



# The Kelsey Coalition

Working to change the systems that failed our kids

## Online Community Convinces Autistic Boy That He's Really a Girl

One night shortly after my son turned 12, he told us he was transgender. This came as a complete shock as he had always been a stereotypical rough-and-tumble boy who loved computers and video games.

We talked a bit about what led him to this conclusion and we also looked through his search history online. He seemed to believe he was transgender because of very innocuous normal parts of growing up, such as being uncomfortable going into the men's changing room. In his life however, he did have some trouble making friends and likely always felt like he didn't fit in because as we later found out, he has high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder.

We reassured him that all of the feelings he was having were totally normal. But we also found that he had gone in deep online, doing "quizzes" to see if he was transgender, chatting with people who encouraged him to identify as transgender and even researching all of the steps in a sex change. We limited his time online and didn't hear much on the topic for two years, during which time he continued to act like a stereotypical boy.

At age 14, his friend group exploded with bullying and the transgender declaration came back with a vengeance. He again joined transgender chats online and started insisting that he needed puberty blockers, cross sex hormones and a social transition. By this time he had tallied more things into the "I am transgender" column such as not liking his body hair and having a difficult time with puberty.

We resisted any changes, because we felt that this declaration did not represent his true self, and was an escape for him from the difficulties of growing up. We tried to get him help, but it was very difficult as several therapists we went to, refused to look at underlying reasons why he might feel this way.

Because of "anti-conversion" laws, therapists are very leery of looking at underlying reasons. I checked in at our doctor's office to see if they had any suggestions of where to turn, but they only pointed us to the local children's hospital and I refused to go there as well, as I had heard stories from other parents that the doctors suggested hormones after one visit.

After almost 1½ years of looking for help, we found a psychologist from the UK who was willing to work with us using video conferencing. After a few online sessions this very knowledgeable psychologist who used to work at the gender clinic in the UK said that my son does not have gender dysphoria but does seem to have latched onto this idea that he is transgender because of things that are normal parts of growing up, and because of his black and white thinking associated with being autistic. He also confirmed for me that if I had ever, over the past 3 ½ years, brought him to a gender clinic, he would without a doubt be on hormones.

