

From the time our son was a toddler he was obsessed with all things mechanical and electrical. He was profoundly speech-delayed and uncoordinated, a hyperactive little boy who couldn't sit still in class, look at the teacher in the eye and who had no self-control over his emotions. He had trouble navigating social situations and got in trouble at school because of it. He was given a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome.

He had his first experience with trauma at 3 years old when I got sick with a catastrophic illness. He saw me, his mother, rushed to the hospital multiple times. This illness lasted for years and it affected him deeply.

Our son was dually gifted and was in gifted and advanced classes. He experienced significant bullying in school. Nevertheless, he did very well academically and participated and excelled in state and national technical competitions.

When he was 17, I suffered another catastrophic illness that nearly killed me. He came to the hospital to say good-bye to me because doctors didn't think that I would survive the night. I survived, but my son went into a deep depression and was in a dark place where no one could reach him. We offered mental health help, which he rejected. He shut down and started spending a lot of time in his computer playing video games on the Internet.

As a senior year in high school, he became paralyzed with fear of having to go away to college. He didn't want to grow up. After graduation, he chose to go to the local university and live at home. At the university, he was approached by two girls who befriended him and convinced him that he was "queer" and "trans". He was so happy to have "friends" in college and to belong to a group that celebrated his quirkiness.

His grades in university started slipping. He went from being a dean's list student to failing courses because he was so distracted. He became bulimic and abused laxatives. Then the pandemic hit and, in his isolation, he turned all of his attention to spending time on the Internet. He became obsessed with the idea of transitioning into a woman.

The more immersed he became in this virtual world of trans groups, the more his personality changed. He went from being a responsible student who cared about doing well in school and a model employee at his part-time job to being myopically focused on the goal of transitioning. He dropped all of his lifelong friends and became obsessed with this new virtual world that fed his obsession. He spent hours shaving his body, doing hair treatments, skin care routine and doing hours of work outs to try to change his very obviously male body shape. As a result of these distractions and obsessions, he had to drop out of his four-year University. He stopped doing the things about which he was so passionate and at which he excelled: lifting weights, building structures, inventing new gadgets, welding, etc. Instead, he became a hermit in his room living in an alternative reality.

As parents, we were willing to give him the time that it took for this period of self-discovery and experimentation to play out. We accepted that he was dressing and behaving in gender non-conforming ways but urged him not to medicalize. We knew that our son's emotional maturity was at a 13-year-old level and that he wasn't fully capable to understand the ramifications of the life altering decision he was about to take.

But he would not be deterred and went to an OBGYN who gave our son a prescription for cross sex hormones and a testosterone blocker. She didn't do a psychological assessment, didn't get a detailed family medical history which would have told her that he is at a high risk for dangerous side effects. She didn't even wait for the initial blood work to come back before prescribing him hormones. He was in charge of giving himself shots and he abused the prescription by taking more than the recommended amount.

This hasn't made him happy. He has the same struggles and mental health challenges as he had before transitioning but now has the added burden and challenges of being a medical patient on medication.

As his parents, who know him and love him more than anyone in this world, all we can do is watch in horror as he medicates himself in harmful and irreversible ways to numb the pain that has driven him to this.

In a moment of vulnerability when he first came out to us, our son told us that he never felt comfortable in his body in general. He confirmed that there was no gender discomfort as a child or even as a teenager. He just felt that he didn't feel connected to his body and didn't fit in socially. Then, one day, he went on the Internet and read about Gender Dysphoria. He said "I really wish more than anything that I could be the guy who ends up with a girl on his arm. I have tried but it hasn't happened. This is the only thing that makes sense." We tried to explain that the discomfort is a normal part of growing up and very much what people on the Autism spectrum experience but he wasn't buying it.

The pain of rejection and the wounds of many years of being bullied and being made to feel that he was not "man enough" to get the girl or "man enough" to be good at team sports are too much to bear. He is looking to make sense of a world where he doesn't fit in and it is better to cast aside who he is – who he really is – because it hurts too much to be him. So, he is trying to become someone new: a new identity that gets cheers and applause, that gets support and "friends" who give him attention. What he doesn't know and what we, his parents and those who love him, know is that the cost of this new fake identity is so high, and that it will not complete him. I know this because we know our kid but also because every day we hear the detransitioners' cries of regret, pain and suffering from those who tried to numb their pain by medicalizing. The stories of detransitioners told in their own voice gives me both hope and dread for the future that awaits my child.