

Connection helping fathers, kids

Lauren Richardson

FROM shaving tips to emotional safety, a new Tasmanian project is helping fathers champion their transgender children through connection and shared experience.

Engender Equality has launched a new project - Dads for Gender Diversity - to support Tasmanian fathers in affirming, celebrating, and advocating for their transgender and gender diverse offspring of any age. Tasmanian transgender man James (last name withheld for privacy) came out to his mother at 17, and his father a year later.

Now 25, James said initially there was a bit of fear from both his parents, but overall they were supportive and came to understand it did not change who he was as a person.

"[They] saw the confidence that actually came out of me once I did start transitioning, and how much happier, and just better I was with my overall wellbeing," James said.

Eight years on, he said his dad's support gave him exposure to experiences and advice his mother could not have prepared him for.

"There were a lot of things my mother couldn't have told me about," he said.

"Even as simple as shaving your beard, that maybe don't go a big way for a lot of other people, but that was something that definitely meant a lot."

James said those little things his father could teach him were gender affirming.

He said having fathers specifically support trans kids showed that acceptance was not conditional.

"When we think of broader systemic norms that mothers are more often expected to take on, that caring role, they therefore maybe have more time to build those

emotional connections or understanding with their child," James said.

He said expectations of men working and fulfilling their gender roles could give fathers less time with their children.

"Having time and space to be able to have conversations with your child, but not expecting them to give you all the answers, and to go out and do some of that research is a really important thing," James said.

"It definitely takes a lot of weight off the young person's shoulders - it's a scary enough to just come out, we've already overthought all these different scenarios.

"Taking on some of that responsibility yourself is a really big thing and would go a long way in actually supporting your child."

Matthew's (last name withheld for privacy) daughter came out to him as trans almost a decade ago.

He said it came as a surprise - she had not given any prior indication to him.

"I'm fairly lucky, I've got a number of friends in the LGBTQIA+ community. I was aware, on a surface level, there was a rise in kids realising that about themselves and there were more discussions," Matthew said.

"For me personally, I was accepting, but a little bit confused."

He acknowledged it was a scary time for his daughter, and said initially she did not want to talk about it a lot out of concern about how her parents might react.

"That left me thinking, what is the best way that I can support her? Because I'd never anticipated I would need to support her in that way," Matthew said.

He said he was particularly worried due to the current climate of misunderstanding and hate towards transgender people.

"Misinformation is easier to disseminate than good information," Matthew said.

He said he struggled to find good information, or the help they needed to support his daughter in the year she came out.

Dads for Gender Diversity project manager Don Pitcher said fathers of transgender people face specific challenges they are not necessarily supported for, to best support their children as they come out and transition.

He said some men don't know other men who are parenting trans kids, and have no role models or support systems who can help them to navigate this time.

It could be due to some men internalising their feelings, or not wanting to be seen as needing assistance, so they are less likely to reach out to available services or other people.

"This project is about trying to bring and connect dads of trans kids, and to collect their stories in a way to make available for future dads," Mr Pitcher said.

"Hearing positive stories from other parents challenges the negative messages they might receive from the broader community and helps parents to feel 'less alone'.

"The cliché 'you can't be something until you see something' is true and we need to ensure that men have access to other dads' stories."

He said ultimately more supported fathers, means more supported young people.

"Underpinning all this, in a society where there is still anti-trans voices, the parental support for trans young people is the number one protective factor for young trans people's wellbeing," Mr Pitcher said.

"When parents support the gender identity of young trans people, rates of suicide, anxiety and depression all drop dramatically, and it's very clear from all the research."

A 2025 study by the Australian Institute of

Family Studies stated health improvements for transgender and gender diverse young people associated with supportive parents included:

- reduced anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, disordered eating symptoms, self-harm and suicidal ideation;
- greater quality of life, life satisfaction and self-esteem;
- reduced risk of homelessness;
- improved sexual self-efficacy and consistent condom use;
- reduced risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Spokesperson for Equality Tasmania Rodney Croome said, on average, more mothers accepted a child's trans identity than fathers do.

"This may reflect a higher level acceptance of trans people among women more broadly, or it may reflect a father's desire to protect their child from discrimination and other harm," Mr Croome said.

"In my experience, many fathers come to accept their trans child even if it takes a bit longer. Paternal acceptance is vital to a trans or non-binary child feeling loved and accepted, having a sense of safety, and having a healthy model of what masculinity is."

He said gender diverse kids often take many years to come to terms with their identities, so parents may also need time to fully understand and affirm the child.

"Information and support groups for parents of trans children, including fathers, can play an important role in keeping families together," Mr Croome said.

"If there is a conflict between a trans child's mother and father about accepting them, they may blame themselves for this conflict."

NEWS



Transgender bride socks. Picture by Jonathan Carroll