February 22 to February 28 marks the national 2015 NEDAwareness Week (pronounced need-awareness-week). Gender Spectrum is partnering with the National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA) to connect youth and parents to life-saving resources around eating disorders.

For general information about eating disorders, visit: [http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/general-information](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/general-information)

Who suffers from eating disorders? Many hold onto stereotypes when they think of those that suffer from an eating disorder. Contrary to popular belief, eating disorders can affect anyone.

Gender Spectrum’s participation in NEDAwareness Week is important because we believe that more people should talk about eating disorders and gender, especially parents and youth. We don’t want your Gender identity or body image to contribute to negative and unhealthy behaviors.

Below is an excerpt from a blog written by Ryan K. Sallans, Author of Second Son: Transitioning Toward My Destiny, Love and Life.

I grew up in a small farming community and struggled to find a place where I felt accepted by anyone, since my baggy pants, untucked athletics t-shirts and disheveled hair didn’t fit with my female body and the expectation that I should be feminine. I was often asked by the younger kids in the school’s hallways, Are you a girl or boy? I was asked by my family, “Don’t you want to look pretty like your sister?”

When my puberty began, my insecurities with my physical appearance became my obsession. As my body grew into a curvy female form I let go of the fantasy of turning into a boy and surrendered to the idea that I’d forever be uncomfortable in my own skin.

My curves made me feel fat.

My curves scared me.

At the age of eighteen I decided that all of my discomfort in life would go away if I just lost weight.

By the time I turned 19, I was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. My eating disorder caused me to live in a world that revolved around all the things I was trying to avoid; my body, food, fear and loneliness.

We all have different and personal feelings about our bodies. But as Ryan’s story shows, gender identity and expression can be intimately related to a healthy sense of self and care. Sometimes, our thoughts around our body can leave us feeling lost, unwanted, or as if there is something wrong. If you’re ever feeling like you can’t talk to anyone about this, you can
call the NEDA Helpline.

**NEDA Helpline**
Call (800) 931-2237 or visit online for a “click to chat” option
M-Th 9a-9p ET, Fr 9a-5p ET
[http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/information-referral-helpline](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/information-referral-helpline)

**Online Eating Disorders Screening:** [www.mybodyscreening.org](http://www.mybodyscreening.org)

Parents who are doing research about eating disorders should also note that there are many unique stressors that Gender-expansive youth experience, such as coming out, internalized negative messages around gender (and body), harassment and bullying, which can all impact levels of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse. NEDA wants parents to be aware that these are common co-occurring conditions and can be contributing factors in the development of an eating disorder.

One’s journey with gender can be very personal and may even last a lifetime. The journey can feel less lonely if youth and parents (or caregivers) are able to talk openly about feelings related to gender, body image, and self-esteem.

Filmmaker, Diane Israel, sums up this post beautifully with a hopeful message:

> It took me a long time to learn to be myself in a culture that devalues those who challenge narrow beauty standards and transgress gender norms. Now at 50, I don’t think of myself around the confines of being a woman or a man, being male or female. I feel my authentic self beyond the limiting ideals our culture has created and imposes upon us. I have learned that the incredible variety that exists among people is what is truly beautiful. If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder or body image issues, I encourage you to seek treatment and support.

If you have a gender story to share, visit: [https://www.genderspectrum.org/stay-connected/share-your-story/](https://www.genderspectrum.org/stay-connected/share-your-story/)