

IMAGINING TRANSGENDER (YOUTH)

I would like you to imagine with me... an average day as a young person who is transgender, around the age of 7 years old. Please close your eyes and follow along.

If you currently identify as a woman, please imagine that everywhere you go, the people around you treat you as if you are a little boy. You are expected to act and dress like a boy. Everyone refers to you using male pronouns and nicknames . . . he, him, his, little man, buster, champ, or son. Even though you know in your heart and mind that you are a girl, everyone around you insists that you are a boy and demands you act accordingly.

If you currently identify as a man, please imagine that everywhere you go, the people around you treat you as if you are a little girl. You are expected to act and dress like a girl. Everyone refers to you using female pronouns and nicknames . . . she, her, sweetie, girlie, or darling. Even though you know in your heart and mind that you are a boy, everyone around you insists that you are a girl and demands you act accordingly.

[pause]

When you get out of bed in the morning, you survey your closet and aren't happy with any of the clothing options you see. These clothes make you feel really uncomfortable and upset when you wear them. Your parents tell you to hurry up and get dressed, so you pick the clothes that are least uncomfortable—they make you feel more like yourself.

When you get on the bus in the morning, some of the other kids tease you. They say mean things like "What are you, gay or something?" and "Why do you dress like that?" Other kids ignore you. You feel isolated and alone. Once you get to school, you are asked to line up by gender and you consistently get yelled at for where you go, and the teacher tells you to stop causing problems and to get in the "correct" line or they will call your parents. During recess, the other kids group together by activity, but you have a hard time choosing—when you do what you really want to do, it results in more teasing. You are sad, frustrated, and confused.

[pause]

Imagine now that you are 14. For the past few years, your body has been changing in ways that are

profoundly uncomfortable. You are starting to have sexual feelings and fantasies, which are confusing because it feels good, but also feels uncomfortable. You have asked your close friends questions to see if they have similar feelings, but so far no one else has had a similar experience. At the same time, everyone else is suddenly interested in hooking up and dating, and that feels overwhelming. Sometimes you feel like you should just hook up/date so that people will stop harassing you about whether or not you are gay, and besides, you really want to be in a relationship... but things are so overwhelming. You know that you are attracted to one gender, but think that you might also be attracted to the other gender. Maybe all of this discomfort is because you are gay. You seek out information online about being gay, but somehow it doesn't seem to fit. You found a transgender teen support forum, and a lot of what is you find there makes sense, but it is super scary.

You wish that someone could understand where you are coming from, explain why you feel this way, and help you figure out how to make it stop feeling so bad. You can't talk to your parents about this.

Over the years, you have noticed your parents saying little things here and there about how transgender people are freaks, and how they would never let their kid do that. You are afraid of how they will react if you tell them, and life is hard enough as it is. You don't want to risk their rejecting you because you just aren't sure that you will be able to handle it. Besides, you know that your parents are struggling for money, and dealing with your aging grandparents and your siblings—you don't want to add to their burden when they are already so stressed out.

Every day starts to feel like a battle, and you are exhausted. You are feeling increasingly depressed and start looking for things to help make you feel better. You consider experimenting with drinking and drugs, or maybe cutting—anything that might help. You saw the "it gets better" videos online, but frankly you just can't see how that can possibly be true for you.

[Pause]

Take a moment now to reflect on how you're feeling. When you feel ready, please open your eyes. Once everyone is ready, we will discuss these scenarios as a group.