

Framing Guidance

How to Communicate about Transgender Youth

We know how to support transgender youth. Policies, practices, and care that accept and affirm young people’s gender identities can help transgender young people thrive. Research clearly shows that **support and acceptance** from parents, using young people’s **chosen names**, enacting inclusive policies and practices at schools and in the community, and providing **gender-affirming medical care** all support the physical health and wellbeing of trans youth. Moreover, supporting their wellbeing today helps them become **happier, healthier adults** who can contribute to their communities and well into the future.

Using this knowledge to guide decision-making is more critical than ever. While the Surgeon General **recently called for** an “all of society” effort to address youth mental health in the face of rising rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among young people, **states** like Texas are threatening the wellbeing of transgender youth and their families. Due to bullying, violence, discrimination, and messages that they don’t belong, transgender youth have some of the **highest rates of mental health issues**, including nearly **twice the rate** of suicidality than the general youth population. Ensuring access to research-based support is thus essential to transgender young people’s survival.

Combating these laws and policies means harnessing what we know about adolescent development to inform *how to talk about it*. Over the past four years the FrameWorks Institute, UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent, and developmental scientists across the U.S. have worked together to translate the science of adolescent development for the public and policymakers. Below is our guidance on how to communicate effectively about transgender youth.



UCLA
Center for
the Developing
Adolescent



- **Connect the needs of transgender youth to the needs of all adolescents.** Proponents of these laws and policies want people to think of transgender youth as different and abnormal. Include phrases like “all young people” and “just like youth of every gender” to highlight what all adolescents have in common and diffuse harmful othering.
- **Make it about overall wellbeing, not just medical care.** Gender appropriate medical care is just one aspect of health and wellbeing. Take this opportunity to talk about making sure transgender youth have all the supports they need, including caring relationships, educational opportunities, and policies that prevent discrimination in every aspect of their lives.
- **Always connect the dots between gender affirming care and mental health outcomes.** Don’t assume that people understand the links between gender and mental health. Draw bright lines between discriminatory policies, limits to gender affirming care, and the toll it takes on mental and emotional wellbeing.
- **Tell positive stories about transgender youth who *do* get the services they need.** Demonstrate how important these forms of care are by telling stories about the good outcomes that happen when transgender youth receive the support and care they need so people understand the benefits for young people and their families.
- **Use a moral argument.** Make the case that attacking transgender children and youth is immoral and wrong because it does so much harm. Talk about the motivations of policymakers passing and enforcing these laws as uncaring. Starting with the moral case is more effective than beginning with a rights-based argument, because people don’t always attribute “rights” to children and young people.
- **Emphasize the future impacts of doing the right thing.** Remind people that when young people are happy, healthy, and able to pursue their goals—regardless of gender—it creates a better future for us all.

We need to work together, as scientists and communicators, to keep these harmful laws and policies out of our state houses, and make sure all young people, regardless of gender, have what they need to develop into happy, healthy adults.