

the SCENE

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

There’s a bill currently being debated in the legislative halls of Ohio that could well make a difference around the nation. Ohio House Bill 658 would require government entities, including schools, courts and hospitals, to notify parents if any child displays signs of gender dysphoria or “demonstrates a desire to be treated in a manner opposite of the child’s biological sex.”

Opponents to the bill are saying it will render government officials “gender police” and will endanger the lives of vulnerable teens. Advocates are saying that the point is, parents are in charge of their teens. As Aaron Baer, President of the Citizens for Community Values organization, said, “Already, the spin machine about this bill is in the works, claiming it’s an anti-transgender bill, but it’s not. It’s an intact families bill. It’s a bill that affirms the importance of moms, dads, and children.”

The bill would prevent schools from knowingly withholding information related to a child’s mental health from their parents.

Proponents of the bill want parents to be able to dictate what is in their child’s best interest. After all, schools are required to inform parents of any physical incidents that happen with their children and must obtain written permission before dispensing medications. Why should schools now be allowed to offer mental health treatment, counseling, or education without a parent’s knowledge?

The discussion of the bill has largely been lacking a more detailed and comprehensive discussion of the complex nature of adolescents dealing with gender issues. Often in the current atmosphere, gender confusion and/or a desire to not conform to cultural norms is being automatically swept up in the discussion of diagnosed gender dysphoria and transgender treatment. But teens have been dealing with identity issues as a normal part of a teen’s development for centuries. The problem now is, a school can complicate the mental confusion of a teen by being so-called “affirming”—that is, by agreeing to call the teen by a different name or to use different pronouns in referring to boys and girls. However, this was not what the definition of affirming was meant to be—affirming means to provide a safe place in which teens can talk about their feelings and express their thoughts. It does not mean “agreeing” with everything a teen asks or declares about himself or herself.*

One feminist blogger, referring to part of this bill as part of her opposition, said: “The [paragraph] gives the parent the sole right to decide what counseling, therapy, or information their transgender child—or teen—will have access to.”

Yes, that’s correct. Parents do have that right. They created the children. They are responsible for feeding them, sheltering them, and taking care of all their needs—that includes mental and emotional needs. If they don’t, they get reported to Child Services.

Until that time, can we not trust the parents? And can we stop giving teens the message that their parents aren’t in charge? Does anyone think that’s a healthy thing to say to any child?

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the article. Then discuss in this way:

Use “The Scene” to introduce “Speaking with Credibility” the High School Sunday school lesson for July 1, 2018. The lesson is found on page 29 of *High School Teacher* by Standard Publishing.

What do you think about the topic of this article?

Who do you think should get the right to make decisions about a teen’s physical, mental, or emotional care and well-being? Why?

What problems could arise if schools are allowed to withhold information from parents about issues that are related to a teen’s mental or emotional health? What would such a situation say about who holds the authority? How might that put a student in danger?

We live in an age flooded with voices offering an avalanche of information—and it’s sometimes very unclear who is a credible voice and who isn’t. But how do we decide where authority lies? Who do we believe? More importantly, how do we as Christians get people to believe us? Jesus spoke of how His disciples would, and would not, gain credibility.

*To Youth Leaders: For a detailed and well-researched article on this point, read “When Children Say They’re Transgender,” by Jesse Singal, from the July/August 2018 issue of *The Atlantic* and available online at www.theatlantic.com.