"Is That a Boy or a Girl?"

How to Talk to Your Children or Grandchildren about Gender Identity

Bruce Jenner's athletic world-record and 1976 Olympic gold medal in the decathlon competition propelled him to become one of the most famous athletes in the world. He was a hero and role model for many. He later became well known to younger generations after his marriage to Kris Kardashian and appearances on the reality television show, "*Keeping Up with the Kardashians*."



With his tremendous athletic background, there was huge surprise when, in 2015, Jenner started appearing in public with long hair and nail polish. Tabloids reported he was undergoing plastic surgery. Finally, in a television interview with Diane Sawyer, Jenner announced his decision to "transition into a woman." A cover photo published a few months later on *Vanity Fair* magazine was even more shocking, and a reality television show on his life aired on *E!*

In July of 2016, Jenner appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* wearing the Olympic gold medal won 40 years ago. But it's not just Jenner. The transgender agenda has become a huge media concern, from the fracas in North Carolina to the Obama Administration's newly announced school restroom policy. Sadly, given the prominence of transgenderism in our culture, children are exposed to this complicated issue at far too early an age.

Responding to Children

When confusing events like this are broadcast throughout the culture, Focus on the Family is asked a lot of questions. And we know parents get asked questions, too:

- *Daddy, why does that man want to be a lady?*
- *Mom, what does "transgender" mean?*
- *Can a boy turn into a girl?*
- *Mommy, I'm a girl; but will I ever change into a boy?*

Transgenderism – also called "gender dysphoria," "gender confusion" or "gender identity disorder" – is tough enough for adults to understand. So when our children encounter these gender-confusing messages, what do we say? Most importantly, how do we help them develop a biblical, Christian perspective on this issue?

We want to help you navigate this topic, so here are some useful guidelines and suggestions for addressing transgender issues with your children:

Keep It Simple

Relax. As a parent, you are the authority in your child's life; but you don't have to be an expert on every issue – including this one. And even the "experts" really don't understand all the complexities of this issue. A few years ago, a gay identified psychiatrist was asked about gender confusion and responded, "The truth is we actually don't know what it is. Is it a mental disorder or does the cause of gender dysphoria lie somewhere else?"[1]

So don't think you have to understand everything about transgenderism or tell your children all you know. Here are a few simple truths to communicate:

- *God made humans male and female.*
- *Individuals are born either male or female.*
- *Some people get hurt and confused, and they don't like the way God made them.*
- *As a result, some people wish they were the opposite sex.*
- *Nobody can really change from one sex to the other.*

Keep It a Dialogue

When children ask questions, use the occasion to connect with them. Find out what they are learning, where they learned it and what they are thinking. Ask questions, such as:

- *Where did you see that?*
- *Where did you hear that word?*
- *Why do you think God made both boys and girls?*
- *What do you think "transgender" means?*

- *Do you think a boy can really turn into a girl?*

This isn't an inquisition, but an opportunity to get to know your child better. So keep your tone conversational and friendly.

Older children and teens may have more questions, so we have a list of helpful resources at the end of this article. You might want to read some of these additional resources first, then read and discuss them with an older child.

Keep It Truthful

If you don't know the answer to a child's question, say so. Then tell your child you'll look for an answer. Let's say your son asks, "Why does he want to be a lady?" The real answer, if we're honest, is "I don't know." None of us know all of the pain and false beliefs in the lives and hearts of persons who struggle with transgender issues.

Nevertheless, Scripture is clear about certain things, and those truths are what you can communicate to your children:

- God made us in His image – male and female. *(Genesis 1:27, 5:2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6. ESV)*
- Sin entered the world and spoiled everything, including how we see ourselves. *(Matthew 15:19; Romans 3:23, 5:12-13. ESV)*
- Some people get really hurt and confused as they grow up. *(Romans 1:19-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. ESV)*
- God loves us and sent us Son to save us. *(John 1:1-14, 29; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 2:2. ESV)*
- God can bring healing and truth to those who are hurt. *(2 Chronicles 7:14; Romans 6:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:24. ESV)*

God wants us to live in truth about how He created us and who we are. We know God is powerful to save and transform lives – including the gender-confused. Tell your children this truth.

Keep It Kind

God has a deep love for sexually and relationally broken men and women – including those struggling with gender identity issues. These struggles are complicated and touch on deep aspects of our sexuality and being. The topic can provoke some to laughter or mockery, so work to maintain God's heart for the gender-confused. He loves them with an everlasting love – *just as He loves each of us.*

Your children will be watching you for cues about how to respond to a gender identity disorder (GID). Pray for God's heart and for the ability to convey this to your children. Tone and attitude are as important as your words:

- God loves all of us.
- God loves men who wish they were women, as well as women who think they are men.
- We may disagree with someone's beliefs and choices; however, we can still be kind and loving.
- We can pray for those who are gender-confused.

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Keep It Affirming

When children see a transgender person on the news or on the street, they may feel curious, alarmed, confused or afraid. So, when they ask questions about it, they're not just asking for details about transgenderism. They're also asking for comfort and affirmation. As a parent, you can respond positively:

- *I'm so glad God made you a girl!*
- *I'm happy you're my child and that you're a boy.*
- *What's good about being a girl?*
- *What's good about being a boy?*

Ask the Lord for wisdom and creativity for how best to affirm your sons in their masculinity and your daughters in their femininity.

By Jeff Johnston, Focus on the Family

Note

1. Sharon Jayson, "What 'transgender' means, and how society views it," *USA Today*, August 22, 2013. The psychiatrist quoted is Jack Drescher, M.D. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/22/transgender-primer-manning/2687869/

Credit

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Editor's note (AFA of Indiana, November 2026): This is the article as first published in 2016; Focus on the Family has since updated its online version, which also carries the resource list the article mentions. Some details have changed. The Obama Administration's school restroom guidance was withdrawn on February 22, 2017, and North Carolina replaced its 2016 restroom law (HB2) on March 30, 2017. In 2013 the psychiatric manual (DSM-5) replaced the diagnosis "gender identity disorder" with "gender dysphoria." In the April 24, 2015, Diane Sawyer interview, Jenner said, "For all intents and purposes, I am a woman." We could not confirm the words "transition into a woman" as a direct quote. The *Vanity Fair* cover came out about five weeks after the interview.