

Being the adult in the picture

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My daughter is currently involved with a dilemma of the sort none of us can really prepare for. Not consciously, anyway.

A good friend's child has recently declared as transgender and while she sorts out her emotional path forward, not all the adults in her life are being helpful. One parent refuses to accept the child's situation while the other tries to be helpful and provide a solid home life.

As you might imagine, Daughter One is being very careful to walk the line of being helpful to the kid while not interfering at the family level. And without going into specifics, there are many confounding factors – familial and cultural – playing into the whole milieu. I don't know the whole story and none of us need to know.

Bottom line – this kid is struggling in ways most of us will never experience.

We live in tough times and none of us are more affected than the young people just trying to get their feet on the ground. I had it easy, growing up a white, more-or-less-middle-class suburban kid with lawns to run on, trees to climb and friends who looked and talked like me. I was shielded, mostly, from knowledge of the cruelties many folks of that time faced every day. I was starting high school, my foundation poured and set, long before television brought me nightly evidence that some causes are worth dying for and others, including the wars our leaders chose, were not. At thirteen, I never could have predicted we'd someday be caught up in the current maelstrom of social upheaval, and certainly not that we'd see Americans storming their own seat of government with the intent of stopping the process of democracy.

But at thirteen (I think), this child is standing at a life-defining crossroads, trying to make the basic decision of 'Who am I?' in a way that few of us ever have. And between the craziness in the nightly news and the divisiveness coming at them through the Internet every minute of every day, going through the usual teen angst overlaid with basic uncertainty of gender identification with less than full-throated parental encouragement...well, this kid has some stuff on their plate.

We can't go back and make the times less scary or the competing messages less confusing. Children growing up in this where/when are seeing what they see and we really can't do much about that on a grand scale.

What we can do is offer stability where we can on the personal scale. I don't know a lot about gender issues and I'm glad it was not one of the things I had to face as a parent. But I do know that a kid is a kid and all adults should act at least a little like parents. We can't resolve a child's personal uncertainties and we certainly can't make society more accepting with the click of our fingers. But we can be the adults in the equation.

We can let that one kid know that our house is safe harbor and that with us, they will always have a place to stand. Daughter One is doing that. And I'm proud of her.