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A trans teen came out to her mom in a PowerPoint presentation, and their relationship has only gotten stronger since

Julia Naftulin Feb 25, 2021, 4:23 PM



Juliana, left, with her daughter Gabi. Juliana Ruiz

- **16-year-old Gabi Jimenez came out as transgender in April 2020.**
- **Insider interviewed Gabi and her mother Juliana about the experience.**
- **They shared how parents can best support their transgender children, and even learn from them.**



The coronavirus pandemic has impacted all of our mental health, but transgender youth face a heightened risk for depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicide, an [April 2020 report from the Trevor Project](#) found.

As transgender children discover their truest selves amidst global turmoil and away from the in-person support of friends and role models, their parents have become even more integral to their experiences.

Insider sat down with Gabi Jimenez, a 16-year-old who came out in April 2020, and her mother Juliana Ruiz.

In the below conversation, they discuss how parents can make their transgender children feel safe, loved, and supported and how children, when parents listen and learn without judgment, can be the best teachers.

As a society, we often stay away from conversations about gender and identity. How did the stigma around transgender people affect your own decision to come out?

Gabi: Before I discovered I was trans, it was complicated. When I was growing up, everyone would tell me I'm gay and I kind of assumed I was for awhile.

It was hard at the beginning, just figuring out what being trans is. But I had my mom's friend [Jowharah] who started a [national anti-bullying organization](#) and she helped me through a lot of it, with research and connecting me with someone who is transgender.



I was in denial for a long time but once I accepted it, it was a lot easier to start the process of transitioning medically and socially.

Juliana: Right before Gabi came out, I noticed that something was off. She's a very happy and comical girl, but I could tell she was dealing with a lot of internal turmoil. I was like, "Something is going on. Something's not right."

I actually remember telling Gabi, "If you can't talk to me, regardless of what's going, talk to Jowharah. She'll always be there for you."

And so Gabi took me up on that advice. I know they started talking, but I didn't really know what they were talking about. I just felt relief because I knew she was in the right hands.

Gabi: I feel incredibly grateful, because I know a lot of people don't have that option, especially trans kids. Talking to a few trans youth, they told me themselves, "You're really lucky to have someone that could help you through all of that." [Jowharah] was there helping me through everything and still is.



Juliana Ruiz with her daughter Gabi. Juliana Ruiz



It must have been difficult to have other people define your experience for you, saying that you're gay. How did you think of your own identity at the time? And how did you come to realize it was about your gender, not your sexuality?

Gabi: I knew something was off for a long time and I always thought it was my sexuality. Through school, people would tell me that I'm gay without even talking to me. I never said it myself, but I also didn't say, "No, I'm not gay."

Then, in fifth grade, I saw a news article on [Jazz Jennings](#), the young trans woman [\[who had a TLC show about her life\]](#). Her image always stayed in the back of my mind until I really started thinking about my gender identity instead of my sexual orientation last year. That's when I texted Jowharah and she helped me through that.

My friends have also been really supportive. Before I came out, I'd told them I was curious about my sexual orientation. At the beginning of quarantine, I texted them about how I was thinking of my identity. It felt like I was already telling them without telling them.

What was the coming-out experience like from each of your perspectives, as a transgender teenager and as the mom of a transgender daughter?

Juliana: When she came out to me and her sisters, she came out in a very Gabi manner. Do you want to say how you came out?

Gabi: I made a PowerPoint that was a game where you had to fill in words and each letter was something that had to do with me.



The presentation said that I didn't like girls, just to throw everyone off into thinking I was coming out as gay. Then I switched it on them and put, "I don't like girls, but I'm not gay."

Juliana: It was a shock. She always liked playing with her sisters' dolls and dressing up like Disney princesses with them, so me and her father, we are divorced, thought she might be gay.

We were waiting to see if that was the case, so I didn't expect it to be that she was transgender.

Since she told us, I've tried, and I think her father has too, to be supportive in every way possible.

Gabi: I had my parents tell everyone that wasn't in the immediate family, because I thought it'd be uncomfortable with telling them face to face.

I thought everyone was closed minded, and I was scared of what they would think or what they would say. When I wasn't out and I identified as male, my grandma would go at me for painting my nails and dressing more feminine.

But when I came out, I was really surprised how supportive she was and how she was really trying with my pronouns and stuff like that.

It's now been almost a year since you came out, Gabi. What, from each of your perspectives, has been the most challenging part of this experience?



Juliana: I went from having a son and two daughters to having three daughters overnight. Making that mental switch was definitely a challenge.

Another thing, which I thought would be a challenge and it has not been at all, was Gabi's sisters. I mean, she's got two younger sisters who are 14 and 12. They embraced her with open arms.

I'm Hispanic and Hispanic families are macho, for lack of a better term, so that was another concern. But I was blown away by their support.

Gabi: A lot of people think it's a phase. That's what I thought it was for awhile.

Where we live, most people aren't educated on what it means to be transgender.

When people purposely misgender me, I don't really care. I think they're just being dumb. It's them choosing to remain uneducated on something that's becoming more and more prevalent.

Juliana: I think that my biggest challenge is being so open about it. Since this all happened during the pandemic, we haven't been out seeing people.

It wasn't until two or three weeks ago that I started being more open about it. I posted on social media the other day, mentioning that I have a trans daughter.



I'm working on overcoming that concern of what people are going to think and just realizing that it's irrelevant what anybody thinks. It's my daughter and I have to be there for her.



Juliana Ruiz

Transitioning can look different depending on the person and what they want for themselves. Some choose to medically transition with hormones and surgeries, some go for social-only transitions with pronoun changes, and some choose a mixture. What were conversations about this like for the two of you?

Gabi: Just a few minutes after I came out, my mom was asking questions about what steps I needed to take. At the end of my little PowerPoint, I had information about what we needed to do [for my medical transition] and she was on it the next day, researching and calling people.



Juliana: I'm very action-oriented, so after she came out it was like, "So what do we have to do?"

Gabi's in the prime of her puberty so I knew that certain steps had to be taken. We immediately got her lined up with a therapist, who is actually Jazz Jennings' cousin.

We also got her lined up with an endocrinologist who actually runs the transgender clinic in the county we live in. She recently started hormone blockers and the next step is for her to start female hormones.

Juliana, you're a single mother who co-parents with Gabi's father. Has your dynamic changed since Gabi came out?

Juliana: I think Gabi's father struggled a little bit more with the pronouns. I remember one of the things he said to me when Gabi first came out was, "I wish we could mourn our son together," and I didn't get that comment at first.

It wasn't until I went to the bank and the teller used Gabi's dead name that I understood what he meant. I had to go in the car and cry to mourn my son because I raised a little boy, or so I thought. I think that brought us closer.

We don't have much of a relationship other than being there for our kids, and he's 100% involved in all of Gabi's medical decisions. He's in the process right now, getting her hormone blockers and everything that she needs.



Juliana Ruiz

What advice do you have for transgender youth and their parents?

Gabi: Don't come out if you're in an unsafe environment. That's really important.

When you can, be your truest self, even if nobody in your social group likes it. Be yourself even when it's not the societal norm.

Juliana: There are groups out there, there are other parents, and so many resources and forums where you can join and not be alone. As a parent, you just have to be there for your child.

It's not anything we're ashamed of, or hiding. We're in your face with it, and Gabi definitely is.

She's proud of who she is and at 16 years old, I didn't have that self-awareness and self-assuredness with my identity. It's something beautiful to witness.