

Understanding and Utilizing the Companionship Model in Working with Transgender and Gender Diverse Youth Seeking Gender Affirming Care

Joonwoo Lee, M. Ed. / Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology at University of Wisconsin-Madison

1. The Companionship Model (TCM-Y)

The model highlights clinicians' intentional shift from an assessor to a companion role while navigating gatekeeping with intentionality, centering assessment on clients' access to resources, and recognizing the significance of dismantling gatekeeping within the medical system.

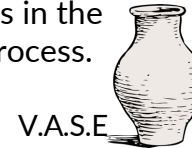
2. Becoming a Companion from the Beginning

- **Prior to the first session,**
 - Proactively provide clients necessary information in navigating medical gatekeeping
 - Ask the insurer/provider to update their criteria to SOC v.8, if outdated
- **Commit to advocacy work (e.g., provide pro-bono referral sessions)**

3. Action Steps: for both youths and caregivers

Clinicians are encouraged to use four actions:

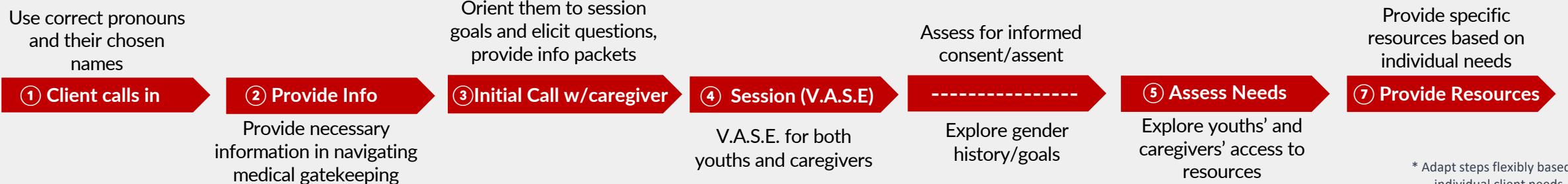
- **Validating** that sessions can often bring a wide range of feelings: nervousness, distrust, fear, excitement, etc.
- **Asking** how they feel about the session and gender transition
- **Sharing** clinician's critical understanding of the assessment process as an informed consent/assent process, understanding of youths' decisional capacity and autonomy, and importance of centering the session on increasing access to resources.
- **Engaging** both youths and caregivers in the assessment and gender transition process.



4. Centering Access to Resources

- ❖ **Relationship with Peers/School**
 - Increasing access to affirming peers and teachers
 - Connecting with LGBTQ+ peers (including online)
 - Identifying LGBTQ+ resources or clubs at school
- ❖ **Relationship with Family**
 - Identifying supportive family figures
 - Managing family dynamics throughout gender transition
- ❖ **Access to Affirming Mental Health Care**
 - Referring to low-cost/free mental health resources and local/online support groups
- ❖ **Access to Education (Caregivers)**
 - Connecting caregivers to accurate educational materials
 - Providing caregivers with social support options for their children
- ❖ **Access to Parent Support Group (Caregivers)**
 - TNB Youth Parent Group (e.g., PFLAG)
 - Identifying supportive community members

5. Session Steps



* Adapt steps flexibly based on individual client needs.



Criteria for Youths' Referral Letters (SOC v. 8)

Puberty blocking agents/Hormone

- a. Gender incongruence is marked and sustained over time
- b. Meets the diagnostic criteria for gender incongruence in situations where a diagnosis is necessary
- c. Demonstrates the emotional and cognitive maturity required to provide informed consent/assent for the treatment
- d. Mental health concerns (if any) that may interfere with diagnostic clarity, capacity to consent, and gender-affirming medical treatments have been addressed; sufficiently so that gender-affirming medical treatment can be provided optimally
- e. Informed of the reproductive effects, including the potential loss of fertility and the available options to preserve fertility;
- f. Reached Tanner stage 2

Gender Affirming Surgery

- a. Gender incongruence is marked and sustained over time
- b. Meets the diagnostic criteria for gender incongruence in situations where a diagnosis is necessary
- c. Demonstrates the emotional and cognitive maturity required to provide informed consent/assent for the treatment
- d. Mental health concerns (if any) that may interfere with diagnostic clarity, capacity to consent, and gender-affirming medical treatments have been addressed; sufficiently so that gender-affirming medical treatment can be provided optimally
- e. Informed of the reproductive effects, including the potential loss of fertility and the available options to preserve fertility;
- f. At least 12 months of gender-affirming hormone therapy or longer, if required, to achieve the desired surgical result for gender-affirming procedures, including breast augmentation, orchiectomy, vaginoplasty, hysterectomy, phalloplasty, metoidioplasty, and facial surgery as part of gender-affirming treatment unless hormone therapy is either not desired or is medically contraindicated.