

My Son Doesn't Listen  
By Pamela Morgan

Synopsis

A mother shares her struggles with listening to her trans son at a PFLAG meeting.

Cast of Characters

Mother: Any age, race. She cares very deeply for her child and struggles with the same shame and worry of all mothers everywhere.

Place

A local PFLAG meeting.

Time

Today.

My seven-year-old son never listens.

*Do your chores. Brush your teeth. Put your clothes in the hamper.*

He doesn't listen. I find socks, t-shirt, shorts dropped in a line from the back door to the living room, where he's lying on the couch in his underwear watching TV.

Can you imagine how frustrating it is to be telling someone the same thing, over and over again, and to have the words mean nothing at all?

I guess I don't always listen either. Like the first time my son told me he was a boy.

Or the second, third, *hundredth* time he told me he was a boy.

I listened to the doctor, when they laid him in my arms and said "It's a girl!" and set us up for six heartbreaking years. You build on those words; you set expectations. You expect to watch Disney Princess movies and braid hair and talk about having babies one day. You shouldn't, but you do.

His third birthday. He wanted a Toy Story theme. He wanted to go as Woody, with cowboy boots and hats. I heard him but I didn't listen.

I found Toy Story boots, brown and light up. But then I forced him into a red dress with white tights and pink cowboy hat because that's what I thought a three-year-old girl should wear.

I felt proud that I was raising a "daughter" who challenged gender norms. Like it somehow made me a better mom or more admirable person.

What other people thought, it was so important to me. Listening to them was more important than listening to my child and his needs and his thoughts on who he was. In supporting my son through his transition, caring about what other people thought was my biggest struggle. And learning to no longer care what anyone else thinks has perhaps been the greatest, most life-changing lesson of all.

Now that doesn't mean that I don't discourage my son from farting loudly in public and then announcing it to the room at large. But it does mean that when someone apologizes to me for my child and our situation, I'm going to speak up.

Nobody needs to be sorry for me or for my son. He is healthy, intelligent, courageous and nearly perfect. Yes, he's loud and sassy. Sometimes downright disrespectful. And his feet stink to high heaven when he takes his shoes off. He also has a bad attitude about math. Or doing chores. Or any kind of work at all.

And yes, sometimes he doesn't listen.

Like when I tell him to close the back door when he comes in. Or like when I tell him to put away the clothes that I spent hours washing and folding, instead of leaving it where his baby brother is going to throw it all over the floor. Or like when I tell him not to eat something that has fallen onto the ground, because there is no such thing as the two-minute rule, it's a five second rule and that's still questionable when its pizza, cheese side down.

Or like when his mother and his father told him he was a girl. His grandparents and his doctors and his teachers told him he was girl. His red dress and his white tights and pink cowboy hat told him he was a girl. His whole world, everything and everyone that he knew and trusted and loved and believed in...we all told him he was something that he knew he wasn't.

But my son...he never listens.