

THRIVING
VALUES™



WHEN TRANSGENDER ISSUES ENTER YOUR WORLD

How Christians can respond with
compassion, courage and truth

JEFF JOHNSTON

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WHEN TRANSGENDERISM ENTERS YOUR WORLD

You've probably accessed this resource because your life has been directly affected by transgenderism or "gender ideology":

- Maybe your child's school announced to students that "John," who last week was a boy, will now be coming to school as "Jane";
- You've found out your local gym now allows men in women's changing areas, and you want help protecting yourself and your family; or

"Man, whom God created male and female, bears the divine image imprinted on his body 'from the beginning.'

"Man and woman constitute two different ways of the human 'being a body' in the unity of that image."

—POPE JOHN PAUL II,
THEOLOGY OF THE BODY¹

- Perhaps you've learned that a member of your family now identifies as the opposite sex.

You may be reading this because you see transgender ideology growing in the culture, and you want to be prepared when you do encounter the issue. Or, you want a better understanding of the issue because you want to prepare your children to navigate this cultural phenomenon.

Whatever your concern or motivation, this Focus on the Family Thriving Values™ resource:

- Explains the basics of this difficult issue;
- Illustrates how it affects our culture;
- Describes some of the ideology; and
- Defines some transgender terminology.

And, like all our Thriving Values resources, it offers a distinctively Christian perspective on these challenging, cultural issues. To help apply biblical principles, we address three specific scenarios and then offer ideas and guidance for dealing with those situations. Along the way, we will also point you toward many other helpful resources that go deeper in addressing this topic from a Christian worldview.

“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)

At Focus on the Family, our ultimate goal is to help Christians courageously and lovingly speak God’s truth about these issues, as well as His design for sexuality, into a confused and needy world.

TRANSGENDER ISSUES IN THE CULTURE

For all intents and purposes, the transgender issue has already entered our world and is having a growing impact on our society.

As a result, people’s thoughts and beliefs about being male and female have shifted. This, in turn, impacts us, our children and our families.

Here are just a few examples from recent years, showing the increased blurring of the sexes and the growing celebration of transgender ideology:

- **Entertainment:** The television show *Transparent*, which is about a family that discovers their father is “transitioning” into a woman, began airing in 2014 and has been showered with awards.²
- **News Media:** The March 27, 2017, cover of *Time* magazine featured a 26-year-old who identifies as “queer and gender-nonconforming.”³

- **Pop Culture:** Olympic decathlete gold medalist Bruce Jenner, also involved with *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, gave an interview to Diane Sawyer in 2015, where he announced, “For all intents and purposes, I am a woman.”⁴
- **Laws:** Numerous states and municipalities have added “gender identity” or “gender expression” to **nondiscrimination laws**⁵ that deal with education, housing, employment and **public accommodations**.⁶



In January 2017, *National Geographic* featured a 7-year-old boy who lives as a girl. Here are its two “Gender Revolution” covers for that issue. (Images: nationalgeographic.com)

- **Business:** In 2016, Target® stores announced, “We welcome transgender team members and guests to use the restroom or fitting

room facility that corresponds with their gender identity.”⁷

- **Education:** In Washington State, schools must begin teaching children in kindergarten “the many ways to express gender”—including information about cross dressing.⁸

These are the times in which we live. Christians must respond with grace, truth and courage, and we must also teach the next generation about God’s creation of humanity in His image—*male and female*.

“Gender theory is hard to pin down. But the basic idea is that being a man or a woman doesn’t follow from being born male or female.

“Gender is fluid, fluctuating.

“Gender theory is all about divorcing ‘gender’ from biological ‘sex.’”

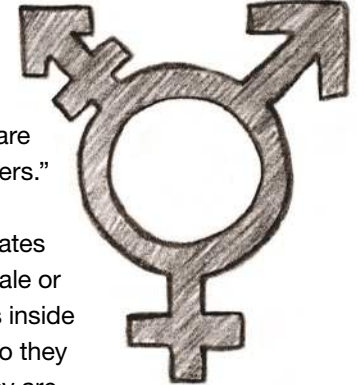
—ASHLEY MCGUIRE,
*SEX SCANDAL: THE DRIVE TO
ABOLISH MALE AND FEMALE*⁹

WHAT IS THIS ‘GENDER IDEOLOGY’?

People and cultures throughout history have recognized that men and women are different. They also recognize there are differences within those two groups, that individual men and women express their masculinity or femininity in various ways.

Modern gender ideology¹⁰ seeks to completely redefine God’s creation of humanity, which He

separated into male and female. Instead of two sexes, this ideology says there are a multitude of “genders.” “Gender” is a recent construct that separates bodily sex—being male or female—from what’s inside people’s minds—who they believe and think they are. So, sex defines how you were born (male or female), but gender is how you see yourself.



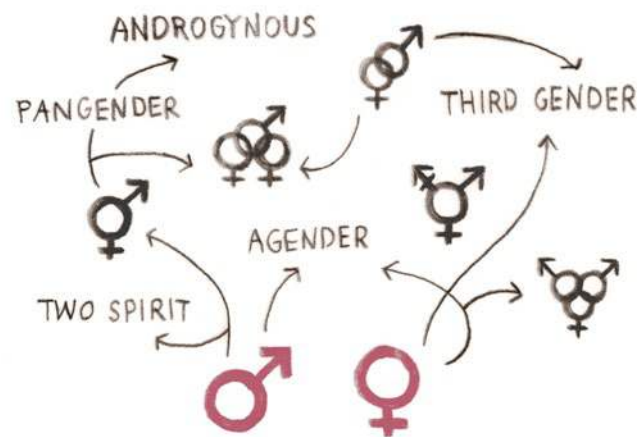
Today’s gender ideologues teach other confusing (and sometimes contradictory) ideas, such as:

- Gender is a social construct;
- Men and women aren’t different;
- People can change from one sex to the other;
- A person can be male, female, neither or some combination of the two;
- Biological sex doesn’t matter—it’s what is in your head that does;
- An individual’s gender can be fluid and changeable; and
- A person might have multiple genders.

The transgender movement—referred to as the “T” in LGBT—has gained widespread acceptance and force, as gender activists have pushed to add “gender identity” into federal, state and local nondiscrimination laws. The goal: Elevate transgenderism to the same protected status as our unalienable rights, such as freedoms of religion and speech. Some transgender activists and their allies even believe gender identity should usurp religion and speech.

WHAT DOES THAT WORD MEAN?

Since this is a relatively new movement, basic terms are often newly invented and subject to change.



With easy access to the internet, children and teens become familiar with these terms—often before the adults around them. And because transgender ideology is now taught in some schools—and even preschools—young children may learn this terminology.

Here are a basic vocabulary and definitions, even while we remain aware that these definitions are fluid and subject to change:¹¹

- **Sex:** The state of being male or female. Scientists use the term “sexual dimorphism,” meaning humans come in two sexual forms, male and female, with numerous physiological differences between the two.¹²
- **Gender:** Psychologist John Money borrowed this term from linguistics in the 1950s to differentiate internal feelings and societal roles from biological sex. The growing feminist movement adopted the term, and its use spread throughout the social studies disciplines.
- **Gender Identity:** This refers to how individuals see themselves internally, regardless of their biological sex. To accommodate various self-identifications, there are now dozens of terms, each coined to describe a person’s gender identity (e.g., pangender, gender blender, queer, or omnigender).¹³
- **Gender Expression:** As the name indicates, this refers to how people outwardly express themselves: male, female, some combination of the two, or neither. One’s gender expression may change from day to day.
- **Gender Dysphoria:** This is the current psychiatric term for those who are distressed by strong cross-gender identification; it replaced the older diagnosis, “Gender Identity Disorder (GID).”



■ **Sexual Orientation:** This is a broad concept with a wide variety of definitions in popular culture, laws and research. It can include sexual, romantic and/or erotic thoughts, attractions, intentions, behavior, experiences and/or identity. Sexual orientation is not necessarily related to a person's gender identity.

■ **Transgender:** This is a broad umbrella term, covering those who believe their "gender" differs from their bodily sex. It includes cross-dressers, drag performers, those who believe they are neither male nor female and those who

believe they are some combination of the two. The term does not necessarily mean a person has taken hormones or undergone surgery.

■ **Intersexuality:** This means congenital, biological conditions where an individual has ambiguous or indeterminate genitalia, or where there is a discord between a person's chromosomes and bodily sex. Medical professionals use the term "Disorders of Sexual Development" to describe this condition. Here's a helpful distinction: Intersex conditions are physical; transgender issues are psychological and spiritual.

■ **Cisgender:** A term used to serve as an opposite to "transgender," describing individuals whose gender and personal identity corresponds to their birth sex.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

As Christians, we believe God created us in His own image and likeness, male and female. In the creation, God separated humans into two sexes, male and female. Each is distinct and valuable. Both separately and together, men and women reflect the image and likeness of God.

Not only does Moses write about this in Genesis, but Jesus and the Apostle Paul also point to the male-female creation as a foundational truth.

Adam rejoiced at the creation of Eve, celebrating and recognizing her as his partner, a complement, distinct from any other created being. Woman is uniquely formed as a gift for man—and man as a gift for woman. The two aspects of God's image, male and female, are joined wholly together in marriage—a unique, permanent and covenantal relationship. Marriage also symbolizes Christ and His Bride, the Church.

Sexual differentiation is at the core of what it means to be human, and a person's maleness

or femaleness is an integral part of a man's or woman's identity. We are embodied creatures, male or female. Our physical body is an integral part of who we are as humans.

The Bible also teaches that sin has entered the world and affects every area of life. Sin causes disconnection and separation from God and others. It also causes disconnection and brokenness within. "I'm a woman in a man's body" is just one example of the effect of sin in our world. *The errors taught by transgender activists, and believed by many today, are likewise a result of sin and deception entering into the world.* The good news is that God made a way to deliver us from sin, through His Son, Jesus Christ!

Keeping the Christian view in mind, let's see how we might address three different scenarios.



Transgender: A Talking Points Book
by Vaughan Roberts

This **brief book**¹⁴ explains the huge cultural shift regarding transgenderism and offers a biblical framework for responding with compassion and truth.

GET IT HERE

STORIES OF HOPE AND HEALING

WALT'S STORY: HE TRADED HIS SORROWS



"A key element to healing is working through the delusion that changing genders is possible.

"It gets much easier to recover when you acknowledge that surgery cannot perform a gender change, nothing can.

"You are as God made you to be. Live it, love it and celebrate it."

—Walt Heyer, "**Trading My Sorrows—
A Story of Healing From Transgenderism**"¹⁵

STORIES OF HOPE AND HEALING

LINDA'S STORY: SHE WAS TRANSFORMED



"As a child, I prayed repeatedly for God to make me into a boy and became obsessed with my pursuit.

"I'm grateful for all the pastors, counselors, faithful friends, and especially my supportive parents who walked with me during the healing process. The 11-year journey towards transformation was totally worth it."



—Linda Seiler, author and speaker, "[Linda's Story: Transsexuality Transformed](#)"¹⁶

[Listen to Linda's compelling testimony](#)¹⁷

WHEN TRANSGENDER ISSUES ENTER YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Scenario: Your 8-year-old child comes home and says, "Did you know there aren't just men and women? We learned today that there are lots of genders—and people can change genders. Our teacher read us a book about a boy who changes into a girl."

RESPONDING TO YOUR CHILD

- **Ask Questions:** "What did you think about that lesson?" "How do you feel about the lesson?" (Boys may have a harder time with "feeling" questions.) "How did the other children in your class respond?" "Did you and your friends talk about this afterwards?"

This isn't an inquisition, but it is an opportunity to find out what happened in the classroom and how it affected your child. Keep your tone conversational and friendly. If you are angry and upset, assure your child that you're not upset with him or her; explain that you're unhappy with the school giving these kinds of lessons. Your child may sense your feelings anyway, so it's better to be honest and up front about it.

- **Affirm Your Child:** Thank your child for coming and talking to you: “I’m so glad you came and told me what happened in class today. I’m proud of you, and I always want you to be able to talk with me when you’re upset or concerned about something.”
- **Teach the Truth:** “Yes, some people do feel confused about being a boy or a girl. We know that in the beginning, God made a man and a woman, Adam and Eve. He made humans male and female—and both are good. When Adam and Eve sinned, all kinds of confusion and pain entered the world. But this doesn’t change God’s design, and He wants us to live in the truth of how He created us.”

“I think the fluidity of gender is the next big wave in terms of adolescent development.

“Gender has become part of the defining way that youth organize themselves and rebel against adults.”¹⁸

—CAITLIN RYAN, DIRECTOR,
FAMILY ACCEPTANCE PROJECT
(A PRO-LGBT ENTITY OF SAN
FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY)

You don’t have to explain everything at once, but keep this an ongoing conversation, a dialogue with your son or daughter. Affirm and bless your child as a boy or girl—made in God’s image. Teach children that **biology**¹⁹ and social research confirm what Scripture says—women and men really are different. The online article, “**Talking to Your Children About Transgender Issues**,”²⁰ helps you communicate with your children about this sensitive topic.

“Courage is contagious.

“When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened.”

—BILLY GRAHAM²¹

PRAY, GATHER ALLIES AND ACT COURAGEOUSLY

While it might feel intimidating to talk to a teacher or school principal about sexually confusing lessons in your child’s classroom, it’s within your parental rights to do so. We suggest taking time to pray beforehand. Ask God for the courage to address this difficult issue. Connect with some like-minded parents to pray and discuss how to approach your school. Our **True Tolerance**²² website has great resources to **educate you**²³ and **help you take action**,²⁴ when necessary.

Across the nation, **schools**²⁵ are teaching children the confusing message that there are a multitude of genders and that people can change from one sex to the other. But it’s not just lessons that have gone awry. When transgender ideology is brought into education codes and laws, this jeopardizes parental rights and children’s privacy and safety. For example, some boys with gender confusion

have asked their schools for access to girls' dressing rooms, showers and restrooms. The rights of parents who want privacy and safety for their children should be respected.

WHEN TRANSGENDER ISSUES ENTER YOUR PRIVATE SPACE



Scenario: You've learned that your local gym allows men who identify as women to enter women's dressing rooms, showers and restrooms. You and your family, which includes elementary and high school age children, have been members for years, and you spend much of the summer at the outdoor pool.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

First, understand the issues involved. Our six-part series of articles, "**Public Restrooms—Your Privacy and Safety**,"²⁶ goes into much more detail, so we suggest that as a good place to start. Second, learn about your city and state laws. It may be that your gym has not changed its policies, but that your city or state has laws elevating sexual

orientation, **gender identity and/or gender expression**²⁷ (SOGI) in public accommodations.

Since such non-discrimination laws often apply to local businesses, your gym may be required to open its dressing rooms, shower areas and restrooms to those who identify as the opposite sex. In addition, some cities and states now have penalties for individuals or businesses who use language that does not match with another person's internal "gender identity."

PLAN AHEAD AND ACT—WITHOUT AGGRESSION

To ensure the privacy and safety of your family, find out if your gym has single-user or family changing facilities and restrooms. If it doesn't, you may decide to do your changing at home, before and after gym visits.

If you must use the gym facilities, plan how you would respond if someone of the opposite sex enters a dressing room, shower area or restroom. We suggest: Quickly finish your business, get dressed and leave the room without confronting the individual.

For some adults, it may be a natural instinct to confront or challenge the individual in this situation. However, **if you respond with anger**

or aggression, you may be the one in trouble with the law—not the person who entered the facility designed for members of the opposite sex.

If you encounter a dangerous or illegal situation:

Take your children, leave immediately and phone the authorities. Planning ahead for such situations will help you to act calmly and decisively.

HOW TO REVERSE THE TREND

The only way these policies will be reversed is when Christians use their voices and votes to influence business owners, educators and politicians. One way to make your voice heard is to join with others who advocate for life, family, privacy and safety.

Here are three simple suggestions:

- **Sign up** for our **Thriving Values e-Newsletter**,²⁸ where we keep you informed about these important issues.
- **Subscribe** to **Focus on the Family Citizen**®²⁹ magazine for a Christian perspective on current events.
- **Connect** with a state **Family Policy Council to influence policies in your state**.³⁰

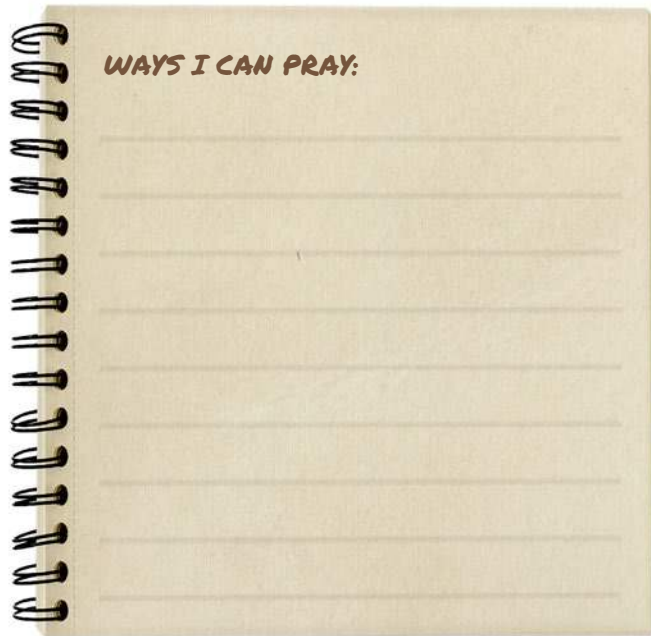
STAY WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Use common sense and keep safety in mind. As much as possible, we suggest escorting your children to public facilities—even if they're a little older and roll their eyes or protest. Very young children, keep with you. For older kids, you might station yourself outside the door to keep an eye on who is going in and out.

Of course, you can't be with your children every moment. If family members or friends are taking your children out, let your family members or friends know you want someone to stay with the children while they use dressing rooms, showers or restrooms. Explain about the new world of restroom use based on gender identity and how some predators have taken advantage of this situation.³¹ For pre-teens and teens, encourage them to use these facilities with a friend.

EQUIP YOUR CHILDREN

Educate your children about sex and sexuality. This should start early and be age appropriate, biblically sound and in the form of an ongoing dialogue with children. Our resource **“The Talk: Healthy Sexuality Education—Basic Goals and Guidance from Focus on the Family”**³² has information and ideas about communicating with your children.



Teach your children that certain parts of the body are private, and we keep those parts covered and protected. As “The Talk” explains, teach a simple three-step response for children when someone (other than mom or dad, a doctor or trusted family members) tries to see or touch those parts inappropriately. The basic response to teach and for your child to practice is:

- Say, “No.”
- Walk away.
- Tell Mommy and Daddy (or a teacher or other trusted adult).

ACT KINDLY, PRAYERFULLY AND COURAGEOUSLY

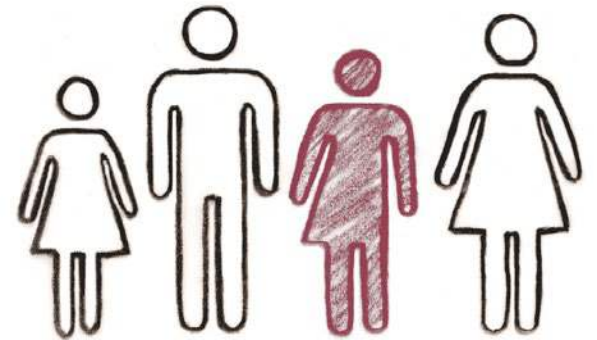
We value privacy and safety, so we are genuinely concerned about opening dressing rooms, showers and restrooms to the opposite sex. And we value all people—including those who struggle with gender confusion, so we encourage you to approach this issue with others kindly and truthfully.

Ask God for wisdom and peace if He calls you to take action. Our goal is not to arouse fear or to live in fear, but to pray and be at peace as we address transgender ideology. We want people to

be realistic about the dangers of “gender identity” laws³³ and take action to protect themselves, their families and their children.

WHEN TRANSGENDER ISSUES ENTER YOUR FAMILY

The number of patients seeking treatment for gender confusion is on the increase, as well as the number of clinics treating such individuals. In 2007, there was one treatment center for transgender youth in the United States. Eight years later, there were 40 youth clinics.³⁴ In the United Kingdom, referrals to adult treatment centers have increased, as well. One clinic in London saw a jump from 498 patients in 2006-2007 to 1,892 patients in 2015-2016.³⁵



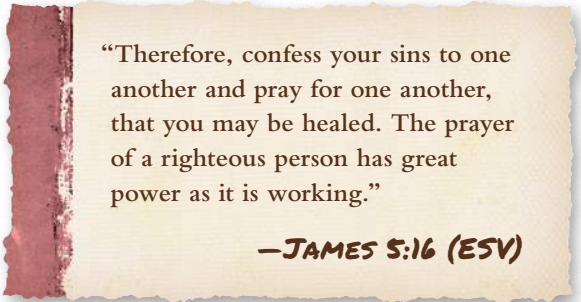
As a result of this upturn, we regularly hear from family members affected by transgenderism: the grandmother with a granddaughter who now claims to be a boy; the aunt whose nephew is “transitioning” and lives as a girl; and parents with gender-confused children. What follows is some basic guidance about responding to a transgender-identified individual in your family.

SEEK TO MAINTAIN YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND INFLUENCE

This is an important goal to work toward. Here are some things you can do to maintain your relationship and influence your family member:

- Resist making gender identity the focus of your relationship, while still viewing your family member as God created him or her to be.
- If you’ve already reacted badly, confess and ask forgiveness, and work to make amends.
- Demonstrate love with your words and actions.
- Listen and ask questions; work to understand the person.
- Let go of trying to fix or control someone else’s life.
- Share what God has done and is doing in your own life.

Relationships are a two-way street, so your family member must be open to relating. *If he or she cuts off connection, you can still maintain influence through prayer.*



“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

—JAMES 5:16 (ESV)

PRAY, PRAY AND PRAY

We cannot change, save or rescue another person. But God can, and we can storm Heaven with prayers for our loved ones—and for ourselves.

- Pray that God will pursue and save your family member from the pain and deception he or she is experiencing.
- Ask the Father to open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears and soften your loved one’s heart.
- Pray that your own heart would be loving toward your family member and that God would work in your own life.

- Grieve and mourn with our Comforter, the Holy Spirit; this is an appropriate response to loss and sin.



Join regularly with others to pray for your family member. Some churches have support groups for families with prodigals; you might join one or share with a home fellowship group. As you connect and pray with safe people, you will learn you are not alone, and you can receive comfort, encouragement and strength.

MAINTAIN HOPE

Most young children who experience gender confusion or act in gender atypical ways grow out of this. They “desist” from transgenderism and embrace their bodily reality. Dr. Paul McHugh writes,

When children who reported transgender feelings were tracked without medical or surgical treatment at both Vanderbilt University and London’s Portman Clinic, 70%-80% of them spontaneously lost those feelings. Some 25% did have persisting feelings; what differentiates those individuals remains to be discerned.³⁶

Some teens and adults experience “trans-regret” after living as transgender for a time. (See “Walt’s

Story” on page 7.) Sadly, this may come at great cost, as these individuals may have taken puberty blockers, received opposite-sex hormones or had surgery.

EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Dr. Miriam Grossman, a physician who specializes in pediatrics and child psychiatry, describes the usual progression for a boy’s development. At around age three, a boy develops a sense of *gender identity*. He then learns *gender stability*, that he will grow to be a man. Finally, he learns that he will always be a boy, *gender permanence*.³⁷

The same developmental process is true for girls as they grow and embrace their femininity.

Since we live in a broken world, some children have difficulty navigating these normal developmental phases. The usual process of aligning their identity with their body is derailed. We want to be cautious with theories of transgender development, but here are just a few factors that clinicians believe may contribute to gender confusion:

- Children with “a high level of anxiety or insecurity.”³⁸
- Family stressors during formative years, including “loss of important family members,

illness in parents or children, and intense parental conflict.”³⁹

- Some research suggests a link between autism and gender confusion for some children, suggesting neurological issues play a role.⁴⁰
- For girls, clinical observations suggest relational difficulties may lead a daughter to disidentify with her own femininity.⁴¹
- Sexual abuse may be a factor for some children; some reports correlate higher levels of childhood sexual abuse among the transgender population.⁴²

Most likely, multiple influences lead to struggles with gender confusion.

Sadly, those struggling with gender confusion also exhibit higher rates of several additional psychological, relational and developmental issues, including: depression, suicidality and isolation; difficulties with peer relationships; anxiety disorders; and substance abuse issues.⁴³ It's difficult to know if these co-occurring issues contribute to gender confusion or stem from it. Learning about some of these possible contributing factors and co-occurring issues may give you more compassion for your loved one and insight into how to pray.

PLEASE NOTE

This resource provides basic information about transgender issues and gives guidance for dealing with specific situations. Individuals struggling with their own gender issues or those with family members will need more help and support. Our online article [“Understanding ‘Transgenderism’”](#)⁴⁴ has links to other resources on this issue.

For those who need more help and support, Focus on the Family offers a one-time complimentary consultation from a Christian perspective. We also offer referrals for licensed [Christian counselors in your area](#).⁴⁵ To reach our counseling department by phone, call 1-855-771-HELP (4357) weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Standard Time).

Please be prepared to leave your contact information for a counselor or chaplain to return a call to you as quickly as possible. The consultation is available at no cost to you. You can also reach us online by filling out our [Counseling Request Form](#)⁴⁶ or you can visit [FocusontheFamily.com/FindACounselor](#).⁴⁷

In addition, [“Family Help”](#)⁴⁸ at [Focus on the Family](#)⁴⁹ has resource lists and answers to frequently asked questions about a wide range of issues.

Endnotes

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