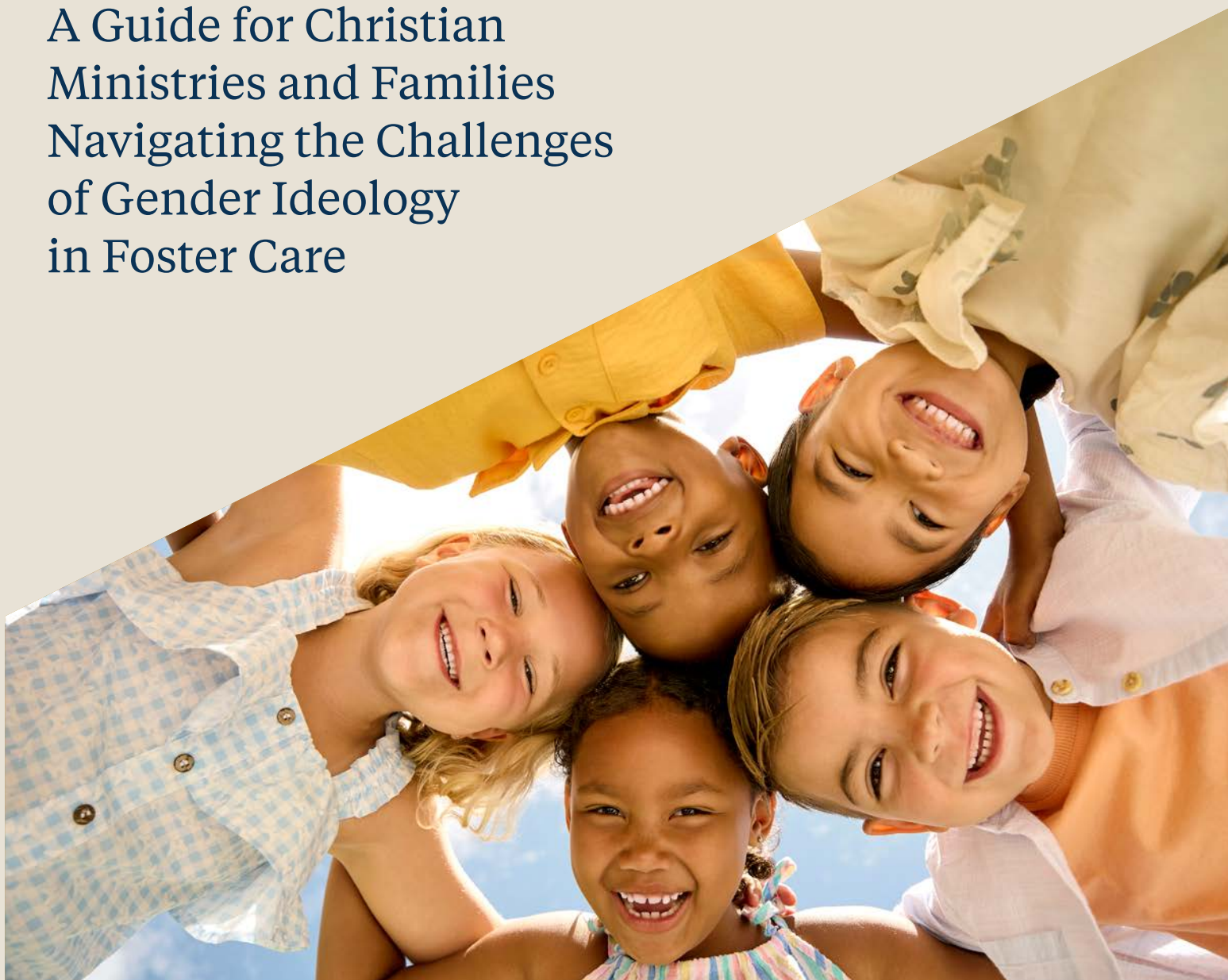


TO *welcome* A CHILD

A Guide for Christian
Ministries and Families
Navigating the Challenges
of Gender Ideology
in Foster Care



I. WELCOMING ALL GOD’S CHILDREN

Every child is precious in the eyes of God.
And every child needs a loving family.

Today [over 330,000](#) American children no longer live with family members, cared for instead by the child welfare system. Although “systems” cannot give children the love, protection, and stability they need, generous families can, through foster care and adoption.

Thanks to the visionary work of Christian ministries, and the commitment of countless foster families, adoptive couples, and supportive church communities, thousands of vulnerable children are welcomed every year into the warmth and stability of loving families.

Care for these beloved children extends beyond practical needs of food, clothing, and education to the child’s deepest needs for unconditional love, tender guidance, and spiritual formation.

Each child welcomed into a new home arrives with a personal story and carries heart-wrenching burdens from their recent past. For some, the story is complicated by questions of “identity.”

Children in the child welfare system are [more likely](#) than other children to struggle with questions about sexuality and identity. As vulnerable children, they are more likely to be influenced by gender ideology.

Gender ideology’s deceptive narrative — that a child can be born in the wrong body — offers a ready explanation for a child’s pain and a seemingly compassionate fix. It claims that the child will be freed from pain and distress and find happiness only by repudiating the “wrong” sex, choosing a new identity, and using drugs and surgery to align the body with the child’s self-perception.

It’s just not true. Gender ideology distorts the truth about “who we are,” destabilizes vulnerable children, and causes serious harm.

Children need love. But love without truth is not love at all.

This guide offers clarity to Christian ministries and foster families about the challenges of gender ideology and ways to protect these beloved children. Most importantly, it reminds families that all children need to know the truth about who they are and why they matter. Each child is a son or daughter created and loved by God, gifted for a life of purpose on earth, and called to eternal life in heaven.



“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”— Matthew 19:14



II. WHAT EVERY CHILD NEEDS: TRUTH & LOVE

“WHO AM I?” “WHAT IS MY PURPOSE IN LIFE?”

Children yearn for answers to these universal human questions. They yearn for the truth, presented with love.

The good news: The truth about “who we are” is revealed by God’s Word and inscribed in the whole person, body and soul. Children need to be taught the truth of the human person, which is reflected in human nature and in the body’s design.

Like the gift of life itself, each person receives his or her human nature and sexual identity (male or female) from the Creator. These “givens” — life, embodiment as male or female, and human nature — are fixed and enduring. They are gifts to be received, not rejected or manipulated.



*“God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.”*

— Genesis 1:27

FIVE TRUTHS ALL CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW:

1

**I am loved,
unconditionally.**

Each human person is lovingly created by God in His image and likeness. Endowed with inherent dignity, the person deserves respect and love. No one should ever be treated as an object or a “thing” to be used for someone else’s selfish purpose.

2

**I am a son [or daughter]
of God, and I belong
to His family.
*My foster/adoptive
parents care about me
and want to welcome me
into their family.***

Every person is made for relationship. From the moment of conception, “who we are,” at the deepest level, is a beloved person, created male or female, in relationship with Our Creator. Called to be a son or daughter of God, each child is also born into a family, the son or daughter of their parents. When family relationships are disrupted, foster and adoptive families step up to restore a family relationship and provide unconditional love to the child in need.

3

**My body is me.
My body is good and
exactly right for me.**

Each human person is created as a unity of body and soul: God unites the person’s soul with their male or female body at conception. Put differently, the child receives his or her sexual identity (male or female) as a gift from God. No one is born in the wrong body. All children experience times of emotional turmoil and uncertainty when they feel unsure about themselves or struggle to fit in with other boys or girls. This is normal. It is not uncommon for some children to dislike or be distressed by sexual development and puberty’s bodily changes.

4

**I am male
[or female], forever.
It is good to be
male [or female]!**

Males and females are different, but equal in dignity and value. Sexual difference has a purpose and reveals God’s design for marriage as the sexual union of one man and one woman and the creation of new life from their union. Because the body has intrinsic meaning and shares in human dignity, it should be treated with respect and care.

5

**God loves me and
has a wonderful plan
for my life.**

Every child is “unique and unrepeatable.” God has a beautiful, personalized plan for each child’s life. Sexual difference is an immutable characteristic, but each child has a unique personality and specific talents and gifts. No two people are exactly alike, and traits and interests vary widely among boys and girls. Living in accord with one’s sexual identity doesn’t require cookie-cutter conformity, and non-conformity with stereotypes does not erase or change sexual identity.

Children naturally discover their personality traits and talents and grow in self-awareness as they develop over time through relationships and experiences. Children need confidence that God has a wonderful plan for their lives and desires their “yes” to His plan.

III. GENDER IDEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON VULNERABLE CHILDREN

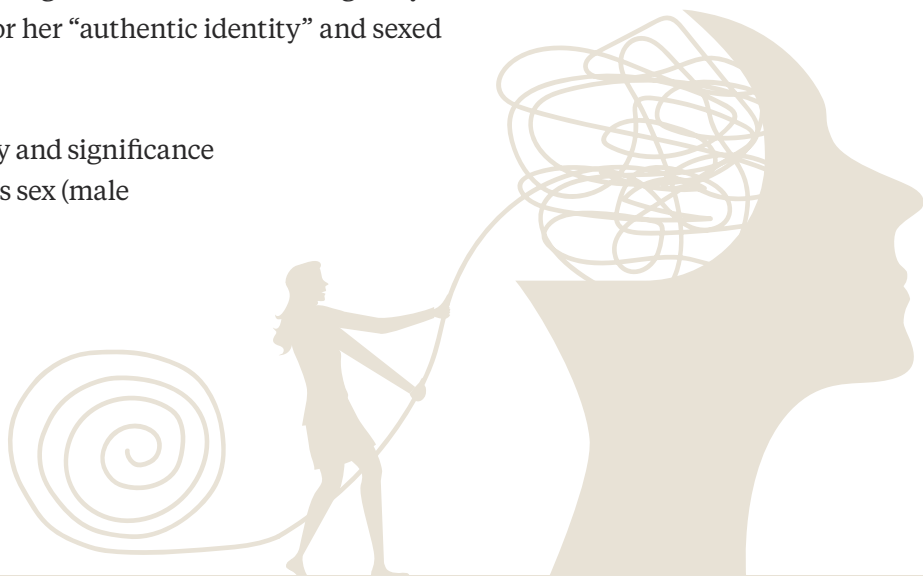
The truth about “who we are” never changes. But in a confusing world, gender ideology may obscure the truth or influence a child to reject it. Children who have suffered family disruption and loss are particularly vulnerable to the lies of gender ideology.

Gender ideology is a false belief system about the human person.

The central claim of gender ideology is that personal identity (“who I am”) is determined by a person’s feelings, or “inner sense” of identity, regardless of the person’s male or female sex.

Gender ideology claims that a person might be “born in the wrong body” or experience a mismatch between his or her “authentic identity” and sexed body (male or female).

Gender ideology minimizes the reality and significance of sex by claiming: first, that a person’s sex (male or female) is merely an arbitrarily “assigned” label that can be discarded or changed; and second, that a person’s sexual characteristics (breasts, genitals, reproductive organs) can be removed or altered to match the person’s chosen identity.



Human beings are male or female, not “transgender”

Gender ideology asserts a new binary based not on sex but on identity beliefs. It applies two invented categories to everyone, claiming human beings are either “cisgender” (identity beliefs match the body) or “transgender” (identity beliefs don’t match the body).

The truth: Every person is immutably male or female.

Identity feelings cannot change biological reality.

No one “is” a “transgender child” or “transgender person.”

Christians should use reality-based language rooted in the truth.



Gender ideology promises happiness but cannot deliver.

Gender ideology is not only a set of beliefs but also a plan of action with “guaranteed” results. The action plan is benignly described as “transition,” a shift towards expressing a chosen identity through external props, name and pronoun changes, and medically invasive interventions. The “guarantees” include promises of happiness, even “[euphoria](#).”

Gender ideology cannot deliver on its promises. “Transition” is life-altering and destructive. Rejecting one’s sexual identity as male or female disrupts every personal relationship, rewrites family history, and denies biological reality—and demands that others reject reality too.

Gender ideology uses medicine to alter the body to attempt to match fantasy beliefs.

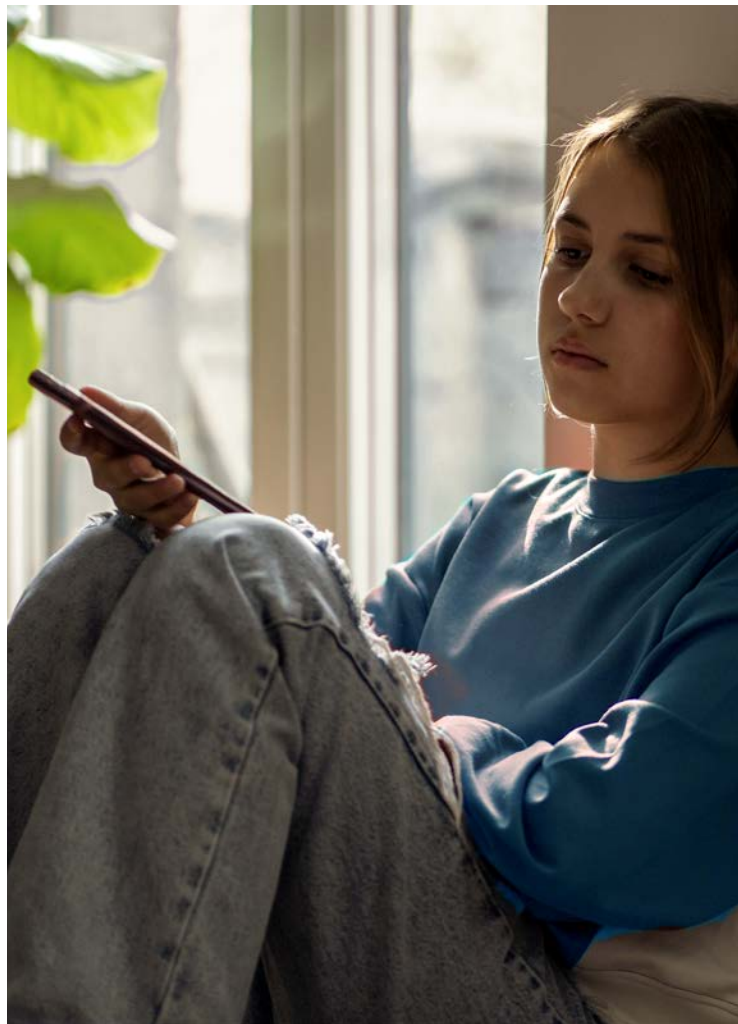
Medical interventions to express a “chosen” identity pursue an impossible goal. No one can change sex. Drugs and surgeries can alter appearance, but they also disrupt healthy functions, disfigure the body, and degrade overall health.

Claims that sex-rejecting hormones and surgery are “medically necessary” and “lifesaving” are belied by [clear evidence of harm and no evidence](#) that these interventions improve psychological health or prevent suicide.

Children in foster care may be especially vulnerable to identity distress.

Any child who experiences upheaval in family life is a vulnerable child. A child who has been removed from the family home for their own protection or care is particularly vulnerable. It is hardly surprising that “[c]hildren in [foster care experience more mental health disorders](#).” Traumatic histories, including high rates of childhood mental health issues and [adverse childhood experiences](#), have been [linked](#) to identity distress. Children who identify as “transgender or gender diverse” are reportedly “[overrepresented](#)” in child welfare systems and, more broadly, [about one-third](#) of adolescents in the child welfare system reportedly identify as “LGBTQ+.”

Children with complex histories need unpressured time to mature and heal. They need support in navigating personal challenges, rather than encouragement towards hasty decisions or irreversible interventions.



IV. LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES AND FAMILIES

In recent years, some governments have [tried to exclude](#) those who adhere to the truth about the human person from serving children in foster care. But the First Amendment protects every American's right not to be punished or excluded from government programs for speaking the truth or because of their religious beliefs. State officials cannot force you to agree to attend pride parades, or to lie to a child about his or her sex, nor can it force you to agree to abandon your religious beliefs as a condition of fostering or adopting a child.

Given the vulnerabilities of children in the child welfare system and the pervasive influence of gender ideology, it is a tremendous blessing to see Christian ministries and families open their hearts and homes to God's beloved children. They deserve our support, and Alliance Defending Freedom stands with them in the courtroom and the culture.

If the government is discriminating against you or your ministry because of your adherence to the truth or because of your religious beliefs, [contact ADF](#) to find out if we can help you.

