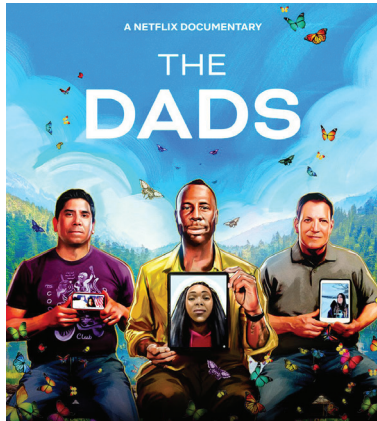




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THE DADS

A DISCUSSION GUIDE



In *THE DADS*, five fathers of transgender children join Dennis Shepard — the father of slain, gay college student Matthew Shepard — for a fishing trip where they find common ground across racial, geographical and generational lines: unconditional love for their children. Speaking openly and honestly with others who understand their fears all too well, the conversation becomes a gentle meditation on fatherhood, brotherhood and manhood. It's clear they cannot survive in isolation — it will take all of them together to protect trans youth, in this generation and beyond.

THE DADS showcases conversations between fathers. This guide is an invitation for you to have your own conversations — between family members, friends, colleagues, religious and civic communities. Approach these conversations with an open mind, with an intention of learning, and by also being an active listener. While the discussion prompts are meant to start a dialog with others, you might find yourself thinking about them days or weeks later on your own. Confronting our own ideas about gender, parenting, social justice, and civil rights starts within each of us.

TERMINOLOGY

It is important when discussing such a personal and sensitive topic that all participants start with a shared understanding of words being used. Here are a few terms and concepts that are mentioned in *THE DADS*:

Gender or Gender Identity — One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither — how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Transgender — An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Cisgender — A term used to describe a person whose gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth. The word cisgender is the antonym of transgender.

Transition — The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions.



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Gender Expression — External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender Roles — A set of behavior patterns, attitudes, and personality characteristics stereotypically perceived as acceptable as masculine or feminine within a culture.



GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

If a friend asked you about this film, what would you say?

Did you find yourself relating to any of the fathers in the film because they reminded you of yourself, a sibling, a friend, or your own dad? What was it about that person that helped you feel that connection?

Was there any one moment or quote in the film that you found particularly moving? What emotions did it bring up for you?

Did any part of the dads' story "speak truth" to you?

Did you learn something from these dads that you think other people should know? How would things change for trans youth and their families if others knew it?

Is there one person (or group of people) you think should be required to view this film? What would you want them to gain from it?

GENDER AND TRANS YOUTH

Before viewing THE DADS, were you familiar with trans youth? What have been your sources of information about transgender children and their families? Why do you consider those sources credible? Do the messages you have previously heard about trans youth and their parents support or challenge what you saw in the film?

Peter told the story of a therapist telling him that his profession wasn't "masculine enough," as if transgender children are trans because of the influence of people around them. Have you ever had your gender expression or gender role judged as being too masculine or feminine, or not masculine or feminine enough? How did that make you feel? Do you believe that judgment around gender expression and gender roles can be harmful to cisgender people as well as transgender people? Have you ever considered how difficult it must feel as a transgender person to constantly be judged about their gender, gender expression, and gender roles and what is deemed acceptable to others?



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PARENTING LEARNING CURVES

Peter and Frank both spoke about struggling to understand their daughters and attempts they made to change their behavior: Peter said he tried to get his daughter to wear different clothes and Frank pushed hard with traditional activities like playing football. They told those stories with a feeling of regret. How would you have handled a child's gender expression that you didn't understand? Do you believe that allowing children to wear certain clothing or play with certain toys can influence a person's gender, or that they can be tools children use as an outward expression of who they know they are? Can you see how pushing against a child's internal sense of self in this way can cause them pain and cause damage to your relationship?

Wayne admits to having a powerful moment of confronting his fears while cutting wood. He said to himself, "What are you afraid of? It wasn't Nicole. It was me. I was uncomfortable around my own child." Have you had a similar moment of fear as a parent that you can relate to? If you have a trans child in your life, how might similar fears be preventing you from stepping into a more supportive and affirming role?



FACING SOCIETY

Peter explained that his daughter lost friends at school when she spoke about her social transition. Frank asked if it was because of the parents or the kids, to which Peter said he is sure it was due to other parents because he and his wife lost their friends, too. It's not uncommon for transgender people and their supportive family members to lose friends over their support. Does this surprise you? Are you surprised that the judgment comes from other adults rather than from other youth?

Jose spoke of immigrating to the US as a child and still feeling out of place as an adult. He compared his experience of having some of his rights questioned versus his American trans son having his humanity questioned. How did that make you feel? Have you heard dehumanizing language about transgender people? Have you previously thought about how dehumanizing language is used as a tool to promote discrimination and oppression?

Stephen says he thinks about his child's safety when he leaves the house. He explains it with three simple sentences: "He is a Black man. He's a Black trans man. He's a Black trans man in America." What did you feel when you heard those sentences? Do you understand why they were important enough for Stephen to say them so directly regarding his son's safety?



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TAKING ACTION

Dennis reflected on losing his own son, Matthew, to homophobic violence twenty years ago and said of the other dads, "They're fighting the same battle right now. Only it's worse." Are you aware of the hundreds of anti-trans legislative bills filed in states across the country in the last few years? Do you understand how the debate of these bills with inflammatory and accusatory language puts trans youth and their families in danger? Even if these bills have not passed in your state, do you think that they can influence legislation and/or access to trans-supportive healthcare in your state? Does seeing this renewed backlash against the progress LGBTQ people made in the last two decades worry you?

"Father" is both a noun and a verb. As a verb, its meaning is "to treat with protective care." Each of the dads reflected on their roles as fathers: Stephen, a widower who is raising his kids as a single parent said, "You gotta keep moving forward. They need stability. They need me to be present and on the front lines." Wayne said, "So many trans families don't make it because the dads aren't on board. They gotta figure out why they're afraid." Dennis said dads need to show people they support their child 100%. Frank said it was important and healing for him to speak out as a father. Jose reflected that he and the other dads are willing to put everything on the line for their children and other people's children. Peter said, "we all need to get back in the fight." How do you define being a father? How would you carry out that role if your child was transgender?



To learn more about supporting transgender youth and their families, visit:
www.hrc.org/resources/parents-for-transgender-equality-national-council