

DAD, YOUR CHILD NEEDS YOU

*An essential guide by fathers, for fathers,
on showing up for their trans, nonbinary,
or gender-expansive child.*



The
Dads
FOUNDATION

Dear Dad,

Opening this book is its own kind of courage.

If you've turned to this page, you have already done something that matters: you showed up. You chose to learn, to listen, and to try.

Your child coming out to you may feel unfamiliar, even overwhelming. That is okay. The Dads who wrote this guide know that feeling. We are parents of trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive (TNBG) children too. We have been uncertain, afraid of saying the wrong thing, and still learning through mistakes, repair, and love.

What we know for certain is this: Learning is an act of love. So is listening. So is staying.

When a child shares who they truly are, it can be one of the most vulnerable moments in their lives. Coming out can cost their friendships, family, and spaces that once felt safe. It should not cost them their dad. Accepting them is one of the strongest ways you can protect your child.

You don't need all the answers.
You don't have to get it right.
You just have to say, **"I've got you."**

- Stephen Chukumba

Executive Director, The Dads Foundation



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“

No child should have to lose their father because they told the truth of who they are.”

- **Alex Polotsky**

Vice President, The Dads Foundation

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DAD, START HERE

You may be reading this because you chose to. You may be reading this because someone asked you to. You may not yet understand or agree with everything, or you may already be on your journey as a supportive dad.

Start here anyway.

This guide is for dads who want to show up but do not always know how. It is for dads who feel alone, confused, protective, upset, resistant or ready, and dads who have started this work and know something needs to change.

Wherever you are, your child is asking whether your love is stronger than your fear.

Remember... Love Stands Strong.

FIND YOURSELF

How do you feel right now?

ALONE

You feel as if you're the only one. You are not - we are a growing community of love and support.

CONFUSED

You love your child, but the language or changes feel unfamiliar. Stay curious, not interrogative.

PROTECTIVE

You are scared of how the world will treat your child. Start by making home their safest place.

UPSET

You may feel like you are losing your child. Lots of us felt that way at first.

RESISTANT

You may disagree. Pause, listen, and reflect before you respond.

READY

You've said, "Thank you for telling me this, and I'm here with you."

Please don't let your feelings distract you from the fact that your child needs you.

Try understanding, not reacting.

LISTENING IS AN ACT OF LOVE

As dads, we naturally give advice (but this is the time to listen).

Interrogation divides, curiosity connects.

INTERROGATION

- Who told you this?
- Why are you doing this?
- Can't you just wait?
- Do you know how this affects me?

CURIOSITY

- How long have you felt this way?
- How can I support you?
- Tell me more.
- What should I avoid doing?

GOOD LISTENING LOOKS LIKE

Put your phone away. Do not interrupt. Reflect back what you heard. Ask: "Did I get that right?"

YOUR WORDS MATTER

When your child shares their truth,
protect and support.

WHEN YOU SAY

"Are you sure?"

WHAT YOU MEAN

I want to make sure you know
what this means.

WHAT THEY HEAR

"I don't believe you."

LEAD WITH LOVE

If you feel unsure, practice acceptance first. Try saying,
"Thank you for telling me." Keep showing up.

SHOWING
UP

LOOKS LIKE...

AT HOME

Use their chosen name and pronouns. Respect their expression. Protect their privacy. Correct disrespect.

WITH FAMILY

"We can discuss but not debate my child's identity." You do not have to understand to respect my child.

AT SCHOOL

Ask your child if they feel safe. Document and report issues. Request support to form a plan.



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Love is what your child experiences from you.

AFFIRMING CARE & SAFETY

Your child's identity is not the problem.
Rejection, isolation, bullying, and shame are.

WARNING SIGNS

- Withdrawal.
- Hopelessness.
- Changes in sleep or eating.
- Avoiding school.
- Self-harm.
- Talk of death or suicide.

IN CRISIS

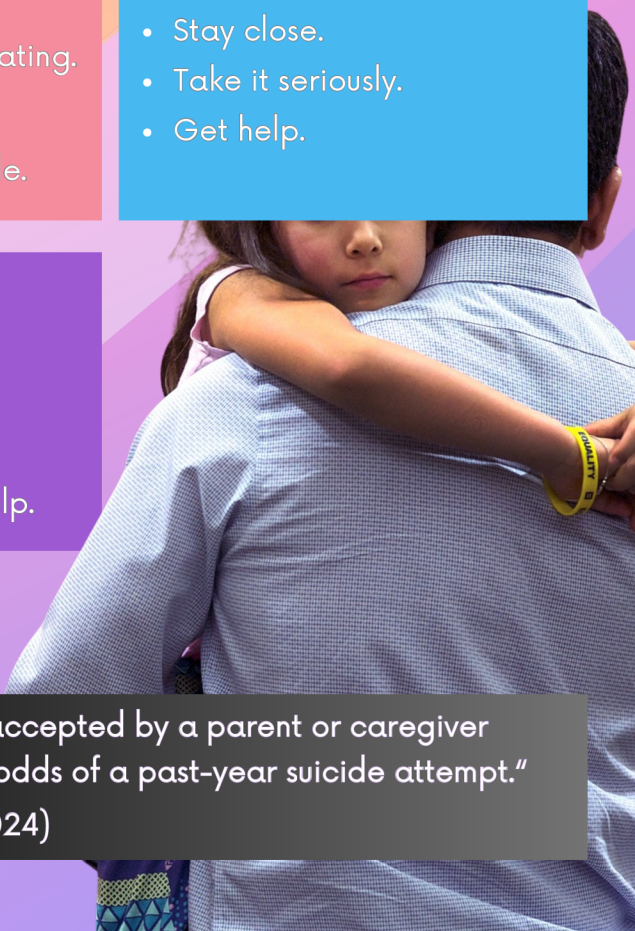
- Stay calm.
- Stay close.
- Take it seriously.
- Get help.

CONTROL

- Your response.
- Your home.
- Your consistency.
- Your ability to get help.

"TGNB youth who feel accepted by a parent or caregiver have about 40% lower odds of a past-year suicide attempt."

- The Trevor Project (2024)



REPAIR AFTER MISSTEPS

We all mess up. What matters is whether you repair.

FEELING THIS

- I'm trying! Isn't that enough?
- You're too sensitive.
- This is hard for me too.
- I said I was sorry, what else do you want?

TRY THIS

- I got that wrong.
- Thank you for correcting me.
- I'm working on it. I'll get it.
- I'm sorry.



REPAIR LOOKS LIKE

Correcting yourself gently. Not making excuses. Not beating yourself up. Not asking for praise. Practicing.



Genuine repair builds more trust than a perfect performance."

START SMALL, START TODAY

RIGHT NOW

- Thank them for telling you.
- Affirm their identity.
- Ask your child what their dreams are.

THIS WEEK

- Have one real conversation.
- Learn one thing on your own.
- Join our community of dads.

THIS MONTH

- Ask about school safety.
- Explore one affirming community.
- Set one family boundary.

THIS YEAR

- Keep showing up.
- Keep learning.
- Keep repairing.

THE DADS PROMISE



"I promise to listen before I react. To keep learning, even when I feel uncomfortable. To make our home a place where you feel safe to be yourself."

"You will not lose your dad because you told the truth about who you are."

If your child has not heard your love, acceptance, and commitment out loud, do not wait. **Go tell them now.**

WHAT DO I DO WITH FEAR & GRIEF?

Being afraid and grieving do not make you a bad father. How you process them matter. Ask yourself...

FEAR

- Is this about my child's safety or my discomfort?
- Am I reacting to danger or judgment from others?
- How can I help my child feel safer right now?

GRIEF

- Am I grieving my child, or the future I imagined?
- What expectation am I being invited to release?
- How can I own my grief without burdening my child?

SHARED

Who can help me process these feelings without placing them on my child?

**TRY NOT TO FEAR OR GRIEVE
YOUR CHILD.**

Grieve or fear the expectation, then release it.

FIND YOUR PEOPLE



AFFIRMING SPACES

Find communities where your family can breathe.



THERAPY/COACHING

Process your feelings with another adult.



TRUSTED FRIEND

Choose someone who can listen without fueling fear.



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Talk to other fathers who are doing this work.



KEEP LEARNING

Your child shouldn't have the responsibility of being your only teacher.

LEARN TERMS

- Pronouns.
- Gender expression.
- Privacy.

LEARN STORIES

- Listen to trans and nonbinary people.
- Listen to other dads.

LEARN SAFETY

- Mental health matters.
- Understand how not accepting your child can do damage.

LOCAL SUPPORT

- Find affirming providers.
- Find parent groups.
- Find safe community spaces.

Stay teachable, Dad.

RESOURCES

You do not have to figure this out alone. Here are trusted places for support, information, and community.



THE DADS FOUNDATION
thedadsfoundation.org



THE TREVOR PROJECT
thetrevorproject.org
 1-866-488-7386



TRANS LIFELINE
translifeline.org
 877-565-8860



PFLAG
pflag.org



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
hrc.org/resources



GLAAD
glaad.org/transgender/resources



THE ALI FORNEY CENTER
aliforneycenter.org

GLOSSARY

Affirming

Supporting someone in who they are through your words, actions, and consistency. For a dad, affirmation can look like using your child's name, using their pronouns, listening without judgment, and standing up for them when it matters.

Assigned Sex at Birth

The sex listed for a person when they are born, usually based on physical anatomy. This is different from gender identity.

Chosen Name

The name a person asks others to use for them. For some trans, nonbinary, or gender-expansive people, a chosen name better reflects who they are.

Coming Out

The process of sharing one's identity with others. Coming out can happen in different ways, at different times, with different people. Your child gets to decide who knows and when.

Deadname

A name a trans or nonbinary person no longer uses. Using someone's deadname can be painful, especially when done intentionally. Use the name your child asks you to use.

Gender-Affirming Care

Support that helps a person live safely and authentically as themselves. This can include emotional support, social support, mental health care, and, for some people, medical care guided by qualified professionals.

Gender-Expansive

A broad term for people whose gender identity or expression does not fit traditional expectations of gender. Some people may use this term instead of, or alongside, words like trans, nonbinary, gender diverse, or gender creative.

Gender Expression

How a person shows or expresses gender through clothing, hair, voice, behavior, interests, or presentation. Gender expression does not always tell you someone's gender identity.

Gender Identity

A person's internal sense of their gender. Someone may know themselves as a boy, girl, both, neither, or somewhere else on the gender spectrum.

Support

More than saying “I love you.” Support means your child experiences your love through your words, behavior, consistency, protection, and willingness to learn.

Repair

What you do after harm, conflict, or a mistake. Repair means acknowledging what happened, correcting yourself, changing your behavior, and rebuilding trust without demanding immediate forgiveness.

Pronouns

Words used to refer to someone when not using their name, such as she/her, he/him, they/them, or other pronouns. Use the pronouns your child asks you to use.

Ally

Someone who supports and stands with LGBTQ+ people, even if they are not LGBTQ+ themselves. For dads, allyship starts at home and shows up through respect, protection, learning, and action.

Social Transition

Changes a person may make to live more fully as themselves in everyday life. This may include using a different name, pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, or presentation.

Transgender / Trans

A term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. “Trans” is often used as a shorter version of transgender.

Transition

The process a person may go through to live more authentically as themselves. Transition looks different for every person and may include social, legal, medical, emotional, or relational changes.

Trusted Adult

An adult your child feels safe turning to for support. This may be a parent, relative, teacher, counselor, coach, therapist, mentor, or family friend.

Safety Plan

A clear plan for what your child can do when they feel unsafe, overwhelmed, bullied, or in crisis. It may include trusted adults, crisis lines, safe places, school contacts, and steps to take when support is needed.

Misgendering

Using the wrong name, pronouns, or gendered language for someone. If you make a mistake, correct yourself briefly and keep going. If it happens on purpose, it can damage trust.

Nonbinary

A term for people whose gender is not exclusively male or female. Some nonbinary people identify as both, neither, somewhere in between, or outside of those categories.

Pronouns

Words used to refer to someone when not using their name, such as she/her, he/him, they/them, or other pronouns. Use the pronouns your child asks you to use.

LGBTQ+

An umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning people, and others within the broader community. Some expanded versions, such as LGBTQIA+, includes intersex and asexual identities.

Queer

A word some people use to describe identities that are not straight or cisgender. Some people embrace the word. Others do not. Use the language your child uses for themselves.

Cisgender

A term for someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Thank you, dad.



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You don't have to do this alone.

Connect with The Dads Foundation for community, resources, retreats, and support from dads who are learning, repairing, and showing up too.

thedadsfoundation.org

**LOVE
STANDS
STRONG**





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