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Gender Nonconforming Children: Education for Rural Vermont Families

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ST. ALBANS, VT

MARCH-APRIL 2018 FAMILY MEDICINE CLERKSHIP

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Problem Identification and Need

Although the incidence of Trans and Gender Non-Conforming (TGNC) children is not known, some studies have indicated up to 27% of adolescents in certain populations identify as TGNC.

According to experts, there is a general lack of education for providers and families of TGNC children.

Rural areas generally have a lack of awareness and resources about LGBTQ topics

There are many different guidelines for successful supporting and raising of TGNC children

The rapidly changing field can be hard to interpret for patients and providers alike

Public Health Cost and Community Considerations

TGNC youth have higher rates of mental health disorders, including depression and suicidality

Increased family support shows fewer episodes of these disorders, higher overall life satisfaction, and improved academic success

Unfortunately, a lack of awareness of the issue has resulted in minimal studies evaluating incidence, let alone specific outcomes

Community Perspective and Support

Dr. Jeremiah Dickerson, Child and Adolescent psychiatrist at the Vermont Center for Children, Youth and Families

- Outside of Chittenden county, there is significant confusion about any type of gender variant population
- Parents especially need facts and tools to talk with other family members

Deana Chase, LICSW, Parent of a TGNC child

- There is a general lack of knowledge on gender binary and the social construct of gender
- Even when parents and family have knowledge, there is often a sense of grief, fear, and loss when their child “comes out”

Other Community Leaders

- Many misconceptions exist between physicians and the TGNC community about terminology how to address the topic

Intervention and Methodology

Reviewed current literature and community websites for commonly used terminology

Conducted interviews with community healthcare providers and family members of TGNC children

Developed family oriented pamphlet with

- Terminology
- Myths and Misconception
- Community resources
- Tools for discussing the topic

Intervention - Brochure

Myths and Misconceptions

All kids who are gender creative will stay transgender as adults!

- FALSE! Many children who are trans will end up identifying with their sex assigned at birth post puberty. However, there is no way to predict which children will persist or desist as adults.

Being gender creative means something is wrong with my child!

I did something wrong as a parent to make my child be gender non-conforming!

- FALSE! Many pre-pubertal children engage in gender play and exploration. It is a part of normal childhood development that all children go through to some degree!

It's just a phase so I should force my child to act their normal gender!

- NO! Many studies have shown that children who receive parental support experience fewer episodes of depression, higher life satisfaction, and improved academic success.

Our family is the only one having these issues, so we should just deal with it.

- NO! You are not alone! There are tons of resources online and here in Vermont to meet other families with similar experiences!

I should feel bad for being sad or afraid for my child who's gender creative.

- NO! It's perfectly okay to feel sad or loss for how you pictured your child's future and there is always support available!

Resources and Citations:

Outright VT, outrightvt.org

- Based in Burlington VT, Outright hosts and sponsors trans and gender creative kids and parent groups. They are dedicated to building safe, healthy, and supportive environments for LGBTQ youth.

Green Mountain Crossroads, greenmountaincrossroads.org

- Rural Vermont oriented LGBT resource and advocacy group based in Brattleboro VT.

Gender Spectrum, genderspectrum.org

- National organization that helps create gender sensitive and inclusive environment for all children and teens.

Rosenthal SM. Transgender youth: current concepts. *Annals of Pediatric Endocrinology & Metabolism*. 2016;21(4):185-192. doi:10.6065/apem.2016.21.4.185.

Kalliala-Helmo R, Bergman H, Työläjärvi M, Frisén L. Gender dysphoria in adolescence: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*. 2018;9:31-41. doi:10.2147/AHMT.S135432.

Ehrensaff D. Gender nonconforming youth: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*. 2017;8:57-67. doi:10.2147/AHMT.S110859.

Produced by Zachary Silberman in association with the University of Vermont Lamer College of Medicine



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Why is my kid wearing different clothes and using new pronouns?

A guide for Vermont parents of Gender Creative/Non-binary children.



What does gender creative and related terminology mean?

Gender identity: every individual's internal sense of self as male, female, something in between, or something else entirely.

- o Ex: "I am a man" or "I am transgender"

Gender expression: outward expression of gender identity

- o Ex: "I like to wear skirts" or "You can use they/them pronouns to refer to me"

Sex assigned at birth: typically refers to sex given by external genitalia at birth and more recently chromosomal sex, with some variation due to congenital processes.

- o Ex: "I was born with a vagina, so doctors decided I am female" or "I have X and Y chromosomes, but my body cannot sense testosterone, so I have breasts and a vagina"

Sexual identity: who an individual is or is not attracted to, physically, romantically, emotionally, or otherwise.

- o Ex: "I am a woman attracted to men so I am straight" or "I am attracted to both men and women so I am bisexual" or "I am attracted to people regardless of expression of gender so I am pansexual."

Transgender: An umbrella term for anyone whose personal gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth.

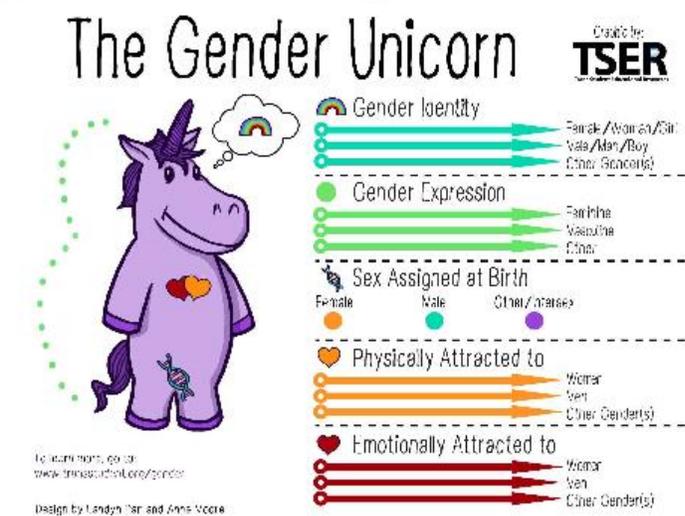
- o Ex: "I have two X chromosomes, but I identify as a man" or "I was born with a penis, but I am genderfluid"

Gender creative/nonbinary/nonconforming: anyone whose gender expression does not fit within the typical roles of male or female. Sometimes considered a subset of transgender.

- o Ex: "I'm a boy and I like to wear dresses" or "I'm a girl and I love monster truck rallies"

How can I explain gender creative to other family members?

The Gender Unicorn, developed by TSER, is a great starting place. It shows how components of our identity are just sliding scales. This is a great tool for starting a conversation with anybody.



Results and Response

The educational pamphlet serves to address the general lack of knowledge about TGNC children

Pamphlet was well received by providers and staff, with several people commenting on the necessity of the topic for providers and patients

The pamphlet was distributed out to the 8 practice offices of the Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH) group, and a pdf was requested for continued distribution

Evaluation of Effectiveness and Limitations

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Evaluation of effectiveness could be accomplished by surveying providers on the frequency that patients mention the topic

Additionally, surveys of the topic could be conducted at community resources to see if the pamphlet was a reason for contact

Limitations

There was no time within the scope of the clerkship project to evaluate the effectiveness of the pamphlet

The population of TGNC children is considered vulnerable and so could not be interviewed without a lengthy IRB approval process

There is minimal demographic information regarding the TGNC population, especially in rural areas

Future Recommendations

Expand on project scope to develop family education tools for a broader aspect of the TGNC population

Distribute pamphlet to rural primary care offices in Southern Vermont

Develop provider training modules for talking with TGNC children and their families

Rework pamphlet for distribution to schools and other areas to increase family awareness

References

Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of California San Francisco. Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Nonbinary People; 2nd edition. Deutsch MB, ed. June 2016. Available at www.transhealth.ucsf.edu/guidelines.

Wilson BDM, Choi SK, Herman JL, Becker T, Conron KJ, 2017. *Characteristics and Mental Health of Gender Nonconforming Adolescents in California: Findings from the 2015-2016 California Health Interview Survey*. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute and UCLA Center for Health Policy Research

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Ehrensaft D. Gender nonconforming youth: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*. 2017;8:57-67. doi:10.2147/AHMT.S110859.

outrightvt.org

transstudent.org

Interview Consent

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This project is a requirement for the Family Medicine clerkship. It will be stored on the Dana Library ScholarWorks website. Your name will be attached to your interview and you may be cited directly or indirectly in subsequent unpublished or published work. The interviewer affirms that he/she has explained the nature and purpose of this project. The interviewee affirms that he/she has consented to this interview.

Yes Deana Chase – Verbal

Yes Jeremiah Dickerson – Verbal