Guide to coming out as transgender to your straight partner or spouse

OurPath, which assists Straight Partners and Partners of Trans People after discovery or disclosure of their partner's LGBT+ identity, affirms that everyone deserves to live as their authentic selves. But it can take time to figure out just what or who our authentic self is. According to the Pew Research Center, for LGBT+ people, "realizing their sexual orientation or gender identity and sharing that information with family and friends is often a gradual process that can unfold over a series of years." If these LGBT+ people are married or otherwise committed to a partner, those partners are part of this process, whether they are aware of it or not. This is why coming out in the best way possible to your partner or spouse matters.

A quick review of the Human Rights Council's resources for coming out includes articles on coming out at work, coming out to your doctor, coming out to extended family, and coming out when you are BIPOC. Sadly, there are no resources listed for coming out to your partner or spouse.

After years of listening to Partners of Trans People share what helped and what hurt when their Transgender Partner came out, we've compiled this Guide to Coming Out as Transgender to Your Partner or Spouse. OurPath has learned that while coming out will always be challenging for both the Trans Partner and the Cisgender Partner, much of the trauma and strife associated with coming out and transition is avoidable. Partners and spouses deserve a respectful transition to whatever is next. NOTE: This guide balances the Cisgender Partner's perspective of the coming out experience with the transgender partner's experience. This focus does not invalidate the Transgender Partner's perspective or experience. The two perspectives can and do exist simultaneously. We also recognize that sexuality and gender are two different aspects of a person. This guide is for aspects of gender transition, not sexuality of a partner. Please consult other Our Path resources for situations of hidden and/or discovered sexuality. It is also important to note that a partner may transition in a gay or lesbian relationship as well and we have attempted to use inclusive language considering non-straight relationship types.

OurPath hopes you are able to use these guidelines during your coming out and transition. Afterall, when one person in a family undergoes a gender transition, the entire family must transition to a new normal, whatever that new normal may be. When you know what to expect in terms of possible responses from your Cisgender Partner and children, you can better prepare your coming out. And when you come out in a way that is compassionate toward your Cisgender Partner's and children's experiences, in the long run, this paves the way for a healthier transition for the entire family. And that benefits everyone, including you.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

Here are a few comments from Cisgender Partners about the way their Transgender Partner handled their coming out and how it impacted them:

CISGENDER PARTNER QUOTES

"When my partner came out to me as trans, they said, 'my therapist told me that once you know, this is your story too and you have every right to tell anyone. I accept that you are going to need to tell some people to get support.' That meant a lot to me."—*Victoria*

"My partner asked what she could "dial up or dial down" to make things easier for me. Unfortunately for me, marriage to a woman wasn't possible, but I still can appreciate that part."—*Jan*

"My ex permanently gave me Mother's Day on our parenting plan schedule. I didn't have to fight for it and I was so relieved."—*Renee*

"At least initially, she was empathetic to how I was feeling about her transition. She understood it was hard for me to find out I was married to a woman all these years without knowing it."—*Jean*

"She waited until we were legally separated before she did any medical transitioning. It was too painful for me to watch. Her friends said I was impeding her transition and that was selfish of me, but I was devastated, and I was grieving for the loss of my husband."—*Melanie*

"I wish she had understood that being married to a woman was as inauthentic for me as her living as a man was for her."—*Alyson*

"After my partner informed me that he didn't fell like his authentic self, I was destroyed. I felt betrayed and erased. Didn't we just spend 18 years together? After the cry of my life I was so angry I could barely think straight."—*Suzy*

PLANNING YOUR COMING OUT
to minimize trauma to your partner and family

Discerning and then coming to terms with your gender identity can be a long process, and it is both okay and normal if you don't have all the answers right now. Any answers you do have form a good starting point for a discussion with your partner. Expect changes and adjustments in your own feelings as you continue to process your gender identity. Know that you are doing

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

the right thing by coming out, telling the truth, and taking a step toward a more authentic life. In doing so, you are also allowing your partner to begin their process of living a more authentic life.

Many Transgender Partners agonize over how to tell their spouses or partners the truth, fearing they will hurt them. But secrecy and deception are far more destructive in the long run. When, where and how you come out to your spouse or partner can lay the groundwork for a more respectful, less traumatic transition to your family's new normal.

- **When to Come Out:** Avoid coming out to your partner on holidays, birthdays, anniversaries or vacations. You run the risk that those days will have negative associations for your partner going forward.
- **Where to Come Out:** Choose a private location. Partner reactions vary widely. Disclosing in a public place deprives your partner of the dignity of their honest reaction, and they deserve to have their reaction, whatever it might be.
- **The Setting:** Create a window of free time for you and your partner, (e.g., a Friday after work). Arrange for the kids and other family members to stay elsewhere during that time. Leave the time open for you and your partner to talk, cry, sleep, yell, and grieve.
- **Holding Space:** It will not be easy but do your best to "hold space" for your partner's reaction. With the exception of abuse, do your best to be present for all of it.
  NOTE: The intense emotions of confusion and anger are often a normal part of a Cisgender Partner's response. In and of themselves, these emotions do not constitute abuse or transphobia.
- **Your Approach:** Come out with compassion, empathy, honesty and respect for your partner. It is likely that this is not something they ever expected to happen when you began your relationship. They may have made a different choice at the time if they had known you were trans. They need time to both have a reaction and absorb the information. Do not insist that your partner accept your transgender identity. That is their choice, and their acceptance may evolve over time. Both you and your partner deserve a relationship based on honesty, transparency and respect. Remember, this is the person you chose to live your life with; they may be the mother or father to your children. They deserve to be treated well in this process. Your partner is not the enemy.
- **Your Truth:** Tell your partner the truth. Half-truths, evasions, and equivocation only erode trust and add to your partner's confusion and betrayal in the long run. A partner can tell when you are deflecting, giving non-answers to legitimate questions, or skirting issues. This creates further breaches of trust. Telling only what you think is "necessary,"

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

either to protect your partner's feelings or to protect yourself from their reaction, only prolongs the healing process. Additionally, if you have children and will need to co-parent them, building a truthful new relationship with your Cisgender Partner will be the best way to move forward for you, your Cisgender Partner and your children.

- **Take a Break:** Be willing to walk away from the conversation and come back to it if you or your partner need to do so. This process did not happen overnight—disclosure to your partner will have its own timeline, too. Take your partner's cues as a guide to continue conversation.

- **Validate Your Partner's Feelings:** This disclosure may be traumatic for your spouse or partner, as well as your children. Acknowledge and validate your partner's feelings verbally. For example, "I understand you're feeling scared/angry/confused, etc., because of what I'm sharing. I know you are caught off guard by this information." Refrain from continuing with a "but" statement or any type of justification for this disclosure.

- **Responsibility:** Take responsibility for the pain this is causing, even if you didn't intend for it to happen this way. You are not at fault for who you are, but you are responsible for how you may have behaved. Taking responsibility is empowering and goes a long way toward your partner's healing, as well as your own.

- **Apologies:** People are responsible for their decisions and the resulting consequences. Infidelity, lying, deflecting, gaslighting, denial, script-flipping, and boundary violations all harm your partner's psychological well-being. They undermine your partner's ability to trust themselves, their intuition and their own reality. You are accountable for your behavior, regardless of any justifications for it. Leave space for your partner to take their time to recover from this. After disclosure, many spouses and partners feel as though their past has been rewritten, and they have to explore a very different future than they might have envisioned. This is a disorienting experience. We encourage individual counseling as much as possible.

- **What About Your Grievances In the Relationship:** Resist the urge to point out your partner's flaws. This is not the moment to air a list of your grievances. Those grievances are irrelevant to the question of both your sexualities or gender identities, and whether those sexualities/gender identities make you fundamentally compatible as a couple. Often, that list of grievances is a reflection of the underlying lack of sexual/gender compatibility that had existed in the relationship. If you decide to continue as a couple, you can address those other partnership grievances separately.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

- **Whom to Come Out to First:** Respect your partner enough to tell them first (with the exception of a therapist, counselor or religious leader who can support you during this process). Your partner has the right to know material information about their own relationship before anyone else, including family and friends. Telling others outside the relationship could lead to a deeper sense of betrayal for the Cisgender Partner.

MY PARTNER ALREADY DISCOVERED OR SUSPECTS I'M TRANS

What if My Partner Discovered? If you have been experimenting with cosmetic changes, it is possible that your Cisgender Partner knows about this, either because they have discovered evidence or because you have already discussed this much. In fact, you may have already discussed how far you intend to go with your transition, and what your partner's boundaries are. If your partner has created a boundary, it needs to be respected, and your partner should not be expected to move their own boundary if they choose not to. Know that each time a boundary is crossed without transparency or disclosure, this is likely experienced as a boundary violation by your Cisgender Partner. Repeated boundary violations have a cumulative negative effect on the psyche of the Cisgender Partner that can have ramifications on their ability to trust others and themselves in future relationships. Boundary violations are serious. Your Cisgender Partner cannot stop your transition, but you can both be transparent in how you navigate it. If you have discussed your partner's boundaries, you also need to discuss when you are feeling compelled to cross them. You may need to renegotiate a new boundary together. For example, many Cisgender Partners find out after the fact that their Transgender Partners are wearing makeup outside of the house or have already started HRT (hormone replacement therapy). This can feel like a tremendous betrayal if they have already said that HRT is a boundary for them. (Again, they cannot stop your transition, but they do have a right to decide what their own limits for remaining in the relationship are).

HOW YOUR PARTNER MAY RESPOND TO YOUR DISCLOSURE

- **Difficult Emotions:** Shock, anger, confusion, betrayal, rage, sadness, grief and depression are common reactions to disclosure of a partner's LGBT+ status. Some Straight and/or Cisgender Partners may initially react with more concern for their LGBT+ partner and forget to care for themselves, but they will still have their own feelings. These emotions may evolve, intensify, lessen and resurface again repeatedly over an extended period of time, even years. Many Straight and/or Cisgender Partners show symptoms consistent with Complex-PTSD and Relationship Betrayal Trauma. As difficult as this may be for you, be honest with your partner, and be kind. They are at the start of the process in coming to terms with this change to their relationship with

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

you, whereas you have likely already had months or years to process your sexuality/gender identity.

- **Answer Honest Questions Honestly:** Your partner may have a lot of questions. Common questions include:
    - How long have you been questioning your sexuality/gender identity?
    - How long have you known you were transgender?
    - Did you lie to me about who you are when we first met?
    - Why didn't you tell me sooner? Have you been lying for the entire relationship?
    - Why couldn't you trust me with this?
    - Why did you marry me/commit to me?
    - Did you use me as a "beard"?
    - Did you use me for children?
    - Did you ever really love me?
    - Was our marriage/partnership a fraud?

  These are difficult questions. Tell the truth as best you can in response to these questions but do your best to deliver hard truths with compassion. If you've known for awhile, or suspected, or dealt with confusing feelings from the time you were an adolescent, tell your partner. If you are still grappling with your sexuality or gender identity, that is ok to say. This honesty is crucial to healing for you both. Some couples report more intimacy post disclosure, because it is the most honest communication they have had during their entire relationship.

- **Boundary Violations:** Gender transition is often a quest to find how far a trans person must transition until they feel at home in their body and identity. This engenders a difficult period of limbo for Cisgender Partners. They may try to negotiate boundaries, "I'm ok with you wearing makeup at home, but can we agree before you start wearing makeup in public?" Often the trans partner can accept a temporary limitation, but eventually they may need to exceed that limitation, and they may feel the need to do so in secret for fear of the Cisgender Partner's response. This sets up a harmful dynamic where the boundaries of the Cisgender Partner are continually set, pushed and ultimately violated. This has profound impacts on the emotional well-being and trust levels for Cisgender Partners. Communicate honestly with your Cisgender Partner

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

before a boundary violation occurs. Negotiate honestly and in good faith. Ultimately, the Cisgender Partner cannot control the pace or depth of your transition, and this may contribute to a feeling that their own lives are beyond their control. You can mitigate this by discussing the phases of your transition openly.

- **Duration of Partnership and Age of Coming Out:** When a marriage or partnership is of significant duration, it can be particularly difficult for a Cisgender Partner to cope with their partner coming out. Not only do they have a sense of losing their past (an entire life and marriage was not what it seemed to be), but they have a sense of losing their future too (dreams of the future they envisioned with you go up in smoke). The financial considerations of late-in-life divorce may mean some partners have to return to work just when they were hoping to retire. In addition, many face emotional and logistical barriers to dating again in later life and may feel there are no more chances for them to find authentic love and partnership in their remaining years. This can cause tremendous psychological stress. If you are coming out after decades of partnership, be especially sensitive to the remarkable changes this may mean for your partner—both for the life they have already lived and the life they anticipated living.

- **Will they still love me if I'm trans?** Maybe, maybe not. While some Cisgender Partners are able to and choose to "love the person, not the gender," other people "love the person, and the gender." While your sexuality and gender identity are intrinsic to you, so your partner's sexuality and gender identity is intrinsic to them. Some partners can and choose to adapt to having a trans partner. Other partners cannot or choose not to adapt because their own authentic sexuality means they want to be with someone of the opposite sex. This is not about transphobia, this is about authentic sexual identity and expression. Some people can be in same-gender relationships, others cannot. Still other Cisgender Partners separate love from sexual attraction. While they may continue to love their transgender partner, they may not remain sexually attracted to them during or after transition. This is discussed more below.

- **Transphobia:** Cisgender Partners are often uncomfortable expressing normal anger, grief or confusion to their Trans Partner or in public because those emotions may be mistaken as transphobia. This has a silencing effect on Cisgender Partners. Expressing anger over behavior, grief over loss, and confusion over a new and unexpected reality are normal when learning your partner is LGBT+. Also, being angry with one's spouse or partner does not extrapolate to anger at the entire LGBT+ Community. Many Cisgender Partners are and remain LGBT+ allies post disclosure. Anger at their own spouse or partner does not mean they do not support or empathize with LGBT+ people in general.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

- **Complex Trauma:** Depending on the length of your marriage or partnership, your partner may feel their youth, or their lives have been stolen from them. They may feel your marriage or partnership was a lie or a fraud. These are difficult feelings to navigate, and they are grounded in complex trauma. OurPath highly recommends competent therapy for all partners in the relationship.

- **Rewriting History:** Your Cisgender Partner may feel as if their memories of your family life are being erased or denied, especially if they are being asked to make a cognitive adjustment to their memories that is not in alignment with how they experienced them (e.g., to think of you as the opposite gender in a past context). They may feel anger or even rage at being asked to re-write or recontextualize their own life history and experiences. For example, if you choose to remove physical evidence of yourself from before your transition (e.g., family photos), your partner may feel like their own family history with you is being erased, which may cause significant distress or cognitive dissonance. Navigating this dissonance requires tremendous psychological support from qualified professionals.

- **New Identity:** Just as you are transitioning to a new identity, your Cisgender Partner may have to grapple with theirs. They may question their own sexuality in light of your coming out as trans. They may wonder, "can I be a lesbian/gay? Do I want to identify as a lesbian/gay? Are those labels and identities authentic to me?" Cisgender Partners must be given grace and space to work through their own identity issues in response to a partner coming out as trans.

- **Damaged Trust:** Many Cisgender Partners grapple with severely damaged trust in themselves and others as the result of disclosure or discovery. Being in partnership with a trans person without their knowledge or consent can be profoundly disorienting. They experience cognitive dissonance trying to reconcile the version of you they thought they knew and the real you they are just learning about. Telling the truth about the nature, depth and duration of your feelings will help them learn to trust the feelings new partners express to them and help them avoid the repercussions of feeling they cannot trust their partner's word. As difficult as this may be for you, be honest with your partner, and be kind. They are at the start of the process in coming to terms with this change to their relationship with you, whereas you have likely already had months or years to process your sexuality or identity.

- **Sexual Relationships:** The gender transition of a spouse or partner often presents new challenges to the sexual relationship of the couple. Here are some areas that may be impacted:

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

- Changes to body feel and function as a result of medical transition.
- Changes to the sexual identity and sexual expression/sexual behavior of the transgender partner.
- Questioning or reconceptualizing sexual identity and sexual expression for the Cisgender Partner.
- Changes to feelings of attraction and desire for either partner.
- Changes to feelings of emotional connection for either partner.

It is normal for couples to do any or all of the following while navigating changes to their sexual relationship:

- Take breaks from sexual intimacy.
- Explore other, less conventional ways of exploring sexuality together.
- Experience changes to their attraction for their partner.

It is critical that both partners:

- Be honest and communicates about needs and boundaries.
- Give each other full permission to initiate, demure, accept or decline any and all sexual contact.
- Understand that attraction and desire are fueled by complex emotional, psychological and physiological factors and cannot be compelled.
- Do not shame or pressure the other partner for withdrawing or initiating sexual activity.
- Be sensitive and respectful in how they turn each other down.

- **Loving the person, not their gender:** Many Cisgender Partners often hear the phrase, "love the person, not the gender." For some Cisgender Partners, the gender identity or expression of their trans partner will not make a material difference to their feelings of love, romantic attraction or sexual attraction for the trans partner. For other Cisgender Partners, it will make a tremendous difference. It is vital Cisgender Partners are not shamed or invalidated if gender identity/expression are linked to their own feelings of sexual/romantic attraction toward their trans partner. They need permission to "love the person, and the gender," in alignment with their own authentic sexualities.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

YOU'VE COME OUT TO YOUR PARTNER. NOW WHAT?

The good news is that it's possible for you to work through this together as a couple and a family. Emotions will run high for some time. Release the pressure to have the answers or make any long-term decisions in the moment of, and the days and weeks following, disclosure. It is normal for the situation to change on a daily or even hourly basis.

Each individual will need to process disclosure in their own way and determine how it impacts their desires for the relationship going forward.

- **Immediate Divorce?** Sometimes both partners agree early on that the marriage or partnership cannot continue. Sometimes the LGBT+ Partner wants to divorce immediately, and the Cisgender Partner insists the couple can still "make it work." Other times, the Cisgender Partner wants out right away, and the LGBT+ Partner wants to keep the family together.

- **Make it work?** Sometimes both partners want to see if they can make a their relationship work. Cultural and family values play a role in these decisions, as do financial considerations, living arrangements and community consequences.

- **Fluid Situation:** Whatever your immediate situation, your relationship dynamics will change as you both process the disclosure and subsequent steps of transition. Decisions arrived at in the early days post disclosure or discovery may shift over time. Leave room for things to evolve as processing and healing progress. Stay open and communicate honestly about changes in feelings and desires.

- **Renewed Intimacy:** Some couples do go through a "honeymoon" period initiated by the increased honesty and intimacy of disclosure. Straight and Cisgender Partners in this situation report that the disclosure conversation was "the most honest we've been with each other in years." This may lead to a renewed sexual interest between the couple. If this is the case with you and your partner, be honest with each other about any prior sexual liaisons outside the marriage, agree to STI testing together, and use safe sex practices such as latex condoms until everyone's health is assured.

- **Whom to Tell?** Disclosure is a sensitive topic for many couples and conflicts can arise about whom to tell and when. Both partners may have different ideas about whom to tell/not tell and why. Discuss with your Cisgender Partner whom you will come out to and why, develop a plan and do your best to adhere to it.

    - **Disclosure for the purpose of support.** Both partners need support. The Cisgender Partner may need to disclose your transgender status to a therapist, counselor or

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

support network such as OurPath. This is critical for their own mental health and wellbeing. Your partner has a right to receive emotional support, and they will very likely need it during this time. Being in the closet with you is stressful and can have adverse impacts on your partner's mental health. Trusted confidantes are essential. Encourage them to get support from safe, neutral and trustworthy sources.

- **Coming out to family, friends, community.** As the trans partner, you may or may not be ready to come out to your broader community. Conversely, your Cisgender Partner may or may not be ready for your transgender identity to be made public. Respect each other by discussing disclosures ahead of time and assessing the consequences of disclosure on each other and the family.

- **Personal Boundaries:** Many Cisgender Partners report that personal boundary violations are an issue during their partner's gender transition. Cisgender Partners (and all members of the household, including children), must be able to establish boundaries when it comes to the following:

  - Sharing clothing, jewelry, accessories.
  - Sharing lingerie, underwear.
  - Sharing makeup or personal grooming/hygiene products.

  Cisgender Partners may have no problem sharing their belongings, or they may want clear boundaries such as no sharing at all, or not sharing without permission. These boundaries help Partners of Trans People to have a sense of agency at a time when little is within their control. They cannot stop a partner from transitioning, but they can insist that their property be respected, and it needs to be.

LANGUAGE

- **New Names and Pronouns:** If you are transgender you may choose a new name and new pronouns. Your partner, extended family and children need time and grace to adjust. Language is as cognitive as it is habitual, and changes are difficult. They will make mistakes. These mistakes are not necessarily evidence of transphobia or that they reject your new identity. Some partners may not cooperate with your language preferences, feeling instead that the new language is not in alignment of their understanding of their own experience of your relationship. They married a person of one gender, and to acknowledge that partner is the opposite gender upends their sense of their own reality and negates their own history, and that can be profoundly destabilizing to the psyche. This is complex psychological territory and must be handled with care. Just as your

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

Cisgender Partner cannot stop or control your transition, you cannot compel or control language use from someone else. This being said, if you feel that you are being intentionally misgendered you are more than in your rights to express how this makes you feel and what your wishes are for your own mental safety.

- **Titles:** If the couple has children, some trans partners may request to be called by the honorific of the other partner. Male-to-female trans people may want to be called "Mom," and female-to-male trans people may want to be called "Dad." Some Cisgender Partners may have no issues with sharing parental titles, but others will. This must not automatically be taken as a sign of prejudice or transphobia. Human beings have attachments to their identities and roles within a family, and what those titles mean to each individual is valid. Language also comes with various emotional attachments for children, and the loss of those attachments (such as the name and identity of "dad") must be allowed to be grieved. Outcomes tend to be better for families when the entire family discusses what the trans parent will be called. "Maddy" is one example of a hybrid of "mom" and "daddy." When families work together and validate the feelings of all involved, everyone can move forward with new language that is respectful to all family members.

- **Mother's Day & Father's Day:** In addition to honorifics, there's the question of Mother's Day and Father's Day. As with the titles "mom" and "dad," Cisgender Partners may or may not be okay sharing these holidays. Creative solutions, such as an alternative day of celebration, seem to work in situations where one parent chooses not to share the holiday. Being unwilling to share a holiday is not necessarily an indication of prejudice.

THE IMPACT OF COMING OUT PUBLICLY ON YOUR CISGENDER PARTNER

When you are ready to come out publicly, you may receive praise and congratulations, depending on your social or cultural environment. In more conservative or religious circles this may be less so, and instead of being congratulated, the Transgender Partner may be criticized, shunned or excommunicated.

- **Public Response:** Watching you receive public congratulations and support may be very difficult for your Cisgender Partner. They're seeing people celebrate something that has devastated them. Seeing you be congratulated and told you are brave for living authentically is a reminder to your partner that they were part of your "inauthentic" life, which can feel hurtful. The public response from your friends, family, and/or community may also be negative. The Cisgender Partner may feel that attacks upon you

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

reflect on them as well. Either of you may be criticized, shunned or excommunicated. In either case, the Cisgender Partner may have feelings of resentment and anger.

- **Isolation:** People are often unsure of what to say to or how to treat Cisgender Partners. It can be difficult balancing joy for the Transgender Partner coming out and empathy for the Cisgender Partner who is left bewildered and hurt. This leads to Cisgender Partners being treated like an uncomfortable afterthought or being ignored altogether. You are the best advocate for your Cisgender Partner. While coming out and living this new life is an exciting and scary time for you, understand that the Cisgender Partner will be facing a much different scary time. They are unsure of their past, present, and their future.

- **New Relationships:** If you move on with a new partner, especially quickly after the ending of your relationship, it may be difficult for your Cisgender Partner. While you may have been grappling with your gender identity for years, they have only just found out about it. While you have had a long time to process this, they haven't. You may have already grieved the loss of your relationship, while they have only just begun to do so. Be kind and understanding.

- **New Personas:** Your Cisgender Partner is trying to reconcile the person they thought you were with who you are now, which can be highly traumatic. You may be changing your appearance, your friends, your hobbies and interests and your lifestyle. You may now appear to be living life unfettered (even if the reality is rockier for you), while your partner may be feeling devastated, abandoned and/or traumatized. It may be disappointing or even hurtful that your partner cannot be happy for your new changes, but they need the opportunity to grieve the relationship they thought they were in.

- **Moving On:** Sometimes the Cisgender Partner is an uncomfortable reminder of an inauthentic life for the Transgender Partner. The Transgender Partner is eager to put that chapter of life behind them. Being "a painful reminder" to a Transgender Partner can itself be a painful reminder that the relationship the Cisgender Partner thought they were in was not an authentic one. It takes time to heal from feeling this way.

- **Grieving Together:** Your Cisgender Partner may be wondering why you don't seem to be grieving as they are. They may wonder if they ever mattered to you at all if you move on quickly. Not being able to grieve with you is another loss for your Cisgender Partner. Again, you are your partner's best advocate during this time, and with kindness and help through this process, they can be yours as well.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

- **Second puberty:** When a trans person begins HRT, especially in adulthood, they undergo a "second puberty." According to Dr. Maddie Deutsch, Associate Professor of Clinical Family & Community Medicine at the University of California – San Francisco (UCSF), and Medical Director for UCSF Transgender Care, "Puberty is a roller coaster of emotions, and the second puberty that you will experience during your transition is no exception." This phase can impact everyone in the family. It can be difficult and confusing for your Cisgender Partner to witness, and it is especially important to be mindful of children during this time. Do your best to provide as much stability and consistency for your children even while you are undergoing your own "second puberty."

NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CISGENDER PARTNER

Whether you remain together in a Mixed Orientation Relationship, a Same Gender Relationship, separate or divorce, negotiating the rules of engagement, permissions and boundaries of your future relationship with respect and honesty is critical, especially if there are children who need to be co-parented in a healthy way.

- **Monogamy or Open Relationship?** Some Mixed Orientation Couples choose to stay together, either in monogamous relationships or relationships open to outside sexual partners. Negotiating boundaries is key.

- **Financial considerations:** Gender transition is costly. Financial outlays for procedures, new wardrobes and other expenses must be negotiated for the financial health and wellbeing of both partners and the family. Developing a financial plan or budget for those expenses is critical. In some cases, transition costs can easily run over $100,000. Medical procedures may or may not be covered by insurance. The financial costs of transition impact the financial wellbeing of both partners and entire families, whether a couple remains together or not. Transition can cause families to accrue significant debt, which is shared by both partners if they are married. In cases of divorce, marital debt is generally split 50/50 in the US. It is critical that couples negotiate who is responsible for what expenses and how those expenses will be paid as soon as possible. You may even consider signing a legal financial agreement indicating who is responsible for expenses. It is vital that Cisgender Partners have agency over their financial wellbeing and can assert financial boundaries if they need to when it comes financing gender transition.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

- Medical expenses can include:
    - HRT (hormone replacement therapy).
    - GAS (Gender Affirmation Surgery).
    - Mastectomy or breast augmentation.
    - Hair plugs, hair removal.
- Non-medical expenses may include:
    - New wardrobe.
    - New hair and makeup.
    - Voice training.

HEALING AND MENTAL HEALTH

This kind of disclosure often takes longer to heal from than many issues a marriage/partnership confronts. There are multiple layers to sort. Your partner may be angry with you for a very long time, perhaps even years. This is typical. Even under the best of circumstances, anger is a normal part of the healing process. The more honest the LGBT+ Partner is in disclosing to their Cisgender Partner, and the more that mutual empathy and respect is displayed, the healthier the process is.

- **Mental Health Issues:** Many Cisgender Partners continue to show mental health impacts long after such impacts may resolve in normal divorces. Depression, anxiety, suicidality and PTSD are all increased in Cisgender Partners of trans people. This is compounded when the Cisgender Partner's grief is disenfranchised or ambiguous. Disenfranchised grief occurs when someone's grief is socially discounted. Often Cisgender Partners are told they should be happy for their trans partners, because now they can live authentically. Cisgender Partners often suffer Ambiguous Loss without closure if they never get answers to their questions such as, "how long have you known you are trans?" or, "why didn't you tell me you were transgender sooner?"
- Coming to the conclusion that you are transgender can be a long process and often involves interaction with therapists and/or support groups. Please continue to support your own mental health needs as it will also help you process your thoughts and emotions as you support you Cisgender Partner.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

COMING OUT TO THE KIDS

Kids often do adjust well to having an LGBT+ parent, provided they still feel loved and secure, and they are given open, honest (age appropriate) information and space to express their feelings, and both of their parents work toward a healthy and honest relationship. If both parents remain actively involved in their lives despite the changes, and they are loved and a main priority to their parents, adjustment can be positively supported. Often, the earlier children learn about an LGBT+ parent, the better they adjust.

- **Processing the News:** Kids have their own processing time and methods. For you and your partner/spouse, this is a life-changing event. For the kids, this is a life-defining event. Kids need security, love and consistency to process the news and the changes. Allow the kids to have their feelings and express themselves and validate those feelings. Give your kids as much stability and love as you and your partner are able to.
- **Whole Family Approach:** The emotional processes of both parents affect the kids. Take a whole family approach to mental health support and processing, where everyone getting healthy support is also best for each individual in the family. Make your kids' well-being a priority, and that means making your partner's wellbeing a priority. How you treat your partner–their other parent–matters to the kids. If they see you and your partner working together, respecting each other, and caring about each other, that will go a long way toward your children's adjustment as family dynamics change.
- **Disclosure:** How disclosure is handled may impact your children's own self-worth, future relationships, and many aspects of their lives. While it's never possible to do it perfectly, it's worth it to do it in a healthy, loving and respectful way. This is a whole family experience. You will often hear that "kids are resilient." While this is true, it is not permission to assume that your children will bounce back healthily no matter what you do or how you behave once you are out of the closet. Answer any of their questions in honest, age-appropriate ways with as much information as you and your partner are prepared to disclose.
- **Discovery:** If your children discover something that points to your trans identity, speak with your partner about it first, even if this involves disclosure, and decide together how to talk to your child about what they've seen or heard.
- **Family Secrets:** Family secrets are toxic to children and families. Children can usually tell when there is something being hidden in the family, and that pattern of secrecy and mistrust stays with them unconsciously, having negative impacts upon their own relationships in the future.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.

- **Making Your Child Your 'Secret Keeper':** Sometimes kids discover something on their parent's computer that points to an affair, or they glimpse a parent dressed as the opposite gender in private. If your children discover something about your trans identity, never make your child or children your secret keeper. They should never be in a position of knowing more about your trans identity than their other parent or siblings. This is damaging to the child's psyche and may have profound negative consequences that can follow them into their adult lives and relationships.

- **LGBT+ Children:** Keep in mind that your children may be LGBT+ themselves. In some cases, LGBT+ children have had difficulty coming out themselves because the process of a parent coming out was full of angst, fighting, and acrimony between their parents. Do your best to avoid creating a negative environment for your entire family during the coming out process. The healthier the transition the entire family has, the easier it is on all the kids, LGBT+ or not.

- **Introducing New Partners:** Be mindful when introducing new partners to your children. Being out can lead to a new period of dating and welcoming new relationships. Newly out people may date several new people in short order. This often results in kids being introduced to a revolving door of new adults, to whom they can get attached. This is difficult for the kids if those new adults are not around for long. Consider waiting for a reasonable period before introducing your children to a new adult. This increases the likelihood those adults will be a more stable influence in your kids' lives.

OurPath hopes you are able to use this guide to transition to a more authentic life. And we hope that your Straight or Cisgender Partner will find greater authenticity in their own lives, now that you have disclosed this important part of your identity that impacts both of you.

Copyright © 2021 OurPath, Inc. All rights reserved.