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Social Transitioning for Gender Dysphoric Children: A Practical Guide for Parents

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Raising a child with gender dysphoria often introduces unique challenges to the already difficult task of parenting. At first, parents may overlook the possibility of gender dysphoria, instead perceiving their gender nonconforming child as a “tom-boy” or a “sissy boy” because of their cross-gender preferences in clothing, toys, and games. When these children grow older and become better at expressing themselves, they may describe unhappiness about their physical sex characteristics and function, disgust with their genitalia, and/or desire to be the other sex. These feelings can be expressed by a child as young as three years old. It is often at this point that parents realize gender dysphoria may underlie cross-gender behaviors and preferences. So, what can a parent do with this information?

This chapter aims to inform parents and professionals of what we believe to be the best parenting practices to assist gender dysphoric children with social transitioning in a school setting. At the present time, the research on this population is scarce, and there are diverse views on when and how to implement a social transition. In this chapter we will introduce some practical ideas gleaned through our clinical experiences.

Social Transitioning

Social transitioning refers to a change in social gender role aimed at exploring and consolidating an individual’s gender identity. Contrary to popular belief, social transitioning does not necessitate gender reassignment surgery or any medical interventions. Rather, for gender dysphoric children, it can involve changing their appearance (e.g., clothing, hairstyle), name, pronouns, and other reversible expressions. For example, an affirmed girl may grow long hair, wear dresses, adopt a new name that is socially constructed as female or androgynous, and ask to be referred to with female pronouns (e.g., she, her). Social transitioning

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