



CSWA Position Paper

At Risk: Trans Children and Adolescents

May 2023

“Strong families—however they are composed—support the well-being of transgender people throughout their lives and are instrumental in helping them to access life-preserving, gender-affirming care” (retrieved from <https://transequality.org/issues/families>, 5/11/23).

Transgender identity is a topic that has become a flashpoint politically. The general meaning of the word “transgender”, sometimes shortened to “trans”, describes a person that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. See this additional definition from transequality.org:

***Transgender** is a broad term that can be used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born. “Trans” is often used as shorthand for transgender. To treat a transgender person with respect, you treat them according to their gender identity, not their sex at birth. So, someone who lives as a woman today is called a **transgender woman** and should be referred to as “she” and “her.” A **transgender man** lives as a man today and should be referred to as “he” and “him” (retrieved from <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-transgender-people-the-basics>, 5/13/2023).*

Whether or not parents/caregivers affirm their trans child’s identity, especially when identity is emerging, is crucial to the child developing a positive sense of self and healthy wellbeing. This support by parents and family is linked to fewer depressive symptoms and reduced suicidal ideation (retrieved from <https://www.ncfr.org/news/critical-benefits-familial-and-community-support-transgender-youth>, 5/11/2023). Trans youth are also at greater risk than cisgender youth for early age and recent substance use (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28942238/>, retrieved on May 11, 2023).

Another source identifies psychosocial risk factors related to victimization and found that perceived risk of substance use partially mediated the relationship between gender identity and substance use.

Not surprisingly, the incidence of suicidality for trans youth is well above that of cisgender youth. Data indicates that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide (Austin, et.al., 2022) compared to rates of 25.7% completed and 12% of cisgender youth who have attempted suicide. The stark comparison speaks for itself. It is even more alarming for BIPOC transgender youth who are 50% more likely to be suicidal than white cisgender youth and 30% more likely to complete a suicide (Thomas, et.al., 2019).

Just as threatening to the wellbeing of trans people is the increase in discriminatory, anti-trans policies either being considering or that have already passed which disregard trans people as a population at risk and promote removal of affirming care and accommodations.

- In 2021, 33 states had over 100 bills that restrict the rights of transgender children and adolescents.
- Arkansas passed a bill outlawing the right of transgender youth to gender affirming treatment to minors (CNN, 2022).
- There have been 533 bills proposed in 2023, of which, 62 have passed.
- On the national level, 23 bills have been proposed (<https://translegislation.com/>).

Preventing trans children and youth from having access to mental health and medical treatment is cruel and unjust. CSWA supports trans youth having the validation to their nascent identities that they need. This includes the right to mental health treatment to prevent the unnecessary suicide and suffering that is occurring today, as well as all gender-affirming care as determined by trans people themselves and medical professionals.

Austin, L., Craig, S., D'Souza, S., McInroy, L. (2022) "Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors", *Interpersonal Violence*, 2022,DOI: [10.1177/0886260520915554](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520915554)

CNN, 2022. "This record-breaking year for anti-transgender legislation would affect minors the most."
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/15/politics/anti-transgender-legislation-2021/index.html>

NIMH (2022). "Understanding the Characteristics of Suicide in Young Children."
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2021/understanding-the-characteristics-of-suicide-in-young-children>

Thomas, B., Salk, R., Choukas-Bradley, S., Goldstein, T., Levine, M., Marshal, M. (2019) "Suicidality Disparities Between Transgender and Cisgender Adolescents." *Pediatrics*, 2019 Nov;144(5). DOI: [10.1542/peds.2019-1183](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1183)

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