

APRIL HARTFORD

Transgender - One Person's Journey

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Transitioning as a Minor

Trans people may realize their identity at any age, but some know as early as age 3, which is the age when children begin to establish a gender identity.*

Youth who reach adolescence with gender dysphoria are unlikely to revert to a gender identity that is congruent with their assigned sex at birth.†

“Since puberty suppression is a fully reversible medical intervention, it provides adolescents and their families with time to explore their gender dysphoric feelings, and [to] make a more definite decision regarding the first steps of actual gender reassignment treatment at a later age.” —Dr. Annelou de Vries‡

Safeguards and protections

Transitioning as a minor is okay and safe. Below are some guidelines for the process from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and UCSF's Center of Excellence for Transgender Health.

Young children: If the child expresses gender dysphoria quite young, say age 5 or 6, it's appropriate to support them in expressing their gender in the way they want. They can socially transition by changing their clothing, hairstyle, and perhaps their name and pronouns. Therapy that creates a safe space for kids to discuss and explore their gender is recommended.§

Puberty age: When the child reaches the earliest stages of puberty, they can take puberty blockers, hormones that delay the onset of sex-related physical changes. Puberty blockers delay the growth of secondary sex characteristics,

buying kids time to make the decision. The effects are reversible; remove the puberty blocker, and the teen will go through the puberty of their natal sex. Although they may be expensive, these medications can reduce the need for later surgery, a solution that is easier on the body and finances. They can also literally be life-saving, making it easier for trans teens to fit in and preventing the depression, substance abuse, and suicidality that affect so many.

Teenagers: If the teen's gender dysphoria persists and is strong enough, they can go off the puberty blockers and start taking cross-sex hormones. While the Endocrine Society recommends starting cross-sex hormones no earlier than age 16, some experts recommend beginning it sooner to avoid the social consequences (such as bullying) of delaying puberty too long.§

Age of consent: For youth under 18, parental consent and the approval of the medical provider are needed for any hormonal or surgical treatments. WPATH recommends surgery be performed only after age 18, but this too may be handled on a case-by-case basis.§ After age 18, trans people can decide all aspects of their medical care.

definitions

puberty blocker - Synthetic hormones, either injected or implanted, that delay the onset of puberty. They are safe and reversible.

socially transition - Transitioning through changing clothing and hairstyle, and perhaps name and pronouns.

*Daniel Trotta, “U.S. Parents Accept Children's Transgender Identity by Age Three,” Reuters, Dec. 23, 2016.

†AL de Vries et al., “Puberty suppression in adolescents with gender identity disorder: a prospective follow-up study,” *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 2011;8(8):2276-2283.

‡Alan Mozes, “Puberty Suppression Benefits Gender-Questioning Teens: Study,” U.S. News & World Report, Sept 10, 2014.

§Johanna Olson-Kennedy, MD, et al: “Health considerations for gender non-conforming children and transgender adolescents,” *Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, University of California, San Francisco*.