

Parental rights are fundamental

When and how did the “rights” of a parent to be the first guardian of a child’s welfare come into question? The claim that parents do not have first rights is completely illogical. The most important, most sacred duty in a person’s life is the good and welfare of their children. That is a law of nature.

Of course there are exceptions; if the parent is ill or incapable of caring for the child, then someone else must step in. But those are exceptional cases and relatively rare. In the vast majority of cases, parents love their children and recognize that it is their duty to care for them, to guide them toward adulthood, and to protect them from harm.

Society agrees with this to the extent that the Lord’s prayer has been removed from schools in respect to parental rights to bring the child up in the religion of their choice. Nor would anyone agree to enable a child to get a tattoo, to cut their hair, to take medication or any number of other things without parental knowledge and consent.

Yet, it is the contention of some today that a child, who has been influenced by presumptive caregivers, often teachers, has the right to proclaim a change of gender and name and hide it from their parents. The proponents say that this is not an intrusion into the jurisdiction of the parent to provide guidance and protection to the child because some parents cannot be trusted to provide that care and guidance to the child. They contend that they know more than the parents about the welfare of the child and imply that many parents will react in a way that is harmful to the welfare of that same child.

Following this logic, it appears that a parent has the “right” to bring up the child in the religion of parental choice, to govern how they appear in public and to instill in the child the parents’ principles and beliefs, but only until it comes to assuming a new identity and gender. At that point, the immature understanding of a child can make an accomplice of his teacher to assume and override the wisdom of the parent.

The contradictions in this are stunningly evident.

I am not ignoring the fact that there are some children who have biological gender issues. This is often detected by both the parents and the child before they even start school. It is an issue between parents, the child, and their doctor.

Sadly, it is not simply the issue of changing one’s name and acting out a desire to have been born as a different gender. Gender dysphoria is not uncommon around the time of puberty when hormones are wreaking havoc in the body and mind of the child. It may be lasting, and it may not. This requires medical help, not the judgement of a teacher overriding the understanding of the parent.

Arizona State University puts it

this way: “In the United States, most people are assigned both a biological sex and gender at birth based on their chromosomes and reproductive organs. However, there is an important distinction between biological sex and gender. Biological sex, such as male or female, commonly refers to physical characteristics. Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and actions people take on, usually in relation to expectations of masculinity or femininity.”

The key phrase above is “socially constructed roles”, and this implies something influenced by the popular modes of the times. We have been through many of these events during my lifetime – false memory, anorexia, bulimia and so on. Today, “social contagion” promoted through cultural narratives, social media, and peer influence undoubtedly prompt some young people to identify as transgender to explain their feelings of confusion that are natural to growing up.

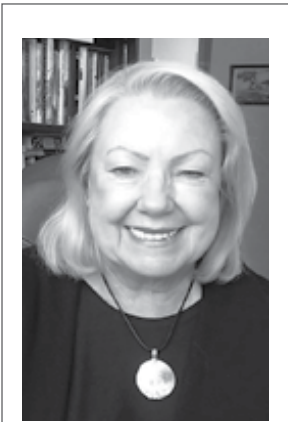
This sort of transference is not new. Think back to the false notions about the witches of Salem. Mass hysteria had women being hunted down based on the belief that they were bewitched. Some even “confessed” to being witches thanks to the overpowering effect of this hysteria.

Many parents understand that children go through some tough times at puberty – some more than others but they know their child better than anyone else – and they have their own ways of helping their kids deal with these troublesome feelings. But hiding them behind the “protection” of a secretive teacher is not only troubling, it is potentially dangerous to the child.

Why dangerous? Think about the child. He or she may take steps to change their gender or adjust their gender identity only to find out a short time later that, indeed, this is not how they really feel or who they are. The walk back is not easy. If hormonal or surgical interventions have taken place, it may be irreversible.

I trust a parent’s instinct about this to be more acute than that of a teacher or a guidance counselor. And if, indeed, this is to be a lifelong change, then I believe it is up to the parent to help the child through that decision-making process.

One last thing. What if the child doesn’t want to tell the parent? This, to me, simply indicates that they instinctively know that the parent will counsel waiting until they are older to make irreversible or hasty decisions. That does not make for a bad parent, but for one whose wisdom is nearly always proved to be right.



Dorothy Dobbie

Children’s rights

Should teachers be required to tell the parents of students who come to them with concerns about their gender?

Alberta, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick have implemented policies that teachers must inform parents if a student identifies as transgender, regardless of the student’s wishes. While parental rights are important, it is crucial to remember that children, too, have rights, and these rights are internationally recognized and protected.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which Canada ratified in 1991, sets out a framework for understanding children’s rights. This landmark document states that children are entitled to protection, education, healthcare, and freedom of expression. Importantly, it also affirms that children have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives in accordance with their age and maturity. Articles 3, 12, and 16 state:

- Article 3: The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.
- Article 12: Children have the right to express their views freely in matters affecting them, and those views must be given due weight based on the child’s maturity.
- Article 16: Children have the right to privacy, including protection from arbitrary interference in their personal lives.

These articles are not abstract ideals; they are clear directives that put the child’s best interests and agency at the forefront. When policies require teachers to breach a child’s privacy, they ignore these fundamental rights and put children at risk. These principles underline that children are not just extensions of their parents but are individuals with their own rights and dignity.

When a child comes out as transgender, it is often the culmination of deep self-reflection and personal understanding. For many young people, the decision to share this information with a teacher rather than a parent reflects trust and a sense of safety. Teachers, in turn, have an ethical responsibility to create a supportive environment for students, particularly when those students face stigma or rejection at home.

Some kids can’t or don’t trust their parents to talk to them rationally about questions of sexuality and gender identity. Yet a confused child needs someone to talk to about these things. Policies that force disclosure rob children of the chance to seek help in environments where they feel safe. For a

transgender or questioning child in an abusive or unaccepting home, such policies can be catastrophic, silencing them when they most need support. Research has consistently shown that rejection by parents or an inability to talk to anyone can lead to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and even suicide among LGBTQ+ youth.

Now, I will mention that with kids’ consideration of their gender identities, some will come to early conclusions that they won’t stick with. My husband and I know a few of our kids’ friends who have let their pronouns or new names just fade away as they’ve become older. With those kids, why get

their parents into a dither about a little experimentation? Exploring their identities is a normal and important part of growing up. Mandating parental involvement at every turn adds unnecessary stress and may cause harm – especially if the parents are not prepared to support their child’s journey.

Parents undoubtedly play a critical role in their children’s lives. Most – but not all – parents provide love, guidance, and support as their children grow. Recognizing children’s rights does not diminish parental rights, it enriches them. A healthy parent-child relationship is built on trust, communication, and mutual respect. When children feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings with their parents, stronger bonds are formed.

Teachers are often the first adults outside the family to whom children turn when they are navigating complex emotions or experiences. Educators should be empowered to support students while respecting both the child’s rights and the role of parents.

Policies that mandate automatic disclosure to parents risk undermining the trust students place in teachers. Instead, schools should adopt guidelines that prioritize the child’s well-being, including working with the student to determine the best way to engage parents, if appropriate, and offering support resources for families.

The loudest voices in this debate often claim to champion ‘parental rights.’ But what about the rights of children? Children are not possessions. They are individuals with autonomy and dignity, and their right to privacy must not be dismissed to appease political agendas or placate parental insecurities.

We must continue to have a society where children feel safe and valued, not one where their rights are sacrificed to political pressure. The “parents’ rights” mantra sounds really good the first time you hear it, but if you stop and think, it really doesn’t consider children’s rights as distinct.

By upholding the principles of the UNCRC and respecting children’s autonomy, we protect not just their rights but their very futures.



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