



MY PARTNER IS TRANSGENDER. SO WHAT NOW?

Ok, so you've just found out that your partner is transgender. You've got a lot to consider and don't really know what to think. Maybe you've never heard of transgenderism, maybe you feel confused, or cheated, lied to, betrayed, hurt, repulsed and afraid. Maybe you feel ok with it, unsure, comfortable but don't really know what to do? Worried about your partner, the kids, your neighbors, work, money..... and the list goes on. Let's assume that you know what 'being transgender is'. Your partner has somehow told you they are transgender. You may or may not have talked about it further but you want to know more. You may be wondering what to do.

HOW CAN I HELP MY PARTNER?

If you have decided to stay with your partner then most likely you will want to be able to help him/her with transition. Being supportive is extremely important. Listen to what your partner is saying to you even if you don't like what you are hearing. Just being there and being supportive is one of the best things you can do. Don't let your wants override your partners'. Don't stop your partner from undergoing surgical or other procedures because you can't deal with it and don't want your partner to change. Opposition to procedures your partner sees as essential can be extremely damaging and unhelpful and are unlikely to change your partner's mind..

HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS TO HELP YOUR PARTNER:

PRONOUNS

Pronouns seem to vary greatly between people. Some transgender people really care about pronouns and insist on "she" even if they are still, for all intents and purposes, presenting as male or "he" even though they still look female and that's ok! If that is what your partner wants you to do then support them. It will help you and your partner overcome difficulties later on when his/her appearance matches the inner gender identity more closely. Some transgender people won't care and will say "call me whatever makes you feel comfortable".

EMOTIONAL WELFARE

It is really important to remember that emotional welfare is not all about your partner. You also need emotional support. Find a good counsellor, join an online transgender forum and/or talk to supportive friends (if any of them know). Don't give up your life looking after things for your partner. Do things that make you happy: see friends, exercise, shop, read, garden, fix the car, take a holiday. Take time out for you. You will need help along the way so make sure you get it. Make sure your whole relationship does not become about your partner transitioning.

Do fun things together that have nothing to do with transition. Your partner will have ups and downs. Learn how to cope with the downs. There are a couple of ways to do this. See a counsellor together or separately. Talk to your partner about how you can help her/him. Talk to your counsellor about devising strategies to cope with this. Make sure your partner doesn't become socially isolated and that he/she keeps up with regular things that she/he enjoys. Visit friends, make sure your partner has time for family including children. Be supportive but don't lose yourself in your partner. You have your own life.

STAYING TOGETHER

One of the first questions you will ask yourself is: "do I stay or do I leave?"

One starting point is to try to talk to your partner about it and to find a good counsellor to talk to.

A counsellor/ psychologist/ other professional help can talk you through your relationship with or without your partner. It will help clarify your feelings and give you an outlet. Eventually you will need to decide if you are going to stay in the relationship. This may take a lot of time and there is no rush. Ask yourself honestly "do you want to stay in the relationship? Why? Do you want to be just friends? Why?" Some people choose to move on completely and that, although it can be very painful, is ok too.

If you cannot accept the fact that your partner is transgender then do not stay in the relationship. If you think your partner will change his/her mind and that it is just "a phase" you are almost certainly wrong. If you think that being transgender is a sin against God and that your partner will soon see the error in her/his ways, they won't. They will always be transgender. It can't be cured and there isn't a cure, so don't look for one. Your partner may choose to his/her transgender status from you if you give them an ultimatum: I'll stay if you don't transition. If this is the case think about how this will impact on your relationship (mentally and emotionally) long term. Do you want your partner to live a lie for you? If you are very attached to your heterosexual identity and don't want to be a lesbian then that is okay. Not all transgender people choose to have SRS/ GRS and that may be something to consider.

If you cannot get over how betrayed you may feel, or how angry you are and nothing will ever make up for the hurt your partner has caused, take a break. Think about how you could stay in the relationship. Maybe you won't be able to. If you think you can work through it, then go for it! There is nothing wrong with feelings (anger, sadness, confusion etc.) but holding onto them forever is not helpful.

If your partner is very suicidal and/ or depressed you know that you will never be able to cope with it, don't stay in the relationship. Or should I say, don't stay in the relationship if your partner has big ongoing mental health issues that you cannot deal with. If you can stay with your partner and get help for them and manage it that way, that's great. Transgender people have a thirty per cent successful suicide rate. If your partner is suffering from crippling depression that is dragging you down and making you depressed too, either work out a way to change it or leave. Depression and suicidal thoughts can be alleviated through a transition. If you are willing to put effective support networks in place for you and your partner then power to you and I hope it goes well!

If you are not prepared for the fact that it never ever ends and is part of life then leave. This is not meant to scare you. The reality is that being transgender has, unfortunately, many issues attached to it, issues that may go on for the rest of your partner's life and implicitly in yours too. For a number of years, transition will take up your life in various ways.

Eventually this may subside and life will go on. For many it does. For some it takes a decade. Simple things like going to beach without SRS can be a stressful event.

Things from the past can be brought up years later. But be prepared for at least a minimum amount of one to two years of "issues". If your partner is still unsure about transitioning talk to them about it but don't try to sway them. Some transgender people take a measured approach. They are unsure and so will try a small dose of oestrogen to start off with, or cross dress and see how it goes. Others will want to go out as soon as possible. Transition doesn't happen overnight. It is a long process.

It is NEVER okay for a partner to lie, cheat, abuse (emotionally, physically or mentally) you. That is NOTHING to do with being transgender. That is just your partner being a bully. Being transgender is not an excuse to be horrible (and likewise it is not an excuse for you to be horrible either). If your partner wasn't transgender would you accept such poor behaviour???? I don't think so. Transgender people are NOT horrible and nasty by nature, although they are often self-centred and obsessed. If you have a bad experience that does not make ALL transgender people bad. And transgender people should understand that they have responsibilities as well as rights

CHILDREN

Transgender people who have children mostly say that children under about ten don't care too much. Teenagers may be more opinionated. Please don't think that staying together "for the sake of the kids" is the best idea. It isn't. If you leave your partner remember your kids still have a relationship with that parent even if you don't want that relationship and even if you don't want them to either. Don't use your children to punish your partner and don't let your partner punish you for leaving.

I WANT TO STAY

Then be prepared for it to be difficult but rewarding and awesome! You may face prejudice, discrimination, lose some family and friends either because they can't accept it. Unless you have a lot of money accept the fact you will be not be flush for quite some time. Your partner may go through bouts of depression, start having teenage temper tantrums due to hormones, may lose their job and financial security. You will have to make yourself both physically and emotionally available to help your partner as much as possible. It is not a picnic and it will be very stressfull at times. And ultimately..... your relationship might still fail in the end.

BUT.....

It isn't all bad. If you have an accepting group of friends, are comfortable and secure enough within yourself, love your partner and can easily talk to them then you have a good chance. Not all work places are discriminatory and some may assist your partner's transition. Not every section of society will make a big deal out of it. Some couples can make it a positive and rewarding experience. Think of shopping and exploring new and exciting things and places together.

WILL MY PARTNER BE OK?

This is a really difficult question to answer. Your partner will need all the help he or she can get. Every person is different and will need different things. Do the best you can and "you never know if you never go".

WHAT DO I TELL MY FAMILY, FRIENDS AND WORK?

In an ideal world you would never need to worry about this. Unfortunately it is not the case. Most people will be (outwardly) fairly accepting. You will have some negative reactions. Some transgender people move to larger cities with bigger, more accepting and supportive communities- both trans and non-trans. It is worthwhile trying to gauge how the people around you feel about transgender people before telling someone outright. Do it surreptitiously by talking about a "friend of a friend" whose child/parent/partner is transgender or talking about an article in the newspaper. Of course they may feel differently when they realise you are talking about someone they know and may have to interact with, so be careful. The good news is that some people who are negatively inclined to transgender in theory become accepting when they encounter the situation in real life, and with a person they already know and like. Sometimes it is useful to discuss transgenderism with people before telling them about your specific relationship with the situation.

HOW WILL I COPE?

With support from people around you.

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