What does “Gender Affirmative” really mean? Implications for School-Based Mental Health Providers

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Abstract:
“Life as a 5 Year Old Transgender child” (NBC News, 2015, April)
“The Youngest Transgender Child in the World” (60 Minutes, Australia)
“Mother of Transgender Child Shares Powerful Message of Acceptance” (YouTube, 2019, January)
We often see headlines about young children who identify as a gender that is different from their assigned sex at birth. We are also likely privy to some of the debate in the field about how to best help these children. Should we help a child become comfortable with the assigned gender based on genital appearance at birth? What if we work to get a child to accept the birth-assigned gender, but we aren’t successful? Do we affirm children’s self-proclaimed gender and help them transition as quickly as possible? What if we support transition to another gender, but they change their mind later? What can cause damage to the child’s development?

This workshop will review the historical and current approaches to working with gender expansive children regarding their gender development, and the ethical implications associated with these approaches. We will review developmental theories of gender and associated psychological factors that are important in development. We will identify unique issues impacting transgender and gender expansive children of color. Assessment practices with children and families using gender specific and general assessments to help illuminate the child’s understanding of gender will be explained with case study examples provided. The focus of these assessments and helpful strategies for families of gender expansive children are based on the well-balanced Gender Affirmative Lifespan Approach (Rider, Vencill, Berg, Becker-Warner, Candelario-Pérez, & Spencer (2019).

Learning Objectives:

1. Explain the historical and current approaches to working with gender expansive children and the ethical implications.


3. Explain the process of child and family assessment using gender specific and general assessment tools outlined by the Gender Affirmative Lifespan Approach.
4. Identify helpful approaches for families of transgender and gender expansive children.

**Biography: Lisa L. Persinger, Ph.D.** is an assistant professor and program coordinator of school psychology in the Educational Psychology Department at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ. She teaches courses in school psychology including crisis prevention & intervention, practicum, internship, school-based intervention, autism assessment and diagnosis, research and statistics. Her research interests include diversity in gender and sexual orientation and school practices related to supporting this population. A recent publication with Joey Dan’elle Persinger & Sara Abercrombie includes: The association between school policies, practices, and public perception of trans youth in the U.S., Journal of LGBT Youth, (2019) Available online http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/19361653.2019.1632772

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