



Understanding Mental Disorders

Your Guide to *DSM-5*[®]



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Gender Dysphoria

Christine's Story

Christopher, a 52-year-old salesperson, has begun a legal process to change her gender to female. Her new name is Christine.

Christopher had been born with male genitals and was raised as a boy. Nothing unusual was noted by Christopher's parents until childhood, at which point Christopher was viewed as a "sissy" by other children. Christopher sought out female friends in school and chose activities and clubs that mainly involved girls. He did not wish to play contact sports, much to the dismay of his father. Christopher did well in tennis and competed in the sport to please his father.

Christopher began to sense that his feelings and thoughts were those of a girl's. He felt he was "Christine" instead of "Christopher." He knew his strict father would never accept such an idea, so he never spoke about it.

Christopher did well in college and became very fond of a longtime girlfriend. Although he did not feel sexually drawn to her, he wanted very much to please his father, so he married her after college. He was fairly content with his married life, but he knew he was living mostly to please his family. The way he was living never matched the way he felt inside. He felt much more at ease when he could think of himself as Christine. When his wife was not at home, he would often wear her clothing.

Over years of marriage, Christopher felt more unhappy and upset with himself that he was not being honest with his own life goals or honest with his wife and family. He sought treatment from a mental health care provider. After he talked about his life at length, he began to talk about his sense that he is "Christine" and his fears of letting down his family. As "Christine," he began to share more private feelings in therapy. He became more secure in describing himself as a woman and began to ask some of his closest friends to refer to him as "she."

Over time, she (Christine) began to realize that she was not going to have the quality of life that she wanted unless she began to live openly as a woman. Over the next several months, she worked with her mental health care provider to gain courage to tell her wife that she wanted to separate. She also sought a referral with a specialist who could inform her about hormone treatments and surgeries. She might someday explore these options if she wanted to change her physical appearance to a female, but she knew this would be a big decision. The first step would be to learn how to discuss her condition with all of her family and friends and decide how to begin changing her life to match the female role. She sought out a specialist who works with people who have *gender dysphoria* to help with this process, as she knew that it would be a very hard transition for her wife. Christine's father also would have trouble accepting the diagnosis and why it was crucial to Christine to be able to live her life as a woman.

Learn more and purchase *Understanding Mental Disorders* at www.psychiatry.org/UnderstandingMentalDisorders.

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