

## Misguided Compassion

By Ross S. Olson MD, Retired Pediatrician

I have been a medical doctor for over 40 years, 25 of which were spent caring exclusively for children. **Is it possible to do harm with the best of motivations? Unfortunately, yes!**

There are indeed children with gender confusion but what is the truly caring thing to do? Is it to just let them become whatever they want to be? The truly wise response needs rather to grow out of proper understanding.

A transgender child says, "I have always felt this way." Does it mean they were born that way? No, it is because the usual age when a child decides, "I am a girl," or "I am a boy," is 1 ½ to 2½. Factors that may have interfered with identification to biologic gender will not be remembered and yet there are many possibilities.

And the dominant culture says, "You can choose your gender; you can change your gender." So we see well-meaning parents advocating for hormonal therapy to block their child's puberty and ease the transition to sex change. Although this seems compassionate, the science is not supportive. 98% of gender confused boys and 88% of gender confused girls come to peace with their biologic gender after going through adolescence.

And delaying puberty, instead of increasing options, actually pushes the decisions towards sex change. Is it really wise to move in the direction of an essentially irreversible surgical therapy which in about 90% of cases is not actually necessary? Ominously, a 2011 study published in Sweden showed a suicide rate **twenty times higher than expected** in long term follow-up (10 to 30 years) of adults who had undergone sex change – all this in liberal, supportive, affirming Sweden! Sex change did not make them happy!

A principle of medicine is "First Do No Harm." It is **not** wise to jump on a popular bandwagon when the science is disturbing. Affirming an identity also helps to **solidify** that identity. If a child believes himself or herself to be **stupid**, what do you do? You **don't** say, "Yes, I affirm you in your stupidity!" Of course not. You say, "**No you aren't!**" You do not allow it to become a fixed false belief. You even ask, "Why do you feel that way?" and try to identify and deal with what you find out or surmise.

Don't the gender confused deserve the same consideration? Instead, by misguided policies we reinforce the misunderstanding of its cause and cure and prevent people from even asking the crucial question, "Why?" Understanding of the causes, leading to effective treatments will benefit the individual we care about as well as all future generations.

As a retired pediatrician, I am urging key decision makers to commit with me to "Do No Harm."

## References

**Gender Dysphoria in Children** *American College of Pediatricians* – August 2016

<https://acpeds.org/position-statements/gender-dysphoria-in-children>

**Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden** <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0016885>