

Becoming a Superhero: 101

The “How-To’s” of Being the Best Advocate for Your Gender-Variant Child

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Part II

Accessing Information and Services

One of the first things you can do, starting now, is to collect information – information about gender-variant children, about the services that are available, and about the specific things you can do to protect your child and become the best advocate for their needs. Collecting and using the information available on transgender issues is a critical part of being a parent of a gender-variant child. However, in addition to researching the subject, you must research *the research*. The Internet is a great starting point for resource gathering, but keep in mind that it is also a public forum where anyone can make an assertion or claim. In order to verify the integrity of a source, you will have to ask questions and build a strategy.

First, does the source have a bias that could affect the reliability of the information? While *your* motivation is locating resources that will help you help your child, you are also researching a subject that is emotionally, politically, and culturally charged. Steer clear of moral debates or personal opinions where you feel attacked or forced to defend yourself or your child – When considering a source, ask yourself why they are contributing to this conversation. Keep an eye out for red flags that might indicate a hidden agenda. Who owns or is sponsoring

the web site? Ownership information can usually be obtained by looking up the domain name registration record in the Whois database (<http://www.whois.sc>). Advertising can also assist you in determining objectivity. Does it influence the content? Are you being provided with accurate, objective information, or is the author just trying to sell you something (Gil, 2012)? Should the website even have advertising? Remember that *anyone* can create a website or pay to have a book published.

Next, if the information provided is from a single author or authors, verify their expertise and credentials. What is their educational background? Are they considered an expert in this field of study? You can independently verify college degrees by contacting the school's Office of Registrar, and a basic web search may help you confirm the author's level of expertise. Even something as simple as spelling or grammar errors, or the over-all "look" of a website can provide you with insight into the quality of the resource.

Fact-check the content. Can you find two or more reliable resources that provide the same information? If it is a research article, has it been published in a **reputable** academic journal? If you are unsure, ask your Primary Care Physician or a Librarian. While you're at it, ask for their recommendations for additional resources. Good research will provide thorough citations and references; use those to your benefit as well. In addition, be aware of the date of publication. You are obtaining resources in a field of study that is rapidly

expanding and evolving; the accuracy of information is greatly influenced by time-sensitivity (Virtual Chase, 2006). A few good places to start are:

- **Boston Children's Hospital** – Gender Management Service (GeMS) Clinic
(<http://www.childrenshospital.org/clinicalservices/Site2280/mainpageS2280PO.html>).
- **Children's National Medical Center** – Gender and Sexuality Psychosocial Program
<http://www.childrensnational.org/DepartmentsandPrograms/default.aspx?id=6178&Type=Program&Name=Gender%20and%20Sexuality%20Development%20Program>
- **The World Professional Association for Transgender Health** (WPATH)
(www.wpath.org)
- **Center of Excellence for Transgender Health** – University of California, San Francisco (www.transhealth.ucsf.edu).

Use the same caution with referrals to services. Who is the provider? Are they reputable? What services are being offered? Do they have the support of the medical community? Why is this service being recommended? How will this benefit you and your child? Are you able to obtain references from other parents and health care professionals?

Finally, seek out other parents. There are other families like yours, and at one time, they were where you are right now. They have already gathered much of the information that will be helpful to you, and they *want* to help. Start by checking out websites, online forums, discussion groups and blogs, by and for parents and families of gender-variant children. In addition to obtaining a lot of really good advice and information, connecting with these families can be an enormous comfort. Some suggestions are:

- **TransYouth Family Allies** (TYFA) – Assistance and support for families with trans and gender-variant children (www.imatyfa.org).
 - Resources for Parents, Caregivers, Youth, Educators, Healthcare Practitioners, y recursos para las Familias en español
 - Family support systems, personal stories and profiles, parent blogs, online forums
 - Research resources, suggested reading, educational programs, articles, additional links
- **Gender Spectrum** – Provides education, training, and support to help create a gender sensitive and inclusive environment for all children and teens. (www.genderspectrum.org)
 - In addition to child and family resources, you can join other parents and caregivers in a national monthly Parent Support Conference Call. 5:00 - 7:00 pm (PST) on the last Wednesday of each month. For more information or to sign up, phone: 510-567-3977, or email info@genderspectrum.org.

- **PFLAG** – Is a national organization with state and local chapters that provide education, information, and support for parents and family with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) family members (www.pflag.org).
 - PFLAG's Transgender Network – or TNET – specifically focuses on support for transgender people and their parents, families, and friends.
- **Mermaids** – Family and Individual Support for Teenagers and Children with Gender Identity Issues (<http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk>).
- National **Gender Odyssey Conference**: For families with gender variant and transgender children (<http://www.genderodysseyfamily.org>)
- **Family Acceptance Project** – Community research, intervention, education and policy initiative, developed to decrease risks for LGBT youth – in the context of their families (www.familyproject.sfsu.edu).
 - Research-based, culturally grounded approach to help ethnically, socially and religiously diverse families decrease rejection and increase support for their LGBT children.
 - The Family Acceptance Project is developing the first evidence-based family model of wellness, prevention and care to strengthen families and promote positive development and healthy futures for LGBT children and youth.

A last piece of advice on accessing resources and information concerns getting organized. Make sure to have a note pad ready when you call or meet with other parents or professionals. Write down dates, names, and key points of the conversation. You will meet many new people on this journey, and something as simple as a few details jotted down on a notepad will become invaluable. This includes writing down questions or concerns before you meet with doctors, therapists and teachers. Most people are busy and they are giving you what they can. Make it easy for them to help you by being organized.

Once you have started gathering information, create a binder or a filing system to help you keep track of medical and insurance documents, resources, and information you collect from other parents and sources. The point is to have everything in one place, even if that means tossing it in a box until you have time to organize. Down the road, you may also learn about and want to build a “Safe” Folder. The TransYouth Family Allies website provides a detailed description and tutorial (http://www.imatyfa.org/permanent_files/safefolder.html). A Safe Folder contains legal, medical, and other professional documentation related to your child’s gender identity.

Finally, advice, information, resources, and assistance can be a blessing, but always remember that you are the parent, and you know your child better than anyone else. Do your research, consult professionals and follow your gut.

Works Cited

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