



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS



Parenting a Transgender or Gender-Expansive Child: How to Protect Your Family Against False Allegations of Child Abuse

Every day, usually many times a day, parents take steps to protect their children—from small things, like making sure they wear seatbelts in the car and eat healthy food, to helping their children be confident in themselves and caring towards others. Parents take these steps to help ensure that children have what they need to develop into healthy adults and achieve their full potential. Parents raising transgender and gender-expansive children must take additional steps that they could not have anticipated when their child was first born. These parents must also prepare their child and family to cope with the possibility of negative reactions, based on fear or misinformation, to their child's gender and the family's decision to love and affirm their child for who they are.

You may have heard of situations in which teachers or other professionals make child abuse reports against parents who affirm their gender-expansive child. Although there have been a few cases where child protective services fully investigates these allegations, those cases are not common.

Understandably, the thought of responding to child abuse allegations can be scary and overwhelming. Although formal investigations are rare, there are concrete preventive steps you can take to be prepared in the unlikely event that you are contacted by child protective services.

1. *Keep a Gender Journal.* Like a diary, a gender journal catalogues your child's gender journey. This includes your child's statements about their gender and your observations about their mood, gender expression, and overall development. The journal should also detail your response as a parent, even if it may not be the most flattering or your finest parenting moment. The more contemporaneous and detailed the journal is, the better. Including pictures of your child and family as well as your child's drawings or writings can also be useful. The purpose of the journal is to demonstrate that your approach as a parent has followed a learning curve that is typical and understandable for any parent who is learning to respond to a child's new and unexpected need, and that you are following your child's lead.
2. *Consult Competent Healthcare Professionals.* In addition to supporting your child's healthy growth and development, including by supporting the child's identity, where possible, you should seek the help of trained medical and mental health providers. Healthcare professionals, ideally with experience working with transgender and gender expansive youth, should oversee your child's care and provide you with professional advice on how to navigate this process with

your child. It is equally important that you follow that advice. Not only can this help your relationship with your child, those healthcare providers can corroborate that you are maintaining a healthy level of support for your child. You should request letters from your child's healthcare providers documenting their work with your child and you as the parent, including a statement that the child is in treatment and you are appropriately supportive of and involved in treatment.

3. *Build Your Village.* Although healthcare providers are important, your community can also be an incredible resource for allaying the concerns raised by abuse and neglect allegations. The experiences of these community members can corroborate and validate your experiences. Collecting letters from community members (*i.e.* extended family, parents of your child's friends, educators, clergy) that detail their experiences with your child, especially outside of your presence, offers additional proof that you are acting to promote your child's best interests.
4. *Reach Out for Help.* Before speaking with child protective services, contact an attorney who can explain the process and advise you about your rights as a parent during the investigation. If you do not know of an attorney in your area, contact the National Center for Lesbian Rights or GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders to obtain contact information for attorneys in your area. Similarly, if you have found an attorney, but the attorney needs help with the more technical aspects of representing the parent of a transgender or gender-expansive child, the National Center for Lesbian Rights and GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders provide direct assistance to attorneys and can provide that context. You, or your attorney, can use the contact information below to reach those organizations.

National Center for Lesbian Rights
Legal Information Helpline
800.528.6257
www.nclright.org/gethelp

GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders
GLAD Answers
800.455.GLAD (4523)
www.glad.org/know-your-rights/glad-answers