

Does Bruce/Caitlyn Attend your Children's Ministry?

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The first time eight-year-old “Diana” (name has been changed) walked into my children’s ministry she was literally wearing a boy’s brown three piece suit. I was later told by friends, who knew the family, it was boy’s clothing down to the underwear. Her parents had recently gotten born again, and immediately became faithful church attenders.

Week after week Diana consistently dressed much the same. I would overhear her telling the other kids she wanted to be a boy, and was going to get a sex change operation when she got older. I had no idea what to do with this child. She got saved, and seemed to be engaged in our services.



When I visited their home, they proudly showed me Diana’s bedroom—predictably decorated as a boy’s room. Even the baby and toddler pictures on the walls of the home showed Diana dressed as a boy.

Sadly, as I talked with the parents, they saw no reason for concern at all; even when Diana sat with us and confessed she had already had crushes on her little girl friends at school. There was nothing more I could do.

Another Tomboy

During the same time frame, I began to notice similar troubling signs in another girl in my kids’ ministry in “Cindy” (again the name has been changed). She was the ten-year-old daughter of church board members, who were committed Christians.

Cindy was an outgoing, fun-loving, born-again, Spirit-filled, spiritually engaged, ten-year-old little tomboy who loved to play baseball—with the boys. I had never seen her in a dress, and really never thought a lot about that, until I overheard her telling a group of my kids that she, too, wanted to be a boy. (Thankfully there was no mention of an operation!)

I prayed diligently about what I should do, if anything. I felt I clearly heard from the Lord to simply take her take her shopping, and buy her a dress. So I set up a meeting with her parents and expressed my concerns. They were very grateful, because they too had seen warning signs they didn’t know what to do with.

They gave me full permission to follow my heart. So I set up a date with Cindy, and I have to say, I was shocked. I thought she would go kicking and screaming all the way. But she flew out of my car, ran straight to the store she wanted to visit, and began trying on dress after dress. That day, because of sales, I was able to buy her three new dresses.

There was an instant change in Cindy. Even her parents remarked about it. When I saw her a couple years later, she was a beautiful, feminine looking young woman still in love in Jesus, and is to this day (though I’m sure she still loves to play baseball!)

It Begins in Childhood

We need to understand that gender identity issues do not begin in the teens, or adulthood. It has its roots in

childhood. Bruce/Caitlyn did not start having an identity crises as a 60 year old man. It started, by his own confession, when he was a boy. How are we as children's ministers, or church leaders, to respond in today's culture where the Bruce/Caitlyns are becoming not just normalized but celebrated, and young children are being allowed to choose their own gender at tender ages?

Clearly, not all homosexuals and lesbians have gender identity issues. But of those who do, according to research, 85-90% of them have three things in common.*(See Sy Rogers in video at the bottom of this blog.)

1. They were sexually molested sometime in childhood or right around puberty.
2. They are victims of some type of name-calling, such as, "You run like a girl," "You talk like a sissy," or "You're butch!" This type of name calling reinforces in the mind of the child that they are a failure in their gender role.
3. And somewhere along the line there was an emotional detachment from the same-sex parent for a wide variety of unpredictable reasons. This is where the child either consciously or unconsciously makes a decision to NOT be like their same sex parent in their gender role.

No one of the three elements by themselves is normally enough to push a child over the line. But put all three together and you can potentially have a recipe for disaster.

Critical Child Development

A good friend of mine, who has a Master's degree in child development, says there are two age periods in a child's life that are the most critical in their sexual development. The first is between the ages of three and five, when they are just discovering that they are either a boy or girl. The second is between 14-16 or just when they are becoming young men and women.

Statistically if a child is molested or has a sexual encounter with someone of the same sex during either of these time frames the chances of them entering the gay/lesbian lifestyle sky rockets.

What Are the Signs?

If you haven't encountered a child experiencing gender confusion in your children's ministry yet, you will. Remember, gender identity issues start in childhood, when we are least prepared to deal with it, because we just don't expect it, and it's so difficult to talk about.

How do you recognize the signs of a genuinely gender confused child? It's not that hard. Really, it's common sense. When boys consistently want to do feminine things such as play dress up, are obsessed with mermaids and fairies, love frilly girl things, and long hair, there's a problem. However, such behavior is typically an indicator of deeper issues within the family.

What makes it difficult for churches and children's ministers to be effective in helping a child like this is they need the full cooperation of the parents, such as in the case of Cindy. Diana's parents never saw their own dysfunction, thus Diana could not be helped. In the cases of Diana and Cindy, identifying the issue was easier, because they were openly verbalizing their confusion, even though other indicators were also there.

(PLEASE NOTE: There is a huge difference between girls who are tomboys and love sports, and things that normally boys do, and boys who love art, music, cooking etc. and children who do these things because they see themselves in a different gender role!)

What Can We Do to Help?

One of the most important things parents can do is to make an effort to consistently, and genuinely, affirm the masculinity in their sons and the femininity in their daughters verbally and in action. This needs to be done by both

parents, extended family and friends, as well as children's pastors and leaders.

I highly recommend the book "A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality, by Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D., Intervarsity Press, 2002.

It's important to keep several points in mind.

1. You cannot pray their gay away. While change cannot be made without prayer, and lots of it, this is a healing process that is going to need a lot of careful intervention and likely professional counseling. It's a process of changing their thought patterns and well-rooted belief systems about themselves. The parents have to be committed to changing behaviors in the home. What makes homosexuality so difficult to change is because more than any other sin, this goes to the very core of who the person believes him or herself to be. It's not just something they DO. In their minds IT'S WHO THEY ARE, and it has been developing inside of them since childhood!
2. Know that you just can't cast a devil out of them and straighten them out. This is largely a family issue—not a devil issue. Is there a devil involved? Sure, just like there is with every sin. The degree to which we each give ourselves over to a sin, is the degree that demons are involved. But with a child who has not yet become sexually active, it normally is on the level of hearing lies in their heads and being deceived to believe something about themselves that's not true. It is those demonic voices who twist the words and actions of parents to make a child believe something is real that is not. (Please note: It is NOT a "sin" to be confused and believe internal lies. These innocent children have committed no wrong!)
3. Don't ignore the issue, bring it out in the open, carefully, tactfully, and prayerfully. Like with any wrong action, sin, or potential sin, when light exposes it, its power dissipates. One of the most important helps is to pray ask the Holy Spirit what lies the enemy is using with the child, and expose them. Simple, frank, unemotional conversations are often enough to break the power of the lies. (Be sure you know your pastor's policies on such things as there are certain legal ramifications you might not be aware of.)