy D'Arpino, mother of a transgender daughter

An important part of educating yourself is a matter of self-protection; it is critical that you are educated on current laws and policies that impact transgender people, and transgender and gender-expansive youth, in particular. Remember, too, that the legal landscape is always changing; it is okay to defer to experts, who are the most up-to-date! This could be vital information not only for your family, but for those who hear your story and identify with it.

> *"There are a lot of people who don't know that if they're kicked out of a doctor's office — which has happened here with some families — they have some recourse. The provider isn't in compliance with a law. So what can you do? File grievances. File lawsuits."*
> – Amy D'Arpino, mother of a transgender daughter

A common piece of advice you will hear from other parents regarding social media and traditional media shared online is to "never read the comments." This is because there is still widespread hatred and animosity toward the transgender community, largely due to ignorance around what being transgender really means. Many transphobic individuals feel comfortable sharing their opinions over the internet, where they feel their identities are protected. However, do your best to maintain an awareness of common misconceptions you may encounter — your position may offer you the unique opportunity to refute these common misunderstandings simply and concisely.

> *"Whenever we do articles or interviews, we always provide background information — scientific information, medical information — as part of the story. There's great resources now that can get people up to speed, and we basically did it like a crash course. And it was scary in the beginning, but once we felt like we really did know more than anybody asking the questions, we could make sure that valuable information was getting out there."*
> – Pete Tchoryk, father of a transgender son

FINDING SUPPORT, BUILDING COMMUNITY

Peer-to-peer support is crucial for parents and caregivers of transgender and gender-expansive children, and becomes even more so when choosing to go public with your story. Advocating publicly can be an emotionally draining endeavor, which can take a toll on relationships and on your own mental, emotional, and physical health. Building a community of like-minded people around you — people who can show support and solidarity, who may have had similar experiences, and who can provide resources, a listening ear, or simply a reminder that you are not alone — can help lighten the load.

Reaching Other Parents

It's critical to have a place to bring your fears, concerns, worries — and wins! — to other adults who understand the risks, and have potentially been — or currently are — where you are. It's also important to have a place to take those fears and concerns away from your child, in order to avoid placing any unnecessary stress on them during what might already be a very stressful situation. There are many support groups online including major social media platforms but there are also in-person groups that organizations such as PFLAG run.

> *"I was desperate to find other parents. I felt horribly alone. And really, I knew I couldn't be the only parent out there. So I just went public immediately. I talked to a radio station and I got a call from a few parents. We did a newspaper article and I got a call from more parents. And then I started speaking out as much as possible in every way I could, just to get the word out there and grow a community around me. They've been some of the most meaningful relationships of my life. I tell people that my PFLAG family knows more about me and my family, and ask after me and my family more, than my biological family. So being with other parents — to be thrust into a minority community by virtue of my child, which I have been, was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. It has made me a hugely better person. And my PFLAG family gets that, because they've all been on that journey to some extent, one way or another."*
> – Catherine Hyde, mother of a transgender daughter

Prioritizing Self-Care

Being an advocate of any kind is emotionally exhausting work, particularly when you are speaking on an issue that is deeply personal for you. Forgive yourself when you are exhausted or frustrated. Take care of yourself. This will mean that sometimes, you may need to take a break. Recommend the same to your child, as well.

In particular, it's important to think about how you will prioritize self-care before, during, and after you speak publicly. It can be easy to focus entirely on the preparation--learning talking points, preparing notes, rehearsing — and to forget that life will continue after you give that speech, or speak to that reporter, or testify at that hearing. Ask yourself, who will you celebrate with if everything goes well? Who will be a shoulder to lean on if things don't go the way you were hoping? Is there a treat you can use to lift your spirits when they're down, or to build on your excitement when you're on a roll?

Above all, self-care sometimes means saying 'no.' Give yourself permission to say, "This opportunity, at this time, isn't the right fit for my family." Saying, "No, I'm not up for sharing my family's story today," doesn't mean you have to say no tomorrow. Likewise, saying, "Yes, I'm ready to tell my story" today doesn't mean you have to say yes tomorrow.



"I want to make sure I'm always at my best, so that I can continue to advocate. I don't want to break down or burn out. And that can happen. So I take that time for myself, remembering that I am just one person trying to hold the world up. We tell parents to have self-care anyway. And it's exhausting. You're going to get tired. And it's okay to be tired."
– DeShanna Neal, mother of a transgender daughter

Professional Support

Receiving emotional and behavioral health support from a therapist or counselor can be life-changing. If you or your child don't already consult with a professional as part of your gender journey, regardless of whether that includes any kind of transition, consider setting up an appointment for yourself or your child with a therapist or counselor who has a reputation for being affirming of transgender and gender-expansive identities. For families with limited or no access to insurance, consider researching local LGBTQ centers and organizations; some offer free or sliding scale behavioral health support. These centers and organizations are also great resources for locating and selecting therapists and counselors, if that is an option, financially, for your family.

"I think a lot of parents get concerned when someone wants to do a full psychological evaluation. But there can be other things that are happening, too. My daughter was diagnosed with ADHD, and for a long time, I wasn't sure if that was just anxiety over being transgender, of transitioning, of not being supported at her daycare. But a trans person could have ADHD, OCD, or any other similar condition just like a non-trans person could."
– Debi Jackson, mother of a transgender daughter

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

Being "out" in the public eye — particularly as advocates for a cause that many still deem controversial — is a vulnerable act. Every family's greatest consideration must be safety. All parents are concerned with their child's wellbeing and protection from outside dangers; when you are sharing your story with people who may express hate or even threaten your family in response, there are ways to protect your child, yourself, and your family. While some of the details in the following section may feel scary or overwhelming to consider, it is important to have this information as you consider moving forward with public advocacy work; take your time with it.

Physical Security

One element of safety, of course, is physical security. Human Rights Campaign's security expert, Tom Brinkman, offers a number of questions to consider if you have a high public profile centered around a contentious issue:

- Do you feel safe in your home, in general?
- Are you able to secure your home using locks, fences, gates, etc.?
- Do you have an alarm system, if only for peace of mind?
- Do you have an agreed-upon family response plan in case of an emergency (imminent danger, or less serious circumstances, such as vandalism)?

Tom emphasizes that families should not be afraid — rather, they should be prepared. You may find that you will never have to use an emergency plan, or that the lock on your door may never become a real issue, but it is important that families of transgender and gender-expansive youth assess the security of their home to ensure that they are responsible and alert while in the public eye. Keep in mind that if you ever receive threats or otherwise feel that you are in immediate danger, contact Human Rights Campaign, and they can provide more personalized support and advice.

Personal Information

Many public advocates may also choose to use a pseudonym in place of their last name and/or first name, in order to protect their privacy, as well as their family's. If you plan on selecting a pseudonym, it is recommended that you do so as early as possible — minimize the information that is out there which can be linked to your real name. Similarly, some advocates choose not to disclose their place of residence. This may be impossible for those who are public with advocacy on the state or local level; however, if you find your family's story suddenly prominent on

a national level, concealing where you live can be a helpful precaution. Be cautious about revealing your child's school name — and in a video story be aware of any landmarks, license plates, or signage which might reveal your location.

It's worth mentioning that choosing to be anonymous, and keeping your identity private, may mean some media outlets won't be able to share your story. Some outlets will only speak with people comfortable using their full legal name, some will speak with people who are only using their first name, and some will speak with anyone, even if they are anonymous. It's important for you to make the right decision for your family, not for that media outlet. If you know you aren't comfortable showing your child's photo, or using your last name, or specifying what school your child goes to, or any other personal details you might not want to share, set your boundaries and stick to them. Only you know what is the best decision for your family, and other opportunities will likely come along.

"We showed a picture of our son, who was seven at the time. It had our name and the school. And there was somebody who was trolling the state board meetings, who had an eye on being on the state board. She just happened to be a mom in our school system, with a kid in our son's school. And she exposed us on the school's Facebook page."
– Pete Tchoryk, father of a transgender son

"We're friends with some folks in town who had their windows broken with rocks. You have to consider that — if you're ready to face that, head-on."
– Amy D'Arpino, mother of a transgender daughter


The Tchoryk Family

Internet Security

Whether or not you choose to use your real name in your advocacy, you may not realize how much personal information is available to those who take the time to hunt through your internet presence. Consider hiring a service, such as Privacy Duck (which offers discounted rates to those seeking protection related to LGBTQ identities), to scrub the internet for information that put your family's or your safety at risk. It is important to keep in mind that many companies that remove personal identifying information (or "PII") from the internet are only removing data from the "surface web." This means they are attending only to publicly available search engines, and other easily accessible sites. Services known for their work with high profile CEOs, celebrities, and other common targets — such as Crisis Management Consulting — are worth looking into if you would prefer to have your info scrubbed on the less savory, and more difficult to access, parts of the internet as well.

Preparing for Emergencies

No matter what precautions you may take to protect your family's safety, there is always a chance that you will feel significantly threatened. This is a reality of sharing your story in a world that is ignorant about and unaccepting of transgender people. Anticipate this possibility, and prepare a plan to carry out in reaction to such a threat. You may choose to create a "safe folder," including all the necessary information to ensure your child's rights are protected. In rare cases, those who are particularly intolerant will attempt to challenge your parenting abilities. In severe cases, they might even call in Child Protective Services.

The following story is not a common one, but it offers a clear example about the importance of having crucial information and documents at your fingertips. If anyone should question your parenting or make allegations against you, this will save you needless stress. You will likely never have to use it, but preparing documents will offer peace of mind.

We'd always heard it was a good idea to have a 'safe folder' of documentation supporting your child's good health, their gender identity, and our parenting, but to be completely honest, we never thought we would need it. I made sure we had letters from our doctor and therapist affirming our daughter's identity, and I knew if I needed to, I could scrape together photo documentation of our daughter's gender expression over the years — so I left it at that. Our family and community were generally supportive when our daughter transitioned, so we naively thought we were pretty safe in this regard.
As we went more public with our story and jumped into advocacy, one of the most frequent comments we heard from emails and social media was: "this is child abuse." In fact, we heard it so frequently from these

outlets that I would just roll my eyes and move on. Then, one Saturday afternoon, Child Protective Services knocked on my door. They'd received an anonymous call from a blocked phone number, indicating that we were forcing our young son to take hormones to make them a girl. There was all sorts of misinformation in the call, but the state was still required to investigate. I was furious that someone who likely didn't even know us except from our public advocacy could make a phone call to put our family through this. I knew we hadn't done anything wrong, and yet, I felt so vulnerable.

I spent the next 36 hours scrambling to get every single piece of documentation I could manage of my children's good health, our parenting, and our child's gender expression. I made frantic phone calls to family, friends, and colleagues for reference letters. I combed through files of preschool drawings and printed out blog posts describing parenting over the years. It was exhausting. It was stressful. I know I would have felt more prepared and less anxious if I had all of that compiled ahead of time, and as a result, the situation would have been less scary and stressful for my transgender daughter.

In the end, the people at CPS were nice enough. I didn't show them every piece of documentation I had in order to protect our family's privacy, but I felt prepared and empowered knowing that I had a paper trail to back me up. It also set the tone with our caseworker that we are highly educated, well organized, and have done our due diligence in every way. When she had a question about something, I was able to answer confidently and with documentation.

The entire situation left our family with a new respect and awareness for the risks we take when we tell our family's story publicly, and a renewed dedication to doing this work. We know that having the resources and support we do, and living in a fairly progressive state, made this experience far better than it could have been, and we will continue to share our stories and raise awareness for those who are most vulnerable. We will now keep our safe folder up to date, adding to it over time.

We also now keep a file of examples of negative media, messages, and comments. One of the things they asked us is: "why would someone report you?" We tried to explain that, thanks to being public, people who don't support trans kids have attacked us, and why that explained the reason someone would report us. They still didn't understand until we showed them examples of the messages we receive and the articles that have been written about us. This seems to be a tactic those who oppose transgender rights are taking in order to scare us into going away and being quiet. We won't go away, and we won't be quiet. But we will be prepared for what this means for our family. If I had to do it all over again, I would have used a pseudonym from the beginning of our advocacy. I know they could still find us, but anything to make it more difficult would have added a layer of protection.

– Jamie Bruesehoff, mother of a transgender daughter

As noted in the story, a Safe Folder gives you control over what information to include, who gets to see it, and when. It can be updated as frequently or infrequently as needed, and when your child reaches adulthood, the folder can be passed on to them. The list of items that is best to have in a Safe Folder can vary; however, these are some important elements to include:

- Documents from medical and mental health professionals
- Letters from validators (a validator can be an extended family member, a friend, or a member of PFLAG or another LGBTQ organization) about your family dynamic
- School documents (i.e. report cards, IEPs, parent-teacher conference notes)
- Letters from a gender therapist, gender clinic, or family doctor, attesting to your child's good health and gender identity
- Copies of paperwork showing changes to official documents (i.e. name change, gender marker change)

Other documents may include:

- Pictures drawn by the child, which may include self-portraits of the child displaying gender-expansive elements of appearance
- Published articles about your family which you feel offer an accurate and positive representation
- Blog posts or baby book entries of gender non-conformity over the years
- Report cards and letters from teachers indicating your child's general happiness and success
- Photos of your child which show their happiness from transitioning
- Letters from community members, religious leaders, close friends or family, describing your parenting and your child's gender-expansive behavior over the years
- Other documents based on your personal circumstances

LEGAL ISSUES

In the digital environment, your family must consider both risks and available protections when sharing information about or images of your child. Telling your child's story will empower many who read it; others may see it as an opportunity to cause harm. It is important to be aware of these dangers, as well as the protections you have against any such (often illegal) behavior. If problems do arise, your family may want to contact an attorney, who can help ensure child protection, copyright, and related state and federal laws are enforced, and help combat issues with online harassment.

Human Rights Campaign's legal team has provided some essential information you should become familiar with before deciding to advocate publicly, and continue to keep in mind throughout your advocacy).

1. **Copyright**
   A copyright gives the owner of a document, photo, or other creative work the right to decide what others do with it. Any image of your child is automatically protected by copyright laws in the United States. The photographer—whether you, your child, or anyone else—holds the copyright to the image, and does not have to file any paperwork for it to be copyrighted. Copyright ownership is one method to discourage and/or go after those who would wish to exploit your images or use them in a negative manner. If an image you submit while sharing your story is used on another website—regardless of the intended purpose and/or modifications—there is a potential legal violation of your copyright. If you feel you need to have an image removed for this reason, refer to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which reserves you this right.

2. **Rights of Publicity/Persona**
   Most states have laws, sometimes referred to as rights of publicity/persona, that protect individuals' rights to control the commercial use of their image and likeness. Each state's law is different, but the basic concept is that your child's or your image/likeness is a property right that only you/your child can take advantage of. If an individual or a website uses your child's image without your permission, you may have a state claim for violating your child's right of publicity.

3. **COPPA**
   The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ("COPPA") requires website operators to get consent from a parent or guardian if the website is targeted toward (or used by) children under 13. Another option, should your child's image be published for inappropriate or hateful purposes, is to go after a website for violations of COPPA.

4. **Additional State Laws**
   An attorney may also advise you on any potential additional state laws that may be violated if a troll or company exploits your child's image.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEDIA

Being "public" can mean many different things, and can result in many different levels of visibility. Some public advocates are able to remain visible primarily to their local community, while others advocate on the national or international level. However, it's important to know that once you speak on the record to a media outlet, you have no control over how widely your story will be shared. It might stay confined to your local paper, but it's also possible that national and international outlets will pick it up.

Deciding Whether to Speak Out

Some people proactively choose to talk to the media about their story, others may be thrust into the media spotlight by circumstances outside their control, and some families may choose not to speak out at all. We encourage you to talk to parents, and trans and gender-expansive youth, and transgender adults who are many years past their transition about their experiences telling their stories publicly before making your final decision about talking to the media.



> **Sometimes it's not a choice.** We were kind of thrown into it. They showed up at our school with cameras and attorneys, and they changed our family forever.
>
> – Wayne Maines, father of a transgender daughter

Remember: There is no one right way to navigate the process, and the decision not to speak out is just as valid as the decision to share your story publicly. If you do make the decision to speak out, we encourage you to arrange a media training, to help ensure you and your family have the best experience possible when dealing with the media. While media training cannot prepare you for everything, it's a great way to get hands-on experience with being interviewed and speaking in front of other people. Media training can provide information on how to craft your family's story in a way that shares what is important to you, allows you to practice being interviewed in a safe environment, and can provide talking points around specific topics like bathrooms or ID documents.

For more information on receiving media training, contact GLAAD.

Sometimes, when a story "breaks," a parent may receive dozens of media requests—this can be overwhelming to handle, and you may not have prepared with media training. If this happens, consider contacting an organization such as those contributing to this guide, where staff members can talk you through how to navigate this, when to say "yes" to an opportunity, or when to decline it.

> *"Each time we did it kind of slowly. We would dip our toe in a little bit more, and a little bit more, and a little bit more, and test the waters. There's always going to be haters and trolls. But each time, the reaction was surprisingly positive, which gave us the courage to go a little bit deeper into the water."*
> – Amber Briggle, mother of a transgender daughter

Jazz Jennings is a transgender teenager who has been telling her story in the media since she was five years old, and is considered by many to be a trailblazer for other transgender and gender-expansive youth hoping to do public advocacy by sharing their personal stories publicly.

Ten years ago, Jazz's appearance on *20/20* was one of just a handful of stories about trans youth available in the media. And there is no doubt that her willingness to share her story helped countless other families realize they could support their trans child. But today there are hundreds of media stories about trans youth from all walks of life.

If you are thinking about proactively offering your story to the media, you might start by asking yourself whether or not your family's story adds anything new to the media landscape of stories about transgender youth. If your story adds something new to the information that's already available (for example, if your story speaks to a particular identity within the transgender community, or takes a different course than others') it might be worth doing media. However, if it doesn't add anything new or different to the narrative, then it might be more valuable to preserve your family's privacy.

Media Training

Whether you have made the decision to share your story — or the decision is made due to circumstances outside of your control — it is important to consider arranging for training to help ensure you and your family have the best experience possible when dealing with the media, as this document can only scratch the surface of the things you know in order to be an effective media storyteller. An in-depth media training will cover topics like tailoring your messages to a specific audience, crafting your story into anecdotes, pairing your personal story with a call to action, how to speak in clear sound bites, how to do on-camera interviews (both live and taped), etc.

Many of the national LGBTQ organizations can offer you guidance and training about how to interact with the media. As a media advocacy organization, GLAAD has a free media training curriculum that it offers through the GLAAD Media Institute. We strongly encourage you to reach out to GLAAD (contact information is included at the end of this resource), or another group you feel comfortable with, to ask for a training that will give you the skills you need to appear in the media.

Essential Research

Before saying "yes" to a media opportunity, do your research. Who is the interviewer? Search the internet for the journalist's their name with the word "transgender" and see if they've written anything on this subject. (For example: "Katy Steinmetz" transgender.) Research the media outlet the reporter is writing or filming for: How has that outlet covered transgender people in the past? Ask the journalist what particular topics they want to cover. Are they talking to anyone else for this story, for example, an anti-trans activist? If it's a TV interview, are they interviewing anyone else? Are there "experts" being brought on to talk about your family? If so, who? Is there a live audience who can ask questions? You are entitled to ask all of these questions — and more — before you commit to an interview. Once you've done the research, if you're still not sure you have the information you need, reach out to GLAAD, PFLAG National, or HRC for assistance in evaluating the request.

Limiting Personal Information

Once you decide to tell your story, or that decision is made for you by circumstances beyond your control, it's extremely important that you and your family decide on your boundaries regarding personal information you are willing to share. Journalists are better than they used to be at respecting boundaries, but they still might ask for information most transgender people feel is invasive and inappropriate. For example:

- Birth name
- "Before" pictures
- Details about a child's body and genitals
- Medical information about hormones and surgeries
- Sexual orientation questions
- Other details about the transition process that might be traumatic (i.e., how "difficult" this process has been for parents and/or grandparents, or being asked to leave a church)

Make decisions about these and other personal questions long before you ever get in front of a journalist or a TV camera. Please keep in mind that children who are fine with their birth name and "before" pictures being shared when they are very young may have different feelings about that as they get older. We strongly suggest drawing a firm line against any discussion of a child's body and genitals, as reducing any transgender person down to their bodies is dehumanizing and inappropriate, and is especially so for youth.

If media attention around your story includes questions about your child's status at school, send a letter to the school to ask what information they would share or not share if contacted by the media. Including language such as "per the Student Privacy Act" should help assert that no personal information can be shared including gender markers or former names.

Responding to Difficult Questions: 3 Strategies

It can be helpful to think of responding to difficult or probing personal questions in one of three ways:

1 Deflect or shut it down

2 Partially answer, then move on

3 Fully answer

How to Deflect:
If a question is inappropriate or off-topic, it can be helpful to set a firm boundary and politely move on. For example, if someone asks about your child's medical transition, you could respond, "Actually, I'm not here to talk about that. I'm here to discuss discrimination against transgender youth." Similarly, you could say, "My family generally keeps medical information private, between ourselves and our doctor."

These answers allow you to get back on topic without getting flustered or overwhelmed, and also without being rude or dismissive of the question.

How to Partially Answer:
Often, inappropriate or probing questions come from a place of wanting to learn, even if the question is asked rudely. If this is the case, it can be helpful to say something along the lines of "Well, some trans people do this, and some trans people do that. But I'm really here to talk about…" and pivot back to whatever issue you're hoping to focus on.

For example, if someone asks about your child's medical transition, you could respond, "Well, some trans youth do medically transition, while some don't. That decision should be made with the family and their doctors. But I'm not here to talk about that. I'm here to discuss discrimination against transgender youth." This provides an opportunity to educate the person answering the question, while still setting boundaries for your own family.

How to Fully Answer:
Finally, if your family is comfortable sharing some of those details, educate the journalist and/or mention in your interview that your family is comfortable answering personal questions, but that doesn't mean it's appropriate to ask other transgender or gender-expansive people the same questions.

For example, if someone asks about your child's medical transition, you could start by saying, "It's important to understand that that's a personal question, and one many families won't be comfortable sharing publicly. I'm going to tell you a bit about our family's journey, but I need you to understand that every family is different and that there is no one right way to be trans, or to transition. And although my family is willing to talk about these details, please don't assume other families will feel the same way."

Reviewing Material

You can ask a reporter to show you their story before it appears, but they are unlikely to allow you to see it as that can be perceived as violating journalistic ethics. If they do show it to you, you may check it for factual errors and terminology, but it's unlikely they'll allow you to have any input into the substance of the story.

"When my daughter's story was published in our paper, I actually told them which words not to use, and they still used two of them. It's harder to get it fixed once it's already out there."
– DeShanna Neal, mother of a transgender daughter



DeShanna and Trinity Neal

Using What's Out There

Advocating constantly is an exhausting task, especially when you find yourself repeating basic information to justify your family's lives. Fortunately, in the past few years, material has been created which covers most of the basic "Trans 101" questions you might receive. If you are asked to answer basic questions, consider referring the reporter to an existing trusted resource, such as those available on the GLAAD, NCTE, PFLAG, or HRC websites, so you can reserve your energy for telling your own personal story in a more nuanced way.

"When Jazz got older, she got to a certain point where she would tell her friends herself that she was transgender. She'd be eight or nine years old and say, 'Hey, I'm transgender. I don't know if you know what that means.' And she would say to me, 'Mom, I've got this one covered. I'll just show them the video.' She was even advocating on her own, which was great."
– Jeanette Jennings, mother of Jazz Jennings

Compensation

Most journalists cannot compensate you for your time; that can be perceived as violating journalistic ethics. However, they may cover your transportation and other costs associated with getting to the interview. Some talk shows may actually be able to provide compensation for your time. If you are giving a speech in a public place, you can ask for an honorarium. A simple way to approach this is to ask the presenting organization if they have a budget for speakers. This allows you to start a conversation about compensation without directly asking for money.

LONG-TERM PRIVACY AND IDENTITY CONSIDERATIONS

We've often heard parents say that they want to tell their story in the media to help make the world a better place for their transgender or gender-expansive child. Parents also say that they want to tell their story publicly so their child understands that being transgender or gender-expansive is nothing to be ashamed of; both impulses are understandable and even admirable.

That being said, there are many, many ways to make the world a better place for transgender and gender-expansive youth that do not involve being in the public eye. And most transgender adults will tell you that choosing to be private about one's gender history does not mean they are ashamed about being transgender. It simply means that they prefer to meet new people as their authentic selves, without immediately disclosing something that happened decades in the past.

While your child may want to be out and public now, they may not understand the longevity of the internet, and that once something is out there, **it cannot be taken back**. As they get older, they may simply get tired of carrying the "transgender" label with them through life, and may wish to be known solely as a man, woman, or person. Choosing a pseudonym (whether a nickname for your child's first name and/or a different last name) is one way to give your child the ability to be private about their gender history as they get older. If you have gone through the legal steps of changing your child's name, you have a right to keep that information private, and can ask to have the court records sealed.

Media Regret

In thinking about the longer term, it is essential to consider the very real possibility of media regret. Media regret happens when someone shares their story publicly, only to later wish they hadn't done so. In sharing your story, particularly as a young and vulnerable person, you lose anonymity as well as the ability to control whether or not you want to disclose your gender history for the rest of your life. Imagine how it might feel to have the most private and intimate information about you available for anyone in the world to read with a quick internet search of your name. But being a public advocate does not mean you must open every part of your life up to public scrutiny. It bears repeating: Decide before going public what information your family feels comfortable sharing, and what will be strictly off limits. You can always revisit these boundaries over time, but it is better to know in advance what your comfort level is as a family in order to avoid being put on the spot, and potentially saying something you may later regret.

When living in a smaller town, city, or state, it is best to make sure your family understands that many who did not know of you before will likely know you. Your story will forever leave traces on the internet or in magazine articles, and your child may not be able to control being private in the environments where they will find themselves later on. Constant conversation is the best method to use when various media opportunities arise because your child's current feelings and attitude about the world knowing their gender history will probably change significantly as they get older.

In this section, you will hear not only from parents of transgender and gender-expansive youth, but also from some transgender adults who have had many years of experience in being public. These individuals have seen both positive and negative effects of their visibility.

> "Checking in with how [children and youth] are feeling is extremely vital for them and the family as a whole."
>
> – Raffi Freedman-Gurspan, Director of External Relations (NCTE)



Raffi and her parents

Parent Perspective

When our child was around 6 years old, we chose to talk to the media about our experience. We wanted to share our story so other families could learn how to support their trans child. But only a few months after it aired, it became very clear that she did not want her private medical history to be public knowledge. She was being seen by others as the girl she always knew herself to be, and she wanted to be able to disclose her gender history to others in a time and manner of her own choosing. She did not want a Google search of her name to reveal it to anyone who looked. (When our child was in middle school, there was a cyber-bullying episode which shook us all.) We actively worked to scrub all identifying details in those news stories from the internet, but it was very difficult. Once a media outlet has published a story it is extremely reluctant to make edits or remove it. A decade later, it still really bothers our child that there is a radio show where she talks about her experience and we speak as her parents. Our advice to parents of pre-pubertal children is to consider that even if a young child consents to a media story, they may change their mind as they get older and are in a different phase of their transition. Media regret is a very real phenomenon for many trans children. But once their story is told — especially if real names or identifying details are used — the child's ability to be private about their gender history has been lost for the rest of their lives. Parents of transgender children are often (rightly) concerned about preserving their children's ability to make decisions in the future, decisions about fertility, decisions about surgeries. Please consider that it's also important to preserve your child's ability to go on a coffee date in high school or college without the other person being able to Google them and find out they are trans before they even get to the coffee shop. We are not including our names on this quote because sharing our family's name in this context is something that our child would not be comfortable with, so we will sign as 'Anonymous.
– Anonymous

Trans Youth Perspective

I began my medical transition in high school, and doing media was very exciting in the early stages of my transition. I did it because I wanted to help people understand what it means to be transgender, and since I had supportive parents, I felt I should be doing my part to make the world a better place. Shortly after starting my medical transition, the world began to see me as male all the time. I started a new high school where no one knew me from before, and now no one could tell my gender history by looking at me. That was a new experience for me, and I found it incredibly important to just be a guy in high school. I was able to fulfill my dream of playing on the football team at my new school — not as "the trans guy on the football team" — but just as a guy. At that point, I began to wish that my personal information wasn't so easily accessible by the general public. I was there to enjoy the game and live out the dream I've always had to play tackle football. I did truly enjoy the season and the focus was on me as a football player, rather than me as a trans person. There were challenges being completely undisclosed — I was always worried about what would happen if my teammates found out. Eventually, after the season, I was Googled, and because of my media advocacy and my name being linked to my ENTIRE story, my teammates found out I am trans. I was never actually confronted by any of them about it except for a couple of my best friends on the team. Most of the players just brushed it off and talked to me as they would before. There was only a small group that became distant or just stopped talking to me all together, but all in all, it was a much brighter outcome than the one I had imagined. For the remainder of the school year, I started to attend the GSA meetings because it was where I felt genuine. It was at that point where I realized that I cannot regret doing media or wish I'd never told my story because it helped a lot of people and it's information that would've helped me tremendously pre-transition. But it has been a journey to get to this place, and there was a lot of time where I had phases of regret, discomfort, and even self-hatred because I just wanted to be seen as a "regular guy" at school. I would like to do media again, but not necessarily as a trans advocate. I don't want to be known for just my gender story. I would love to share my life beyond my gender story as a musician, an athlete, an artist, etc.
- Avery Wallace

Trans Adult Perspective

> *Becoming a public figure came with negative and positive situations in my life. Looking back, some of the pre-considerations that I wished I would have thought about was how I could never be stealth again. Even after the excitement died down, there would still be times when a stranger would recognize me. It is best to explain this aspect to children so they understand that depending on the platform they share their story, i.e. locally or nationally, they will sometimes find themselves being recognized. I honestly found the "fame" of being public overwhelming. There is a sense of stress associated with constantly being that face for a people or movement. Especially if your identity crosses many intersections. I felt almost blocked-in by my own publicity and needed to be seen as more than being a transgender woman. This is the same for trans youth. They are still growing and as they evolve they will find more in life that they love as well as who they are. Seeing them only for being trans can block them in a box and overwhelm them at the same time. Checking in with how they are feeling is extremely vital for them and the family as a whole. Having a support network and being around others who have gone through what they have will be important for these children as they grow older. I wish that I had known how going public would reflect on how people see me in a professional role. Especially in terms of social media. Children and their families need to realize that with colleges and employers now looking to social media to know about the person they are considering accepting as an applicant, how they look publicly will make a difference.*
> - Raffi Freedman-Gurspan

Just as the youth and adults who share their stories in this guide have had vastly different experiences, all families will be impacted differently if they make the decision to go public with their stories. Consider this guide a way to start the conversation — with your partner or spouse, with your trans or gender-expansive child, and with your other children. Explore the outside resources we have included here, please keep in mind the many risks and benefits of speaking out, and remember that, regardless of your decision, you are not alone.

RESOURCES

National LGBTQ Organizations

GLAAD
www.glaad.org

GLSEN
www.glsen.org
Phone: (212) 727-0135
Address: 110 William Street, 30th Floor, New York, NY 10038

Human Rights Campaign
www.hrc.org
Phone: (202) 628-4160
Address: 1640 Rhode Island Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20036-3278

National Black Justice Coalition
nbjc.org/issues/transgender-equality
Phone: (202) 319-1552
Address: Post Office Box 71395, Washington, DC 20024

National Center for Transgender Equality
www.transequality.org
Phone: (202) 642-4542
Address: 1133 19th St NW, Suite 302, Washington, DC 20036

PFLAG National
www.pflag.org
Phone: (202) 467-8180
Address: 1828 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20036

LGBTQ-Affirming Parent/Family Support Organizations

Gender Odyssey
www.genderodyssey.org

Gender Spectrum
www.genderspectrum.org
Phone: (510) 788-4412

PFLAG (Chapter Network)
www.pflag.org/find

TYFA
www.imatyfa.org
Phone: (888) 462-8932

Legal Resources

ACLU
www.aclu.org
Phone: (212) 549-2500
Address: 125 Broad Street, 18th Floor, New York NY 10004

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Phone: (617) 426-1350
Address: 30 Winter Street, Suite 800, Boston, MA 02108

Lambda Legal
www.lambdalegal.org
Phone: (212) 809-8585
Address: 120 Wall Street, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10005

National Center for Lesbian Rights
www.nclrights.org
Phone: (415) 392-6257
Address: 870 Market Street, Suite 370, San Francisco, CA 94102

Transcend Legal
www.transcendlegal.org
Phone: (347) 612-4312
Address: 3553 82nd Street #6D, Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Transgender Law Center
www.transgenderlawcenter.org
Phone: (510) 587-9696
Address: PO Box 70976, Oakland, CA 94612-0976

Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund
Phone: (646) 862-9396
Address: 20 West 20th Street, Suite 705, New York, NY 10011

Child Advocacy Groups

National Association of Social Workers
www.socialworkers.org
Phone: (800) 742-4089
Address: 750 First Street, NE Suite 800, Washington, DC 20002

National Children's Advocacy Center
www.nationalcac.org
Phone: (256) 533-5437
Address: 210 Pratt Ave NE, Huntsville, AL 35801

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PHOTOS

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