

A Spectrum of Identity: Gender Variant Children and Schools

Amanda J. Hirsch, Ph.D., NCSP
Faculty, University of Pittsburgh



Jennifer M. Hoffman
Graduate Student, University of Kentucky

Contributors: Alicia L. Fedewa, Ph.D., NCSP
Faculty, University of Kentucky



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Reflecting on Boys vs. Girls

- As a society, how do we define “boy”?
- What are some examples of “boy”, “guy/man”, or “male” things?
- As a society, how do we define “girl”?
- What are some examples of “girl”, “woman”, or “female” things?
- How do you know? Who or what told you?

Overview

- Terminology/definitions
- Typical gender identity/role development
- Gender variant children
- Importance and relevance
- School psychologists’ roles
- School information
- Working with Parents
- Affirmative Intervention Approach
- Resources

Basic Definitions

- **Gender** - male, female
- **Gender identity** – knowledge/sense of one’s gender
- **Transgender** – gender identity does not match assigned birth gender (narrow definition) – may or may not make physical changes to outwardly express gender identity
- **Gender roles** - cultural/societal expectations of gender (e.g. behaviors, activities, interests)
- **Gender variance** - differing from the social norms for males and females

How is sexual orientation different?

Transgender vs. Gender Variant

- Transgender child - asserts firmly, over time, that their gender identity is the opposite of that which was assigned at birth
 - Insist that they are in the wrong body, or that God made a mistake.
- Gender variant child - often less adamant about who they are not, but will assert what toys they do and don't like, clothes they will and won't wear, or activities they do or don't prefer (irrespective of their assigned gender)
- **Relationship: while all transgender children are gender variant, not all gender variant children are transgender**

Typical Gender Identity & Role Development

- Categorization - by the end of 1st year
- Labeling - ages 2-3
- “Blanket rules” for genders – ages 3-7
- Future-oriented, unchanging identity- ages 5-7
- Flexibility in roles – ages 8-9
- Stable “Adult” Traits – ages 10-11
- Puberty

Who/what are the major contributors?

Gender Variant Youth Experiences

- Commonly experience feelings of shame, fear, self-consciousness and isolation
- Verbal, physical, & sexual harassment and assault from peers
- High risk for lower achievement, social withdrawal, skipping school, dropping out, drug and alcohol abuse, unsafe sex, depression and suicide
- Some may pretend to be their “birth sex” to avoid harassment and violence
 - May even experience mental health or religious practices or “treatments” that attempt to extinguish their gender non-conforming behaviors – these don't work

What do the statistics say?

- **Based on their gender expression¹:**
 - 39% of students heard negative comments from school staff about someone's gender expression
 - 65% of students felt unsafe at school
 - 87% of students were verbally harassed
 - 53% of students were physically harassed
 - 76% of transgender students report being sexually harassed

¹Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Diaz, E. M. (2009). *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools*. New York: GLSEN.

School Experiences of Transgender Youth

- 40% missed school due to safety concerns
- Those who experience high levels of harassment based on gender expression compared to those who experience low levels of harassment:
 - had significantly lower GPAs (2.3 vs. 2.8)
 - were more likely to report they were not planning to go to college (40% vs. 30%)

Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Diaz, E. M. (2009). *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools*. New York: GLSEN.

School Experiences (con't)

- Transgender students who were out to most of the other students *and* school staff reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community
- Only 11% of students were exposed to an inclusive curriculum that included positive representations of LGBT people, history or events in their classes
- Only 54% of transgender students reported that their school had an anti-harassment policy
 - And only 24% said the school policy included specific protections based on gender identity or gender expression

Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., & Diaz, E. M. (2009). *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools*. New York: GLSEN.

Suggestions for School Psychologists

- Use accurate gender pronouns and names. If you are unsure, just ask.
- Offer children resources (e.g. online, print)
- Talk to them about their family – who is and is not supportive.
- Maintain student's and family's confidentiality in school.
- Be their advocate and ally.
- Ensure your school or employment setting has inclusive policies toward gender variant youth.
- Address child's needs directly (e.g. unisex/gender-neutral bathrooms, locker rooms, student ID cards).
- Never assume one's current or future gender identity.

Changes in the School

- Examine your own ideas, biases, & misconceptions about gender, gender identity and expression
- Educational & sensitivity training for students, teachers, all staff, and administrators about gender identity, expression, and gender variant identities
 - possibly by aware & educated school psychologists ☺
- Suicide Prevention, Anti-Bullying and Violence Prevention Programs **MUST** include issues faced by LGBTQ persons
- Include affirming books in the school library and positive artwork & posters in lobby, office(s), & hallways

Changes in the School (con't)

- Develop strategies to address bullying, harassment, & violence.
 - Keep classrooms and hallways free of homophobic, sexist and biased language to create a safer school environment
 - Immediately challenge all "put-downs" & correct/dispel stereotypes & myths
- Create a supportive student club (Gay-Straight Alliances)
- Include gender identity & expression in nondiscrimination policies

What School Psychologists Can Do With Parents

- Educate about gender variance, identity, & expression
 - Recognize that their child may have difficulties in school, particularly with social ostracism, and may be targets of violence
- Assist with advocacy to meet child's needs at school
- Help to create supportive family environment (if needed), since it can be a HUGE buffer to negative societal responses
- Support in developing skills to deal with family members & peers who may not be supportive of a gender variant child

Affirmative Intervention Approach for Parents

- Encourage unconditional love and support of their child and his or her declared gender
 - Affirm the activities, interests, & talents of the child
 - Maintain family & home as unconditional "safe spaces"
 - Teach strategies for dealing with teasing and harassment
 - Emphasize that trying to enforce gender conformity will likely lead to feelings of shame, confusion, lower self-esteem, stress, & anxiety but will not change gender identity or expression
- *Children's Gender and Sexuality Advocacy and Education Program*
 - www.childrensnational.org/gendervariance

Questions?

- Resource packet
- Presenters' contact information
 - Amanda Hirsch: hirscham@pitt.edu
 - Jennifer Hoffman: j.schmedes@uky.edu
 - Alicia Fedewa (absent contributor): alicia.fedewa@uky.edu

Definitions

Gender identity refers to a person's internal, deeply-felt sense of being either male, female, something other, or in between. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender expression refers to an individual's characteristics and behaviors such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are perceived as masculine or feminine.

Transgender is an umbrella term that can be used to describe people whose gender expression is non-conforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their birth assigned gender.

Transsexual is a term most commonly used to refer to someone who transitions from one gender to another. It includes students who were identified as male at birth but whose gender identity is female, students who were identified as female at birth but whose gender identity is male, and students whose gender identity is neither male nor female. Transition often consists of a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the correct pronoun when describing them. Transition may, but does not always, include necessary medical care like hormone therapy, counseling, and/or surgery.



Gender non-conforming refers to a person who is or is perceived to have gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal expectations. Gender non-conforming people may or may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Genderqueer refers to people who do not identify as, or who do not express themselves as completely male or female. Genderqueer people may or may not identify as transgender.








Sexual orientation refers to a person's emotional and sexual attraction to other people based on the gender of the other person. A person may identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. It is important to understand that sexual orientation and gender identity are two different things. Not all transgender youth identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. And not all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer youth display gender non-conforming characteristics.

LGBTQ is an umbrella term that stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning." The category "questioning" is included to incorporate those that are not yet certain of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Gender Identity Myths + Facts

- 1 Myth:** Youth are not old enough to know their gender identity.
Fact: Because of greater awareness about gender and transgender issues, more and more young people are becoming empowered to express their identity at young ages.
- 2 Myth:** Youth are identifying as transgender just to be trendy.
Fact: Identifying as transgender brings with it challenges and often discrimination. It is not something people do to be cool. Like in many other areas of their life, some students may be exploring their gender expression and the labels they use to describe themselves. Such exploration is a normal part of adolescent development.
- 3 Myth:** All gender non-conforming students are white.
Fact: Gender non-conforming students are from all socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.
- 4 Myth:** Transgender youth deceive others about what their "true" gender is.
Fact: Transgender people are not deceiving others by expressing their gender identity. For example, when a student transitions from male to female, she is expressing her true self to the world. She deserves to be recognized and respected like any other girl should be.
- 5 Myth:** Transgender and gender non-conforming students are actually gay.
Fact: Sexual orientation and gender identity are different. A person's sexual orientation is related to whether the person is romantically attracted to men, women, or both. Gender identity, on the other hand, is about the person's own internal identification as male, female, or a gender in between male and female. Just like non-transgender people, transgender people can be of any sexual orientation.
- 6 Myth:** All transgender youth will eventually take hormones and have sex reassignment surgery.
Fact: Some transgender people take hormones and/or have surgery. However, for a number of reasons, many transgender people do not take either of these steps. Some feel comfortable with their bodies the way they are. For others, hormones and surgery are inaccessible because they may be too expensive and/or require parental permission.
- 7 Myth:** Transgender women are not "real" women and transgender men are not "real" men.
Fact: People's "true" gender is not defined by the sex they were assigned at birth. Our true gender is based on our gender identity. When a person who is transgender expresses an identity different from the one they were assigned at birth, the gender they are expressing is their "real" gender.
- 8 Myth:** Communities of color are more transphobic or homophobic than white communities.
Fact: No one community is any more transphobic than any other. Unfortunately, most transgender people experience transphobia regardless of the racial or ethnic community they are a part of.
- 9 Myth:** It's okay to make fun of girls who are too masculine and boys who are too effeminate because that is just harmless teasing.
Fact: Teasing is never harmless, particularly regarding gender stereotypes. Gender non-conforming youth are often very clear about their gender identity. Their appearance or expression may seem confusing, but that is only because it doesn't fit into stereotypes we have about gender.

Wrapping Their Fingers Around Gender

						
7 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	2 YEARS	2-3 YEARS	3-4 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6-7 YEARS
Infants begin to tell the difference between male and female voices	Infants begin to tell the difference between male and female faces	Toddlers begin to use gender stereotypes in their play.	Young children use words to label friends, family, and themselves as a boy or a girl.	Children begin to use gender typing , putting things in to gendered categories.	Children at this age begin to use gender scripts , putting events and activities in to gendered categories.	By age 6 or 7, most children develop a sense of gender permanence , a belief that a person's gender is constant and will not change throughout life.

This chart does not describe what every child will comprehend at any specific point in their growth, but is intended to be a guide of where many children fall in their development. Each child learns at a different rate, and will understand gender differently.

SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ORGANIZATIONS:

- ❖ **Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN):** www.glsen.org
GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for ALL students. They provide curriculum ideas and resources
- ❖ **Gender Spectrum:** <http://www.genderspectrum.org>
Gender Spectrum provides community information and training on support for gender variant children and their families. They organize the Gender Spectrum Family Conference, an annual conference for people raising gender non-conforming, gender variant, and transgender children and adolescents
- ❖ **Parents, Families, and Friends of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG):** www.pflag.org
PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity
- ❖ **TransYouth Family Allies (TYFA):** www.imatyfa.org
TYFA empowers children and families by partnering with educators, service providers, and communities, to develop supportive environments in which gender may be expressed and respected. They have advocates and provide resource assistance to families experiencing discrimination or other difficulties in schools or other environments
- ❖ **The Trevor Project:** <http://www.thetrevorproject.org>
The Trevor Project is the leading national organization focused on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. Provides a nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, digital community and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive and positive environment for everyone.
 - **The Trevor Lifeline** (24/7, nationwide, free and confidential service for LGBTQ youth that offers hope and someone to talk to): 866-4-U-Trevor (866-488-7386) – **NOT only a suicide prevention hotline, help with any issues LGBTQ youth may want to talk about**
 - **“Dear Trevor”** is an online, non-time sensitive question and answer resource for young people with questions surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity. Read previous questions or submit a question: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/dear-trevor/youth>
 - **TrevorChat** - free, confidential, secure online messaging service that provides live help through a link on the main Trevor Project website (<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>). TrevorChat is only intended to assist those who are not at risk for suicide. It's available on Friday between 1:00 PM Pacific (4:00 PM Eastern) and 9:00 PM Pacific (12:00 AM Eastern). Youth can connect with a volunteer who can support them with any concerns and questions.
 - **TrevorSpace** - a social networking site for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth ages 13 through 24 and their friends and allies (<http://www.trevorspace.org/>) - ****although this is a monitored site, it is still a social networking website so anonymity and/or confidentiality are not guaranteed & youth need to be careful about sharing personal info**

- ❖ Washington D.C. Children's National Medical Center - Children's Gender and Sexuality Advocacy and Education Program:
<http://www.childrensnational.org/DepartmentsandPrograms/default.aspx?Id=6178&Type=Program&Name=Gender and Sexuality Psychosocial Programs>
This program offers a variety of resources to support families with gender nonconforming children, including a national support network and a comprehensive Parents' Guide (available online as pdf)

BOOKS FOR PROFESSIONALS AND/OR PARENTS:

Brill, S. A., & Pepper, R. (2008). *The transgender child: A handbook for families and professionals*. San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press Inc.

"Just Evelyn." (2007). *Mom, I need to be a girl* (2nd ed.). Longmont, CO: Just Evelyn. First edition available online at: <http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Evelyn/Evelyn.html>

Sears, J. T. (2005). *Gay, lesbian, and transgender issues in education: Programs, policies, and practices*. New York: Routledge.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS:

Ewert, M., & Ray, R. (2008). *10,000 dresses*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press. (children)

Kilodavis, C. (2010). *My princess boy*. Seattle, WA: KD Talent. (children)

Zolotow, C. (1985). *William's doll*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers. (younger children)

Levithan, D., & Merrell, B. (Eds.) (2006). *The full spectrum: A new generation of writing about gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and other identities*. New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers. (adolescents)

Peters, J. A. (2006). *Luna*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, & Company. (adolescents)

Wittlinger, E. (2007). *Parrotfish*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

MEDIA:

- ❖ Chicago Public Radio (Producer). (2009, February 13). Somewhere out there (episode #374, act 2, "Tom Girls") [Audio Podcast]. *This American life*. Available online: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/374/somewhere-out-there>
Lilly and Thomasina have a lot in common. They're both 8 years old. And they were both born boys, although it became clear pretty early on that they'd prefer to be girls. There aren't all that many kids in the world like them, but recently, at a conference in Seattle on transgender parenting, they met. And they immediately hit it off. They could talk about things with each other that they'd never been able to share with other friends back home (17 minutes)
 - Entire episode available online (Act 2 begins at about 29:00): <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/374/somewhere-out-there> (click on "Play Episode")
- ❖ ABC News (Producer). (2007, April 27). 20/20: My secret self [Video file]. Available online: <http://www.gendernetwork.com/transchildren.html> (Provides links to all 5 videos of episode on YouTube)

Supportive Parenting* (may also be applied broadly to Educating)

Our children's gender identity is out of our hands, but their well-being is not. Being supportive rather than assigning blame has a profound impact on how our children feel about themselves. Research shows that parental acceptance is critical to our children's positive future outlook on life. Our level of acceptance directly affects their self-esteem. These studies conclude that the most crucial thing we as parents can do is to allow our children to be exactly who they are. Additionally, if our other children see evidence of our acceptance, they will more easily adjust to their gender non-conforming sibling. The suggestions below may be a stretch for many parents, some more easily adopted than others. What is important is to start somewhere and demonstrate to your child that, as primary caregivers, you are with them on this journey.

Examples of Supportive Parenting Practices

- ***Supportive Family Environment:*** the ability to make the home a sanctuary of security and support for your child is the single most important factor in promoting lifelong health and well-being for your child. Such an environment creates buffer for your child from the hardships they may face outside of the home. Creating such a space may not come easily for you, particularly if you are struggling with accepting your child's gender identity or expression. If so, seek help from an empathetic, knowledgeable family therapist.
- ***Require Respect within the Family:*** with immediate and extended family, it is imperative that you require and accept only kindness and respect for your child. While you may not be able to change people's opinions, you can certainly dictate how you expect others to behave and speak around you and your child. It can be scary to make this demand of family members yet many parents report that once they've taken a stand on their child's behalf, they feel a great sense of relief and empowerment.
- ***Express Love and Support for Child's Gender Expression:*** What does this look like? It means allowing them to choose, without pressure or unspoken messages, the clothes they wish to wear, how and with whom they play, their favorite toys, the accessories they favor, the manner in which they wear their hair, and the decorations and images with which they surround themselves.
- ***Zero Tolerance for Disrespect, Negative Comments or Pressure:*** A concrete way to demonstrate ongoing support and acceptance for your child is to tolerate absolutely no negative comments about your child, from anyone. Follow this practice whether your child is with you or not. You may wish to excuse yourself, or remain to press your perspective. This also includes when you hear about such comments after the fact. This means following up with the people who make such comments in a firm way that makes clear your commitment to your child's well-being. It may also mean needing to follow up with other parents or the school about the comments made by other children.
- ***Open and Honest Communication:*** Stay open about this journey, both your child's, and your own. By demonstrating to them that you are a partner in this process, and showing a genuine sense of inquisitiveness about how they see themselves, what they think, what they are experiencing, you show that you are there for them. This open level of communication will also help you know your child's level of stress or distress, and whether they may need additional outside support or intervention.

*Much of the content described here comes from the groundbreaking research conducted by the Family Acceptance Project, which indicates a direct and significant impact on rates of suicide, drug use, HIV-related risk, depression, outlook on life, and homelessness

Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth Recommendations for Schools

Overall Problem:

Transgender students face severe discrimination and harassment in schools. 89.5% of transgender students report feeling unsafe in schools. Transgender students are at higher risk of dropping out of school and of suicide.

Example of harassment:

School was.... Hell. No one wanted to sit near me in the cafeteria. No one wanted to talk to me. I was treated like I had leprosy of AIDS. I was the freak kid. Kids would say, "Oh, hi, Lawrence." And I would speak back. And, "oh my God, you sound just like a girl." Guys wanted to pick fights. People would say just a whole bunch of vulgar things to me. Every day I'd come home from school cryin'. Kids would yell from the school bus, "Faggot!" Throw stuff out of the windows. Make me hate kids, hate school, hate life."

-- Lawrence, 19-year-old transgender youth

Overall Recommendations:

- A. To protect transgender and gender non-conforming students by creating an explicit anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy – and to enforce these policies meaningfully.
- B. To train all teachers, administrators, counselors, and students in transgender sensitivity, in what it means to treat all people respectfully and equally.
 - ◆ California protects transgender and gender non-conforming students in public schools from discrimination and harassment. (AB 537 – Student Violence and Prevention Act). So, in California, the above recommendations are the law. Minnesota, New York, and New Jersey have similar protections.

Specific Problems and Recommendations:

Problem 1: Incorrect and Disrespectful Names and Pronouns

Frequently, transgender and gender non-conforming students are not addressed by the appropriate pronouns or names. Having our gender recognized and validated is important for our emotional health. As anyone can imagine, it is extremely disrespectful to be called by a pronoun or name one does not chose for oneself. It invalidates ones identity and self-concept. This lack of validation and recognition can and often does lead to depression and suicide.

Recommendation 1: Correct Names/Pronouns – according to student self-identification

Transgender and gender non-conforming students have the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun corresponding to their gender identity. This is true regardless of whether the student has obtained a court ordered name or gender change. Intentionally addressing a student by the incorrect name or pronoun is a form of discrimination. The directive does not prohibit inadvertent slips or honest mistakes, but it does apply to an intentional and persistent refusal to respect a student's gender identity. Students who wish to use pronouns other than the masculine or the feminine (such as zhe and hir) need to be respected equally.

Problem 2: Lack of appropriate restroom accessibility

Many transgender and gender non-conforming students have no access to bathrooms. Some are told to use the bathroom that does not correspond to their gender identity. Many are expelled from school because the school does not know where the person should use the bathrooms.

Recommendation 2: Gender appropriate restroom accessibility

All students have a right to safe and appropriate restroom facilities. This includes the right to use a restroom that corresponds to the student's gender identity, regardless of the student's sex assigned at birth. Requiring the student to 'prove' their gender (by requiring a doctor's letter, identity documents, etc.) is not acceptable. The student's self-identification is the sole measure of the student's gender.

Problem 3: Lack of gender-neutral bathrooms

Often transgender and gender non-conforming students do not feel safe in either the men's or women's restrooms. Many students are harassed in both women's and men's restrooms – because they are perceived to be sufficiently stereotypically feminine or masculine. In a transgender focus group, the Gay Straight Alliance Network found that the lack of safe bathrooms is the biggest problem that gender non-conforming students face. For instance, "One youth wouldn't use the restroom at school. Instead, he would cross the street to a restaurant and use the men's room there where people didn't know he was biologically female."

Recommendation 3: More Gender Neutral Bathrooms

In addition, where possible, School District will also provide an easily accessible unisex single stall bathroom for use by any student who desires increased privacy, regardless of the underlying reason. However, use of a unisex single stall restroom should always be a matter of choice for a student. No student should be compelled to use one either as a matter of policy or due to continuing harassment in a gender appropriate facility. If possible, we encourage more than one gender-neutral bathroom.

Problem 4: Lack of Locker Room Accessibility

Transgender and gender non-conforming students also face difficulties in locker room facilities. Gender non-conforming students are harassed, no matter what locker room. Often, transgender students are kept from going into any locker room.

Recommendation 4: Locker room accessibility

In locker rooms that involve undressing in front of others, transgender students who want to use the locker room corresponding to their gender identity must be provided an accommodation that best meets the student's needs. Such accommodations can include: (a) use of a private area within the public area (a bathroom stall with a door, an area separated by a curtain, a PE instructor's office in the locker room), (b) a separate changing schedule in the private area (either utilizing the locker room before or after the other students), (c) use of a nearby private area (a nearby restroom, a nurse's office), (d) access to the locker room corresponding to the student's sex assigned at birth, or (e) satisfaction of PE requirement by independent study outside of gym class (either before or after school or at a local recreational facility). It is not an acceptable accommodation to deny a student's opportunity for physical education either through not allowing the student to have PE or by forcing the student to have PE outside of the assigned class time.

Problem 5: Lack of access to sports and gym class

Often, transgender and gender non-conforming students are forced to be on a sports team that does not fit their gender identity. This is yet one more way in which transgender and gender non-conforming students are not taken seriously and are told that their identities are not valid. Being repeatedly told that one's self perception is invalid is extremely psychologically harmful.

Recommendation 5: Sports and gym class

Generally, students should be permitted to participate in gender-segregated sports and gym class activities in accordance with the student's gender identity. In some situations, legitimate questions about fairness in athletic competitions will need to be resolved on a case-by-case basis. This exception will not, however, apply to participation in gym class where the activity is recreational instead of competitive.

Gender segregation in other areas

This directive outlines the main areas where students may find themselves segregated by gender. It does not, however, purport to identify and address all such circumstances. As a general rule, any other time students are segregated by gender (i.e. classroom discussion, field trips, or support/counseling groups) students must be permitted to participate in accordance with their gender identity.

Problem 6: Inappropriate Dress codes

Often students are required to wear clothing that is inconsistent with their gender identity. For instance, Pat Doe, a male to female transgender student was told that she could not wear girl's clothes. Every single day, first thing in the morning, she had to go to the principal's office, where the principal would look at her and decide if she was dressed enough like a boy. This student brought a suit against the school, a suit which she won.

Recommendation 6: Students can dress according to their gender identity

School District can enforce reasonable student dress codes for the purposes of maintaining a safe and orderly school environment and ensuring that the school can fulfill its educational mission. However, all School District employees must respect the right of a student to dress in accordance with the student's gender identity. Further, students should not have to choose between male and female clothing. Some students are most comfortable in and most themselves in clothing that is not clearly male or female or a combination of the two.

Problem 7: Unsupportive Families:

Some transgender and gender non-conforming students are not openly so at home because of safety reasons. "Transsexual youth who are open about their identity face extreme abuse and rejection from families and peers. Many are forced to leave their home communities and survive on the streets."

Recommendation 7: Confidentiality

A school should never disclose the student's gender non-conformity or being transgender to the student's parents unless the student consents.

Problem 8: Lack of role models and access to accurate information

Often, transgender students feel like they are all alone in the world. There are very few transgender role models in schools. There are no books in schools that teach about transgender and gender non-conforming people. Often schools reinforce stereotypical gender norms. And, further, schools do not teach students that there are gender options beyond female and male. In fact, most school structures reinforce the myth of two genders: male and female segregated bathrooms, male and female segregated locker rooms, female and male segregated sports teams and activities, etc.

Recommendation 8: More role models and access to accurate information

Schools should make an effort to employ transgender and gender non-conforming teachers. Schools should have books about transgender and gender non-conforming people. Schools should make sure that everyone is aware that there is a great human gender diversity that certainly includes female and male, but goes far beyond.

Fact Sheet: Transgender & Gender Nonconforming Youth in Schools

Many public school administrators, faculty and staff have a lot of questions when working with students who are transgender or gender nonconforming.

What is “gender identity”?

- “Gender identity” refers to how people see and identify themselves; for example, some people identify as female; some people identify as male; some people as a combination of genders; as a gender other than male or female; or as no gender. For example, transgender girls identify as girls but were classified as males when they were born. Transgender boys identify as boys but were classified female when they were born. Everyone has a gender identity.
- “Gender Expression” refers to how people express their gender identity. Everyone expresses their gender identity in different ways: for example, in the way they dress, the length of their hair, the way they act or speak and in their choice of whether or not to wear make-up.

What does “transgender” and “gender nonconforming” mean?

- “Transgender” is a general term used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- “Gender nonconforming” refers to people who do not follow other people’s ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth.
- “Transgender” and “Gender nonconforming” are umbrella terms that often encompass other terms such as transsexual, cross dresser, gender queer, femme queen, A.G., Two Spirit, and many more. It is important to refer to people with terms they prefer.
- “Gender Questioning” People who are questioning their gender identity might be wondering whether they identify as a boy, a girl or another gender. They might also be experimenting with different genders.



The Sylvia Rivera Law Project works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination or violence.

These are some ways you can make school a safer and gender affirming place for transgender youth:

- **Arrange for transgender awareness training for faculty, staff, and administrators from a qualified community-based trainer.** Most people do not receive training or support in transgender awareness throughout their education or professional careers; it is not fair to assume that educators will arrive at their work already having learned the skills they need to work respectfully and effectively with youth from these communities. Transgender awareness trainings are most effective when they are mandatory and regular.
- **Incorporate positive information about transgender issues into curricula.** The existence of transgender people is often erased or only included in a highly stigmatized way in the teaching of any subject, as well as in media and popular culture. The lack of any positive acknowledgment of transgender issues or history makes it difficult for transgender, gender nonconforming, or questioning young people to feel that they have a place in the world and supports a worldview among other students that transgender people do not exist or are an object of scorn.
- **Create gender neutral restrooms.** Eliminating sex segregation of facilities can significantly decrease violence and harassment against transgender and gender nonconforming youth. While sex-segregated restrooms or locker rooms exist, however, transgender and gender nonconforming youth should be supported in using whichever facilities they identify as most appropriate for themselves in terms of their gender identity and safety needs.
- **If a student talks to you about their gender identity, listen in a respectful and non-judgmental way.** Do not brush them off, react with skepticism or disapproval, or pressure them into any particular category. Support them in developing their own understanding of their gender and direct them to resources for transgender, gender nonconforming and questioning youth. Do not “out” a young person or disclose their gender identity to another without permission.
- **Avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes.** Many of us enforce gender norms without even realizing it, but these stereotypes hurt everyone, especially transgender young people, gender nonconforming young people, and young women. Think carefully about the messages in everything you say, do, teach, or communicate about gender. Are you complimenting girls more often on their appearance but boys more often on their athleticism? Do you ever imply there is something wrong with men who behave in stereotypically feminine ways? Do you discipline girls more harshly than you would otherwise if they seem “masculine” or “butch” to you? Does your language ever equate gender (the way people view themselves and express their genders) with genitals (a person's birth sex and anatomical designation) or otherwise imply that the gender identities of transgender people are not “real”?
- **Intervene and take action when students use gender-specific terminology to make fun of each other.** When students make fun of each other with terms like “sissy,” “pussy,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “homo,” “freak,” “it,” “he-she,” “bitch,” or “gay” and faculty fail to intervene, these words are perceived as acceptable. The use of such language further alienates transgender and gender nonconforming in schools and perpetuates discriminatory stereotypes about gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.
- **Create gender-neutral and / or mixed gender spaces.** Be mindful about the ways in which single-gender teams and/ or groups (like girls-only groups and boys-only groups) can alienate transgender and gender nonconforming students. Proactively create spaces for transgender and gender nonconforming students within these groups and/or create additional spaces for transgender and gender nonconforming students.

Raising a gender-variant child

Neither you nor any other parents of a gender-variant child are responsible for a child's gender variance or sexual orientation—any more than you or they are responsible for the child's being right- or left-handed. Remember that eventual sexual orientation is uncertain and will remain so until your child becomes fully conscious of his or her sexual attractions, is able to label that sexual orientation appropriately, and is willing to disclose it to others.

Whatever the final outcome, here are some tips on what you can do to make your child's life (and your own) easier:

Make your home a safe space. It may be the only safe place the child has. Allowing the child to be who he or she is at home builds self-esteem. Preschoolers may need your help to recognize social situations in which people might react negatively to gender-variant behavior. Older children learn to make decisions on their own about how to express themselves and what interests to pursue in public.

Encourage appropriate activities that fit your child's interests and talents. Activities “prescribed” to change the child are always a failure. Children overly focused on very few interests should be introduced to alternative activities, given adequate time with each parent to support these new activities, and praised for trying. Protect a regular time for the child to spend with the parent or other adult of his or her gender. Try not to withdraw emotionally because your child's interests are very different from yours.

Encourage communication. Listen to the child's concerns and wishes without criticizing, so that the child feels understood and remains open with you. Talk with the child matter-of-factly and in positive terms about being different. Model tolerance and acceptance of diversity for your children. Include siblings in these discussions.

Avoid stereotyping. Don't say things like “only girls play with dolls” or “boys love to play ball but girls do not.” Instead, tell your child there are many kinds of boys and girls. Become vigilant about the language you use, avoiding assumptions about boyfriends, girlfriends, and marriage. Keep in mind that gay men and lesbians form long-term committed relationships that often include children. Express affirming opinions toward well-known openly gay individuals and couples through family discussions of news events, books, and movies.

Help the child with bullying. Look for resources to guide you on how to teach the child to handle bullying. Do not blame the child if he or she is bullied. Ask the child to tell you if bullying occurs. Be alert to possible warning signs, such as school refusal, aches and pains, or excessive crying.

Advocate with schools. Insist that your local schools adopt policies to eliminate bullying. Teachers are more likely to intervene if parents explain the issues and anticipate problems. Request that children's books on diversity, including sexual orientation and gender identity, be available in the library.

Advocate with extended family and friends. You might also need to educate grandparents, aunts and uncles, and neighbors. They may also benefit from some of the materials suggested as resources. Use all opportunities to educate children and adults about the value of respecting those who are unique or in some way different.

Frequently Asked Questions by Parents

Is my child gender variant?

Our children are who they are, despite what gender was assigned to them at birth. Some children may already have an intuitive sense that their personal gender identity does not align with their assigned gender. Your daughter may say she is really a boy; your son, a girl. Your child may articulate this at age 4, 14, or even 24. As parents, navigating this may be the greatest parenting challenge you will ever experience. No one expects their child to be gender variant or transgender. However, the reality is that some children are.

Is my child transgender?

We know that you would like a quick and easy answer to this question. But, as with many issues in life, the answer may be quite complicated or reveal itself over time. For most children, the answer is very simple. When given two choices -- boy or girl-- most kids feel strongly that they are one or the other. However, some children cannot so easily make this choice, and when given a wider set of options, will provide a wider set of responses. When your 18 month old girl's first words are "me boy" or your two year old son insists he is a girl, and these responses don't waver over the next few years, you can be pretty sure that you have a transgender child. This does not mean the second a child demonstrates behavior that is inconsistent with their biological sex you should assume they are gender nonconforming. But if you can look over time and see that your child has persistently and consistently made that assertion, it is probably not just a phase.

Is my child gay?

Gender variance may or may not be an indicator of a child's later sexual orientation. These are two separate, but many times interwoven concepts.

Being gay refers to a person's sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is a term that refers to being romantically or sexually attracted to people of a specific gender. Gender variance refers to gender-typed behaviors or interests that fit outside of what is considered 'normal' for a person's assigned biological sex.

Isn't this just a phase?

For some children, expressing gender variation may be a phase; for others, it is not. The longer a child has identified as cross-gendered, the easier it becomes for a parent to answer this question themselves. The answer may become clearer over time. Regardless of the eventual outcome, the self-esteem, mental well-being, and overall health of a gender variant child relies heavily on receiving love, support and compassion from their parents.

Who caused this?

It is common for parents to blame themselves when a child falls outside of gender norms. They ask themselves, "Is it my fault somehow?" "Where did I go wrong?" Mothers may feel they were too permissive. Fathers may be angry and refuse to accept their gender variant child, especially if this child was born a boy. Gender variance is not an illness or a result of poor parenting. It is not the result of divorce or an indication of child abuse. Gender variance is not caused by liberal, or permissive parenting, or by a parent who secretly wished their child were the 'opposite' sex. It is normal. You did not cause this or do anything wrong. Current research supports the theory that gender is, to some extent, "hard-wired" in the brain from birth.

How do I change it?

A parent cannot cause a child to be gender nonconforming, nor can they change a child's gender identity. It is a core sense of self. If a professional tells you that you can change your child to have a different gender identity, they are wrong. While your parenting choices will not change your child's sense of who they are, however, they will have a profound impact on how they feel about themselves in relation to their gender identity.

I am confused (what about my feelings?)

Parents' responses to their cross-gender children vary. It can be very hard to create an environment to enable children to express themselves in ways most natural to them. We may get uncomfortable, embarrassed, nervous or afraid. Feelings of denial, anger, fear, doubt, grief, and worry are normal, and part of the path to acceptance, understanding, support, pride and joy.

Another common yet often unexpected feeling is that of loss. Families, parents, and siblings may feel a sense of grief at the idea they are "losing" their son or daughter, their brother or sister. Even though the child is alive and well, changing gender can elicit strong feelings of loss. We may experience periods of sadness, anger, and mourning as we (or our other children) come to terms with our child's new identity.

How many kids like this are there?

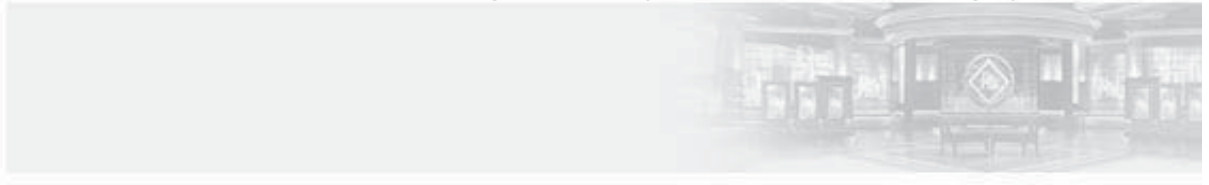
No one knows how common gender variant and transgender children are. Some gender specialists estimate that 1 in 500 children is significantly gender variant or transgender. An older study based on statistics of postoperative transsexual men put the number at 1 in 20,000. The challenge of answering this question is immense. What is considered "gender variant" to one researcher may not to another; many families choose not to be public about their child's gender status, and doctors cannot do "population-based" research in the United States on such issues. So at present, it is impossible to determine the actual number of transgender or gender variant children in the US.

If I allow my child to be this way, won't they be bullied or worse?

Gender variant or otherwise, children not fitting typical gender boxes are frequently the victims of mistreatment or even violence. This may well happen for our children too; sadly, most kids are teased about something at some point growing up. Our role as parents is to love and accept our child, and we will help them learn how to deal with teasing. We will also teach our child how to access the support needed when it feels like things are becoming unsafe. It is our job to protect our child, and we will do as much as possible to educate those around them—in our family, our community, and our child's schools.

What about the pressures to conform?

Currently our society is somewhat tolerant of a certain level of masculinity in females. However, the pressures and expectations of masculinity as it is expressed in males are profound. In U.S. culture, there exists little flexibility in the boundaries of masculinity. This seems especially true if a child is born biologically male, but expresses interests or behaviors traditionally considered feminine. This pressure affects both parents, but can also mean that fathers may have a more challenging time accepting gender variance in their child.



'My 5-Year-Old Son Prefers Girls' Clothing And Toys'

12/13/2002

Robby's 5-year-old son loves to play with Barbies and prefers wearing girl's clothes. She asks Dr. Phil how to deal with this behavior, which she doesn't think is normal.

"There are developmental stages in kids and it is not unusual, particularly for young boys, to experiment and get stuck on certain stimulus items," says Dr. Phil. Particularly because the little boy has two older sisters, he says, it's not unusual.

"This is not a precursor to your son being gay," explains Dr. Phil. He'll know that in time, but this is not an indication of his sexual orientation.

Dr. Phil tells Robby that she has a job to do: "Direct your son in an unconfusing way. Don't buy him Barbie dolls or girl's clothes. You don't want to do things that seem to support the confusion at this stage of the game... Take the girl things away, and buy him boytoys."

Most importantly, he tells Robby, "Support him in what he's doing, but not in the girl things."

"And if your son is gay," Dr. Phil continues, "he'll learn that when he passes puberty and gets into a lifestyle and determines what his orientation is, and his lifestyle will flow from that. It won't be a choice; it will be something that he's pre-wired to do, and he'll know that in plenty of time if he's an adult. But you shouldn't take this as an indication of that at this point"