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## Transforming the Identity of Parents of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Children

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### Introduction

Researchers and clinicians who work with same-sex-oriented people have long observed that gay people, who usually have heterosexual parents, do not enjoy the same kind of family support and protection offered to members of some other stigmatized minorities. For example, children who are African American or Muslim usually grow up in families and communities where they are culturally like their parents, siblings, relatives, even neighbors. Although they may be ostracized or mistreated by “outsiders” and the larger society, they can count on belonging to a network of others who will try to protect, validate, and educate them about how to survive in a hostile environment. The importance of this cannot be overstated. Research has shown that lesbian and gay children who enjoy family support do better, suffer less from the rejection of peers, are less suicidal and depressed, and practice safer sex more frequently than those whose parents reject them (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Haas & Drescher, 2014; Lasser, Tharinger, & Cloth, 2006).

In many ways, parenting a child who is transgender or gender nonconforming is similar to having a gay child (LaSala, 2010). In both cases, the child is different, not only from most peers, but from the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of most of their family members. The child needs protection from the very people who have the potential to do the most harm—the child’s identity representing something the parent fears, dislikes, or believes sinful. If parental support is critical for gay and lesbian youth, it’s even more so for gender diverse and transgender youth. On the one hand, most gay children don’t come out—to themselves or others—until adolescence, and until that happens, their sexual orientation can be masked. Gender identity, on the other hand, is often obvious as young as toddlerhood, which forces parents to deal with gender nonconformity early on. Gender diverse children get bullied and harassed more than oth-

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