



## Supporting Non-Binary and Genderqueer Youth: 6 Themes

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In Summer 2017, the peer support group QueerPDX conducted a participatory action research study on improving counseling services for nonbinary and genderqueer adults. Research group members generated and analyzed data in focus groups, interviews, and over email. We have adapted the results to supporting non-binary and genderqueer youth.

We found 6 primary themes. The best practices are given as the list on the other side of this handout; the other five themes are briefly explained below.

validation 101

holding space  
for complexity

finding safe  
spaces

erasure

trauma-informed  
intersectionality

best practices

**Validation 101:** Non-binary/genderqueer youth need to be basically validated as they are, without being told they should fit into a different identity, performance, or set of norms.

**Holding space for complexity:** NB/GQ identity and development are complex and can take many forms over time. Family members and supportive adults need to hold space for that complexity.

**Finding safe spaces:** NB/GQ youth need to find and inhabit safe spaces, when accessing services, in home life, with friends, and in community. Peer support can be very helpful.

**Erasure:** NB/GQ experience is characterized by erasure in the mainstream social context. It is crucial that family and community members understand the pain of erasure and that they not enact it.

**Trauma-informed intersectionality:** Traumatic experiences and membership in oppressed social groups constellate with NB/GQ identity in complex ways that demand sensitivity and discernment.



## 12 Best Practices for Supporting Non-Binary/Genderqueer Youth

1. Embrace gender transition as an open-ended, lifelong process of exploration and joy.
2. Be curious about NB/GQness in general and your child's experience in particular.
3. Don't use NBGQ youth for your general education— put in the effort to learn for yourself.
4. Get our pronouns right (and if you mess up, apologize and move on).
5. Appreciate the rich complexity of trans\*ness.
6. Start from within: Analyze your own gender assumptions and limitations.
7. Change your thinking, practices, and family culture to avoid binary gender assumptions.
8. Change your speech to avoid binary gender assumptions.
9. Develop a relationship with trans\* youth and adults that goes beyond learning from us.
10. Understand that trauma and NB/GQ experience co-arise and are intertwined, but one does not cause the other.
11. Develop a critical analysis of systems of oppression and intersectionality, to help NBGQ youth & all people.
12. Carry forth these principles and become an NB/GQ ally and activist!

## Suggested Next Steps

- Reach out to nonbinary/genderqueer folks you know and make friends. We're people!
- Work on removing automatic binary language from your lexicon— refer to people in gender-neutral ways until they actually tell you what pronouns they use.
- Examine and deconstruct your implicit assumptions about binary genders— there are so many ways to be human!
- Notice the ways binary gender assumptions pervade popular culture and mainstream worldviews, and work to undo these assumptions in your organization and your community.
- Look at, understand, and release the ways that gender-non-conformity makes you feel uncomfortable. Acknowledge your own gender vulnerability and complexity.
- Seek consultation from recognized experts on NB/GQ cultural competency in order to make your community or organization more embracing and affirmative of our unique needs.
- Find counselors, clergy, educators, and other NBGQ/trans\*-competent adults who can help support you in working with your own feelings around your child's gender experience.
- Participate in peer support groups for families of queer youth, so that you can feel held and supported while you hold and support your child.
- Reject pathologization and marginalization of trans\* and queer identities and expressions.
- Support gender fluidity, uncertainty, and diversity in your children and in your world. Peoples' names, pronouns, identities, performance and experiences unfold playfully. There are examples, stories, and reference points of how people have done their gender, but there is no one "right way" to do it— there are so many creative ways.

## My Next Steps

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## **Further Reading: Literature on Supporting Non-Binary and Genderqueer Youth**

- Brill, S. (2016). *The transgender teen: A handbook for parents and professionals supporting transgender and non-binary teens*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press.
- Brill, S. A., & Pepper, R. (2008). *The transgender child: A handbook for families and professionals*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press.
- Duron, L. (2013). *Raising my rainbow: Adventures in raising a fabulous, gender creative son (1st ed)*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.
- Ehrensaft, D., & Menvielle, E. (2011). *Gender born, gender made: raising healthy gender-nonconforming children (3rd rev. ed.)*. New York, NY: The Experiment.
- Ehrensaft, D. (2016). *The gender creative child: Pathways for nurturing and supporting children who live outside gender boxes*. New York, NY: The Experiment.
- Human Rights Campaign, & Gender Spectrum. (2014). *Supporting and caring for our gender-expansive youth: Lessons from the Human Rights Campaign's youth survey*. Online booklet (PDF), Washington, DC. Retrieved from [www.hrc.org/youth-gender](http://www.hrc.org/youth-gender)
- Micah. (2015). *Nonbinary transition for medical and service providers*. PDF slide deck downloaded from <https://genderqueer.me/non-binary-transition/>
- Nealy, E. C. (2017). *Transgender children and youth: Cultivating pride and joy with families in transition (1st ed.)*. New York, NY: W.W Norton & Company.
- Whittington, H., & Gasbarre, K. (2015). *Raising Ryland: Our story of parenting a transgender child with no strings attached (1st ed.)*. New York, NY: William Morrow.
- Wilchins, R. A. (2014). *Queer theory, gender theory: An instant primer (Rev. ed.)*. Riverdale, NY: Magnus Books.

## **For Adults and Young Adults**

*Note that some of these books discuss sex frankly; please review them before giving them to your child.*

- Bornstein, K. (2006). *Hello, cruel world: 101 alternatives to suicide for teens, freaks, and other outlaws*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- Bornstein, K. (2013). *My new gender workbook: A step-by-step guide to achieving world peace through gender anarchy and sex positivity (2nd ed)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bornstein, K. (2016). *Gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us (2nd rev. ed.)*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Hoffman-Fox, D., Jones, Z., Finch, S. D., & Keig, Z. (2017). *You and your gender identity: A guide to discovery*. New York, NY: Skyhorse.
- Nestle, J., Howell, C., & Wilchins, R. A. (Eds.). (2002). *GenderQueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary (1st ed)*. Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Books.



## For Young Adults

- Andrews, A. (2014). *Some assembly required: The not-so-secret life of a transgender teen*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Cronn-Mills, K. (2012). *Beautiful music for ugly children* (1st ed). Woodbury, MN: Flux.
- Jennings, J. (2016). *Being Jazz: My life as a (transgender) teen*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Testa, R. J., Coolhart, D., & Peta, J. (2015). *The gender quest workbook: A guide for teens & young adults exploring gender identity*. Oakland, CA: Instant Help Books.

## For Kids

- Pessin-Whedbee, B., & Bardoff, N. (2017). *Who are you? The kid's guide to gender identity*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley.
- Kilodavis, C., & DeSimone, S. (2011). *My princess boy: A mom's story about a young boy who loves to dress up*. New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Ewert, M., & Ray, R. (2008). *10,000 dresses* (1st ed). New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- Gino, A. (2015). *George*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Hall, M. (2015). *Red: A crayon's story* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Herthel, J., Jennings, J., & McNicholas, S. (2014). *I am Jazz!* New York, NY: Dial Books.

## Links

- It Gets Better - [www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)
- Gender Spectrum Lounge [www.genderspectrum.org/join](http://www.genderspectrum.org/join)
- The Trevor Project - [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)
- Family Acceptance Project <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>
- Gender Spectrum - [www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)
- PFLAG's Transgender Network <http://community.pflag.org/transgender>
- Philadelphia Trans-Health Conference [www.trans-health.org](http://www.trans-health.org)
- Transkids Purple Rainbow Foundation [www.transkidspurplerainbow.org](http://www.transkidspurplerainbow.org)
- TransYouth Family Allies [www.imatyfa.org](http://www.imatyfa.org)
- HRC's Welcoming Schools [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org)
- PFLAG's Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All <http://community.pflag.org/safeschools>
- Safe Schools Coalition [www.safeschoolscoalition.org](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org)
- HRC's Youth Well-Being Project and Annual Time to THRIVE Conference - [www.timetothrive.org](http://www.timetothrive.org)

**We're available for training, consulting, and counseling for queer youth, adults, and groups.**

Please get in touch if you could use more support in your family, school, or organization. We'd love to help!

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Based in Portland, OR · Available regionally, nationally, and online