

## Kaden: Kayla's Choice Should Angelina's Child Grow Up To Be A Man Or Woman?

By Rebecca Leung - Feb. 25, 2004

(CBS) Angelina is a single mother facing a choice most parents would find simply imaginable: Should her child grow up to be a man or a woman?

“He isn’t your typical 11 year old. There isn’t enough research on this for a child this young,” says Angelina, who asked **48 Hours** not to use her full name, or reveal where her family lives.

Her 11-year-old, Kayla, was born a girl – but desperately wants to be a boy. “I don’t think like a girl. And I just don’t feel like a girl,” says Kayla.

“I think I’m numb. And don’t get me wrong, I still have my issues with it. I still think that I lost something. I’ve lost my little girl, you know,” says Angelina to **Correspondent Maureen Maher**.

“There’s still some times I keep thinking this is gonna disappear, and it’s gonna be the way it was. But if I hold back from who he wants to be, then I’m gonna hurt him as a person.”

A few years ago, Angelina was divorced and raising two girls, Ashley and Kayla, on her own.

What girly things did Kayla like? “I saw the girly parts during the Halloween times,” recalls Angelina, who thought her daughter was just a tomboy.

“She ended up being a ballerina one year, and looked so cute. That was the only time I can really think of when she really dressed up and looked like a girl.”

“I’ve always hated dresses and any type of girl stuff,” says Kayla, who started showing signs of puberty when she was just 9. Her body was changing and so was virtually everything else about her.

She went from a straight A student to nearly flunking out. Then, she seemed depressed and complained about nightmares in which she dreamed she was a boy: “I always thought there had to be some way I could be a boy.”

Hoping for answers, Angelina took Kayla to a bevy of counselors and therapists.

“I told her [the counselor] that I thought I was lesbian or gay, because I liked this one girl at school,” recalls Kayla. “She thought it was a phase I was going through. I didn’t, but after I heard it from so many people, I believed them. And I just stopped talking about it.”

But she didn’t stop thinking about it.

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One night last summer, when Angelina was trying to have a private phone conversation with a friend, Kayla's frustration finally exploded.

"She threw herself on the ground and kicked me, and bit and hit her head. It was a battle all the way down the stairs," says Angelina. "Tried to get her in the room. Started screaming like I was killing her. And that's when I called the Crisis Line. I said, 'Something's not right. I need some help.'"

Kayla was admitted to the children's psychiatric ward of a local hospital, and doctors diagnosed her as bipolar. But Kayla disagreed, and a few days after being released, she summoned the courage to finally confess her secret to her mother.

"I was really freaked out by this information," says Angelina, who started doing extensive research on transgender issues.

She took Kayla to a social worker and gender disorder specialist, who agreed Kayla should grow up to be a male.

"I walked in and this woman said, 'He knows exactly who he is,'" says Angelina. "She said, 'He,' and that's when I looked at her. I didn't want to say that was enough for me – but that was beginning. This weight came off of me. 'I mean, I'm like, OK.'"

So mother and daughter ripped out all remnants of Kayla's "little girl" room. Then, Kayla got a haircut. "I wanted a boy's haircut," says Kayla.

"That was really hard. The bedroom thing was nothing. It was the appearance thing," says Angelina. "And it was going from what looked like as effeminate as my girl to all of a sudden going to looking like the boy that he wants to be."

Angelina says that was the last day she saw Kayla: "She was gone after that point."

Kayla changed her name from Kayla to Kaden. But as this determined 11-year-old's brain was thinking "boy," her body was still rapidly growing as a "girl."

Kaden's mother, Angelina, supports her daughter's decision to live as a boy, but says the change has come with many challenges: "I hear him moaning and yelling at himself downstairs, throwing clothes around because he can't find something to wear that's comfortable and that's not gonna show his growth."

Kaden wanted to keep his big change a big secret, but like most kids his age, he told his best friend -- who then told another friend, who told another friend. It wasn't long before the entire school knew that Kaden was really a girl.

“Once I got to school it was hard, and everyone just made fun of me. A lot of stuff happened,” says Kaden.

“He was being called names. He was being kicked. He was being pushed in class,” says Angelina.

When Angelina heard that one of Kaden’s teachers refused to call him by his new name, she demanded an emergency meeting with everyone – from the principal to the school nurse.

“I just explained to them all that this is a transgender issue here. I need your support,” says Angelina. “I said, ‘I’m not asking you to accept him. I’m not telling you. You need to believe in this. But he’s a child, and he’s in your classroom. He’s a student -- you’ll treat him with respect, regardless of who he is or what he does.’”

The school has now gone out of its way to accommodate Kaden, and has arranged for a private bathroom and even excusing him from gym class. This is a not-so-small victory in a war being fought on many fronts – including the battle against Mother Nature and puberty.

Although surgery is not an option right now – hormone therapy is, and Kaden can’t wait.

But Dr. Khalid Hasan, a pediatric endocrinologist at a major pediatric hospital, has concerns about giving an 11 year old these kinds of drugs. It will be up to him to decide whether Kaden can start taking the hormone – Depo-Provera – to suppress the monthly female cycle.

“We need to get a team approach. And we need to get the opinions of other specialists and do a full analysis and find out if for certain or as close to certain Kaden really wants to go this journey of changing gender,” says Hasan. “The good thing is that these medicines are reversible.”

But before anything can happen, Kaden must undergo an intense psychological evaluation. If the psychiatrist doesn’t believe Kaden can handle the hormones, he could stop Kaden’s journey to become another gender.

How hard has it been on Angelina? “It’s killing me. This was my daughter. This was my first child,” she says. “And regardless of what has happened, the changes, it’s still somebody that I’ve lost.”

**48 Hours** wasn’t allowed to attend the evaluation, but less than an hour after it began, Angelina said it went really well: “At the end, he said, ‘I absolutely believe what he’s saying to be true.’ And he went ahead and approved to start the shots.”

“I feel better now,” says Kaden. “It takes the weight off my shoulders.”

And there’s more good news: a rebound in Kaden’s grades on his last report card.

Does Angelina think they're over the toughest part of the process?

"I don't know. I don't think you're ever over the tough part," she says. "And that's why I'm doing this -- because Kaden wants people to know it's OK. If this is how you feel, just do it, because there's enough people out there who love you and can care about you."

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