

How to Parent Your Trans Kid When the World Is on Fire

“Affirming our kids is about more than acceptance. It’s about survival.”

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After the election, I was asked time and again, “How are you doing?” in that sort of gut-punch way people do when you lose a job or a family pet.

As the parent of a transgender child, I woke up in the early hours of November 6, 2024, feeling a great deal of fear and uncertainty. I wondered: Would the new administration *really* strip trans and other LGBTQ+ people of their rights, as [promised on the campaign trail](#)? (A bevy of [executive orders](#) on January 20 made the answer resoundingly clear: yes.)

So I would reply to those well-meaning questions over and over in my best Dorinda Medley voice, “I’ll tell you how I’m doing: not well.”
(*Real Housewives* fans, you can fill in the rest.)

To many, the presidential election was just another end to an every-four-years debate, a simple vote for one's interests. But for my family and many others, the rise of this new government forced us to change how we move through the world. Very real threats to basic human rights mean that calls to LGBTQ+ crisis hotlines spiked by 700 percent after Election Day. More than 800 anti-trans bills have hit state capitols around the country, all aiming to disenfranchise and, in many cases, criminalize the very existence of this tiny percentage of the U.S. population—along with the people who love and care for them. It takes a lot of mental energy to process so much hate.

“Trans kids are being constantly bombarded by negative messages, including from powerful politicians,” says Jack Turban, MD, a psychiatrist and the author of *Free to Be: Understanding Kids & Gender Identity*. With trans children already experiencing a higher percentage of mental health challenges compared with their cisgender classmates, “it’s easy to internalize those messages, which can lead to problems with self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.”

**TRANS PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED, AND NO HATE-FUELED
LAW OR ILL-INFORMED DEBATE WILL CHANGE THAT.**

Parents like me know that affirming our kids is about more than acceptance: It’s about survival. According to The Trevor Project, trans youth who have at least one accepting adult in their lives are 40 percent less likely to attempt suicide. Decades of rigorous research from scientists and medical experts across the world show that trans people, no matter their age, experience an overall improved quality of life when they live out in the world in a way that matches how they feel on the inside.

My family and I have been through the complex process of understanding and accepting our trans son and now celebrate the authentic and self-aware young adult he’s grown to be. As a result, his mental health and emotional health are on solid ground.

However, he’s off to college in the fall, and we now have a very real concern for his physical safety once he leaves our nest. Along with the recent avalanche of anti-trans executive orders and laws, more than \$215 million in political ad dollars were spent last year across all states to demonize people like our high school drum major and budding biology whiz. These messages often justify violence against marginalized people in all corners of our country.

This environment has already forced us to make hard decisions about Stephen's future. Even before the election, we had to pull his college application from my home state. As a fifth-generation Texan and proud Longhorn, I was heartbroken to know he wouldn't feel safe on a campus without LGBTQ+ support, let alone in a state trying more than any other to wipe people like him off the map (spoiler: It's not working). Could he get taken into custody for using the "wrong" bathroom, or be beaten up just for walking outside while trans? Those are risks we're not willing to take.

Our safety awareness is now hyperawareness, and we're not alone. I've seen so many parents like me lighting up online discussion boards with very real concerns about sustaining a safe haven in their hometowns...and when it might be time to leave.

"Keeping your trans kids safe has different meanings depending on where you live," says Mandy Giles, founder of Parents of Trans Youth. "Knowing how much risk you can tolerate and when to take action is an incredibly personal and difficult decision."

Whether LGBTQ+ families ride it out at home or away, how do they find community support to get through—*waves hands*—all of this, let alone relocation options and legal resources? And how can everyone help advocate for the most marginalized among us?

Put your oxygen mask on first.

"You absolutely cannot take care of your child if you are not taking care of yourself," says Turban. "Make sure you have social support, and if possible, a personal therapist as well. In the same way community connectedness is important for kids, being in a support group with other parents of gender-diverse kids can be a game changer."

Families of LGBTQ+ kids can start with online and in-person support networks, including PFLAG and Parents of Trans Youth, Trans Lifeline, and the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Parents for Transgender Equality Network.

Create a safety plan.

If sheltering in place is not possible, here are a few steps parents can take to prepare for a potential move.

First, research LGBTQ+-friendly states and countries that are a good fit for your family. Journalist Erin Reed's [Anti-Trans National Risk Assessment Map](#) tracks legislative changes that influence livability and travel to all U.S. states. Similarly, [World Population Review](#) tracks the best and worst countries for LGBTQ+ rights. If you're ready to go, check out [TransLash Media's](#) comprehensive relocation guide.

Next, find out if your job is transferable. Check with your employer about working remotely or transferring locations within your company. Your professional skills may qualify you for a foreign visa in a specific country.

Always remember: "You have the power to move if necessary, no matter your income range," says Jessica Drucker, international LGBTQ+ relocation strategist and founder of [Rainbow Relocation](#). "People with economic impact, those that have critical job skills or can even just teach English are in high demand across the globe."

Lastly, have your documentation in order. Passports and birth certificates need to be updated and at the ready, as laws allowing gender and name changes on official documents change frequently. [Advocates for Trans Equality](#) provides extensive guidance for the upkeep of state and federal IDs.

Get ahead of health care changes, if possible.

Given the current administration's [hostile stance toward gender-affirming health care](#) (particularly for minors), the [HRC](#) recommends talking to your child's health care provider to figure out a plan B in case of any potential interruptions to their care. Looking for a new doctor or therapist? [World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#), [GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality](#), and [OutCare](#) maintain directories of affirming physical and mental health care providers, including those focused specifically on the care of LGBTQ+ children and their families. (Telehealth services and out-of-state providers may be an option too.)

Know your legal rights.

With a changing legislative landscape comes confusion, fear, and legal battles to be fought. If you or your child have been discriminated against, [Ellen Kahn](#), the HRC's senior vice president of programs and partnerships, recommends reaching out to trusted legal resources for support and guidance. The HRC, [ACLU](#), [Lambda Legal](#), and [Advocates for Trans Equality](#) have

provided legal representation and other related resources to people in marginalized communities for decades.

Fight back for our kids.

Parents and allies are the most potent weapon in the war against hate. We have the ability to create change, no matter how big or small the action. LGBTQ+ friends and family can start by calling out bigotry and discrimination within their own homes, schools, and communities.

“Anyone can affect change within their sphere of influence,” says Giles. “Have conversations with your friends and family about issues affecting trans people, and let them know when they say or do something harmful or inappropriate, even unintentionally.”

Use your voice to demand reform from your state and federal representatives. “Call and email your members of Congress and tell them that these anti-LGBTQ+ bills cause direct harm to you and your family,” says Kahn. “Ask your friends and family members to do the same. They need to know that people do in fact care about trans youth.” Apps and websites such as [5 Calls](#), [ResistBot](#), and [USA.gov](#) make contacting legislators about proposed anti-LGBTQ+ laws quick and easy.

Showing up in person is important too. Consider testifying at state legislature sessions, town hall events, and school board meetings. [Advocates for Trans Equality](#) has a great guide to get started.

Luckily for my family, some things have so far remained the same. We live in Los Angeles, where our communities are LGBTQ+-educated and supportive of our transgender child. Stephen has had the opportunity to successfully grow into adulthood just like everyone else. In the fall, he will attend an in-state university that is equally supportive, with inclusive housing, legal, and health services all protected and upheld by state laws.

I know for sure that we will continue to be visible and vocal in our local community to protect the safety of our child. I’ve interacted with so many fiercely loving parents like me, and I have yet to meet a single person who wants to shove their kid back into the closet. Trans people have always existed, and no hate-fueled law or ill-informed debate will change that.