

My name is January Littlejohn. I am a mother of 3 teenagers, a licensed mental health counselor and a senior fellow parent advocate at Do No Harm. I am here to offer my personal experience – both as a licensed counselor – and as a mother.

In the spring of 2020, our 13-year-old daughter told us that she was experiencing distress over her sex and that she didn't feel like a girl. She had expressed no previous signs of gender confusion and her announcement came shortly after 3 of her friends at her middle school also claimed transgender identities. Soon afterwards, her mental health spiraled.

We worked with a licensed mental health professional to help our daughter explore and resolve co-occurring issues, including low self-esteem and anxiety. We also gave her more one-on-one time, in-person activities away from trans influences, limited her internet use and declined to affirm her newly chosen name and pronouns. We set appropriate boundaries and allowed her to choose her hair style and clothing, but denied harmful requests such as breast binders, puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and surgeries.

It was clear from conversations that our daughter was uncomfortable with her developing body and had an intense fear of being sexualized. She was filled with deep self-loathing and was in true emotional pain and had been encouraged by peers and influencers to believe that gender was the source of her pain. What she really needed was for us to help her make sense of her confusion and remind her that hormones and surgeries could never change her sex or resolve her underlying mental health issues. I shudder to think what could have happened if we had affirmed her false identity and consented to medical interventions, as opposed to what we did, which was to lovingly affirm her in the reality of her sex, as she is, beautifully unique and irreplaceable, and undeniably female.

After several years, our daughter has desisted and is on a path to self-love and she is thankfully not the only one. In the last 7 years, there has been an explosion in predominantly pre-teens and teens suddenly believing they are born in the wrong body. I have spoken to many parents all over our country, including here

in Pennsylvania and parents are not being informed of all treatment options available when they seek help for their child. They are not being told that if they do not socially or medically transition their child, there is a high probability their child will resolve their distress on their own by early adulthood. They are not being informed that the US is now an outlier in how we are treating childhood and adolescent sex discomfort compared to the rest of the world and that most countries are now moving away from medical interventions because the risks far outweigh the benefits.

Instead, parents are being convinced by medical and mental health professionals that affirmation and medicalization is their only option to avoid the impending suicide of their child. Suicide is told to parents as if it is a guaranteed outcome versus a risk factor, often complicated by mental health co-morbidities like depression, a history of sexual trauma, self-harm, autism, and eating disorders.

Unfortunately, gender-dysphoric children are being encouraged through activism and peer pressure to disassociate from their bodies and to believe their body parts can be simply removed, modified or replaced. The irreversible consequences of medically transitioning, including loss of sexual and reproductive function, cannot be fully understood by children or teens who lack the necessary cognitive maturity or experience. These children deserve ethical, evidence-based treatment that helps them explore and resolve the true source of their distress. They need love and exploratory therapy, not hormones and surgery. Real harm is occurring to children under the current model of so-called “gender-affirming care.”

According to Stop the Harm Database, there have been 814 sex change patients and 316 minor children who have undergone some form of surgery in Pennsylvania. Please stop allowing doctors to chemically castrate and cut off the healthy organs of children and teens. Thank you for bringing forth this critical legislation in order to protect vulnerable children in Pennsylvania from irreversible medical harm.