



Understanding Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Children A Brief Overview for Educators

Although they are often grouped together as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community, **being transgender is very different than being lesbian, gay or bisexual.**

Sexual orientation is about who we find romantically attractive. We don't become aware of this until adolescence.

Gender identity is about our inherent sense of who we are, and **lies in our brains, not in our body parts.** Our sense of gender arises very early and it's usually clear by age 4. Sometimes, however, it's not clear until adolescence and for some people, not until adulthood.

Gender fluid describes people who identify as a little of both genders or as neither gender.

Transgender describes people who identify as a gender that is different from that assigned at their birth.

Being transgender or gender fluid is not the result of hormones, trauma or poor parenting. Recent research shows that our **gender identity is mapped into our brains**, and is part of the amazing and magical bio-diversity of our world. It exists throughout the animal kingdom as well.

Transgender and **gender non-conforming children face tremendous hurdles in school and, sometimes, in their own homes.** The target of bullies at school and sometimes shamed by well-intentioned parents, these children often suffer from anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, obsessive compulsive disorder and other challenges. In some very difficult cases, these kids are physically and emotionally abused at home, and your acceptance and support may provide a lifeline.

These children are at very high risk. According to a 2011 [discrimination report](#) by the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#) and the [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#), **57 percent of transgender people were rejected by their families, and 41 percent had attempted suicide.**

Tips for Making Your Classroom Safe for all Children

Address the child by the name and pronoun the child prefers. If the child prefers neither pronoun, as some gender non-conforming children do, avoid using pronouns and refer to the child by his or her name instead. (It's best to determine this in advance and in private.) Be sure to respect the child's privacy. Even if the child is "out" and open about being transgender in front of others, don't let slip things like, "Julie used to be a boy."

Be sure the child has a pass that allows her or him to exit the classroom at any time, in case the student encounters a situation that makes him or her feel s/he needs to get away immediately.

Leave instructions for your substitutes to use the preferred name and pronoun if the classroom records don't do it for you, just as would for any other child with special, but private, circumstances.

Be on the lookout for bullying and address it, but don't make it bigger than any other form of bullying.

Do some research and **find a way to present a transgender person of note into your curriculum.**

Avoid the temptation to redirect a child's activity, interest or expression based on gender stereotypes.

Be aware that **these children often don't feel comfortable using either the boys' or the girls' bathroom** and can avoid liquids to the point of dehydration.

Be creative! **Avoid separating the class by girls and boys, and try to assign projects not based on gender.** Some options can include: Instead of mapping boys' height vs. girls' height, plot the height of blue-eyed children vs. brown-eyed. Instead of separating boys and girls for ballroom dancing, ask the children to pick a partner and then choose who wants to lead and who to follow. Instead of insisting that only boys can try out for typically male roles in a play, allow any child to try out for any part. Try not to assign one project to boys and a different one to girls.

Phys Ed teachers: Please be sure these kids have a place to change that **feels safe and comfortable for them!**