

How can I reach out to my estranged adult children?

Your transition is unlikely to be the main cause of the estrangement. I would write to your children – to try and understand what happened from their point of view

***The dilemma** I am a 72-year-old trans woman. Outwardly, publicly, I can say my life has been interesting and successful. I've had a good career. My last job was to run an NGO to safeguard the interests of girls and women in a part of the world where their interests are habitually overlooked. I now live back home and am happily married. I feel blessed. And yet I am haunted by a loss that I find difficult to comprehend. I have not seen my children for years. The reason for this estrangement is not, I think, specifically my transitioning, but the act of telling: the demand by the hospital that to advance in my progress towards surgery I must take this step to tell my children. Yet the hospital offered no guidance. I managed it badly with – for us all – terrible consequences.*

Prior to my telling my children, I was depressed. I had already stopped work on mental health grounds and my then wife also had mental health difficulties.

I have never doubted the necessity of my course of action or the possible outcome if I had not transitioned – and each day since has proved it to have been right. I have the life I live now, with all that it gives me, but I had that other life that contained my children, who I loved intensely. I do not know how to approach the estrangement or mediate it, and it eats into me. I have been erased.

***Philippa's answer** You have made the right decisions for yourself and you have made your life work for you. You have made a significant contribution to society and you have a loving partner. I'm glad it's not all bad.*

Since parental estrangement usually happens after an event – like the announcement of a divorce or, in your case, the announcement of your transition – parents tend to think it is that incident which caused the rupture, but such an incident is rarely the main cause. It is usually an accumulation of things. And neither is it the things that are the cause of the estrangement: it is how the children experience, interpret and perceive those things.

There isn't one particular type of communication or parental approach, or specific type of conflict that is consistent in parental estrangement cases. Often, the children and their parents believe it was caused by different reasons. Parents usually report that the cause must have been the divorce or that they weren't strict or lax enough, but the adult children usually cite mistreatment, neglect or feeling unheard, unaccepted by, or unimportant to their parents. What I'm saying is that although your children might not like the way they were told about your transition (perhaps they would have preferred knowing your process as it happened or maybe they wanted you to be more interested in them – I don't know), it is unlikely to be the main cause of their estrangement. It is more likely to be an accumulation of their interpretations of many events.

It is hard not to blame the hospital – and, indeed, they may well be partly culpable – but blaming isn't useful and keeps you in the position of victim, unable to do anything. If I were you, I would write to my children. I would talk of my sadness over the estrangement. I would say that I wanted to try to understand it from each of their points of view. I would ask for their help in understanding what their experience has been and how they interpreted that experience.

If they reply, I would attempt to see all the events and feelings that led them to the conclusions they

made. In return, I would sum up to them what they told me, without arguing about their version of events, to make certain that they know I have listened and not been defensive. Then, and only if they want to know, I would say what my experience has been, and what I wish for in the future. Whether they responded or not, I would assure them that they are always in my thoughts.

Where there has been a rupture in a relationship it is never too late to attempt a repair. No action comes with any guarantee, but you can try. You can open the door. It could be that nothing happens. But it is more likely not to happen if you stay behind a closed door.

If, after such an attempt, they are still uninterested in resuming a relationship with you, and you still don't want to be forgotten, you could write your autobiography. You can leave this for them. Also think of some of your things that you can bequeath to each of them when you eventually die. You have been part of their lives and they yours and the more you can all understand about each other, the saner you may all feel – which is why, even if they can't or won't respond, it is important you try to leave them your history which may, in the long run, help them make sense of their own.

Further reading *Rules of Estrangement: Why Adult [Children](#) Cut Ties and How to Heal the Conflict* by Joshua Coleman