

Discussion Questions: *This is How it Always Is* by Laurie Frankel

1. In what ways does the book tackle typical definitions of boys and girls, men and women? Did it change your view of gender and identity as you read?
2. After Jane Doe's trauma, Rosie thinks, "Head colds should be tolerated. Children should be celebrated." What is the difference between tolerance and acceptance? Acceptance and celebration? Discuss how language, down to the pronouns we use, affects the way we interact with people different from ourselves.
3. Discuss what you think it means to be a man, a woman, or "something else."
4. When Rosie feels guilt for forcing Roo to move, Carmelo tells her, "Parents choose one kid over another all the time." Do you agree with this statement? How about Rosie's earlier conclusion that "of course you could uproot a whole family of seven for the needs of just one of them because that's what family means"?
5. When Rosie and Penn discuss what course Poppy should take before puberty, Rosie says: "When a little girl wants to wear jeans and play soccer, her parents are thrilled, but when a little boy wants to wear a dress and play dolls, his parents send him to therapy and enroll him in a study." Are young boys more constrained by gender stereotypes than young girls?
6. Who should be the key people to support families in these situations, and what limitations or freedoms should they have?
7. Does the weight of gendered expectations shift from one gender to another as we grow up? If so, when? Consider what Rosie says just a few pages later: "You think Poppy would be the only woman to hate the way she looks? All women hate the way they look."
8. In what ways are we as a society trapped in gender stereotypes? Do we make children less free by assigning them a label, and things to go with that label, so early in life? Discuss the differences in freedom experienced by Americans and Thai people as shown in the novel.
9. Discuss the ways in which Rosie and Claude discover both their immense privilege and their forced conformity when they get to know Thai culture and people.
10. When comforting Poppy, Ben says, "Fitting in and being normal doesn't exist." How does the novel continuously challenge the idea of "normal"?

There are so many resources now for anyone who wants to learn more about gender identity in general and transgender issues in particular. Below are some resources for families with gender nonconforming children. Two notes:

1) These are just starting points. If they're not your bag, keep looking.

And 2) gender nonconforming is an excellent way to be.

[Here's a piece](#) I wrote for the New York Times' Modern Love column about my own journey with my own kid.

[Here's a letter](#) I wrote to early readers about why this story is so hard to tell and why I did it anyway.

[TransFamilies](#)

[Gender Diversity Group](#)

[Gender Spectrum](#)

[Trans Youth Equity Foundation](#)

[Transgender Law Center Truth Program](#)

[TransYouth Family Allies](#)

[TransKids Purple Rainbow Foundation](#)

Some great books to start with for those (bless you) who prefer actual paper:

- [Gender Born, Gender Made, by Diane Ehrensaft](#)
- [The Transgender Child, by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper](#)