



Being a foster care parent can be very rewarding, as you open your home to a youth who needs a safe, nurturing, and supportive environment while they navigate separation from their family, often including friends and school. This is especially true for transgender youth, who are at greater risk of displacement and social isolation. Thus, welcoming a transgender youth into your home requires some thoughtful preparation. Here is what you should think about.

Your Own Preparation

Examine your beliefs and potential biases regarding transgender youth. Fostering a transgender youth requires you to be genuinely supportive, accepting, and non-judgmental. Connect with reputable sources (e.g., Stand with Trans, PFLAG, HRC) to learn more about the unique needs of the transgender community. Expect moments of adjustment for everyone. Be prepared to address your own learning curve without burdening the youth with the task of educating you. When conflicts arise, approach them with curiosity about the youth's perspective. Seek guidance from your social worker or transgender affirming counselors when needed.

Understanding Gender Identity & Unique Challenges

Understanding gender identity is a great place to start before you welcome a transgender youth into your home. Gender identity (internal sense of self related to gender) differs from biological sex (hormone and anatomy based) and sexual orientation (sexual attraction). Transgender youth explore their gender identity in various ways

and may struggle to come to terms with their identity due to fear of social

Supporting Transgender Youth in Foster

Care: A Guide for Foster Parents

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rejection. Being rejected by family, friends, and society can have negative long-term effects on transgender youth, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts and actions. However, social support can buffer against these negative outcomes. That's where the foster care parent comes in. Understanding terms and the unique challenges can help you respond with compassion.

Medical Considerations

Some youth may seek hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to match their external self with their internal self. They may come to you already receiving HRT, or they may want to start HRT while in the foster care system. You should work with the social workers to identify all the options for your transgender youth. In Michigan, there are several doctors who are educated and able to manage HRT for transgender youth. Having this knowledge ahead of time allows you to be informed and show your transgender youth that you are competent and willing to support. You can find resources on the Stand with Trans website.

Creating a Physically Safe Environment

Safety should include the physical space your transgender youth is in. Consider the sleeping and bathroom arrangements in your home, which may include private sleeping areas if you have multiple youth. Be sure to include your transgender youth in the family environment by establishing clear and

consistent rules for everyone in the home and addressing any negative interactions in the moment. This conveys that your home is a safe place where they can be themselves.

School & Social Environments

Be proactive and coordinate with the school about your youth's chosen name and pronouns. While most schools in Michigan have non-discrimination policies regarding transgender youth, ensure you have alternative name options (e.g., using the youth's last name, an abbreviated form of their first name) if you face challenges. Communicate with teachers and administration regularly to ensure consistent support. Be prepared to advocate if your youth reports any resistance to accommodating their name and pronouns or take actions against other students who negatively impact your transgender youth's educational experience. Additionally, help your youth build connections with supportive peers, whether through school, transgender youth groups, community centers, or faith communities that affirm their identity. Social connection reduces isolation and buffers against negative mental health outcomes.

Mental Health Support

Become familiar with transgender-affirming mental health resources in your area. While not all transgender youth need therapy, transgender youth in the foster care system may experience difficulties above and

beyond those, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts and actions, that could be helped with a therapist. Be alert to warning signs such as changes in behavior, isolation, rapid weight decrease/increase, lack of motivation, aggression, or substance use, and maintain open communication about their emotional well-being.

Family Communication

If the youth has biological family members, discuss how to navigate relationships. Some families are supportive; others need education or time. Ask the youth about their preferences regarding family contact and how much to disclose. Be prepared to be the primary source of support while respecting any family connections the youth wishes to maintain.

Fostering a transgender youth can be highly rewarding. Your affirmation, kindness, acceptance, and advocacy can show a transgender youth that they are not alone as they explore their identity and navigate the foster care system. Your success as a foster care parent to transgender youth will depend on the work you put in and the support you have from your community. If you are interested in more training, reach out to the Stand with Trans team!