



# Discussion Guide for Faces & Facets

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## *About the film:*

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This film was funded by the following: The Open Door Fund of the Community Foundation, the Colorado Coalition of PFLAG Chapters, Susan Polis Schutz, the Brett Family Foundation, PFLAG Boulder County, PFLAG Denver, the Boulder Valley Safe Schools Coalition, and the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence



## **Discussion Guide for *Faces and Facets of Transgender Experience***

### **About the Film:**

The purpose of creating this film, *Faces and Facets of Transgender Experience* is to reveal a glimpse into the lives of transgender and gender diverse people and their families in order to expand understanding and dispel misinformation and stereotypes held by some members of the general public. Our expectation is that this film will serve as a resource for families and organizations that work directly with families (i.e. counselors, clergy and medical professionals). Our hope is that viewing *Faces and Facets* will touch minds and hearts to change long-held prejudices and misconceptions as well as to change behaviors as people interact with transgender and gender diverse persons in more informed and sensitive ways.

### **How to Use this Guide:**

This guide is designed to help viewers process the issues raised in the film, consider how this film applies to their own life and interactions, engage in productive and open dialogue, and provide practical next steps to work at providing the necessary support and resource to transgender and gender diverse people and their families. Because the guide is written specifically for families, the questions below are framed to speak to families with transgender and gender diverse children and groups that work to support these families. Beyond that, suggested topics can be explored that may have specific applications that will require more research and deeper probing into issues merely mentioned in the film.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is your immediate response to the film?
2. Did you identify with any of the people in the film? Why or why not?
3. While the film reveals a glimpse into the lives of transgender and gender diverse people, think about some transgender and gender diverse communities not represented in the film (i.e. communities of color, communities from different rural and suburban regions, gender diverse/genderqueer communities, and communities of trans people who have experienced family rejection). For the trans communities not represented in the film, please identify some ways they could be better supported.
4. Describe a moment or a person in the film that especially moved you. What was it about the scene or individual that touched you?
5. What were the turning points for parents in the film in accepting their trans child? What wisdom did you gain from their experience that would be help you be supportive?

6. How would you compare/contrast the younger (20 and under) and older trans persons' attitudes and experiences presented in the film?
7. What did you learn from the film that will change the way you look at, think about, and behave when interacting with trans persons? Be specific. (Example: how to deal with pronouns.)
8. Try to identify your own personal barriers to total acceptance of transgender and gender diverse people – try to outline any conscious or subconscious prejudices you may have.
9. What are some ways you can overcome these barriers and prejudices? Think about some ways you can educate yourself and your communities about issues impacting the lives of transgender and gender diverse people.
10. Why are we so often uncomfortable when we can't tell if a person is a man or a woman? Why is it so important for most of us to know whether a person is male or female?
11. If you had a family member or colleague at work tell you that they planned to transition to a different gender, how would you respond? What would be a supportive response?
12. How could you help support a transgender person in the workplace or at school? How would you support a family with a transgender child, or a transgender person in your chapter?
13. What is your chapter doing now, and what could they be doing the future to be more inclusive?
14. If you are a part of a PFLAG chapter, what can your chapter do (i.e. outline specific steps) to be more trans-welcoming and inclusive?

### **Next Steps:**

This section is specifically designed to assist individuals, organizations and PFLAG chapters in particular to move toward being more inclusive by supporting the specific needs of families with transgender or gender diverse children.

- **Read *Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends***. Be sure to access and explore the resources included in at the end of this guide and be sure to familiarize yourself with the language transgender and gender diverse people use to describe themselves.
- **Download a copy of *Opening the Door***. The National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force developed this resource geared for LGBT organizations of any kind (from communities of faith, to social clubs, to advocacy organizations), providing both practical and big-picture ways we can all bring our goals of a fully inclusive movement into reality. It also includes the voices of LGBT leaders speaking about their real-life experiences with transgender inclusion.
- **Watch *Transgender Basics***. This 20 minute educational film defines the concepts of gender and transgender people, targeting service providers and others working with the LGBT community.
- **Reach out to your local trans support groups**. Discover how you or your local PFLAG chapter can better support and work in alliance with your community's local trans support groups.
- **Create a community calendar**. On your PFLAG webpage, consider including a community calendar of events that includes chapter meetings, along with events and meetings organized by local trans organizations. This feature will make it easier for people to find events of interest and will build a stronger, more unified community amongst different groups.
- **Be inclusive in your chapter newsletters**. Ask several trans people in your community to contribute articles that help educate the community about their lives. Also consider posting articles on trans issues to your website or blog.
- **Educate Direct Service Organizations**. Consider working with local trans organizations on educating direct service organizations – i.e. homeless shelters, hospitals and emergency medical services - on how to be more trans-inclusive. Helping service oriented organizations evolve into more trans-inclusive spaces will help preserve the dignity, well-being and sometimes the lives of trans people. Check out *Opening the Door to the Inclusion of Transgender People* a guide by the Task Force and National Center for Transgender Equality, which advises organizations and providers on how to be more trans inclusive.

- **Learn about *52 Things You Can Do for Transgender Equality*.** Developed by the National Center for Transgender Equality, this factsheet provides ideas on how to stand up for trans equality at the local and state levels.
- **Advocate with local trans organizations.** Reach out to your local trans leaders and encourage your chapter to advocate with them on lobby days to advance local, state and/or federal LGBT equality legislation.
- **Speak with a local community of faith.** Trans people practice the many religions of our world. Whatever your spiritual practice, if you are involved in a community of faith, consider talking to your community about transgender issues. Sharing these spiritual resources may help start a dialogue:
  - *Made in God's Image: A Resource for Dialogue about the Church and Gender Differences* (Reconciling Ministries Network, 2003), by Ann Thompson Cook.
  - *Transgender Journeys* (Pilgrim Press, 2003), by Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Vanessa Sheridan.

## **A Deeper Focus on the Issues – Learn the Facts, then Act:**

This section features some basic questions and answers that many people have about trans and gender nonconforming people. If you are interested in learning more, please visit [www.pflag.org/publications](http://www.pflag.org/publications) and download a free copy of *Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends*.

### **Common questions you may have**

#### **What does transgender mean?**

Transgender, or simply “trans,” is an umbrella term used to describe those who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. Like any umbrella term, many different groups of people, with different histories and experiences, get associated within the greater trans community – such groups include, but are certainly not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse androgynous, etc.

A transgender person is someone whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex assigned at birth. Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of being or feeling male, female, or something else. For example, a transgender man is a person who is assigned female at birth and identifies as male, while a transgender woman is a person who is assigned male at birth and identifies as female. Sex assignment refers to the act of a doctor inspecting a baby’s genitals at birth and declaring, “it’s a girl” or “it’s a boy” without any degree of uncertainty. In virtually all cases, parents will raise this child as a member of the assigned sex/gender without any conscious deliberation.

#### **What causes transgenderism?**

Research has examined social, biological and psychological factors; however, no single theory has been endorsed by the scientific community. Whatever the cause, supporting your loved one is critical and helps result in a more positive outcome for them.

#### **What are some differences between transgender, transsexual and genderqueer people?**

Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe any person whose gender identity does not conform to their sex assigned at birth. Often, transgender people are interested in living in the gender identity that does not conform to their assigned birth sex. The process of moving towards one’s self-determined gender identity is known as transitioning. While there is no “right” way to transition, there are some common social changes that many transgender people experience such as changing ones name, adopting different pronouns, and/or wearing clothes that more accurately communicate one’s gender identity.

A person who chooses to access hormone therapy or modify their bodies surgically to conform to their self-determined gender identity are transsexual. Transsexual persons

include both female-to-male (FTM) trans men and male-to-female (MTF) trans women. A transsexual woman is assigned male at birth and identifies as female while a transsexual man is assigned female at birth and identifies as male. Typically, transsexual people feel their bodies do not correspond with their true identities; this feeling is referred to as gender dysphoria. Transsexual people typically pursue hormone therapy along with various surgeries to overcome gender dysphoria. The high costs of hormone therapy and various trans-related surgeries are prohibitive for some, however, lacking access to these treatments does not invalidate their identities. Because transsexual people desire hormone therapy treatment and certain trans-related surgeries they are more likely to interface with legal, medical and psychiatric professionals to access this care.

A person who views their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male sometimes identifies as genderqueer, gender fluid, gender neutral, bigendered, androgynous or simply gender diverse. Such people feel that they exist psychologically between genders or beyond the notion of only male and female. People who feel this way may or may not pursue hormone therapy and/or surgical body modification and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., “ze,” “hir”). Some gender non-conforming people are comfortable with their bodies as they are regardless of how they express their gender.

Since every trans person’s narrative will be different, it is important to remember that each of our loved ones will need the space and time to determine how they wish to live and express their gender identity. Some may know and express their need to transition at a very young age while others may not share their needs until well into adulthood or even much later in life. Again, there is no right way to transition. What is important is to provide the support and resources necessary to help your loved one make the most informed decisions to help them along their journey.

### **Is this just a phase?**

If your loved one regularly asks questions about gender, has adopted a different gender identity than the one assigned to them at birth, or expresses their gender identity through clothing and accessories that go against conventional gender norms, then there is a strong possibility that this is not a phase. Also, for young children that express their gender identity in a consistent, persistent and acute manner over time indicates that this is not a phase.

The onset of puberty is a very trying time when transgender and gender non-conforming young people realize the extent of their gender dysphoria. Some may begin to feel severely depressed. Many experts, including the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA), assert that bodily interventions are the treatment of choice to add comfort to certain transgender people’s gender dysphoria. Some families and friends decide to pursue puberty suppression treatments for their loved ones as a way to help alleviate gender dysphoria.

While bodily interventions are the “treatment of choice,” it is important to note that there is no cure for being transgender. In order to address and support your loved one’s gender identity, it is important to take advantage of any trans-friendly resources within your local community. If you cannot locate a trans-friendly support group or professional in your area, please take advantage of our *Resources* section of *Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends* and be sure to reach out to your local PFLAG chapter to receive more support information.

### **Will my loved one be safe from harm?**

With support and resources your loved one will have a better chance of living a healthy and happy life. Being affirmed in their gender identity and expression can improve their self-esteem and relieve the stress of pretending to be something that they are not.

Discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming people exists in employment, education, housing, and healthcare. The lack of adequate federal, state, and local laws and strong enforcement fail to adequately protect your loved one. The lack of legal protections can create challenges and barriers to accessing social services and public accommodations because many tend to be gender-segregated and lack clear policies on the treatment of transgender and gender non-conforming people. One small way you can begin challenging such unacceptable discrimination is to challenge transphobia when and where you feel safe to do so.

The future you envisioned for your loved one may look different now, but it is still filled with wonderful possibilities. While coming out or transitioning will not solve all of your loved one’s problems - and may in fact introduce a new set of challenges - it may make it easier for them to address them. With love and support they may be able to lead a much happier and productive life.

### **Be patient, acceptance takes time**

It is important to sort out your feelings which may at times be contradictory and confusing. Some parents, family members and friends may be relieved to have discovered the source of their loved one’s distress, others may be sad, fearful, angry or shocked; still others may feel as if their loved one has died. Give yourself the opportunity to explore these feelings, and then arm yourself with the facts. Good information will help you feel more comfortable and confident with what is taking place with your loved one and allow you to feel more supportive of the process.

**Be honest with yourself.** Many parents, family members and friends experience distress, fear and embarrassment as their loved one changes their gender presentation. *What do we tell people? What will they think? Will our church still accept us? Will our social status or lifestyle be affected by what our loved one is doing?* Sharing your questions and concerns with parents, families and friends who have gone through similar experiences can be invaluable. PFLAG will support you through this process.

**Transgender Network (TNET) Support.** There are more than 500 PFLAG chapters in the US, most of which have TNET representatives that can offer the support necessary to help you work through and share your experiences with parents, families and friends just like yourself. Representatives can offer you the support necessary to help you be more supportive and understanding. If you aren't ready for group support TNET can help match you with support services you do feel comfortable with.

**The Importance of Self-Education.** Due to the abundance of negative media portrayals of transgender and gender non-conforming people, our culture is grossly misinformed about trans-related issues. Taking the initiative to self-educate and access reputable and trustworthy information will help allay your anxieties and concerns. It is often overwhelming for your loved one to continuously educate family, friends, and peers about the transgender and gender non-conforming community. Doing your homework ahead of time will demonstrate your commitment to understanding transgender histories, experiences, and critical issues important to the community. Your loved one will appreciate these efforts. If you have questions that you feel only your loved one can best answer, ask permission and make sure your questions are presented in a sensitive manner.

## **Resources for Families with Transgender Children**

Below are some great resources from the PFLAG TNET website. You can access all of these resources with just a click of the mouse by visiting PFLAG's TNET page at [www.pflag.org/tnet](http://www.pflag.org/tnet).

### **Get Started Here: PFLAG Resources**

- **Welcoming Our Trans Families and Friends**  
Download this free guide (PDF) to get the basics on what being transgender means, how to talk about it, and how to find the resources that can support you.
- **PFLAG TNET – The Transgender Network**  
TNET is an affiliate of PFLAG created to provide support to trans, gender-variant, and genderqueer people in communities across the country through PFLAG chapters.
- **Find a PFLAG Chapter**  
There are more than 250 PFLAG chapters across the U.S. Find one near you right now.

### **Resources for Youth: Learn more and connect.**

- **Trans Youth Family Allies (TYFA)**  
TYFA provides resources to transgender and gender variant youth and their families. TYFA envisions a society free of suicide and violence in which all children are respected and celebrated. ([www.imatyfa.org](http://www.imatyfa.org))
- **Trans Youth Resources**  
This website was created to link trans youth and the people in their lives with current resources.
- **Trans Youth Support Network**  
The Trans Youth Support Network is a partnership of youth and community members working together to support trans youth in Minnesota, but offering great resources for youth everywhere.
- **Mermaids**  
A UK-based support group offering support and resources for gender-variant children, teens, and their families.
- **Beyond the Binary: A Tool Kit for Gender Identity Activism in Schools**  
The *Beyond the Binary* tool kit (created by the Transgender Law Center) was designed for student leaders, activists, and gender non-conformers who want to challenge the gender binary system in schools by ensuring gender-inclusive policies exist in schools

and by raising awareness about gender through education of students and staff about gender non-conformity and transgender issues.

- **Bending the Mold: An Action Kit for Transgender Students**

Whether you're transgender or gender non-conforming, questioning, or an ally, this kit – developed by Lambda Legal and NYAC – is designed to help you make your school a safer place. They include ideas and information to help you advocate for change. There's also an extensive list of resources to help you connect with the transgender community and find support.

- **Camp Aranu'tiq**

**The Camp Aranu'tiq** mission is to provide transgender and gender-variant youth with a safe, fun, and unique camp experience during which they are able to express gender however they are comfortable and connect with others in similar situations. It is a federally recognized, tax-exempt, nonprofit organization. It is 100% volunteer-run. It was born out of the idea that transgender and gender-variant youth needed a safe place to relate to others like them, away from home, in a beautiful rural setting where they can concentrate on what every camper loves: having fun.

### **Resources for Parents, Educators, and Service Providers:**

- **Trans Youth Family Allies (TYFA)**

TYFA works to empower children and families by partnering with educators, service providers and communities, to develop supportive environments in which gender may be expressed and respected. They envision a society free of suicide and violence in which all children are respected and celebrated.

- **Gender Spectrum**

Raising children who don't fit neatly into male or female boxes brings a wealth of questions and uncertainties. Here you will find information and support to assist you in your search for answers. ([www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org))

- **TransActive**

TransActive works to provide the necessary support to improve the quality of life of transgender and gender non-conforming children, youth and their families through education, services, advocacy and research.

- **Trans Youth Equality Foundation**

The Trans Youth Equality Foundation is based in Maine, but offers education, advocacy and support for transgender and gender non-conforming children and youth and their families everywhere by sharing information about the unique needs of this community and partnering with families, educators and service providers to help foster a healthy, caring, and safe environment for all transgender children.

- **Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Parents of Trans Youth**  
*Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Parents of Trans Youth* is the first comprehensive Canadian publication (created by Central Toronto Youth Services) to address the needs of parents and families supporting their trans children. It summarizes the experiences, strategies, and successes of a working group of community consultants – researchers, counselors, parents, advocates as well as trans youth themselves.
- **Working with Transgender Youth (Lambda Legal & Child Welfare League of America)**  
Like all young people in care, transgender youth are entitled to bias-free attention to their unique needs and to be safe in their placements and services. This guide, created by Lambda Legal and the Child Welfare League of America, provides child welfare professionals who work with transgender young people with education about transgender issues and tools to help prepare them to work sensitively with these clients.

#### **What are people saying? Media about trans youth:**

- **TYFA Media Collection**  
Find out about the work TYFA and advocates of trans youth are doing through media reports.
- **Gender in the News (from Gender Spectrum)**  
Get access to a collection of articles, websites, and multimedia resources of stories regarding gender and gender identity.
- **Hennepin County Library Book Lists**  
Hennepin County’s self-identified “trans library geek” offers recommendations of some books that trans youth may find interesting, comforting, and affirming. Many of these books can be found in libraries and available for purchase online.