

these things in their own time. Trading in an itchy sweater is neither a quick process, nor a painless one. It is, however, so much better than wearing an itchy sweater for the rest of your life. Some people may go through this process multiple times, in fact, as they find even softer sweaters than the one they first try on. That's okay! Improved self-awareness and making growthful choices is to be celebrated, not dismissed as capriciousness.

Hey there!
My name is Enfys J. Book.
If you liked this thing I wrote,
you should know that I also
write books, including a book
of rituals for queer rites of
passage called:
**Queer Rites: A Magical
Grimoire to Honor Your
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At some point, you get a chance to try on a much softer sweater than your own, and it's an absolutely euphoric moment. But afterwards, you have to put your itchy sweater back on, and that's when you realize how incredibly itchy it is, by comparison. How could you not have noticed this before? You did, of course... but you learned to ignore it, because you thought it was normal, that most sweaters felt like that, and you had nothing to compare it to.

Maybe you get a soft sweater to wear in private, but

itchy sweater is simply the experience of "sweater." And that itchiness kinda fades into the background of your consciousness as you go through your life wearing it.

But at some point, you start to notice some other people's sweaters look a lot softer than yours, and suddenly it's all you can think about. And thinking about the softness of those other sweaters makes you aware that your sweater might be a bit itchy, even though you've worn it for years and have become a pro at ignoring the itchiness.

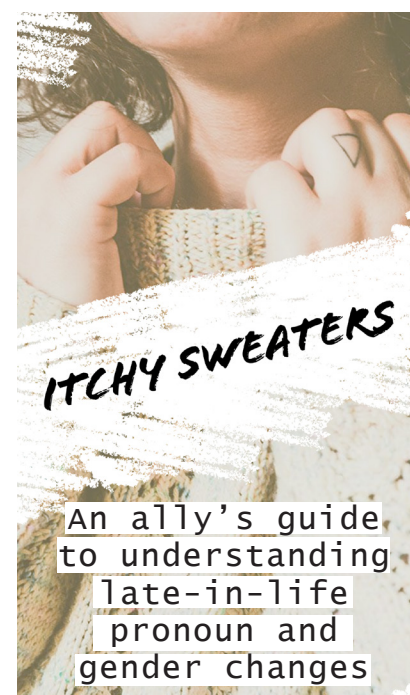
“My middle-aged adult friend just announced they are a different gender than I thought they were, and asked me to use a new name and new pronouns for them.

“Why are they just realizing this now? They never seemed to react badly to their original name, gender, and pronouns before. Was it really bothering them so much they had to change?”

Even the most well-intentioned ally can get confused, or even frustrated,

As an ally, the itchy sweater metaphor may be a good starting point to help you understand why some people take a long time to realize they are transgender/nonbinary and would be much more comfortable with a new name and/or new pronouns. One thing I like about this metaphor is that it includes the joy and euphoria of trying on the soft sweater. Being transgender or nonbinary isn't all about trying to fix something wrong in your life: it's trying to change into something right.

To dive deeper into this topic, I encourage you to read *Gender Euphoria*, a collection of essays on transgender and nonbinary joy, edited by Laura Kate Dale. It features a wide range of experiences of people all over the world.



when someone in their life comes out as nonbinary, transgender, or with a new name and new pronouns. Respecting that person now requires additional effort and practice. You have to rewrite your memory a bit, and take extra care when speaking to or about that person until you get used to using the new name and pronouns. (I assure you, the effort is both worth it, and appreciated!)

From my own experience, as a nonbinary person who changed their name and pronouns after age 40, my

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original name, gender identity, and pronouns never quite fit, but I didn't consciously realize they were "itchy sweaters" until I spent some time trying on different ones.

What do I mean by "itchy sweaters"? Let me tell you a story.

Imagine that you had to wear an itchy sweater all day, every day. Imagine your parents gave you this sweater when you were born, and it magically grew with you and was the only shirt you owned. To you, the experience of the

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afterwards you always have to put that itchy sweater back on, and it feels worse and worse every time, until you just can't stand it anymore.

It may be confusing for other people, and even yourself, when you realize how itchy the sweater is. To them, it's a sudden change. But it's not suddenly wrong. It's always been wrong, but because it was the default setting imposed upon you, you didn't realize there was an alternative that felt so much better.

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But certain people in your life are deeply invested in you wearing that itchy sweater. Even worse, to them that itchy sweater is your identity, and you wanting to wear something different is unthinkable. So maybe they try to convince you that the sweater isn't itchy, or maybe they try bargaining with you to wear the itchy sweater for certain occasions. Unfortunately, at that point, the itchiness of that sweater is positively agonizing compared to your new, soft sweater. The people asking you to wear the itchy sweater for a short

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