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PARENTING

# Myth #7: Children aren't old enough to know their gender identity

By German Lopez | @germanlopez | german.lopez@vox.com | Updated Nov 14, 2018, 4:06pm EST

Part of **Transgender people: 10 common myths**

Some children genuinely identify with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth at a very early age. And some others won't conform to gender norms — but won't necessarily grow up to identify as transgender.

A **study** from the **TransYouth Project** found that trans children as young as 5 years old

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respond to psychological gender-association tests, which evaluate how people view themselves within gender roles, as quickly and consistently as those who don't identify as trans.

"I always knew," Jordan Geddes, a trans man in Columbia, Maryland, said. "But I grew up and had the whole world telling me I'm wrong. At that point [as a child in the 1990s], there was no visibility whatsoever about trans issues. My parents just assumed I'm a very butch lesbian."

For medical professionals who consult with parents on gender, the goal is to gauge whether a child's behavior indicates gender dysphoria, gender nonconformity, or early experimentation. Diane Ehrensaft, director of mental health at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital's Child and Adolescent Gender Center, said parents and doctors should watch for consistence, persistence, insistence, and history of gender nonconformity, which can be evaluated early on to tell if a child is trans. But, above all, she said parents should foster a supportive environment that lets kids drive the process of establishing their own identity.

"We can't say with 100 percent accuracy, but we can get a good picture very early on,"

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Ehrensaft said. “In my training as a developmental psychologist, the very theory is that by age 6 you should know your gender or there’s something wrong with you.”

She added, “When kids whose gender matches the sex on their birth certificates say, ‘I know my gender,’ nobody questions that. They say, ‘Oh, of course. You should.’ But if a kid says, ‘I know my gender,’ but it’s not the sex on their birth certificate, people ask, ‘Oh, how could you possibly know that?’ How can we have both at the same time?”

Fostering a supportive environment can be crucial to preventing some of the worst socioeconomic and health outcomes linked to gender dysphoria. The 2011 **National Transgender Discrimination Survey** found trans and gender nonconforming people who are rejected by their families are nearly three times as likely to experience homelessness, 73 percent more likely to be incarcerated, and 59 percent more likely to attempt suicide.

And that’s among a population that already reports many grave outcomes:

- The 2011 **National Transgender Discrimination Survey** (NTDS) found trans and gender nonconforming people are nearly four times as likely to live in

extreme poverty as the general population.

- A 2013 report by the **New York City Anti-Violence Project** found trans people, particularly trans women of color, face some of the highest rates of hate violence and murder in the country.
- A 2014 study by the **Williams Institute and American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** found that 46 percent of trans men and 42 percent of trans women have attempted suicide at some point in their lives, compared with 4.6 percent of the general population.

So creating a supportive, flexible environment for kids — regardless of whether they grow up to be trans, gender nonconforming, or another identity — can be very important in making sure gender dysphoria and any related problems don't lead to horrible socioeconomic and health outcomes later in life.

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## Transgender people: 10 common myths

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Myth #2: Sexual orientation is linked to gender identity

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Myth #4: Transitioning is as simple as one surgery

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