

**CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER**  
Parents, Families and Friends  
of Lesbians and Gays

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## Transgender issues faced by youth are focus of January meeting

Young people who identify themselves as the opposite gender from that which their bodies indicate have special problems and challenges, in addition to those faced by all kids growing up. They are especially vulnerable and often the targets of bullying.

Describing their issues and how best to deal with them is the subject of our speaker at the monthly chapter meeting on Monday, January 16, beginning at 7:00 p.m. at Mechanicsburg Presbyterian Church, 300 East Simpson Street, Mechanicsburg.



Jeanine Ruhsam

The speaker is Jeanine Ruhsam, who has been the president of TransCentralPA ([www.transcentralpa.org](http://www.transcentralpa.org)) for the past seven years. TransCentralPA is committed to providing education and caring support for transgendered individuals, their significant others, families, friends and allies. They are also actively involved in maintaining an outreach program to provide gender education to businesses, organizations like PFLAG, educational institutions, and governmental agencies.

She is the co-founder and co-chair of the Keystone Conference: A Celebration of Gender Diversity ([www.keystone-conference.org](http://www.keystone-conference.org)) held each March in Harrisburg.

Jeanine serves on the board of directors of the LGBT Center Coalition of Central Pennsylvania and is a former board member of the International Foundation for Gender Education. She lives with her spouse in central Pennsylvania.

Monday  
January 16  
Mechanicsburg  
Presbyterian Church



## ■ Learning the lingo for transgender youth

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**Gender Identity** - Gender identity is who you are, not who you like or are attracted to. It is how you feel you were born to be--masculine, feminine or somewhere in between. This identity doesn't always match up with your biological sex, or the gender you were assigned at birth.

**Gender Dysphoria** - Feeling extremely uncomfortable (persistently in distress) with your physical sex characteristics or your sex assigned at birth.

**Gender Expression** - The way a person presents themselves to the world through clothing, hairstyles, toys and other preferences. Most people's gender expression matches up and/or is congruent with their physical sex characteristics or birth sex.

**Gender Variant** - This occurs when your gender identity or expression is different from your physical sex characteristics or birth sex.

**Gender Fluid/Gender Queer** - Someone who identifies as both male and female at once or at different times, or someone who identifies as neither male nor female, but somewhere in between.

**Affirm** - This is a term we use to acknowledge the gender identity of a person. They are not changing their gender. We are changing our perceptions of a person by what he or she has told us/expressed to us.

**Affirmed Female** - (mtf or m2f) A person who was born anatomically male but identifies as female.

**Affirmed Male** - (ftm or f2m) A person who was born anatomically female but identifies as male.

**Social Transition** - A change in appearance and or presentation in order to express your gender identity (usually changes in clothing, hair or make up).

**Medical Transition** - Medical intervention to alter the physical/sexual characteristics of your body in order to affirm your gender identity.

**Puberty Inhibitors** - A group of drugs that are prescribed by an endocrinologist to suppress or stop the production of estrogen or testosterone in a gender variant child. Doing this in early puberty will prevent many unwanted secondary sexual characteristics, such as breast development and facial hair.

**Hormone Treatment (HRT)** - Introduction of hormones by a health care provider to help develop the desired secondary sexual characteristics associated with a person's gender identity. Some effects of this treatment may not be reversible.

**Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS), Gender Reconstructive Surgery (GRS), top surgery, bottom surgery** - Surgical procedures that alter one's anatomy in order to make the body congruent. ■

## ■ What do you know about transgender children and youth?

### A Summary from Wikipedia.



**Transgender youth** are children and adolescents who identify as transgender and/or transsexual. Because transgender youth are usually dependent on their parents for care, shelter, financial support, and other needs, and because most doctors are reluctant to provide medical treatments to them, transgender youth face different challenges related to their condition when compared to adults. Transgender conditions manifest at different times in life in different individuals. In most cases of gender identity disorder (GID), the condition is often apparent in early childhood, when such a child may

express behavior incongruent with and dissatisfaction related to his, or her assigned gender. However, many of these children experience rejection as a result of their differences and quickly attempt to repress them. Therefore, people who see these children regularly may be unaware that they are unhappy as members of their assigned gender.

**Coming out.** In many parts of the world, transgender and transsexualism are not widely accepted by the public. Therefore, trans youths may feel that they need to remain in the closet until they feel that it is safe and appropriate to reveal their gender identity to their parents and other family members and friends. This is probably justifiable, as parents usually have a great deal of influence in their children's lives, and many parents will react negatively to such news.

However, some parents are very supportive when such news is broken to them. It may be impossible to predict a parent's reaction to such news, and the process is fraught with tension for many transsexual youths. Additionally, reactions of parents to transsexual children can change over time. For example, parents who initially reacted with negativity and hostility may eventually come around to support their transgender children. And parents who were initially supportive may later develop hostility toward their child's gender identity.

Transgender youths potentially face many hardships in obtaining medical treatment for their condition. Psychiatrists and endocrinologists are generally reluctant to provide hormone therapy to youths under 16, and obtaining sex reassignment surgery prior to the age of 18 is almost impossible in most countries. However, the latest revision of the *Standards of Care for*

*the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People* has addressed the needs of transgender children. Currently, the SOC allows for medications for prevention of puberty to be prescribed to these children as soon as the first signs of puberty become apparent.

**Puberty.** Puberty is a very difficult time for almost all transsexual youths, and many other transgender youths as well. Puberty is often considered to be a difficult time for everyone in many ways. But unlike their peers, who may be excited about bodily changes and thrilled with growing up, transsexual teenagers are appalled by the changes that take place. While their peers may seem to be happy about going through puberty, the changes that they are experiencing do not feel right. The androgyny of childhood is lost at this time, and transsexual youths see changes in their bodies that make them very uncomfortable.

When teens talk to parents about these feelings, how their parents respond makes a tremendous difference in how well the teen thrives. Transgender youths who are rejected by their families have lower self-esteem and are more isolated than youths whose families accept them, according to research by the Family Acceptance Project. They have poorer health and higher rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse problems and HIV infection. Those whose families and caregivers support and accept them fare much better overall.

In addition, many physicians insist that adolescents go through the puberty associated with their chromosomal sex before they prescribe hormones that could have prevented the feminization or masculinization of a transsexual man or transsexual woman, respectively. However, recent guidelines from The Endocrine Society "recommend that adolescents who fulfill readiness and eligibility criteria for gender reassignment initially undergo treatment to suppress pubertal development." They go on to specify that hormone treatment to suppress puberty should begin at the first signs of the physical changes of puberty.

**Ensuring the child's security.** Recently, some transgender children have received counseling and, in some cases, medical treatment for their condition, as well as the ability to change their gender role. In some countries, schools are working to accommodate gender identity and expression by eliminating traditional gendered activities.



Families with a young child who may identify as a member of "the opposite" sex and who chooses to alter his or her gender role through dress or behaviors may respect their child's decision, and sometimes, may decide to relocate the child to another area in order to afford the young person the best opportunity to live in their desired gender role among a novel set of peers and community. This helps protect trans children from peer rejection, bullying, and harassment. ■