

GENDER IDENTITY AND TRANSGENDER GUIDE

What Is the Difference Between Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation?

As a transman in a workshop said, “gender identity is who you are and sexual orientation is who you do.”

Gender identity is our internal sense of who we are, male, female, or something else. This usually happens for people around the age of 3-4 when they start to express, “I am a boy” or “I am a girl.” Most of the time, one’s biological sex matches their gender identity, but sometimes that is not the case. In this situation, one might identify as transgender. Sexual orientation is about the person we are erotically, romantically, and affectionately attracted to.

Below are some terms that are helpful to know as a sexuality educator:

Sex = biological status as male, female, or intersexual. It includes physical attributes such as sex chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, internal reproductive organs, and external genitals. These are the same across cultures

Gender = how we act, interact and feel about ourselves and our sex. Varies

across cultures

Gender expression = how we express our gender identity to others. How we act, the clothing we wear, our haircut, voice or body characteristics

Gender identity = a person's internal sense of self as male or female or something else, which may or may not match their biological sex

Transgender = is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity and gender expression differs from that which is usually associated with their birth sex or assigned sex

Transexual (transman or transwoman) = A person whose gender identity does not match their biological sex

Cisgender = a person's gender identity matches their biological sex

Agender = a person who does not identify with any gender

Bigender = a person whose gender identity is of both male and female

Gender Fluid = a person whose gender identity or gender expression changes

Genderqueer = a person who has a gender identity or gender expression that falls out what we consider a societal norm for their assigned gender

Ways to Support People Who Are Transgender

There are many people who are transitioning. Plus, we are hearing more about transgender rights and, in particular, what bathroom they can use in various states. As our culture learns more about people who are transgender, we may be curious and not quite know how to interact with someone who is transgender. Here are some ways:

- Don't use the term "trannie" or "shemale." These terms are disrespectful to people who are transgender.
- Don't assume they have had or are planning to have reassignment surgery.
- Don't ask what the person's sexual parts are or look like. You wouldn't ask that of a person who isn't transgender, treat transgender individuals the same.
- If you don't know, ask people their preferred pronoun. This gives an opportunity for the person to self-identify.
- If a person tells you their name, don't ask what their "real" or "old" name use to be.
- Never out a person who is transgender. That is their story to tell if they want to tell it.

- When teaching sexuality education and discussing sexual parts and sex, say that “usually men have penises and women have vulvas, but not always.” Or “a person with a penis” rather than “a man” or a “person with female sexual parts.”
- Don’t assume that people with developmental disabilities are not transgender. There are rainbow support groups at developmental disability agencies. See if there is one at your local agency in case one of your students needs some support.
- Don’t assume a person’s sexual orientation based on one’s gender identity.
- Do be open minded, listen, and be respectful when speaking to a person who is transgender. They too deserve to be treated as humans just like everyone else.

Resources:

Here is a link to a YouTube video that is from the Whittington Family. You may have seen this on Facebook, but it shows us how this family supported their son who was transgender.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAHCqnux2fk>

Here’s an updated interview with the family from CBS news.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcD5NOIalQo>