Beyond Binary: Gender in Schools

The Potocsnak Family Division of Adolescent & Young Adult Medicine

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Guidelines

• No right or wrong questions
• Confidential
• Use respectful language
• Check your tech
• Shape this discussion to fit your needs
Objectives

• Provide an overview of key terms and concepts related to gender

• Outline characteristics of gender inclusive schools and tactics to personally implement inclusivity

• Discuss how to talk about gender diversity with students, parents, and the school community
• Why are staff from Lurie Children’s Hospital facilitating this discussion?

• Why is our goal to be an affirming institution?
Gender & You

• What does it mean to be female or male?

• What is your gender? How do you know?

• How would you describe your gender without discussing how you look?

• Have there been times when limits or expectations have been placed on you based on your gender or perceived gender?

• How do these experiences impact your ability to do your best work?
Key Concepts
Key Concepts

Sex Assigned at Birth

Intersex

Gender Identity
  • *Raise your hand if you have a gender identity*

Gender Expression
Key Concepts

Gender Expansive (Nonconforming/Creative)

- Long-standing occurrence – not a fleeting curiosity or interest
- Gender nonconformity is a normative variation of human diversity
Key Concepts

Cisgender (Cis)

Transgender (Trans)

Non-Binary Gender
Transgender Umbrella

*this is not exhaustive
International Gender Diversity

Source: PBS Independent Lens

*This is not exhaustive
Key Concepts

Pronouns

- It’s okay to ask people what pronouns they use
  - they/them/theirs
  - she/her/hers
  - he/him/his
  - other pronouns

Quick Activity!

Turn to your neighbor and discuss what you did over the weekend **without** using any gendered language.
Key Concepts

Misgender/Deadname

What if I make a mistake?

1. Apologize
2. Correct yourself
3. Move on
4. Practice!
Key Concepts

Transition
- Process by which an individual begins living in their affirmed gender
  - Social
  - Legal
  - Medical
    - May or may not include hormonal and/or surgical treatment

No one way to be trans; therefore, no one way to transition
Key Concepts

Sexual Orientation

**Sexuality**
(who you are attracted to)

**Gender Identity**
(who you are)
Transphobia/Cissexism

- Physical Violence
  - One in ten trans people reported being physically attacked within the past year due to being transgender

- Microaggressions

- Systemic Discrimination
  - One in six trans people report having lost a job due to their gender identity; one-quarter report having experienced housing discrimination

- Intersectionality
  - Risk factors are exacerbated when people carry multiple marginalized identities

(National Center for Transgender Equality - 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey)
Try it out!

This is Jai. Jai is non-binary. Jai uses they/them pronouns.

Turn to your neighbor and describe Jai and what Jai is doing using the correct pronouns. Remember, if you make a mistake:

1. Apologize
2. Correct yourself
3. Move on
4. Practice
The Impact of Gender
“The generally accepted rule is pink for boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl.”

-1918 article Earnshaw's Infants' Department trade publication
Gender Impacts Everyone

- 50% of elementary bullying is based on gender and/or sexual orientation slurs

- More than 50% report school as an unsafe environment for “not being as masculine as other guys or as feminine as other girls”

- In what ways are you seeing this in your school community?

(Holt, M., & Espelage, D., 2013)
Supporting transgender and gender expansive students
of school mental health professionals described their school’s teachers as ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ supportive of LGBTQ students.

But when LGBTQ students were asked...

reported “always feeling safe in the classroom.”

reported experiencing LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies or practices at school

heard negative remarks about sexual orientation or gender expression from teachers or school staff

(GLSEN 2018, Human Rights Campaign 2018)
When LGTBQ-related harassment/assault did occur:

- 55% of students did not report the incident.
- 60% of students who did report said staff "did nothing" or "told the student to ignore it."

(GLSEN 2017)
LGBTQ students in schools with higher levels of victimization:

• Were almost three times as likely to miss school (63% vs 21% in the past month)

• Had lower average GPAs (3.0 vs 3.3)

• Were nearly twice as likely to report having “no plans to pursue post-secondary education” (9.5% vs 5.0%)

• Also had measurable impacts on **self-esteem, levels of depression, and sense of school belonging**

(GLSEN 2017)
Having one supportive adult cuts the chance an LGBTQ+ youth will attempt suicide by 40%.

*(Trevor Project, 2019)*
Professional Organizations with Affirming Transgender Policy Statements

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Psychological Association
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
- Canadian Psychiatric Association
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Council of Teachers of English
- Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
- National Association of School Nurses
- American College of Physicians
- Veterans for Peace
- National Association of School Psychologists
- Geriatrics Healthcare Professionals
- Association of Title IX Administrators

Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children’s Hospital of Chicago

AMA
American Medical Association

Pediatric Endocrinology Nursing Society

NCTE
National Council of Teachers of English
Supporting Students Coming Out
If a Student Comes Out to You

• Ask what the student needs
  – Have you shared this with anyone else?
  – Do you want anyone else to know?
If a Student Comes Out to You

• Take the student’s identity and expression seriously

• Respect the student’s name/pronoun

• Do not disclose someone’s identity without their consent.
  – Including to parents/caretakers and school staff

• Counselors are allowed up to 8, 90-minute sessions with students age 12+ without parental notification
If a Student Comes Out to Class

• Keep language simple and affirming

• Remind youth that it’s OK to be curious, but it’s not OK to ask overly personal questions

• Know how to respond if someone calls the student by the wrong name

• Remind parents it’s not OK to ask about other people’s children

• Don’t be afraid of questions!
Institutional Inclusion
Institutional Inclusion

- Avoid gender segregation
- Restroom and locker room access
- Inclusive dress code
- Participation in activities/events (incl. IESA/IHSA athletics)
- School signage
- Avoid making assumptions about family structures
- Support your school’s GSA (The Genders & Sexualities Alliance)
Institutional Inclusion

• Respect privacy and confidentiality

• Explicitly include gender identity in nondiscriminatory policies, diversity statements, and anti-bullying policies – and have explicit bathroom/locker room policies inclusive of all genders

• Inclusive forms

• Ensure that resources and support are easy for students and parents to locate

• Inclusive identification materials

• Regular staff trainings
Gender Support Plans

- Districts/schools should have model support plans available for transitioning students

- Support plans are optional, based on student’s wishes

- Topics include: confidentiality, parent/guardian involvement, safety plan, plan for changing name and pronouns, etc.
Responding to Objections

“I don’t think that it’s OK to be gay or trans and I don’t want my child to think that it’s an OK option for them.”

“Talking about gay and transgender people in school isn’t appropriate.”
Curricular Inclusion
“When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing.”

– Adrienne Rich, poet

“We need diverse representation not only so every kid can see themselves as the hero of the story, but so that every kid can understand that other kinds of kids are also the heroes of the story.”

– Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg
Idea to Get Started

• Media (Books, Movies, Music, etc.)

• Historical figures & public figures (writers, artists, athletes) -- recognizing their LGBTQ+ identities

• Incorporate nonbinary people and nontraditional families into scenarios, word problems, etc.

• Historical events

• Inclusive health curriculum
Scenarios
Scenarios

1. Carlos is a male student who uses he/him pronouns. He has long hair, often wears dresses, and is sometimes mistaken for a girl, though he is cisgender.

When Carlos goes to use the boy’s restroom a custodial staff member stops him from entering and tells him he belongs in the girls’ bathroom and should “stop playing around.”

2. A parent of a cisgender student calls you to ask about their child’s transgender classmate. This parent states, “I don’t want my daughter using the restroom with a boy. I believe that this is inappropriate and unsafe.”
Scenarios

3. Emma, a female student, wants to wear a suit to her upcoming school dance and bring her girlfriend, who attends another school. Some other students and parents hear of her plan and protest, saying it shouldn’t be allowed.

4. A student is overheard calling another student a homophobic slur.

5. Students are going on an overnight trip. Jacinta, a transgender female student, would like to share a room with her peers.

6. “I was in a meeting and a guest kept addressing me and my coworker as ladies, but my coworker is nonbinary.”
Reflection
1. Reflect on your experiences and feelings about gender.

2. What systems are in place for gender diverse youth at my school?

3. Is there LGBTQ curriculum inclusion at my school?

4. Do I communicate a non-binary understanding of gender to my students through the visuals on my classroom walls, the books on the shelves and the language I use?

5. How do I ensure the safety of gender expansive students?
Questions?
Thank you!

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