

Not Worth the Risk

Gender transition for kids should be treated with the same caution other treatments get. If it were, it wouldn't be offered to minors until we knew it was helpful and free of serious side effects. Unfortunately, this isn't the case in a lot of places right now.

Puberty Blockers:

The first studies on puberty blockers for kids with gender dysphoria said these kids just needed a short break from puberty. They thought it would help them figure out their gender identity.^{16,17,18} What they didn't realize was this gives kids the impression that their body isn't relevant to their identity. Common sense says their body is always relevant to their gender identity. For this reason, parents and doctors should help teens view puberty as positive, not neutral, and definitely not negative. The adults and professionals should not be affirming there is something wrong with their adolescent bodies. We see this in research: most kids who pause puberty never want to start it again.^{8,10,50} They end up taking hormones or having surgeries instead.

One of the most studied side effects is lower bone mass. Short-term studies show very low bone mass for kids and teens on puberty blockers, especially when they take it for a longer amount of time.^{16,17,46} This is bad news since kids are now allowed to start taking them as young as age 8, instead of age 12.

Puberty blockers might also harm brain development, specifically in the prefrontal cortex.^{2,3,23,34,36,41,42,49} This area of the brain helps with planning and mature decision making .

A possible benefit of puberty blockers is better mental health. The best studies show that puberty blockers barely help with mental health, and that therapy is a good alternative.^{10,16,17,31,48} The side effects listed on the drug's label include mood swings, irritability, seizures, brain swelling, headaches, blurred vision and loss of vision.³⁰ In addition, a reanalysis of data from the main gender clinic in England found that 71% of children had worse or the same mental health after being on puberty blockers. These children reported greater self-harm, and girls exhibited more behavioral and emotional problems, and greater dissatisfaction with their body on blockers.³¹ All together, giving puberty blockers for gender dysphoria isn't worth the risk.

Cross-Sex Hormones:

Some teens feel better emotionally and have much less gender dysphoria right after starting hormones.¹¹ But overall, teens only seem to have small mental health improvements during their first year of hormone treatment.¹¹ Over the long-term, the mental health effect is even less positive. Mental health struggles don't go away just because of high doses of hormones. Research shows that these hormones cause brain changes.^{19,22,32,37} A similar but more serious concern is whether cross-sex hormones could increase a person's suicide risk.^{11,43,47} We do know that heart and blood vessel diseases are increased for people who take cross sex hormones long-term.^{1,13,33} We see again that this treatment is not worth the risk.

Gender Transition Surgeries:

Everyone admits that gender transition surgeries, even for adults, are risky. But people disagree about the possible benefits. Side effects are very common. Depending on the type of surgery they can include urinary issues like infections, incontinence, and inability to urinate, sexual issues like sexual dissatisfaction or pain with intercourse, and surgical issues like infection, needing additional surgeries, or scar overgrowth.^{4,6,7,21,26,35,46}

And because almost all studies on transgender surgeries are on adults, it's not clear how similar the risks are for a minor.

Overall, studies about gender transition surgeries go back and forth, supposedly proving all sorts of things, but the best evidence seems to say two things. First, trans people say they're glad they had surgery, but they still have very bad mental health, very high death rates, and very serious and frequent surgery complications.^{9,24,28,35,39} Again, these surgeries are not worth the risk, especially for a minor.

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