

# Equipping Parents to Respond to Gender-Confusing Messages in Schools



A How-To Guide for Protecting Your  
Child's Heart and Your Family's Values

**truetolerance.org**  
a project of focus on the family

# Responding to Confusion with Truth

The sexual chaos occurring in our society is rapidly finding its way into our classrooms. How can Christian families respond with wisdom, strength and grace?



## In Our High Schools...

Whether it's schoolwide lessons on "gender identity" or boys identifying as girls given full access to female locker rooms—families face a new and bewildering form of sexual advocacy in their schools. For instance, in Missouri, a 17-year-old student—born as a boy but identifying as a girl—was given access to the high-school girls' bathrooms and locker rooms. The student had previously lived as a gay male, but as an upperclassman in high school began identifying as transgender, according to news reports. Not surprisingly, the student's presence in the locker room spurred privacy concerns among many female students.

A school board meeting was held on the topic. But nothing changed, leaving many of the girls feeling their perspective was ignored. "Some girls already have insecurity problems getting dressed in front of other girls as it is, much less having to get dressed in front of a boy," explained a 17-year-old girl to CNN reporters. The federal government later took matters into its own hands by issuing guidelines that order school districts to allow full access to showers, locker rooms and even overnight school trips to students identifying as transgender. How can families respond in a way that demonstrates the love of Christ and also protects children's privacy and safety?



## In Our Elementary Schools...

Meanwhile, even at the youngest grade levels, parents have encountered these disturbing situations:

- An adult from a transgender-advocacy group reads aloud a book called *My Princess Boy*—about a boy who likes to wear dresses—to a kindergarten class.
- A school notifies parents that an elementary-age student who went to school as a boy the previous year will now be returning as a girl.
- Parents with students in a pre-kindergarten to fourth-grade school discover plans to introduce

"gender roles and diversity" materials that encourage teachers to "invite students" to "draw pictures of favorite TV or storybook characters and dress them in clothes that are different ... from what they would typically wear," such as, "Spiderman wearing a magic tiara."

# Preparing Parents

It's no wonder that many parents feel bombarded with sexually confusing messages that conflict with the values and biblical principles they're teaching their children at home. While in many of these situations it might be desirable for a parent to homeschool their children or enroll them in a school that better respects their family's values, often this is simply not an option for families facing economic constraints. And what if a parent is in the process of removing a student from a difficult situation, but regrettably, the child has already been exposed to objectionable instruction?

That's why we've created this guide. Whether you've already encountered these situations or want to be proactive in thinking through them, on the following pages you'll find tips, talking points and resources for speaking up for your family's rights—while also helping your child to better grasp the truth of God's loving design for humanity.



# How to Respond When...

The following pages include 5 scenarios that you may encounter as a parent and practical tips on how to respond to each. We'll help you uphold your values in a loving way that is reflective of God's design.

## How to Respond When... Scenario #1

Your child is introduced to the idea that a person can change genders and told that “transgender” means “the sex a person is born with doesn't match the sex they feel like inside” their head and heart. (This is an actual definition included in materials, such as a crossword puzzle, for use with elementary-age students.)

### □ Speak Truth

A parent can first explain that sometimes we hear messages that do not agree with or match up with God's truth and that can be confusing. But confusing messages don't change God's clear design: In his message to us, the Bible, God described how he created us male and female. That means that being a boy or a girl is a special gift and blessing from God to be celebrated.

*“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27, ESV*

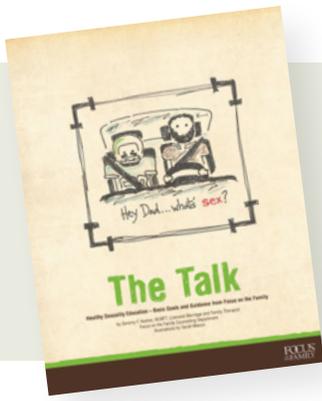


### □ Speak affirmation

You can also explain that we each have private, physical parts of our bodies that make us a boy or girl. Affirm that these parts are good and from God. You can use encouraging statements such as, “Do you know, I am glad you were made as a boy/girl? I am proud you are my son/daughter!”

You can also explain that what a person feels in his or her heart or mind doesn't automatically make it real or true. Although the comparison cannot fully address the complex, deeper issues involved with children struggling with gender identity, perhaps it can help your student have compassion for others.

Emphasize compassion for people, explaining that not everyone follows God's design or believes in it, but we still love and show kindness to everyone.



## ✓ Parent Tip

Avoid overreacting, shaming or ridiculing a child for opposite-gender role play; rather, simply redirect and affirm when necessary. [Click here](#) to learn more.

For more information on how to talk to young children about their gender and body, [download](#) this free guide.

## How to Respond When... Scenario #2

A teacher reads a book or gives a coloring activity to your child that promotes cross-dressing behavior, such as stories or pictures featuring a boy who dresses like a girl. (Parents, be aware of books such as *My Princess Boy*, *10,000 Dresses* and *Jacob's New Dress* that promote these themes to young children.)

**Learn More:**  
Gender Confusion  
in Schools  
[Click Here](#)



## □ Ask Questions

First, ask questions about how your child feels about the story or activity. Invite them to explain what they think about it. Then affirm and encourage their natural feelings about God's truth regarding male-female differences. If it's a coloring book activity, encourage them to draw a new picture or adjust the picture according to the way they think it would be natural and helpful for the character to look and dress.



## □ Use Examples

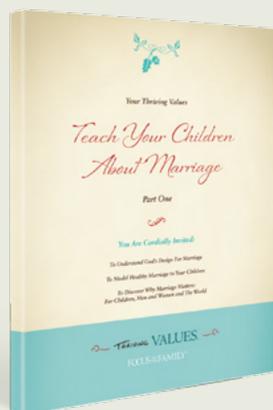
Talk about how there are different clothing styles for men and women. Explain that God made us the way we are because he loves us—and that by dressing according to how God made us, we show God that we are thankful for his gift of being a male or female. If your child seems confused, you can use an example based on “mommy and daddy” or another married couple they have observed to affirm male and female behavior.

Ask your children questions about how mommy and daddy are different. For example, how does mommy dress differently than daddy? How does mommy play with you in a way that’s different from daddy? (Does mommy play more imagination-type games? Does daddy play in a more physical, rough house manner?) That’s because God made them differently and that’s a good thing.

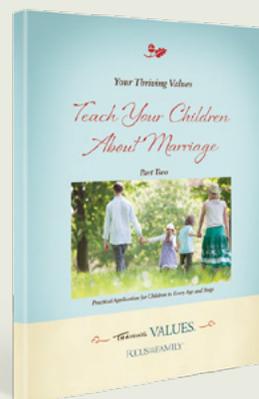
Point out that just like moms and dads, boys and girls are different. Both are special, both are good and both are made to reflect God’s image. (For a helpful object lesson on reflecting God’s image, download the “Teach Your Children About Marriage” resources in the box below.)



## Teach Your Children About Marriage



[Click on image above  
for Part 1](#)



[Click on image above  
for Part 2](#)

## □ Discuss Facts

With older children or those entering the teen years, you can talk in more detail about how boys and girls are physically different—and how that is a wonderful part of the way God designed our world and created his own divine diversity. Discuss how science researchers have discovered many ways that men and women are different. Everything from brains to retinas, from jawbones to blood cells, are affected by those little chromosomes that determine if we are male or female.



### Watch:

[A Scientific Look at Gender Differences](#)  
[Click on Image](#)



### Learn More:

[Does Equal Mean Identical?](#)  
[Click to Read](#)

## ✓ Parent Tip

Avoid rigid stereotypes that too narrowly portray boys' and girls' differences. Make it clear that differences do not mean one sex is better than the other or valued above the other. Nor do these distinctions mean that all women are identical or that all men are the same. There is variation within each sex, but the differences between the two sexes are greater. Each human is unique, valuable and worthy of respect.



## □ Talk to School Officials

Don't hesitate to approach school officials if you are concerned that your parental rights were violated by educators giving controversial materials to your child without your permission or knowledge. Review these tips for approaching educators with concerns:

[Click to Read](#)

### Parents' Bill of Rights

[Click to Learn More](#)



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## How to Respond When... Scenario #3

A boy dressed as a girl is attending your child's elementary school. Your child has encountered this new classmate at recess and is confused about it.

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### □ Reflect Truth and Grace

Discuss some of the points provided in the previous responses about how God made us. Then explain to your child that sometimes people, including kids, get confused about how God made them and who they are. Maybe they are unhappy with who they are and that feels very painful to them.

That means we want to treat that child (a girl dressing as a boy or vice versa) with kindness, as we would treat any other child. It would be wrong to tease or make fun of them.

To a child who is a bit older, you can discuss with them how hard and painful it would be to struggle with hatred or feelings of rejection toward your own body and how important it is to be kind to people experiencing hurt, even when we don't agree with everything they believe.

### ✓ Parent Tip

To help them avoid unnecessary conflict or situations over their level of maturity, it's wise to emphasize to younger children that it is not their role to try to correct a child who is cross-dressing or to argue with another child about their behavior. Help them understand that they can be kind to someone without having to agree with all of the person's actions or beliefs.

### Dig Deeper

*Understanding Transgenderism*

[Click to read](#)

### □ Affirm Boundaries

At the same time, help your child understand appropriate boundaries: Make it clear that they do not have to undress in front of anyone or engage in any behavior that makes them feel uncomfortable or exposed. They do not have to go to the same bathroom with other students when they don't feel safe or private—and that they can ask the teacher to use a different restroom or locker room.

If a temporary solution is needed until you find the best environment for your child, you can also let your student know that they can ask a safe and trusted friend of the same gender to accompany them to the bathroom when they feel uncomfortable.

## □ Talk to School Officials

Be aware that in these situations elementary schools may introduce schoolwide “gender diversity” lessons, and it’s likely that these materials are coming from a homosexual/transgender activist group, which is not a neutral source.

So it’s extremely important to talk to school officials and make clear that every parents’ rights should be respected, including those parents who want to remain in control of when, how and if their children are exposed to controversial instruction on sensitive subjects, such as cross-dressing and gender identity.

Keep in mind that the school officials themselves may be in the difficult position of trying to navigate the wishes of parents who want their son to be able to use the girls’ restroom or vice versa. But the school can and should respect the rights of all parents and children involved. (See links to legal resources on next page.)

In short, parents with concerns that transgender or “gender diversity” lessons would be inappropriate for their children have an equal right to be heard and respected.

### Take Action

What Parents  
Can Do:

[Click Here  
to Learn More](#)



## How to Respond When... Scenario #4

A boy in your child's high school decides to identify as a girl and begins using the girls' restroom—or vice versa. Your child expresses concern about going to the restroom.

### □ Protect Your Child

First, you have the right and responsibility to protect both your parental rights and your child's physical privacy. In addition to asking school officials to see any classroom materials or instruction regarding this topic, you can firmly request that your child's privacy rights and safety be respected.

The Alliance Defending Freedom—one of the nation's largest legal groups defending the rights of parents and students in these types of situations— has pointed out that students “have the right to bodily privacy” and that there “is simply no discrimination in protecting young children from inappropriate exposure to the opposite sex.” See box for resources to help defend your family's rights:

## Legal Resources for Parents

If you are concerned about similar situations, consider sharing these resources with your school officials.

### Letter to School Officials



[Click on image above.](#)

### Model Privacy Policy



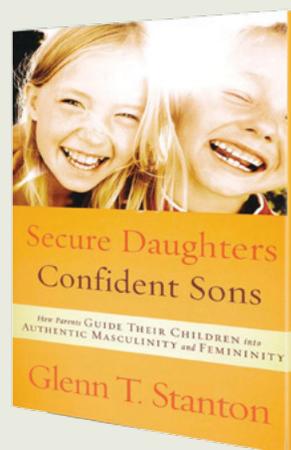
[Click on image above.](#)

## □ Discuss God's Design

With older children or teens, you can read Genesis together and discuss the beauty of God's design in creating us male and female. Discuss how our masculinity or femininity reflects to us aspects of God's character: justice and mercy. Strength and beauty. Initiative and response. These complementary qualities give us a glimpse into who God is and what our relationship with him is meant to be.

“We are all image bearers of the Divine. And don't miss this point: It is our *gendered* humanity that images God. God was certain to make that clear on the first page of His Word to us, and it can't be missed: 'In the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.' Any observer can tell that man and woman are different without even trying because of this deeply divine distinction—a distinction that shows us something important about the nature of God.”

**Glenn T. Stanton**, author of *Secure Daughters, Confident Sons*



Click on image above for more information about the book.



## □ Use Examples

Watch a man and woman ice skating together. Then discuss how they perform the exact same athletic moves—but they have two very unique ways of doing them and different, but essential, roles to play. Both are equally necessary, but they need to perform different roles to create the overall effect and beautiful union we see displayed on the ice. Typically what is enhanced and noticed in the woman is her grace and beauty. In her male partner, we see solidity and strength.

## □ *Emphasize Compassion*

For middle or high school students, it might help to address the transgender issues they hear being promoted from a developmental perspective. Help them think through how when babies are born, they do not know whether they are male or female, but the goal is to help that baby grow into the man or woman God designed them to be. Sometimes, however, people can become confused during that developmental process due to complicated factors and circumstances in their lives.

Ask them to think about a time when they've had a goal—like a tough homework assignment or a skill they've wanted to master in a sport—and had trouble doing that assignment or developing that skill. Did they feel frustrated, confused, hurt or even angry? Although that comparison cannot fully address the complex, deeper issues involved with individuals struggling with gender identity, perhaps it can help your student to have compassion for others. Like everyone else, individuals who are struggling with their gender identity are desperately in need of God's truth and deserve to know the love and compassion of Christ.

### Teen Friendly Articles

*God's Design for Sexuality*

[Click to Read](#)

*Why Male and Female Matter*

[Click to Read](#)



## □ *Affirm Free-Speech Rights*

At the same time, affirm your middle and high school student's religious-freedom right to respectfully express disagreement with gender-confusing messages promoted at school and to acknowledge a personal decision to follow the Bible's guidance about sexuality and gender.

### ✓ **Parent Tip**

Pray with your student for God to guide them and give them his compassion for classmates at school. Pray for God to give them strength to live according to his word, while reaching out to others with Christ's love.

**Listen: Nurturing a Healthy Gender Identity in Your Child. [Click Here.](#)**



## How to Respond When... Scenario #5

Your child's middle or high school is promoting anti-bullying or anti-victimization events that celebrate and advocate transgender and cross-dressing behaviors.

Parents should be aware that national homosexual advocacy groups with significant influence in public schools have promoted materials in the name of "transgender student rights" that often cross the line into a form of radical propagandizing. For example, the materials have encouraged students to practice using "gender neutral" pronouns, such as "zie," instead of "he"—and have defined "transphobia" with examples like "Having the sex one was assigned at birth printed on one's driver's license." [Click to learn more.](#)

**How should parents and students respond?**

### □ Acknowledge the Bullying Problem

When talking about these promotions with your student, it's important to acknowledge the fact that bullying is a serious problem in schools and that it should be prohibited. A biblical perspective teaches us that every person was created in the image of God and has innate dignity and worth, no matter how they identify, sexually or otherwise. That's why we treat all people, even those with whom we might disagree, with kindness and compassion. And that's why Christian students in particular should be the first to stand up for those around them being hurt or harmed.



#### **For Parents:**

Fast Facts & Talking  
Points on Bullying

[Click Here](#)

## ☐ Affirm Religious Freedoms

One resource that equips teens to demonstrate compassion while at the same time lovingly and respectfully expressing a biblical viewpoint is Focus on the Family's Day of Dialogue website.



“The Day of Dialogue gives you, as a student, the opportunity to express the true model presented by Jesus Christ in the Bible—who didn’t back away from speaking truth, but neither held back in pouring out his incredible, compassionate love for hurting and vulnerable people.”

### Free Speech Quiz for Teens:

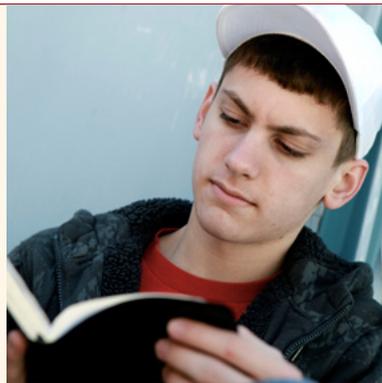
Do you know your rights?

[Click Here](#)

### Teen Resource:

The Bible & Sexuality—  
Responding to Challenges

[Click Here](#)



## ☐ Protect Your Child's Innocence

If an event or celebration addressing these topics is occurring in your child's school, it's important to talk with educators and ask what is being presented in school assemblies or in the classrooms. When speaking to school officials, you can affirm your agreement that bullying should be strongly prohibited. Then explain that you also believe it is vitally important to protect children emotionally and psychologically, especially regarding sexually related topics.

Ask the school to respect and protect the efforts of parents to safeguard their children's innocence.

### Watch:

A Christian  
Response to Bullying &  
Homosexuality Issues.

[Click Image](#)



## Thank You!

The fact that you've downloaded and read this resource demonstrates your own heartfelt dedication to protecting not only the children in your life, but others in your community. Thank you for being a concerned citizen who is making a difference!

### True Tolerance in Schools

Visit [TrueTolerance.org](http://TrueTolerance.org) to learn more!

## Stay in touch

We want to hear from you! Send your stories and additional tips to [ParentVoices@FocusOnTheFamily.com](mailto:ParentVoices@FocusOnTheFamily.com). If you have an immediate need or concern, please contact our Focus on the Family Help Center at 800-A-FAMILY (232-6459). We have caring, Christian counselors ready to assist.

### More Online Resources

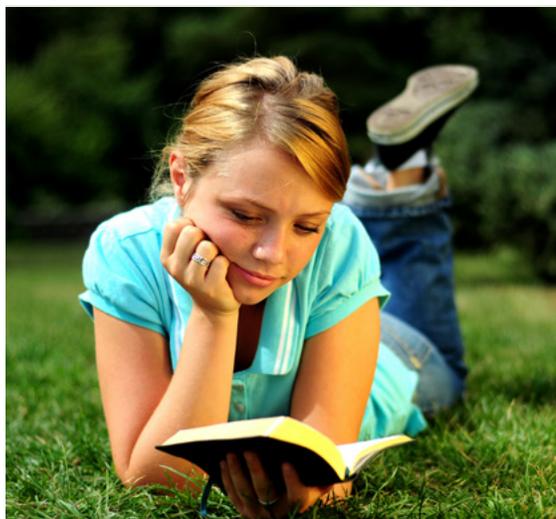
If you're using a hard copy of this resource, and would like to access this guide online, as well other resources within it, please visit these sites:

Online Version of Guide:

[FocusOnTheFamily.com/EmpowerParents](http://FocusOnTheFamily.com/EmpowerParents)

[TrueTolerance.org](http://TrueTolerance.org)

[FocusOnTheFamily.com/SocialIssues](http://FocusOnTheFamily.com/SocialIssues)



## Coming Soon!

**Bring Your Bible** event for students! On Oct 6, Focus on the Family will sponsor a “Bring Your Bible to School Day” for nationwide high school and college students attending public schools.

Watch for more information at [BringYourBible.org](http://BringYourBible.org) and on [Facebook](#).