



GENDER IDENTITY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION SOCIETY (GIRES)

SUPPORTING THE FAMILIES OF TRANS PEOPLE

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT TRANS PEOPLE DO BETTER, AND ARE LESS PRONE TO REGRET POST-TRANSITION, IF THEY HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THEIR FAMILIES (Landén, 1999)

Family members too usually need help to deal with a situation for which they are unprepared. GIRES provides a range of literature for family members. Also, in collaboration with two support organisations, **Depend** and **Mermaids**, GIRES presents a workshop that enables family members to share their experiences, understand their own situations better and work together on finding ways to help their loved ones and themselves. It is primarily aimed at the families of people who have embarked on transition or plan to do so. However, trans people are very welcome too, provided that they are accompanied by one or more members of their families. Confidentiality, understanding and sympathy are guaranteed for everyone who attends. We do not permit the presence of counsellors or other professionals who might wish to observe what happens in the workshop. All the workshop facilitators have personal experiences as family members or are trans people. They enable participants to:

- Understand gender variance and how it occurs
- Hear the histories of the individual workshop facilitators
- Share their own experiences with people who are in a similar situation.
- Consider the ways in which other family members, like themselves, initially react when they first learn of their loved one's gender identity issues.
- Appreciate the matters that their loved one has to deal with in establishing publicly a new expression of his or her gender identity.
- Discuss how other family members can best help their loved one and themselves.
- Learn about the support organisations and that can also help them.

INITIAL FEELINGS: SHOCK, DENIAL, GRIEF, ANGER, FEAR, EMBARRASSMENT, GUILT, ISOLATION

The workshops take place on Saturday afternoon, from 1.30 to around 5 pm. Participants are provided in advance with printed information on transgender issues and how they affect families. Workshops have been held in London (twice), Leicester, Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, Durham, Gateshead and Glasgow. They may be attended by as many as 30 people, together with 5 facilitators.

After a short PowerPoint presentation explaining gender variance and its affect on families, the workshop breaks into three groups, or more if young trans people and their families are attending:

- partners - facilitated by the partner of a trans person
- trans people (this may include a separate session for young people who have not yet commenced transition) - facilitated by a trans man and a trans woman
- parents and siblings (this may include a separate session for families of young children and adolescents affected by gender variance) - also facilitated by a parent

Each group shares experiences, often discussing for the first time, their own emotional turmoil. Coping strategies are suggested, including exchanging contact details so that ongoing mutual support can be provided through staying in touch with other families after the workshop. Finally, everyone joins a roundup session, giving families the opportunity to speak to people from other groups, particularly the trans facilitators.

THE MOST APPRECIATED ELEMENTS OF THE FAMILY WORKSHOPS ARE:

- ~ THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS IN THE SAME SITUATION, AND TO FEEL LESS ALONE
- ~ UNDERSTANDING THAT TRANSEXUALISM IS AN INNATE, NATURAL BIOLOGICAL VARIATION IN DEVELOPMENT. IT IS NOT A MENTAL ILLNESS

and the realisation that

NOBODY IS TO BLAME

If you wish us to help you to run a workshop, please contact us:

GIRES, Molverley, The Warren, Ashted, Surrey, KT21 2SP, England

Tel: 01372 801554; Fax: 01372 272297

E-mail: admin@gires.org.uk Website: <http://www.gires.org.uk>