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Supporting Siblings through Transition: A Child-Centered, Transfeminist Therapeutic Approach

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Radical and transformative models for guiding families through a child's gender transition are emerging (Coolhart, Baker, Farmer, Malaney, & Shipman, 2013; Ehrensaft, 2012; Malpas, 2011; Menvielle & Hill, 2010), but those models do not explicitly include how parents can effectively assist other children in their family. As Kvalanka, Gardner, and Munroe (2019) describe, the availability of a wide network of support for gender nonconforming and transgender children is key to their self-image, health, and adjustment. But sometimes overlooked is the fact that parents of these children need support themselves. How can we, as clinicians, aid parents in helping those siblings of gender nonconforming and transgender kids?

In these families, as in many others, siblings are often lightning rods for what may be latent. Eliciting their voices can add richness to the family's understanding. When one child experiences a greater need or requires more family resources, the other children often suffer. Individuals who have a brother or sister who is gay or lesbian have a wide range of experiences: sometimes they become a primary ally; other times they themselves are bullied; many times they become more aware of their own sexuality; and most times, they evolve into people who experience a greater awareness of and appreciation for difference (Gottlieb, 2005). Similarly, siblings of gender diverse and transgender children may feel ignored, even abandoned, by their parents, may be victimized by peers, or may become strong allies (Menvielle & Hill, 2010; Norwood 2013).

This chapter will introduce Child-Centered Transfeminist Therapy (CCTFT)—an approach previously designed for clinicians and parents—which we adapted for working with siblings of gender nonconforming and transgender children.

CCTFT was developed by Shannon Sennott and the Translate Gender Family Group. In this chapter, we will (1) define specific language used in the CCTFT approach; (2) provide an overview of its theories and influences; (3) outline the tenets

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