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Please Stop Calling My Daughter “He”: Advocating for Teens and Preteens in the School Setting

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About a year ago, the parents of 15-year-old David found out that their child was transgender. During the previous year, his parents have been working hard to understand and accept their child, who is now dressing in a more feminine way and requesting to be referred to as Celia. Recently, Celia’s grades have been plummeting and she has been skipping school, asking her parents if she can drop out. Her parents have been frustrated by these changes and feel helpless. She tells them that she just can’t deal with going to gym class and being forced to use the boys’ locker room. She also says that some of the other kids at school regularly make cruel comments about how she dresses, and it doesn’t help that the teachers are still calling her “David.” Celia’s parents are concerned not only about their child’s educational achievement, but also for her physical safety. They want to advocate for Celia at school but don’t know where to start.

Parents of gender nonconforming and transgender youth often notice a change in their child’s school performance or hear them talk about school as a difficult place to be. Their child may, in reality, be the first “out” transgender student the school has ever had. School personnel are often uninformed and unaware of their unique challenges. Even when they *are* aware, they may not know how to appropriately deal with those challenges or how to create policies that facilitate fair treatment. Additionally, staff may be overtly unsupportive, making the environment unpredictable, even hostile. This chapter provides an overview of gender-related harassment and its consequences and discusses what parents can do to advocate.

Gender-Related Harassment and Its Consequences

Research consistently demonstrates that schools are unfriendly, often unsafe places for gender nonconforming and transgender students. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey, the largest-scale study to date on transgender discrimi-

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