

# TALKING ABOUT

## **Curriculum Censorship Transgender Youth Participation in Sports Medical Care Bans**

Public Education Messaging Overview



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# Talking About Curriculum Censorship



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# Messaging Guide Available Online



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## TALKING ABOUT



### Anti-LGBTQ School Bills & False 'Groomer' Attacks



#### INTRODUCTION

This resource contains messaging to address two different far-right policies that can sometimes blur together—but which often have important distinctions:

- **Curriculum Censorship Bills.** In 2022, far-right politicians in many states introduced bills intended to censor teaching, curriculum, and books—in other words, educational content—discussing race, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, among other topics. These bills typically lead with censoring teaching about, and banning books that discuss, race, though many of them also include bans on curriculum content regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. If a bill includes censorship of educational content discussing race, it's important to lead with that harm in your conversations.
- **Hostile School Climate Bills.** These bills—the most notable of which was passed in Florida and became known as the *Don't Say Gay* bill—focus more on what teachers and school personnel are and are not allowed to say to students when it comes to LGBTQ-related discussions. While these bills may ban LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and lessons, their broader purpose is to ban school discussions—including in the context of student support—about sexual orientation, gender identity, and LGBTQ people and issues.

Some of these proposed bills may focus on one discriminatory agenda or the other, and some may focus on both. As a result, it's possible in some circumstances that your messaging may need to include content from both sets of talking points.

This resource also provides guidance for talking about the far right's growing cultural attacks on LGBTQ people and those who support them:

- **Anti-LGBTQ "Groomer" Attacks.** Amid their escalating assaults on schools, educators and LGBTQ students, the far right is increasingly using "groomer" as a slur to falsely smear those who oppose their efforts at curriculum censorship and their agenda to create a hostile school climate for LGBTQ students. While it may not always be helpful or necessary to engage with these smears, there are approaches for doing so that spotlight the falsehood of the attacks without playing into opponents' hands.

Note that this guidance is not intended to be used from start to finish. Few people will be able to use all these messages in a single discussion. Instead, draw from this guidance based on what feels appropriate in a particular conversation, bringing different elements together as needed.

Please consult with the Equality Federation for additional information about policy specifics and advocacy efforts in a particular state before speaking about them publicly.

#### TALKING ABOUT CURRICULUM CENSORSHIP

**Censorship is at the core of these bills.** After emphasizing shared values, show how the politicians behind these bills intend to censor curriculum, books, and teaching. Talking about how they intend to ban books and/or curriculum may also be helpful in explaining the far right's agenda.

1. *America is a country of freedom of speech and freedom of ideas. Those freedoms end when politicians start banning books and censoring curriculum simply because some people find them uncomfortable.*

*What's next? Censoring teaching about slavery? Banning books about the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King? Skipping over the Holocaust because you can't teach it without acknowledging Nazism? Children deserve an honest and accurate education that enables them to learn from our past and help create a better future.*

2. *When it comes to social studies and history, ask any two politicians what should be taught to students and you'll likely get two different answers. That's why we need to leave teaching to the schools.*

*America's educators have the tough job of preparing children for the future and helping them build the critical thinking skills they need to succeed. Curriculum should be set by educators, not censored by partisan politicians with political agendas.*

3. *A public-school education helps students prepare for their future by encouraging curiosity and critical thinking through math and science, art and music, history and literature. But now some politicians want to make it illegal to teach a whole range of social studies and history topics—and force schools to purge hundreds of books from their libraries. It sets a dangerous precedent when politicians simply start censoring school content and books they don't like.*

4. *Every parent hopes our laws will ensure our children's safety, protection, and freedom. But some politicians are rejecting those values and advancing legislation that would target LGBTQ kids for bullying and mistreatment just because of who they are.*

*The politicians and groups behind these bills want to use our laws to control what students can and cannot read, what they can and cannot learn, and—most troublingly—who they can and cannot be. Our schools should protect all students—including LGBTQ students—so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. This law would force schools to violate that most basic trust.*

#### TALKING ABOUT HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE BILLS

**Many recent state bills are intended to create a hostile school climate for LGBTQ students by banning discussions of LGBTQ people and families.** When talking about these bills, start by emphasizing shared values around what every parent hopes and every student deserves, and then detail the harms that LGBTQ youth face when they are targeted for bullying and harassment by politicians who pass laws to erase LGBTQ youth and their families from our schools.

1. *Every parent hopes our laws will ensure our children's safety, protection, and freedom. But some politicians are rejecting those values and targeting LGBTQ kids for bullying and mistreatment, just because of who they are.*

*Our schools should protect all students—including LGBTQ students—so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. The politicians behind these attacks are trying to force schools to violate that most basic trust.*

2. *LGBTQ students should have the same opportunities to learn and thrive as other students, but they often already struggle with bullying, harassment, and being told they don't belong. When politicians pass laws that say being LGBTQ is so shameful schools can't even discuss it, the emotional harm can be devastating. These attacks add to the isolation and fear that LGBTQ youth cope with as they struggle to accept and love who they are.*

3. *Our schools should protect all students—including LGBTQ students—so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. The politicians behind these bills are trying to erase LGBTQ students, families, and history by banning any discussion about them in schools. This sends a message that LGBTQ kids, and kids with same-sex parents, are not welcome in classrooms and schools.*

#### TALKING ABOUT FALSE ANTI-LGBTQ 'GROOMER' ATTACKS

Politicians who push curriculum censorship and try to force schools to hurt LGBTQ students often say that anyone who opposes them is a "groomer." This is more of the same from far-right activists, who for decades have attacked LGBTQ people by falsely claiming they are a threat to children.

If you need to address these false attacks, start by centering your conversation on the LGBTQ family, friends, co-workers,

and neighbors people already know. Then emphasize the importance of protecting every child and respecting every family—and why it's so harmful to threaten and try to silence people (including teachers) for supporting LGBTQ students.

**NOTE: Never repeat opponents' false "groomer" claims.** Saying or repeating the terms "groomer" or "grooming" gives free airtime to anti-LGBTQ opponents' smear. You can avoid taking the far right's bait by instead referring to their attack—for example, "*This attack...*" or "*The politicians behind these attacks...*" (see examples below).

1. *We all know LGBTQ people. They're our family, our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors. When we stop and think about the people in our lives, we know how baseless and offensive these anti-LGBTQ smears are—and how much they hurt people we know and care about.*

2. *This attack on LGBTQ people isn't new. For decades, the far right has tried to attack LGBTQ people by falsely claiming they are a threat to children—something we all know isn't true. So why are so many people standing silently by as their family and friends are smeared by far-right politicians—and as teachers are threatened, silenced or fired simply for being LGBTQ or for supporting LGBTQ students?*

3. *The well-being of children is important to all of us. Every child needs to be able to learn and thrive in a safe environment free from bullying and harassment. Which is why it's so harmful when far-right activists target LGBTQ students and the kids of LGBTQ parents for political gain—intimidating teachers into silence so that vulnerable kids will be left isolated, unsupported, and afraid.*

4. *We should all be able to agree on the importance of protecting every child and respecting every family. The politicians behind these attacks are trying to erase LGBTQ students and families from schools—and they're doing it by saying anyone who disagrees with them is a threat to kids. We need to stop these attacks and ensure that every child is able to learn free from prejudice and discrimination.*

#### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION

**Don't use name-calling (e.g., "bigot," "hateful," "ignorant") or other inflammatory language.** This kind of language can alienate the people we need to reach. Instead, use the relatable conversation approaches detailed in this guide to educate the public about these dangerous bills.



TALKING ABOUT ANTI-LGBTQ SCHOOL BILLS & FALSE 'GROOMER' ATTACKS  
MAP, the Equality Federation, and Freedom for All Americans gratefully acknowledge Equality Florida's Nadine Smith for her contributions to the development of these recommendations. To download this and other resources for building effective conversations about LGBTQ people and the issues that affect their lives, visit MAP online at [www.mapresearch.org/talking-about-lgbtq-issues-series](http://www.mapresearch.org/talking-about-lgbtq-issues-series). © 2022, Movement Advancement Project.

# Audience Starting Point

**Concerns about  
schools, education  
(exacerbated by  
the pandemic)**

**Concerns about  
government  
censorship, incl.  
in education**



- 1. Focus on curriculum censorship; contrast with core values around freedom of speech and ideas**

“

America is a country of freedom of speech and freedom of ideas.

Those freedoms end when politicians start banning books and censoring curriculum simply because some people find them uncomfortable.

”

## 2. Emphasize the slippery slope—and contrast with what we want for students

What's next? Censoring teaching about slavery? Banning books about the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King? Skipping over the Holocaust because you can't teach it without acknowledging Nazism? Children deserve an honest and accurate education that enables them to learn from our past and help build a better future.

### 3. Unmask opponents' agenda to control students, including when it comes to LGBTQ students

The politicians and groups behind these bills want to use our laws to control what students can and cannot read, what they can and cannot learn, and—most troublingly— who they can and cannot be.

Our schools should protect all students, including LGBTQ students, so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. This law would force schools to violate that most basic trust.

# Talking About Transgender Youth Participation in Sports



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# Messaging Guide Available Online



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## TALKING ABOUT



### Transgender Youth Participation in Sports



#### INTRODUCTION

Young people learn many important life lessons in sports: leadership, confidence, self-respect, self-discipline, what it means to be part of a team, and much more. Sports and athletics are an important part of education—something no child should be denied simply because of who they are.

Anti-LGBTQ opponents have been introducing legislation seeking to ban transgender youth from participating in K-12 school sports. They have also argued that LGBTQ people should be denied nondiscrimination protections at the federal and state levels because these protections would allow transgender youth to participate in sports.

This guide provides four layered approaches for elevating conversations about sports participation, addressing unfamiliarity and concerns, and showing why banning kids from the educational benefits of sports is harmful both to transgender youth and to all young people.

*Note: The approaches in this guide are intended for general use. If speaking about a particular case or proposed ban, contact the relevant organizations for more details.*

#### APPROACH #1: EMPHASIZE SHARED VALUES

Start by elevating the values of school sports—teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership, self-respect, self-discipline, relationship-building, perseverance, fitness and more—that are at the center of this conversation. These lifelong benefits and educational priorities are what make sports so important to young people.

*Kids learn a lot of important life lessons in sports: leadership, confidence, self-respect, and what it means to be part of a team.*

*Transgender kids, like other students, deserve the same chances to learn teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership and self-discipline, and to build a sense of belonging with their peers. When we tell transgender girls that they can't play boys' sports—or transgender boys that they can't play boys' sports—they miss out on this important childhood experience and all the lessons it teaches.*

#### APPROACH #2: HELP PEOPLE NAVIGATE THEIR UNFAMILIARITY AND CONCERNS

In their attempts to create statewide bans on transgender youth in sports, anti-LGBTQ opponents seek to turn people against transgender youth—arguing that transgender girls must not be allowed to participate in sports with other girls, or that transgender boys must not be allowed to participate with other boys. This can result in fear-based reactions from conflicted audiences, which we can help them navigate.

Start with an acknowledgement of the initial unfamiliarity many people have when it comes to transgender youth. This allows people to focus less on their own discomfort by helping them realize that the unfamiliarity they may feel is normal, and that others may feel the same:

*It can be hard to understand what it means to be transgender, especially if you've never met a transgender person. And it's common to have questions at first. But we can all agree that transgender kids should be treated with dignity and respect, just like everyone else.*

For some, it may also be important to clarify what being transgender means. When needed, describe what it means to be transgender with accessible, easy-to-understand descriptions and concepts that build on people's own lived experience of gender—and also emphasize the vital importance of family support for transgender youth.

*Transgender youth grow up knowing deep down that their sex at birth doesn't match who they know they are inside. With the love and support of their family, they can thrive and transition to living as the gender they know themselves to be.*

Elevate inclusive policies to soothe fears created by opponents. Anti-LGBTQ opponents often claim that if transgender youth are able to play sports, other students (e.g., non-transgender girls) are harmed. In fact, thousands of schools across the country have successfully implemented policies that treat all youth, including transgender youth, fairly—and these policies work:

*Local schools across the nation are already creating policies that protect transgender youth and ensure a level playing field for all students, and they're working. Banning transgender youth from participating in sports undermines those efforts.*

Opponents also stoke fears that best practice health care for transgender youth creates an unfair advantage in sports. Address this concern by simply and factually pointing out that such health care, like health care for other student athletes, is conducted under the supervision of a physician:

*Transgender students undergoing hormone therapy are doing so as part of medical treatment under the supervision of a physician. They should be allowed to participate in sports just like any other student who has been prescribed medicine by their doctor is allowed to do.*

It may also be necessary to address opponents' efforts to fuel anti-transgender sentiment through false claims about transgender youth and Title IX:

*Title IX is vitally important when it comes to girls' sports. If we want to support girls' sports, we should be providing more funding and more opportunities to play, and also creating stronger laws to protect female athletes from harassment and abuse—not banning transgender youth from participating in school sports with their peers.*

Some opponents argue that transgender youth—and potentially all youth—should be subjected to invasive testing in order to play sports. When needed, remind audiences that everyday K-12 sports are not, and should not be, regulated the same way as the Olympics and similar elite athletic fields:

*Applying regulations meant for elite athletics to all students is unnecessary. Local schools across the nation have already created policies that both protect transgender youth and ensure a level playing field for all students—and they're working. And they've done it without blanket policies that would require schools to test, for example, a 13-year-old transgender girl who simply wants to be part of the school volleyball team.*

It can also help to remind people that the overwhelming majority of transgender youth don't even play at elite levels:

*We all want to ensure a level playing field when it comes to youth sports. The truth is, every child is different in different ways—which is why some girls excel at gymnastics, others at volleyball, some at basketball, and others at soccer. Success in school sports is really about practice, self-discipline, access to good coaches and facilities, and even money to pay for outside training. The overwhelming majority of transgender youth, like most kids, don't even play at elite levels. They just want to play everyday school sports and participate with their peers.*

#### APPROACH #3: ILLUSTRATE THE HARMS OF BANNING TRANSGENDER YOUTH FROM SPORTS

At the end of the day, anti-transgender sports bans aim to harm transgender children and deny them the chance to thrive and learn. They also seek to overturn school policies across the country that are helping ensure that transgender students are able to learn in an environment free from discrimination.

We can close our conversations about sports bans by reminding people of the shared values at the heart of allowing transgender kids to be part of sports, while also establishing how hurtful it is to deny kids the chance to participate in such an important part of their education:

*Transgender kids want the opportunity to play sports for the same reason other kids do: to be a part of a team where they feel like they belong. We shouldn't discriminate against kids and ban them from playing because they're transgender.*

*As a nation, we decided long ago that discrimination is wrong and that everyone should have the same opportunities to succeed in life—and that should include transgender youth.*

*Schools across the country know that transgender students, like any student, thrive when they're treated with dignity and*

*respect. When school officials recognize that a transgender girl is a girl during the school day, but then treat her as if she's a boy when sports practice starts, it's hurtful to the student and disrupts the school's policy of treating all kids fairly.*

#### APPROACH #4 (WHEN NEEDED): REINFORCE WHAT NON-DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS ARE REALLY ABOUT

In some cases, attacks on transgender youth in sports aren't about statewide bans, but rather about anti-LGBTQ opponents trying to defeat non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people at the state and/or federal level. When talking about this issue in a non-discrimination context, close the conversation by moving back to the urgent need to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in housing, public accommodations, health care and more.

*But let's remember what this is really about: whether LGBTQ people should be treated fairly across all areas of life—or whether they can be unfairly kicked out of a restaurant, denied an apartment, or denied the health care they need, just because of who they are.*

#### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Emphasize the values of sports—especially teamwork—for all youth. Talk about the ways in which transgender students are parts of sports teams—part of a group of students who are learning important lessons about sportsmanship, collaboration, relationship-building, friendship, and teamwork. Avoid examples where transgender students are isolated from their teammates or not part of their team; such examples do less to highlight why participation in school sports is so vital for young people in the first place.

Elevate transgender youth alongside their non-transgender teammates and/or coaches. People want and need to hear from transgender youth. Storytelling that shows transgender youth and their teammates working together, navigating initial unfamiliarity, and ultimately embodying the values of teamwork that sports are meant to instill can be especially helpful to audiences who are less familiar with these issues. Coaches of teams that include transgender youth can also be important voices alongside those students.

Don't descend into name-calling. Calling opponents of protections for transgender students "bigoted" or "hateful" can alienate those who are honestly wrestling with the issues. Using measured, relatable language does more to create empathy and a sense of how opponents' efforts hurt transgender youth and broader school communities.



TALKING ABOUT TRANSGENDER YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS  
To download this and other resources for building effective conversations about LGBTQ people and the issues that affect their lives, visit MAP online at [www.lgbtmap.org/talking-about-lgbt-issues-series](http://www.lgbtmap.org/talking-about-lgbt-issues-series). © 2021, Movement Advancement Project.

# Audience Starting Point

**Concerns about  
fairness/fair play,  
often lensed thru  
zero-sum thinking**

**Concerns about  
exclusion, not  
wanting to hurt  
trans kids**



# Messaging Approaches & Guidance

1. **Focus on sports as a values-centered part of the educational process—what sports teach, and what kids learn (participation, not “competition”)**

“Kids learn a lot of important life lessons in sports: leadership, confidence, self-respect, sportsmanship, self-discipline, and what it means to be part of a team.”

2. **Help people navigate their unfamiliarity so it does not act as a barrier to support**

“It can be hard to understand what it means to be transgender, especially if you’ve never met a transgender person. And it’s common to have questions at first. But we can all agree that transgender kids should be treated with dignity and respect, just like everyone else.”

### 3. **Emphasize the harm of banning transgender youth from participating in school sports**

“Transgender kids, like other students, deserve the same opportunity to learn teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership and self-discipline, and to build a sense of belonging with their peers. The government shouldn’t ban them from playing because they’re transgender.”

## 4. Soothe concerns by emphasizing that local policies are working...

Local schools across the nation are already creating policies that protect transgender youth and ensure a level playing field for all students, and they're working. Banning transgender youth from participating in sports undermines those efforts.

4. **Soothe concerns by emphasizing that local policies are working...  
...and de-anchoring the conversation from elite sports.**

We all want to ensure a level playing field when it comes to youth sports. The truth is, every child is different in different ways—which is why some girls excel at gymnastics, others at volleyball, some at basketball, and others at soccer. Success in school sports is really about practice, self-discipline, access to good coaches and facilities, and even money to pay for outside training. The overwhelming majority of transgender youth, like most kids, don't even play at elite levels. They just want to play everyday school sports and participate with their peers.

# Talking About Medical Care Bans



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## TALKING POINTS AT A GLANCE

### Talking About Medical Care Bans

**This guide contains guidance for talking about harmful efforts to ban medically necessary care for transgender youth.** While these messages provide broad guidance for talking about

medical care bans, it is critically important to understand the specifics of a particular policy before talking about it publicly. For additional information and resources, email [messaging@mapresearch.org](mailto:messaging@mapresearch.org).

#### Approach #1:

##### **Illustrate Concrete Harms for Both Youth and Parents**

- This is one of the most extreme political attacks on transgender people in recent memory. Not only does it ban medically necessary care for transgender youth, but it also allows the state to overrule parents who are trying to get their child

#### Approach #4:

##### **Illustrate Threats to Parents** *(if applicable; be sure the message aligns with the penalties in the proposed policy)*

- The state is threatening parents with arrest, prosecution, and prison if they do what's best for their child and make sure they receive medical care prescribed by the child's doctor and

# Audience Starting Point

**Unfamiliarity with,  
questions about  
medical care for  
trans youth**

**Concerns about  
gov't bans, taking  
decision-making  
away from parents**

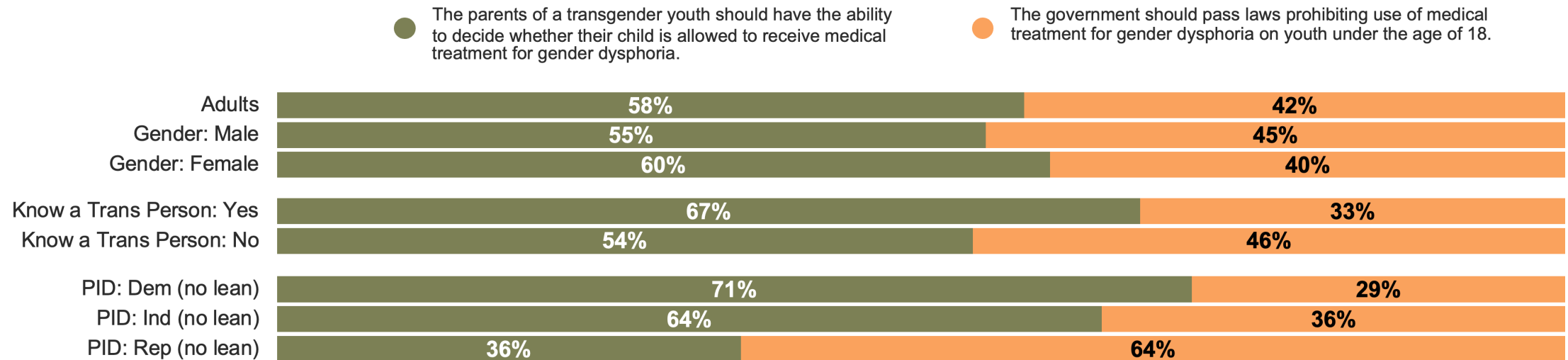


# Audience Starting Point

## DECISION-MAKING: PARENTS' ABILITY TO DECIDE VS. GOVERNMENT BANS

Three in five adults feel parents of trans youth should have the ability to decide whether their child is allowed to receive medical treatment for gender dysphoria.

When it comes to medical treatment for transgender youth under the age of 18, which of the following comes closest to your opinion, even if neither is exactly right?



Morning Consult survey for MAP, February 16-19, 2023, n=2,203 U.S. adults.

# Messaging Approaches & Guidance

## 1. This is about medical care—period.

“Transgender children, like all children, have the best chance to thrive when they are supported and can get the doctor-prescribed medical care they need...

We don't need politicians making it even harder for kids who are transgender, denying them essential medical care, care that is supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and other leading medical authorities.”

## 2. Center parents of transgender youth in these conversations...

**The parents of a transgender youth should have the freedom to get their child the prescribed medication they need.**

**Politicians shouldn't be able to overrule parents who need to access essential medical care for their transgender child.**

- 2. Center parents of transgender youth in these conversations...  
...and name/normalize unfamiliarity, emphasize what motivates parents of transgender youth.**

“It can be hard to understand what it's like to have a transgender child, especially if you've never met someone who is transgender.

Parents of transgender children, like most parents, want to do what is best for their child—and that includes ensuring that a child receives the medical care they need.”

### **3. Strike the right balance on benefits of care for trans youth—and the harms of banning it.**

When transgender youth receive the medical care they need, they are able to thrive and have healthy, happy childhoods that set them up for success in life.

Denying medical care and support to transgender youth puts them at risk of serious harms, including depression, self-harm, and/or suicidal thoughts or behavior.

Research also shows that when families support their transgender kids, those kids are much less likely to be depressed—and they show significant increases in self-esteem and general health.

4. **Address concerns by emphasizing the standards of care (incl. assessment process), monitoring of care, and support from the medical community.**

FOCUS: YOUTH CARE

“ Medical care for transgender youth may involve a doctor prescribing puberty blocking medication and/or hormone therapy with the consent of the parents and after in-depth screening by mental health professionals.

And if there are side-effects, the supervising physician can adjust the treatment.

All the leading medical associations endorse this medical care because scientific research shows it is effective and essential to the health and well-being of transgender youth. ”



- 4. Soothe concerns by emphasizing the standards of care (incl. assessment process), monitoring of care, and support from the medical community.**

## FOCUS: STANDARDS OF CARE

The standards of medical care for gender dysphoria involve the consent of the patient, consent of the parents if the patient is a minor, and in-depth screening and assessment by mental health professionals.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and the other leading medical associations endorse this medical care because decades of scientific research show it is effective in treating gender dysphoria. This medical care is essential to the health and well-being of transgender people.

## 5. Illustrate Threats to Medical Care Providers

This bill would punish doctors who follow the standards of medical care for transgender youth—standards that are endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and the other leading medical authorities.

# Things to Avoid



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**Avoid unfamiliar terms when talking about medical care for trans youth**

**Don't follow anti-transgender opponents down their rabbit holes**

# TALKING ABOUT

## Curriculum Censorship Transgender Youth Participation in Sports Medical Care Bans

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