



Parents' Toolkit

ON CRITICAL THEORY



ALLIANCE DEFENDING
FREEDOM

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A letter from Alliance Defending Freedom President & CEO Michael Farris

Dear Parents and Grandparents,

Like you, I've watched as the past few years have revealed how radical ideologues in our public schools are indoctrinating young children in racist, anti-American revisions of history and confusing them about their bodies, which are created by God. Like you, I'm concerned about how this is impacting my children and grandchildren's generations.

What some activist officials in these public schools are doing is immoral. It's illegal. It's unconstitutional. And they're acting without regard for the best interests of the kids and the rights of their parents. They're putting children on a dangerous and unhealthy path by pitting them against their parents – all to serve an ideological and political agenda.

Through Alliance Defending Freedom's new Center for Parental Rights, we're standing up against the efforts by government officials to violate the rights of parents and indoctrinate our children. With more and more examples of radical ideologies in the classroom being uncovered every day, it's clear these are the issues facing parents across the country. Some public school officials think they should control your children or grandchildren. They believe they should break your children away from the values you raised them with. Put simply, you and I must ACT to stop this before more kids are hurt.

Though we face a powerful enemy, remember that we serve a mighty God. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 (ESV).

I pray that this resource equips you to love, guide, and protect your children and grandchildren according to your God-given rights.

For our children and grandchildren,



**President & CEO of Alliance
Defending Freedom**

What are my rights as a parent?

Parental rights are fundamental rights protected by the U.S. Constitution. These rights include a parent's right to direct the upbringing of their children, and to make decisions regarding their children's education and healthcare in a manner consistent with their family values. Parents also have the corresponding duty to exercise these rights in a manner that promotes their children's general health and well-being. Alliance Defending Freedom is committed to defending the rights of parents who are raising the next generation. They are America's most precious resource and the foundation of our nation's future.

Why are parental rights important?

When parents are denied the right to raise their children according to their own values, it violates the natural parent-child relationship. Parents love and know their children best, and the love, rights, and duties of parents pre-date government itself. These natural rights stem from the unique, intimate relationship that each parent has with their child. It creates both the right and responsibility for parents to raise their children according to what is best for them.

While the state has an interest in promoting the education of children and protecting their health and safety, it must pursue those goals in a manner that respects the rights of parents.

Aren't my rights as a parent protected by law?

Courts have not consistently protected parental rights. Yet, the U.S. Supreme Court and other federal courts recognize that the rights of parents include the right to direct the education and healthcare of their children consistent with their own values because of the vital role of parenthood and the weighty responsibilities borne exclusively by parents.

How are parental rights being undermined?

The spread of Critical Theory (specifically Critical Race Theory and Gender Theory) into classrooms threatens parental rights. Schools are teaching divisive concepts that treat children differently based on race, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. They also promote a destructive gender ideology that can include hiding a child's mental health challenges, including discomfort with their sex, from their parents.

Several things currently threaten the legitimate, God-given rights of parents. Specifically, issues surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT) and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) pose increasing threats. Courageous parents are standing up for their children at school board meetings, in state legislatures, and even in Congress. We want to equip parents and others with the tools to be active in the effort to defend their rights and their children.

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How can parents ACT to protect their rights?

Parents are a powerful force in advocating for the protection of their rights. To preserve their rights, parents can ACT by pursuing laws and policies that promote government **accountability, choice, and transparency (ACT)**.

How can parents ACT to protect their rights in relation to Critical Theory?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Support laws that require courts to treat any government policy that infringes on parental rights with the toughest standard of legal review (“strict scrutiny”). Currently, only 31 states protect parental rights as fundamental rights with strict scrutiny. For more information, visit www.ParentalRights.org.

CHOICE

Ensure that parents can choose the education and healthcare that they deem best for their child, including the freedom to choose a school (including private school, religious schools, and homeschooling) that aligns with their values, the right to opt-in and opt-out of controversial instruction in public schools, and the right to choose healthcare options best suited for their child’s needs.

TRANSPARENCY

Ensure that parents are fully informed about their child, including all aspects of their physical, emotional and mental health, the instructional materials and lessons they are being taught in school, and any records or files being maintained by schools regarding their child.

What is Critical Theory and how does it harm children?

What is Critical Theory?

“Critical Theory” refers to a social theory and philosophy which asserts that society is fundamentally corrupted by power dynamics that enable certain groups (based on characteristics like race, class, sexual orientation, or gender identity) to oppress other groups. Because of this perceived power dynamic, Critical Theory elevates subjective feelings and challenges the existence of objective knowledge, even scientific knowledge. Critical Theory promotes the idea that to achieve “social justice,” society’s institutions (including the family unit) must be dismantled and reshaped to redistribute power from the “oppressors” to the “oppressed.”

How does Critical Theory harm children?

Critical Theory undermines the human dignity of all children. It teaches them to see themselves and others through the narrow lens of race. It silences the voice of children whose views do not align with the school’s view of “social justice.” It also teaches children to oppose the American ideals of individual equality, liberty, and the family.

What is Critical Race Theory (CRT) and What Can I Do To Protect My Child?

What is Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

[CRT](#) originated in academia, but is now being practiced in K-12 schools (often through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) materials). It asserts that America’s laws, policies, and society perpetuate systemic racism that deprives racial minorities of success. It attributes all racial inequalities to the existence of systemic racism and treats the American dream as a finite pie to be carved up rather than a pathway to success for all.

[Click here to learn more about Critical Race Theory.](#)

How does CRT harm children?

While some supporters of CRT may sincerely seek to address racial inequalities, their methods harm children of all races. CRT creates a hostile environment by classifying students as oppressor or oppressed simply because of their skin color or ethnic heritage.

This classification violates a child’s right to equal treatment. When students are compelled (under threat of punishment) to affirm statements like “America is fundamentally racist” or to confess “white privilege” or “implicit bias,” this compulsion violates their freedom of speech. It also tells minority students that no matter how hard they work, their success will be limited by the racism embedded in the American system.

How can I know what is being taught at school, and what books, videos, and websites my child is being exposed to?

Parents have a right to transparency. They have a right to know what is taught and which materials (written, audio-visual, online, and spoken) are utilized during the school day.

When parents request information, they are entitled to a thorough response from the school district and/or local administrator. Too often, this is not the case.

Open records requests give parents the right to request any recorded information held by a public authority. These requests enable parents to find out what is going on behind closed classroom doors, because they can reveal supplemental materials, outside resources, teachers' manuals, and information regarding ongoing teacher training.

See *"Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Open Records Requests"* on page 11 for helpful tips on how to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to obtain more information from your child's school.

Critical Race Theory is being practiced at my child's school... WHAT CAN I DO?

1. Support school policies that provide transparency into curriculum and teacher training. Speak up at school board meetings.
2. Seek opt-in policies for instruction on Critical Theory and opt-outs for instruction that conflict with religious or moral beliefs.
3. Talk with your child(ren) about the importance of classroom discussions that encourage all students to ask questions regardless of their identity. No child should feel left out of a discussion based on their race, color, or ethnicity.
4. Ask your child(ren) to promptly report any discussions which stigmatize a student on the basis of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
5. If you believe your child's civil rights have been violated, [click here](#) to request legal help from ADF.

Can my child opt-in to or opt-out of school instruction?

Yes. In some states you have opt-out rights for certain curricula. A handful of states have opt-in requirements. What's the difference?

- Opt-in policies give parents the most choice and control over children's exposure to materials. Less than [ten states](#) require parents to affirmatively opt their children in for sex education. In each case, requests for parental consent are initiated by the school.
- Opt-out policies are a passive right that parents must actively assert, preferably at the beginning of each school year and separately for each

How can parents ACT to protect their rights in relation to Critical Theory?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Parents should engage their school board members by calling and writing if CRT material/curriculum is being practiced in the classroom. Parents should also be willing to speak at school board meetings.

CHOICE

Parents should pursue opt-in policies for instruction on Critical Theory and opt-outs for any instruction that conflicts with their religious and moral beliefs. Parents have the right to choose a learning environment where their child is treated as an individual (not as a member of a group), and where their child is not stereotyped or limited because of their race.

TRANSPARENCY

Parents should support policies which provide maximum transparency into curriculum and teacher training materials that address CRT and discuss with their children the importance of all students being free to ask questions regardless of their race, religion, etc., and the need to report any unequal treatment.

enrolled child. The District of Columbia and 36 states [allow](#) parents to opt-out of any sex education on behalf of their children. The District of Columbia and 25 states require school districts to notify parents that sexual education will be provided. The District of Columbia and 30 states require public schools to teach sex education.

- [Click here](#) to find out about your state's opt-in/opt-out policies.

IV. What are Transgender Ideology, Gender Theory and Queer Studies and What I Can Do to Protect My Child?

What are schools teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)?

Gender Theory and Queer Studies are branches of Critical Theory that came from academia. These theories are being put into practice in K-12 education to promote politicized views about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).

GENDER THEORY

Denies the objective truth that we are born either male or female and asserts that sex is merely "assigned at birth." Gender Theory asserts that a person's subjective internal feelings of gender identity are the evidence of that person's sex.

QUEER STUDIES

Focus on the study of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. It treats heterosexuality and acceptance of one's biological sex as social constructs that may be rooted in fear and a desire to oppress those who identify as gay or transgender.

How does SOGI ideology harm children?

When Gender Theory or Queer Studies are put into practice in schools, students may feel pressured to conform to viewpoints that violate their own conscience and/or undermine their family's values. Pressuring a student to deny that marriage is the union of one man and one woman or that sex is binary can violate that student's freedom of speech, freedom of religion or conscience, and/or the rights of their parents to direct their education and upbringing.

Children as young as three years old are being shown cartoons or introduced to imaginary figures like the Gender Unicorn or Genderbread Person. SOGI instruction often invokes Critical Theory's narratives of "power and privilege." Students are taught that if they are heterosexual or "cisgender" (comfortable with their biological sex), they are part of an "oppressor" group. This creates a hostile environment for students who do not conform to a particular political viewpoint and it undermines their right to an education.

How do sexual orientation and transgender ideology impact girls' sports and teachers?

Increasingly, we see examples of males competing on female teams and dominating girls' athletics. By substituting gender identity for biology, athletic associations and schools are [robbing girls of opportunities](#).

How can parents ACT to protect their rights in relation to SOGI?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Parents should support policies which hold school officials legally accountable for efforts to socially transition a student with gender dysphoria. Schools should not use secret Gender Support Plans or keep a second set of confidential files. Schools should not use pronouns or names that do not align with a student's sex without parental consent. [Parents](#) are [filing lawsuits](#) against schools to challenge these policies.

CHOICE

Parents should pursue choice by advocating for students to opt-in to any instruction relating to sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. Parents should pursue opt-outs to any objectionable instruction. Parents can also pursue choice by opposing counseling censorship bans. Parents should be able to obtain counseling for their child that affirms they are male or female.

TRANSPARENCY

Parents should pursue transparency and vigorously exercise their right to review all curriculum, instructional materials, and teacher training (whether printed or online) in advance. Parents should also encourage their children to inform them of any lessons, conversations, or activities which conflict with their family values and beliefs.

Teachers

Additionally, Gender Theory is promoted by forcing teachers to refer to students by pronouns that do not correspond to their biological sex. [Courageous teachers](#) have refused to deny the truth that sex is binary out of concern for their students' well-being. Some have [challenged](#) their schools. Compelling teachers to use preferred pronouns that do not align with a student's sex puts additional pressure on students to accept a particular political viewpoint.

What are the facts about gender dysphoria in children?

NO CHILD IS BORN IN THE WRONG BODY, but some children struggle with gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a mental health condition that involves feelings of distress associated with a sense of being “really” the opposite sex, or a desire to be the opposite sex. Many youth who feel distressed about being male or female also have underlying mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Some who have identified as transgender and then later desisted believe their feelings of distress and alienation from their sex were actually symptoms of other mental health issues.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the rise of gender dysphoria among American youth, especially among teen girls whose peers begin to identify as transgender. This phenomenon of social contagion is known as “Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria.”

How are some schools using gender theory to undermine parental rights?

Every parent should be informed of, and involved in, important life decisions regarding their child. Parental rights are undermined when authority figures withhold information about a child's mental health or struggles with gender identity from their parents, encourage the child to withhold information from their parents, or take any action that undermines the parents' role in guiding or protecting their child.

Many schools now create secret “Gender Support Plans” and “socially transition” students to a new gender identity by requiring teachers and staff to use names and pronouns for the child that do not align with his/her birth name or sex.

When schools affirm a different gender identity for a child without parental consent or notification, they violate the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their child. Schools also violate parental rights when they encourage children to deceive their parents, or to obtain sexual counseling and/or reproductive services without parental knowledge or consent.

My child has gender dysphoria or same-sex attraction. Are counseling resources available to me?

Every parent has the right to choose counseling for their child which the parents determine to be in their child's best interest. However, parental choice is limited in at least twenty states by government censorship based on ideologies about sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

[Click here to find out about what counseling may be available in your state.](#)

V. What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)?

The increase of sexually explicit content in K-12 education is the result of international and domestic efforts to promote CSE. The CSE movement is based on the controversial premises that children are sexual beings from birth and have a human right to sexual education and experimentation from a young age.

How does CSE harm children?

CSE harms children through exposure to graphic, sexual materials that are known to [damage brain development](#) and lead to premature sexual activity and higher rates of depression, anxiety, and teen pregnancy. CSE focuses on normalizing sexual activity among minors so long as such activity is consensual and protected. However, children should never be encouraged to “consent” to sex, regardless of the age of the other person. CSE also promotes abortion as a safe procedure with no lasting physical or emotional implications.

How does CSE undermine parental rights?

CSE undermines parental rights by: (1) promoting content and viewpoints that are at odds with the moral and religious values that many families seek to instill in their children; (2) teaching children they have a right to privacy from their parents; and (3) encouraging children to obtain sexual counseling and services (including contraception and abortion) without parental knowledge or consent.

VI. I want to take an active role in defending my rights as a parent. What can I do?

Parents have the right to seek **Accountability, Choice and Transparency** by calling on elected officials to fulfill their civic duty in pursuit of policies and laws which protect children from harm and safeguard parental rights.

ACCOUNTABILITY

School Boards

- Parents should know the name, email address, and telephone number of the school board representative for their district.
- Parents should regularly engage their school board members by calling and writing about matters and topics of concern to them and their children.
- Parents should be willing to speak during public comment opportunities at school board meetings. When speaking publicly, having carefully prepared statements which can be read in the time allotted can ease nerves and

How can parents ACT to protect their rights in relation to CSE?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Parents should seek accountability for state actors (including educators) who dispense contraception or encourage a minor to seek an abortion.

CHOICE

Every parent should be able to choose an education for their child which is free from graphic sexual content, the promotion of abortion, and politicized ideas about sexual orientation and gender identity which may not align with their moral or religious values. Parents can advocate for policies that treat sexual education programs as opt-in voluntary electives and provide opt-outs for other sensitive topics.

TRANSPARENCY

Parents can also advocate for policies that ensure their right to review all educational materials.

spotlight with great impact the importance of the issues at hand. All communication should be clear, concise, civil, and courteous (the “4 C’s” of communication).

- Parents should connect with other concerned parents and citizens for the benefit of shared information, strength in numbers, and encouragement for the task at hand.
- Parents who desire to win the battle against CRT, SOGI and CSE in schools can hold school boards accountable by themselves running for their local school board and/or supporting other like-minded candidates who will promote protective policies for children and respect the fundamental rights of parents.

Legislators

Parents with the courage to face often hostile school boards should have no problem engaging their state legislator over education and healthcare issues effecting children. Visit OpenStates.org to learn who your representative is and how and where to reach them.

Parents should proactively reach out to their legislators and using the “4 C’s” of communication request that they take specific action to introduce and support legislation which ensures government **Accountability** for violations of parental rights, offers **Choices** for parents to obtain the best possible quality education and healthcare for their children, and creates **Transparency** so parents know what their children are being taught and how they are being treated.

Legal Action

If you believe your child’s rights or your rights as a parent are being violated, [click here](#) to request legal help from Alliance Defending Freedom.

Parents who believe their (or their children’s) rights have been violated in education or healthcare can request legal assistance from Alliance Defending Freedom. Government accountability sometimes comes through legal action which seeks to enforce and apply the legal protections under the U.S. Constitution and state and federal law.



CHOICE

Opt-In Policies

Parents have a right to choose what theories and curriculum their children are taught in school. Parents should pursue opt-in policies which give parents the most choice by requiring schools to obtain their prior written consent to any lessons involving Critical Theory, gender identity, sexual orientation, romantic or sexual relationships.

Opt-Out Policies

Opt-out policies are passive which means that parents must actively assert them at the beginning of every school year and separately for each child. Parents should be diligent to avail themselves of all opportunities to opt their children out of lessons and activities which violate their family values.

Thirty-six states and D.C. allow parents to opt-out their children from any sex education.

Twenty-five states and D.C. require school districts to notify parents that sex education will be taught. Thirty states and D.C. require public schools to teach sex education.

For more information, visit www.ParentalRights.org.



TRANSPARENCY

Parents have a right to full knowledge and inspection of what materials (written, audio-visual, online, and spoken) their child or children are being exposed to at school, as well as what information and/or files a school is maintaining regarding their children.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)/Open Records Requests

Parents can submit a FOIA request (sometimes known as an open records request) to school boards for copies of documents and other communications that *already* exist. Districts are becoming increasingly aware of the effectiveness of requests. Some districts may purposely avoid creating official documents, lists, and communications. Be aware that if a district is operating in this manner, they may respond that, “there are no records responsive to your request.”

This type of response is not necessarily a dead-end, it just means that you may need to keep digging. It is imperative that your FOIA request be very specific. The following guidelines will be helpful in formulating your request:

- **DO NOT ask for a list of books, videos, websites, etc. If the district doesn't have that specific list, they can legitimately claim they have no document to send to you.**
- **DO ask to copy or inspect textbooks and written or online materials that were used in a specific class or activity during a specific time frame.**
- **DO tailor your requests. If, for example, you request a list of library books, it may be available, but it won't include classroom books, donated books, or new books ordered during the year.**
- **DO NOT ask for a list of members if your district has a committee devoted to a questionable topic such as “Equity” or “Inclusion”.**
- **DO ask for all emails and other correspondence between specific district employees, board members, or any other person you suspect is involved in the work of the committee devoted to topics such as “Equity” or “Inclusion.” Along with all the names of participants, you will receive information on other groups with which they are working, actions taken, and plans for future implementation of questionable material.**
- **DO ask for correspondence or emails that cite a specific resource, website, or title you are looking for. Teachers often supplement curriculum with videos, books, and websites, and that information is not usually kept by the district. When you receive a response, chances are it will include unexpected information, giving you another avenue to pursue.**

When you submit a request, remember it's just a starting point. The information you receive will likely leave you with more questions, but it will also point you more specifically to additional document requests that will be helpful. Do not be intimidated by the process. With perseverance, you can prevail.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA protects the privacy of a student's education records and restricts educational institutions from disclosing a student's personally identifiable information without parental consent. Disclosure to certain entities without parental consent is sometimes permitted and this loophole poses risks to the privacy of student records.

Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA)

The PPRA protects the students' rights not to participate in evaluation, analysis, or survey which involves protected issues (e.g. political beliefs, mental health, sexual attitudes/behaviors, religious beliefs, family income, etc.). Parents may take the following steps:

1. Opt-out children from studies/surveys which seek such sensitive information.
2. Inspect any instructional material
 - a. Send a letter to the school requesting inspection of all learning materials, surveys, or evaluations to be administered
 - b. Include in the request related documents (e.g. teacher trainings that impact instruction)
3. If the school doesn't comply, file a formal complaint with the U.S. Department of Education.
4. If these steps do not succeed, parents can file legal action.

If you believe your child's free speech rights are being violated, [CLICK HERE](#) to request legal help from ADF.

For more detailed information on the current threats to parental rights, [CLICK HERE](#).

The information provided here does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice; instead, all information, content, and materials available on this site are for general informational purposes only. Information provided here may not constitute the most up-to-date legal or other information. This information contains links to other third-party websites. Such links are only for the convenience of the reader, user or browser; ADF does not recommend or endorse the contents of the third-party sites.

Readers should contact an attorney to obtain advice with respect to any particular legal matter.



ALLIANCE DEFENDING
FREEDOM

FOR FAITH. FOR JUSTICE.

About Alliance Defending Freedom

Alliance Defending Freedom is the world's largest legal organization committed to protecting religious freedom, free speech, the sanctity of life, parental rights, and God's design for marriage and family. We defend your most cherished liberties in Congress, state legislatures, and courtrooms across the country—all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.

We don't just stand for freedom—we win. ADF has won 13 victories at the Supreme Court since 2011, and we're winning nearly 80 percent of all our cases—but we don't do it alone.

When 35 Christian leaders came together to build a ministry that would defend religious liberty and keep the doors open for the Gospel, they knew it would take an alliance. Like the Body of Christ, the alliance is one body made up of many parts.

[Join the alliance today and become part of the movement to defend your God-given and constitutionally protected freedoms.](#)

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