Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Children and Adolescents

Transgender and non-binary individuals comprise an increasingly portion of the child and adolescent population. Recent surveys estimate nearly one percent of teens ages 13-17 identity as transgender, a portion of those also identifying as non-binary.

In September 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics released its first policy statement regarding the support and care of transgender/non-binary children and adolescents. Navigating these recommendations may seem overwhelming at first, so we want to highlight actions that you, as a parent, guardian, teacher, or someone invested in the well-being of transgender or nonbinary youth, can take to ensure these children have safe spaces to facilitate growth and gender expression.

First and foremost, ensure the child has a loving and supportive environment to flourish.
For many, even the smallest act of kindness and compassion can be lifesaving.

You can support the transgender/non-binary children and adolescents in your life by:

- **Asking questions.**
  Find out what kind of support this child needs from you. Some children may not want a dialogue from the start but it is important to remain available when the child is ready to begin a conversation.

- **Affirming the child.**
  Strive to be the child’s biggest advocate. Support them in times and places when they need it the most. Recognize there are many different kinds of affirmation. A simple shopping trip for clothes they feel most comfortable in can mean the world to them.

- **Revamping your vocabulary.**
  Language is incredibly important. Be flexible with your word choices -- for example, using the neutral term “child” as opposed to “daughter” or “son.” Ask the child to clarify what terms they prefer and in which specific situations to use them. In other words, the child may not be “out” to all friends or family members, and you may unintentionally “out” them when you are doing your best to affirm them.

- **Continuing to educate yourself and others.**
  Numerous organizations have already developed a multitude of online and
print resources for the general public. For those starting the learning journey, try material from the Human Rights Campaign, the National Center for Transgender Equality and GLAAD.

- **Not being afraid to ask for help.**
  Many local organizations exist to cater to the needs of transgender/nonbinary youth. They also have support services for family members and caretakers. These organizations can be invaluable for these children. Not only do they offer counseling, support groups, and medical referrals, they show these children they are not alone. A few examples of organizations in South Florida is Sunserve and TransSOCIAL.

- **Accepting feedback.**
  You do not have to be perfect and completely understand everything to meaningfully contribute to a child’s life. If you do make a mistake, listen to the child’s feedback and learn from it. As long as you are always trying your best and loving unconditionally, you are undoubtedly making a difference in that child’s life.

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