



## Gender Inclusive Schools Toolkit

Creating a school that acknowledges and affirms the gender diversity of every student does not happen by accident. Through thoughtful and intentional practices, any institution can create gender inclusive conditions for all of its students. The following materials are designed to set a tone that demonstrates your commitment to making sure every student's gender is recognized and accepted. For additional resources, please visit our website at [www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org).



## Framework for Gender Inclusive Schools

*When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you're not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing*

--Adrienne Rich

### Gender inclusive schools...

- Recognize that gender impacts all students
- Interrupt binary notions of gender
- Normalize gender diversity
- Question limited portrayals of gender
- Support students' self-reflection
- Teach empathy and respect

### Entry Points

When focusing on the intentional development of gender inclusive school settings, it is helpful to think in terms of four discrete entry points: **Internal**, **Institutional**, **Interpersonal**, and **Instructional**. Depending on the context, any one of these may prove the best starting point for this work.

**Internal entry points** focus on educators' own understandings of gender. It involves reflection about how each person's experiences and beliefs about gender impact the work they do with students. Using tools such as *My Gender Journey*, this entry point is really a foundation of learning upon which teachers build their gender inclusive practices, in the process applying a lens of gender awareness to all they do in their classrooms.

**Institutional entry points** are structural steps that create a foundation for gender inclusive practices to take hold. Institutional entry points demonstrate to your community that the school/organization recognizes and honors gender diversity and actively works to reflect a more complex understanding about gender. Such approaches include:

- Policies/administrative regulations emphasizing gender as an area of diversity protected and supported by the school
- Systematic staff training that builds the capacity of teachers and other staff to honor the gender diversity of all students
- Student information systems allowing families to specify a child's gender marker, preferred name and pronouns
- Identified staff members functioning as leads around gender diversity work or issues
- Gender neutral restroom/facilities that provide options for privacy without stigmatizing any students
- Readily available written materials and information about gender diversity
- Signage/imagery celebrating gender diversity
- Procedures/forms that demonstrate a non-binary understanding of gender

**Interpersonal entry points** are the various ways in which individual interactions and communications are utilized to reinforce the school's commitment to gender inclusion. Supported by many of the structural components, these relational aspects nonetheless require intentional behaviors in the day-to-day interrelationships of a campus. They literally voice a school's commitment to honoring the gender diversity of all students. Frequently language-based, teachers operating from this entry point:

#### **Use language that challenges binary notions of gender**

- *There are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl or even something else; isn't that great?*
- *Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes*
- *Is there only one way to be a boy or girl? Can boys and girls like the same things?*
- Rather than "boys and girls," "ladies and gentlemen," etc., refer to pupils as "students," "children," or another non-gendered term for the group.

**Help students understand the difference between patterns and rules**

- *Who says only girls wear dresses? Do all-girls wear them? Do all boys wear dresses? Do some?*
- *What patterns have you observed about expectations for you about gender from peers? The media?*
- *Sure, boys might do certain activities more than girls or vice versa. But that doesn't mean all boys do those things or are supposed to wear that girls don't or shouldn't do that!*

**Question limited portrayals of gender**

- *Who decided what things are for boys and what things are for girls?*
- *Sometimes this stuff is confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. But these messages are just some people's ideas. They may not be right for you.*

**Recognize that gender is more about our identity than anything else**

- *No one gets to tell another person how to feel on the inside.*
- *How someone feels about their gender comes from their hearts and their minds (and not their pants!)*
- *Some bodies are thought of as "boy" and some thought of as "girl" but that's not true for everyone.*

**Support processes of reflection**

- *Who we are or who others think we are on the outside is not always who we are on the inside; think of all the wonderful things about yourself that no one else knows about by just looking at you!*
- *Being a boy or a girl or something else is not about what you like or what you wear or your body. It is something that each of us figures out for ourselves based on how we feel inside*

**Teach empathy and respect**

- *How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your own gender?*
- *No one likes to be pointed out by others. Does it feel good if you think others are talking about you?*
- *Have you ever been teased? How does it feel when you are teased or treated as an outsider?*

**Normalize gender diversity**

- *Ideas about gender are changing all of the time.*
- *History is full of examples of gender diversity! There have been gender diverse people in every culture and religion, from all over the world and throughout time.*

**Instructional entry points** are specific ways in which teaching and learning are used to instill greater awareness and understanding about gender. Whether standing alone or integrated into other aspects of instruction, these approaches are the most direct way to impact students. In some ways, instructional approaches are the most easily accomplished. Teachers in their classrooms can have a great deal of autonomy for what takes place there. Yet at the same time, in an era of increasingly scripted curricula or environments in which controversial subjects are highly scrutinized and regulated, instructional methods for creating gender inclusion can have the highest stakes for teachers or other educators. Instructional approaches include:

- Designing lesson plans to expand understandings of gender diversity
- Exploring curriculum areas or units for inserting gender diversity issues or topics
- Using literature that has themes raising gender diversity issues
- Utilizing the arts to explore gender
- Using the social-emotional curriculum to surface gender related themes
- Examining the media and popular culture for gender related messages
- Assigning open ended projects that include gender related topics, readings, or news
- Arranging for transgender or other gender expansive people to present in classrooms
- Analyzing data about various trends related to evolving understandings of gender
- Inviting guest speakers who work for greater gender equity in education, law or other fields
- Using video or other media that present specific ideas about gender
- Creating space for students to articulate their own understanding and beliefs about gender
- Integrating gender into curriculum areas through story problems, writing prompts, readings, art assignments, research projects and more

## Understanding Gender

People tend to use the terms “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. We assign a newborn’s sex, as either male or female\*, based on their genitals. Once a sex is assigned, we presume the child’s gender. Someone born with a penis will be a boy and someone with a vulva will be a girl. For many people, this is cause for little, if any concern or further thought.

## Dimensions of Gender

However, while our gender may begin with the assignment of our sex, it doesn’t end there. A person’s gender is the complex interrelationship between three dimensions:

- **Body:** our body, our experience of our own body, how society genders bodies, and how others interact with us based on our body.
- **Identity:** our deeply held, internal sense of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither; who we privately know ourselves to be.
- **Expression:** our public gender. How we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Gender expression is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

Each of these dimensions can vary greatly across a range of possibilities. A person’s comfort in their gender is related to the degree to which these three dimensions feel in harmony. Let’s explore each of these dimensions in a little more detail.

### Body

Most societies view sex as a binary concept, with two rigidly fixed options: male or female, both based on a person’s reproductive functions (genitals, sex chromosomes, gonads, hormones, reproductive structures). But a sexual binary fails to capture even the biological aspect of gender. While most bodies have one of two forms of genitalia, which are classified as “female” or “male,” there are naturally occurring intersex conditions that demonstrate that sex exists across a continuum of possibilities. This biological spectrum by itself should be enough to disregard the simplistic notions of the “gender binary”- there are not just two sexes.

The relationship between a person’s gender and their body goes beyond one’s reproductive functions. Research in neurology, endocrinology, and cellular biology point to a broader biological basis for an individual’s experience of gender. In fact, research increasingly points to our brains as playing a key role in how we each experience our gender.

Bodies themselves are also gendered in the context of cultural expectations. Masculinity and femininity are equated with certain physical attributes, labeling us as more or less a man/woman based on the degree to which those attributes are present. This gendering of our bodies affects how we feel about ourselves and how others perceive and interact with us.

\* Some countries offer a third identification option for intersex people.

## Identity

**Gender identity** is our internal experience and naming of our gender. A *cisgender* person has a gender identity consistent with the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a child whose sex was assigned male on their birth certificate and who identifies as a boy is cisgender (you may hear this term shortened to “cis”). A *transgender* person has a gender identity that does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. So, a child who was assigned male on their birth certificate and who identifies as a girl is transgender (sometimes this term is shortened to “trans”).

The two most common gender identities are boy and girl (or man and woman), and often people think that these are the only two gender identities. This idea that there are only two genders is called the “gender binary.” If a child has a binary gender identity (whether cisgender or transgender), that means they identify as either a boy or a girl, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth.

But gender is a spectrum, and not limited to just two possibilities. A child may have a *non-binary* gender identity, meaning they do not identify strictly as a boy or a girl – they could identify as both, or neither, or as another gender entirely. In fact, non-binary individuals are utilizing an ever-growing number of terms as they seek to most effectively capture and convey their own experiences of gender. *Agender* is a term that is used by some people who do not identify with any gender.

## Expression

The third dimension of gender is **Gender expression**, which can be defined as the way we show our gender to the world around us (through such things as clothing, hairstyles and mannerisms to name a few). Practically everything is assigned a gender—toys, colors, clothes, and activities are some of the more obvious examples. Given the prevalence of the gender binary, children face great pressure to express their gender within narrow, stereotypical definitions of “boy” or “girl.” Expectations around expression are taught to us from the moment we are born, and communicated through every aspect of our lives, including family, culture, peers, schools, community, media, and religion. Accepted gender roles and expectations are so entrenched in our culture that most people cannot imagine any other way.

Through a combination of social conditioning and personal preference, by age three most children prefer activities and exhibit behaviors typically associated with their sex. For individuals who fit fairly neatly into expected gender roles and expression, there may be little cause to think about, or question their gender, or how gender is created, communicated and reinforced in our lives. However, children who express gender in ways that are perceived to be outside of these social norms often have a very different experience. Girls thought to be too masculine (especially as they move into their teens) and boys seen as feminine at any age, face a variety of challenges. Pressures to conform at home, mistreatment by peers in school, and condemnation by the broader society are just some of the difficulties facing a child whose expression does not fall into line with the binary gender system. For many young people, whether typical in their presentation or not, expression is the most tangible aspect of their gender experience, impacting them in many, if not all, of their interactions with others.

Norms around gender expression change across societies and over time. One need only consider men wearing earrings or the number of women having tattoos to see the flexibility of social expectations about gender. Even the seemingly intractable notion that “pink is for girls, blue is for boys” is relatively new. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, pink was associated with boys’ clothing and blue with girls’ clothing (still due to the gendering of colors, but with a different rationale associating each color with particular gendered characteristics).

Because expectations around a person's gender expression are so rigid, we frequently assume that what someone wears, or how they move, talk, or express themselves, tells us something about the person's gender identity. But expression is distinct from identity- we can't assume a person's gender identity based on their gender expression. For example, a cisgender boy may like to wear skirts or dresses. His choice in clothing doesn't change his gender identity; it simply means that he prefers (at least some of the time) to wear clothing that society typically associates with girls.

### **Gender Is Different Than Sexual Orientation**

One final distinction to make is the difference between gender and sexual orientation, which are often incorrectly thought to be the same thing. However, gender and sexual orientation are two distinct aspects of our identity. Gender is personal (how we see ourselves), while sexual orientation is interpersonal (who we are physically, emotionally and/or romantically attracted to).

Why is it so critical to distinguish these two concepts? When we confuse gender with sexual orientation, we are likely to make assumptions about a young person that have nothing to do with who they are. For example, when someone's gender expression is inconsistent with others' expectations, they are frequently assumed to be homosexual. The boy who loves to play princess is assumed to be gay, and the adolescent girl who buys clothes in the "boys" section and favors a short haircut may be assumed to be a lesbian. These are faulty conclusions. What someone wears is about gender expression; you cannot tell what their sexual orientation is by what they have on (for that matter, you can't know what their gender identity is, either ... unless they tell you).

Confusing gender and sexual orientation can also interfere with a young person's ability to understand and articulate aspects of their own gender. For example, it's not uncommon for a transgender or non-binary youth to wonder if they are gay or lesbian (or any sexual orientation other than heterosexual) before coming to a fuller realization of their gender identity.

It's important to understand both gender and sexual orientation, but how we come to understand these parts of ourselves – and the choices we make to disclose and express them – are distinct paths. Thinking of these two aspects of self as interchangeable may, instead of helping us know one another better, actually get in the way of our ability to understand and communicate with one another.

### **What's Next?**

One of the most fundamental aspects of a person's identity, gender deeply influences every part of one's life. While gender diversity has existed throughout history and all over the world, in societies where this crucial aspect of self has been so narrowly defined and rigidly enforced, individuals who exist outside of its norms face innumerable challenges. Even those who vary only slightly from the norm can become targets of disapproval.

This does not have to be the case. Through a thoughtful consideration of the uniqueness and validity of every person's experiences of self, we can develop greater acceptance for all. Not only will this create greater inclusion for individuals who challenge the norms of gender, it will actually create space for all individuals to more fully explore and celebrate who they are.

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**BE YOURSELF**

**CHANGE**

**THE WORLD**



boy  
girl  
both  
neither

CELEBRATE  
**GENDER EXPANSIVE**  
YOUTH

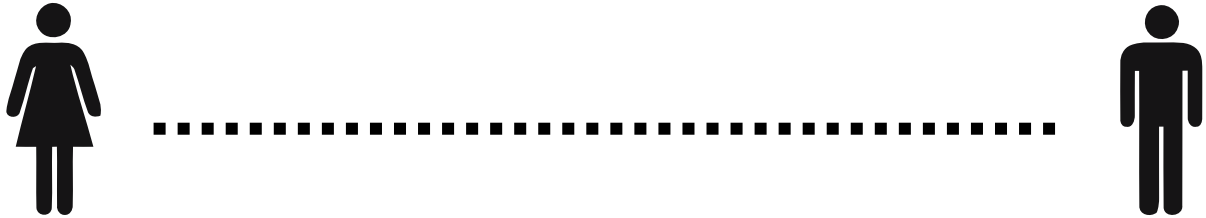


**GENDER**

**BIOLOGY**

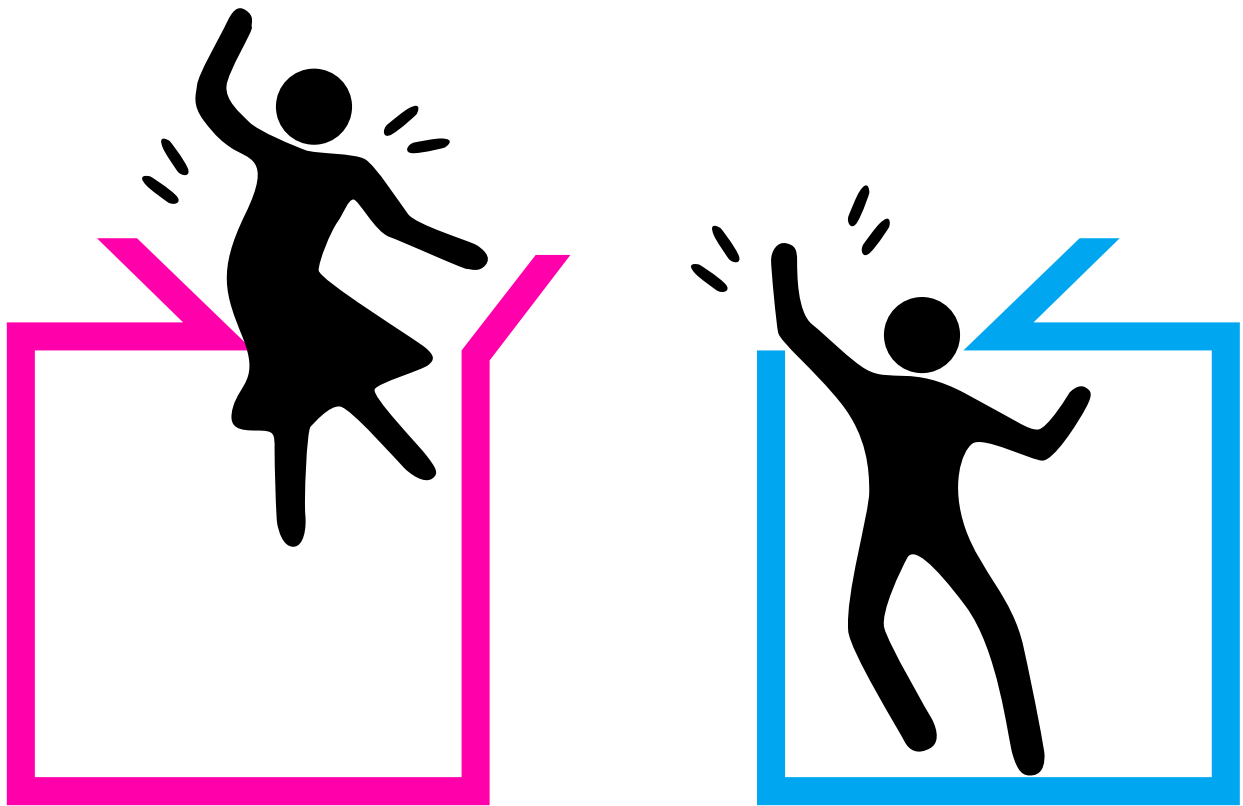
**EXPRESSION**

**IDENTITY**



The binary  
Gender System  
is two limiting

# THINK OUTSIDE THE BOXES



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## Gender Inclusive Registration Forms (guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_ School is committed to recognizing the rich diversity of our students. If you have any questions about any of the information we are collecting, please don't hesitate to discuss with us.

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First Name Child Uses: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's First Name on Birth Certificate : \_\_\_\_\_ Decline to state

Child's Gender: \_\_\_ Decline to state \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Another gender (please share child's gender, below)

\_\_\_\_\_

Pronoun child uses: \_\_\_ He \_\_\_ She \_\_\_ They \_\_\_ Another pronoun: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's sex on birth certificate: \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Intersex /Other \_\_\_ Decline to state (see below if you wish to share details)

Is there anything about your child's gender or sex that you would like for us to know? If you prefer to share this information privately, attach a separate note or we can set up a time to discuss with you in person. Please know that \_\_\_\_\_ school considers this private and confidential information that will only be shared with your expressed permission and guidance.

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## Gender Inclusive Registration Forms (student)

\_\_\_\_\_ School is committed to recognizing the rich diversity of our students. If you have any questions about any of the information we are collecting, please don't hesitate to discuss with us.

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Name You Use: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name on Birth Certificate : \_\_\_\_\_ Decline to state

Gender: \_\_\_ Decline to state \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Another gender (please share your gender, below)

\_\_\_\_\_

Pronoun you use: \_\_\_ He \_\_\_ She \_\_\_ They \_\_\_ Another pronoun: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex listed on birth certificate: \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Intersex /Other \_\_\_ Decline to state  
(see below if you wish to share details)

Is there anything about your gender or sex that you would like for us to know? If you prefer to share this information privately, attach a separate note or we can set up a time to discuss with you in person.

Please know that \_\_\_\_\_ school considers this private and confidential information that will only be shared with your expressed permission and guidance.

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## Talking with Young Kids about Gender

Many adults feel nervous talking about gender with kids. They worry that they won't say the right thing or maybe they don't know what to say at all. Here are a few key concepts about gender, some language you might use, and some conversation starters/tips you may want to try with the kids in your life. These are just some ideas and are certainly not the only ways to talk about gender with kids. Be proactive in your conversations by bringing up topics about gender; **don't** wait for your child to bring it up or for an experience or incident to talk about. Practice (by yourself or with other adults) talking about gender without bias, embarrassment, or judgment. When ready, invite your child into the discussion. We hope this will inspire you to find words and activities that feel right for you and that will spark conversation!

**Concept:** Gender is personal and there is not just one way to be.

### Possible language:

- Is there only one way to be a boy or girl? Does everyone think of themselves as either a boy, or a girl? Can boys and girls like the same things? Do all boys like the same things? Do all girls like the same things?
- Kids can do or be or like or want anything because they are individuals with hopes and likes and dreams. This is not **because** of their gender. It is because they are people.
- If you do know a person's gender, don't assume you know the things they like to do or wear, or play with.

### Conversation starters/Tips:

- Provide "counter narratives" to stereotypical stories or examples that reinforce the gender binary. Give examples of kids they know, such as boys who like sparkly things, girls who like to play with trucks. Try to use yourself and other well-loved family members as examples (e.g. *When I was a little girl, people told me I shouldn't wear red and black because they weren't "girl" colors, even though they were my favorite colors*).
- Read a book that addresses gender with your child and discuss it. You can find a book that you think your child might like in our [Annotated Bibliography of Children's Books about Gender Diversity](#).
- If you hear a child say something related to gender, ask them more about it and help them figure out where the messages are coming from; use it as a teachable moment.
- Watch TV shows and advertisements and discuss: 1) How gender roles are portrayed; and 2) what messages are being sent. Is the mom always making cookies or dinner with the daughter and serving the boys? Are only boys playing with trucks or cars? Who is being portrayed as strong? How is the meaning of strength being conveyed?

- When someone says something gender-biased (e.g. *He is all boy! Look at all the energy he has!*), take the opportunity to mention counter examples (e.g. *One of the girls he plays with has even more energy than he does!*).

**Concept:** Things don't have genders; people have genders.

**Possible language:**

- There aren't boy things and girl things. Instead, toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes.
- There are lots of different types of clothes. Kids get to wear what feels right to them and makes them feel good.
- Who gets to decide that some things are only for boys and some things are only for girls? How do you feel when you like something, or want to play with something, and someone says you can't because it's only for boys/girls?
- These ideas can be confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. But people who say these things just don't understand that people have genders, things do not. Each of us gets to decide what we like and don't like. We just can't be unkind to others about the things they like.

**Conversation starters/Tips:**

- Ask what your child thinks of as "boy" things or "girl" things, and then ask why. See if there are things they like which are assigned to the opposite gender and talk about how it would feel to be told they can't wear those things or do those things.
- Question and explore your own biases. For example, how do you feel about boys with long hair? Girls who want to shop in the boy's department for clothes? Girls playing football or boys wearing makeup or fingernail polish? What messages about gender expression are you giving your child?

**Concept:** Only you know your gender. You can't tell a person's gender by looking at them.

**Possible language:**

- No one gets to tell another person who they are. You know yourself better than anyone else does and only you get to decide your gender- and what it means to you.
- Who you are is not about what others tell you, but something you determine for yourself (even when you get messages that say otherwise).
- Some people think they can tell a person's gender by looking at them, but that is not always true. Think of all the wonderful things about yourself that no one else knows about by just looking at you!

- Gender expression is about showing the world who you are. There may be some patterns we notice, but these are not rules. More girls might wear dresses than boys, but does that mean all girls wear dresses? Or that boys can't wear dresses?

**Conversation starters/Tips:**

- When you or your child refers to someone else as male or female (i.e. “*see that man over there,*” or “*I like that girl's necklace*”), ask whether you can be really sure that you know the person's gender. Introduce the idea that when we notice someone's gender, we are often making assumptions based on patterns of gender expression. Sometimes, these patterns don't hold.
- Mix up gender language when reading stories to your kids. For example, if the story is about a “boy” animal, mix it up and make the lion a girl. Consider adopting this strategy for the people in a story too. Mixing up gender language and behavior expectations is creative and then you don't have to read a story the same way every time!
- When introducing yourself, consider sharing your gender pronouns: “*My name is Jessica and I use the pronouns 'she/her/hers.*” Try asking the adults around you what, if any, pronoun they would like you to use.

**Concept:** Your body doesn't determine your gender.

**Possible language:**

- Gender is a lot more than our bodies. It is also about how we show other people who we are (maybe our clothes, or our hair, etc.) and who we know we are inside.
- Some people think gender is only about your body, but really gender is about who you know yourself to be.
- When a baby is born the grown-ups look at its body and say “It's a girl” or “It's a boy” but they may not be right. We only know what a person's gender is when they are old enough to tell us.

**Conversation starters/Tips:**

- Talk about what it would feel like if one day you woke up in a different body. Would you be the same person? Would it change what you want to wear and like to do?
- Don't rely on or expect transgender, non-binary or other gender-expansive people to take the lead on discussing gender identity. Be an ally by bringing up issues that celebrate gender diversity.

**Concept:** There are more than two genders.

**Possible language:**

- Each one of us has a gender. Kids can be boys, girls, both, neither, or something else—isn't that great? Everyone gets to describe their gender in their own words.
- There have been examples of more than two genders in many cultures, and many religions, all over the world and throughout time.
- History is full of examples of gender diversity!

**Conversation starters/Tips:**

- Speak (in private, of course) of specific people in your child's environment who express gender differently, or who may have a gender other than male or female. Explore what your child thinks about it and share **your** thoughts and feelings about it.
- Introduce the notion of "boy, girl, both, neither, or something else" as a regular way to talk about people.

**Concept:** We need to be respectful of everyone, no matter what their gender is.

**Possible language:**

- No one likes to be pointed out by other kids. Does it feel good when you think someone is talking about you? How do you think it would feel if people were talking about your gender?
- How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your own gender?

**Conversation starters/Tips:**

- Ask your child to think of a time they were teased for being different. How did it feel?
- Share a story about when you were teased about something and how it made you feel.
- Explore the names we use to describe other people (i.e. Tomboy, Girlie, etc.). For some, those names are very hurtful. Respectfully talk with people about other ways they might want to be described.

### Things Anyone Can Do Tomorrow...

- Seek out and use a student's preferred name and pronouns
- Invite ALL students to share a preferred name and/or pronoun (especially early in the year)
- Put up signs that recognize and affirm gender diversity
  - All Genders Welcome\*
  - Celebrate Gender Expansive Youth\*
  - Think Outside the Boxes\*
  - Boy, Girl, Both, Neither\*
- Post pictures depicting gender-expansive individuals or cultures in which gender is expressed differently than typically represented by traditionally binary notions
  - "Two spirited" individuals found in many First Nation communities
  - The Hijra of India
  - Arabic men holding hands
- Display examples of people doing things not traditionally seen for their gender
  - Male nurses, childcare providers and dancers
  - Female soldiers, auto mechanics, and athletes
- Don't divide kids into boy and girl groups
  - Use birthdates, dogs and cats, winter or summer, chocolate or strawberry
  - Avoid arranging students boy/girl/boy/girl
  - Be mindful of always reinforcing the gender binary. At least sometimes say things like "attention scientists," "listen up Cougars," or "folks" rather than "ladies and gentlemen" or "boys and girls."
- Introduce language that is not all or nothing such as "sometimes, but not always," or "more common and less common," or "more frequent and less frequent"
- Say things like "all genders" or "boys, girls, both or neither" or "gender-expansive"
- Share examples of gender's impact on you or what you've learned about it over the years
- When binary statements about gender are made, interrupt them by asking questions like "is that always true?" or "can anyone think of an example that does not fit the pattern?"
- Respond to gender-based putdowns firmly, but instructionally, always being careful about further marginalizing the target of the statements. Follow up privately to see if how you handled the situation was comfortable for the student involved.

Integrating gender diversity into everyday curriculum...

#### Language Arts/Writing

**Personal narrative writing prompts:** A time when someone talked about my gender and the things I could or could not do. When someone confused my gender/When I confused someone's gender.

**Persuasive essay writing prompts:** Girls should not be allowed to play on the football team

**Expository writing prompts:** Describe the ways in which portrayals of gender in the media have affected our society's understandings of gender. Describe ways that gender is marketed to kids

**Reading comprehension:** use a short piece like "*The Dimensions of Gender\**" and have students answer questions about content

**Responding to literature:** Various young adult reading titles\* raise topics related to gender diversity, roles and stereotypes

**Grammar & Spelling:** Correct any of the mistakes in the following sentence. *Alex and shannon, were discussing the auditions for the school play when both girls was starteled by the loud noise?*  
“The word is ‘Extract.’ Denise was trying to extract the doll from her brother’s firm grip. Extract”

### **Social Studies/History**

Studying Native Americans, include two-spirit individuals

Historical figures who have challenged traditional notions about gender

What are some of the ways gender is understood in different cultures?

What is the relationship between gender and issues of power in our society?

### **Science**

**Fact of the day:** did you know there are species of geckos that only have “female” bodies?

The Biology of Gender\*

Genetics

Sexual Health Education

### **Mathematics**

**Sample problems:**

- 12 boys, 10 girls and 2 gender-expansive kids (feel like both or a blend) are in the math club. What is the ratio of boys to girls? Girls to gender-expansive?
- A survey was conducted recently. 373 students identified as male, 396 identified a female, 13 identified as transgender, and 27 identified as other. Graph these results. What percentage of the students identified as male? Female? Transgender? What percentage did not identify as either male or female?

**Data and Statistics:** Why is it difficult to come up with solid statistics about people who don’t identify as male or female?

### **The Arts**

Various projects where students have to portray something using the lens of gender

Allow students to play any part in various theater productions, rather than basing on gender

Discuss how certain dances have “male” and “female” parts. Why might that be challenging for some people?

Songs celebrating gender diversity

### **Foreign language**

If the language is particularly gendered, distinguish between the rules of a language and a non-binary understanding of gender.

### **Advisory, Social-Emotional Curriculum**

My Gender Journey\*

Guest speakers

School climate surveys about gender inclusiveness

*Gender Spectrum works closely with schools and individual teachers to think about ways in which to bring the lens of gender into classrooms. Please email us at [info@genderspectrum.org](mailto:info@genderspectrum.org) or call us at 510-788-4412.*

\* Materials available from Gender Spectrum

## 12 easy steps on the way to gender inclusiveness...

1. Avoid asking kids to line up as boys or girls or separating them by gender. Instead, use things like *“odd and even birth date,”* or *“Which would you choose: skateboards or bikes/milk or juice/dogs or cats/summer or winter/talking or listening.”* Invite students to come up with choices themselves. Consider using tools like the “appointment schedule” to form pairs or groups. Always ask yourself, “Will this configuration create a gendered space?”
2. Don’t use phrases such as *“boys & girls,”* *“you guys,”* *“ladies and gentlemen,”* and similarly gendered expressions to get kids’ attention. Instead say things like *“calling all readers,”* or *“hey campers”* or *“could all of the athletes come here.”* Create classroom names and then ask all of the “purple penguins” to meet at the rug.
3. Provide an opportunity for every student to identify a preferred name or pronoun. At the beginning of the year or at Back-to-School Night, invite students and parents to let you know if they have a preferred name and/or pronoun by which they wish to be referred.
4. Have visual images reinforcing gender inclusion: pictures of people who don’t fit gender norms, signs that “strike out” sayings like *“All Boys...”* or *“All Girls...”* or *“All Genders Welcome”* door hangers.
5. When you find it necessary to reference gender, say *“Boy, girl, both or neither.”* When asked why, use this as a teachable moment. Emphasize to students that your classroom recognizes and celebrates the gender diversity of all students.
6. Point out and inquire when you hear others referencing gender in a binary manner. Ask things like, *“Hmmm. That is interesting. Can you say more about that?”* or *“What makes you say that? I think of it a little differently.”* Provide counter-narratives that challenge students to think more expansively about their notions of gender.
7. Look for examples in the media that reinforce gender stereotypes or binary models of gender (it won’t be hard; they’re everywhere!). When with others, call it out and interrogate it.
8. Be intolerant of openly hostile attitudes or references towards others EVERY TIME you hear or observe them, but also use these as teachable moments. Take the opportunity to push the individual on their statements about gender. Being punitive may stop the behavior, at least in your presence. Being instructive may stop it entirely.
9. Teach children specific language that empowers them to be proud of who they are, or to defend others who are being mistreated. *“Please respect my privacy.”* *“You may think that, but I don’t.”* *“You may not like it, but I do.”* *“Hey, they’re called ‘private parts’ for a reason.”*
10. Help students recognize “all or nothing” language by helping them understand the difference between patterns and rules. Teach them phrases like *“That may be true for some people, but not all people,”* or *“frequently, but not always,”* or *“more common and less common.”* Avoid using “normal” to define any behaviors.
11. Share personal anecdotes from your own life that reflect gender inclusiveness. Even better, share examples when you were not gender inclusive in your thinking, words or behaviors, what you learned as a result, and what you will do differently next time.
12. Do the work yourself. What are your own experiences with gender? What might be some of your own biases? What assumptions do you make about the gender of others? Share reflections about your own evolving understandings about gender.

## Principles for Responding to Concerns

### Slow things down

- Breathe
- Soften your voice
- Listen reflectively

### Appreciate the sharing of their question/concern

- Thank you so much for caring enough about our school to bring this to me
- It sounds like you've really thought a lot about this

### Try to learn what's underneath the question or concern

- Can you say more about that?
- Is there something specific that you are worried about for your child?

### Bring your own experience/expertise to the table

- Here is what I have observed over the years
- I can remember a time when a parent had a similar concern

### Return to shared beliefs

- Safety
- Kindness
- Learning

### School mission and values

- At our school, we believe...we think that is one of the reasons parents want their children here
- As you probably know, the mission of our school is...

### Invite a solution for their child (versus assuming the other child must change or adapt)

- What might we do to support your child, you and your family?

### Provide resources

- Can I share some information that other parents have found helpful who had similar questions?
- I will send you some links about this.

### Ask for time...

- You've really given me a lot to consider about here. I'd like to think more about our conversation, and check in with my colleagues. Perhaps we could set up a time to check back in next week?

### Some other thoughts...

- Gender impacts every student and gender inclusion supports all of them
- I don't talk about another child with other parents, just as I would never talk about your child with someone else. However, in general, at our school we believe...
- Being uncomfortable is not the same as being unsafe
- Transgender and other gender-expansive students are at far greater risk than their cisgender peers



## Responding to Concerns: Teaching about Gender

### *Why should my child learn about gender at school?*

- School is a place where children are taught to respect one another and to learn to work together regardless of their differences. Learning about gender diversity is part of that work. Creating a more tolerant, inclusive, and accepting school environment teaches all children to recognize and resist stereotypes. We teach children to stand up for others, to resist bullying, and to work together.
- We also know that many children whose gender is seen as different than what is expected of them can face very difficult circumstances. Too often teasing, bullying, and violence are common experiences for a gender-expansive child. A growing number of school districts and states (17 as of 2014) specifically prohibit bullying and harassment of students based on gender expression or identity. Furthermore, various federal, state and municipal laws protect students from discrimination because of their gender. Proactive education and training to help students understand gender diversity more fully helps school districts meet those legal obligations while working to create a safer, more supportive learning environment for all students.

### *Isn't my child too young to be learning about gender?*

- Children are already learning about it. Messages about gender are everywhere, and children receive very clear messages about the “rules” for boys and girls, as well as the consequences for violating them. By learning about the diversity of gender, children have an opportunity to explore a greater range of interests, ideas, and activities. For all children, the pressure of “doing gender correctly,” is greatly reduced, creating more space for them to discover new talents and interests.
- Whether in or out of school, children will encounter other children exhibiting wide ranges of gender expression. This is normal and, with a little reflection, we can all recognize it as something we encountered during our own childhoods. Tomboys or shy, sensitive boys are commonly recognized examples of children who buck societal expectations of gender expression. These children, and all children, deserve a safe, supportive learning environment in which they can thrive and empower themselves.

### *If you are talking about gender, aren't you discussing reproduction and sexuality?*

- The simple answer is “no.” When we discuss gender, we talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in, and how they feel about themselves. This is not sexuality. Sexuality involves physical intimacy and attraction. Gender is about self-identity. Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of where they fit on the gender spectrum. This includes all kids, “typically” gendered or not.
- If responding to questions that arise about physical sex, the discussion uses phrases such as “private parts,” and even if anatomical terms come up, nothing specific to human reproduction or sexuality is taught. For the most part, children are simply not raising these questions. While as adults, we struggle to separate the ideas of gender and sexuality (primarily because many were taught that they are one and the same), children have an ability to grasp the complexity of gender diversity because sexuality does not factor in to complicate their understanding.

*Ideas about gender diversity go against the values we are instilling in my child at home. Are you trying to teach my child to reject these values?*

- Absolutely not. Our children encounter people with different beliefs when they join any community. While one aim for learning about diversity is to become more accepting of those around us, not everyone is going to be best friends. That does not mean that they can't get along and learn together. The purpose of learning about gender diversity is to demonstrate that children are unique and that there is no single way to be a boy or a girl. If a child does not agree with or understand another student's gender identity or expression, they do not have to change how they feel inside about it. However, they also do not get to make fun of, harass, or harm other students whose gender identity they don't understand or support. Gender diversity education is about teaching students to live and work with others. It comes down to the simple agreement that all children must be treated with kindness and respect.

*Won't my child get confused if we speak about more than two gender options?*

- Experience show that, with enough information, children of any age are able to understand that there are more than the two gender categories currently recognized by our society. When it is explained to them in a simple, age appropriate manner, gender diversity is an easy concept for children to grasp.
- When you discuss gender with your child, you may hear them exploring where they fit on the gender spectrum and why. This shows that they understand that everyone may have some variation of gender expression that fits outside of stereotypical norms. Their use of language or their personal placements along this spectrum may surprise you. We encourage all parents to approach these discussions with an air of openness and inquiry.

*Don't gender-expansive kids have lots of problems? Is gender nonconformity a product of abuse, emotional problems, neglect, divorce, or detached, or over-involved parents?*

- No. While it is true that some transgender and gender-expansive people do experience a tremendous amount of societal abuse and parental rejection, this is not the cause of their gender identity or expression. As a result, when not supported, children whose gender expression or identity is considered atypical often suffer from loneliness, lower self-esteem, and other negative feelings. Statistics reveal the devastating impact these youth face when placed into a non-supportive or hostile setting.
- A gender-expansive child's emotional distress is a response to the mistreatment they have likely faced from those around them. It is not at all uncommon to see a gender-expansive or transgender child's distress greatly reduce or disappear when they're provided with a more positive environment.

*Won't allowing children to express non-traditional genders cause them to be teased or harassed?*

- While there is a great deal of data suggesting that gender-expansive youth do face teasing, there is a growing body of knowledge that points to the impact gender-expansive education can have on reducing that treatment. If children are being treated badly because of who they are, the answer is not to try and prevent them from being themselves. Rather, we should instead ask what needs to be done to address the teasing. Providing educational programming and training that expands students' understanding about stereotypes and limitations of self-expression can go a long way to preventing teasing.

*Won't discussing gender encourage my child to be transgender?*

- Being transgender is not something that a person chooses. Studies show that although parents cannot make their child gay or transgender, they can deeply influence how their children feel about themselves. Parental pressure to enforce gender conformity can damage a child's self-esteem and is a high predictor of negative health outcomes and risk-taking behaviors for youth. Transgender youth currently have an extremely high attempted suicide rate: some estimate it being as high as 50 percent. Discussing gender will have the effect of removing much of the pressure students face to fit into narrowly defined expectations that few if any can actually meet.

*If transgender people are so "normal", why are some families so private about it?*

- A family with a transgender child will decide together how much they wish to share with others. Many transgender children prefer to live their lives as the gender that reflects their internal gender identity without using the word "transgender." For example, the child would identify themselves as a girl or boy as opposed to a transgender girl or boy.
- Some children and families are open and share this with everyone in their lives. Others choose to maintain a sense of complete privacy, while still others find a blend of these two approaches. In most families, this decision will be determined jointly by the child and guardian(s), often in collaboration with a medical, mental health, or other professionals experienced in this area.
- If a family honors their child's wish for privacy, this can have the appearance of secrecy. In reality, it may be an effort to avoid potential stigmatization or to simply keep a very personal topic private.

*How can I correct or modify the impression I have already given my child about gender?*

- It is powerful to let children know when we don't know the answer to something, and to let them know that adults as well as children are always learning. Having conversations with your children that reflect your growing understanding is wonderful. It does not undermine your parenting. If you were to discover that you had unknowingly taught your child another form of misinformation about other people, you would correct the impression you had mistakenly given them. With gender it is no different. Gender diversity is something that both society and science are constantly exploring and understanding more deeply.

*I don't really feel like I know how to answer my child's questions.*

- Once again, explain that you are learning about this too. It is important, however, to monitor and understand your own feelings before you initiate this kind of conversation. Children can pick up on your feelings towards a subject. So, if you are still feeling uncomfortable about the concept of gender diversity, then consider taking additional time to increase your understanding. Read, talk to others, and further educate yourself. When you have a greater understanding and increased awareness, then you will likely feel more confident to talk with your children.
- Answer children's questions simply, and let them take the lead in how deep the conversation goes. Most children are satisfied with this approach. They will guide the conversation from there and rarely ask the complex questions that occur to adults. You may be surprised at how simply children navigate this terrain. Some parents have found responses such as, "Hmmm, I am just learning about that myself. Let me tell you what I know, and then if you would like to learn more, maybe we could do that together," to be helpful in opening up pathways for further discussion.

## Responding to Concerns: Supporting Transgender Students

*Why is the school making such a big deal about this? How many of these kids are there anyway?*

- Of course I can't talk about any individual students, just as I would never talk about your child. Personal information about our students, including their gender identity is private. But is there something we can do to help you or your child better understand gender-related issues?
- Many people don't realize that gender-based discrimination is illegal under Title IX, and that gender is a protected class in many states and cities (just like race, religion or disability). Unfortunately, these protections are necessary because transgender and other gender-expansive students frequently face a great deal of discrimination from other students, staff and community members.
- Organizations such as the PTA, the NEA, the California School Board Association and many other associations for administrators, counselors, and other educational professionals have written clear guidelines about the need to make sure that transgender and other gender-expansive students are safe at school.
- I know this is new territory for many of us. Sometimes change is really challenging. Perhaps I can share some information with you about this issue?

*Who is protecting my child?*

- What are the specific behaviors of another person that are making your child feel unsafe?
- I can assure you that the safety of all of the students at this school remains my highest priority. If your child is feeling unsafe, we need to know about it. Can you tell me about specific situations or occurrences that have taken place in which your child's safety was at risk?
- Our expectation for all of our students is that they respect the privacy and physical boundaries of other students. If the behaviors of one student are making another student feel unsafe, that is an issue we take very seriously. Is something or someone behaving in a way that makes your child feel unsafe?
- How can we help your child to feel more comfortable? If for any reason your student needs additional support, such as a private space to change or use the restroom, we will work with you and your child to provide these.

*So who decides if a student is transgender? What is to prevent a boy from coming to school one day and simply declaring that he is a girl and changing in the girl's locker room?*

- Schools have always worked to support the needs of individual students in a variety of ways. For any student who requires support related to gender, the school works very deliberately to provide the necessary services. This does not take place without a great deal of care and planning.
- Schools all over the country are supporting transgender students in these ways and this issue simply does not come up.
- A transgender student is very different from a young person who is claiming to be a different gender for some improper purpose. Transgender students are not trying to get away with something or make this up; why would they? Conversely, any student pretending to be transgender would be easily identified in the planning processes we have established.
- Our policy of treating transgender students consistent with their gender identity does not permit a student of the opposite sex to enter into the wrong facilities.

## **Scope and Sequence:** **Gender Inclusive Instruction**

### **Unit 1: Gender, Society, and Me:**

*What images do we receive about gender and where do they come from?*

Learning Goals: As is appropriate per grade level, students will reflect upon the gender messages and expectations they experience and identify some of the ways these are communicated to them. Ultimately, students will be encouraged to consider the complexity of their identities and the degree to which they are represented in the world around them.

### **Unit 2: Gender 101**

*What is gender?*

Learning Goals: In these lessons, students will become familiar with what gender is and all of the diverse ways that people can experience gender, with a focus on the three dimensions of identity, expression, and body, as is age appropriate. This unit will also include an introduction to the distinction between binary and spectrum frameworks, which incorporates a diversity of gender identities, including cisgender, transgender, and everything in between and beyond.

### **Unit 3: Gender Across the World**

*How is gender expressed in different kinds of ways across time and culture?*

Learning Goals: Students will be introduced to the idea that the way our society thinks about and defines gender are not the only ways that it can be understood. In this unit, students will learn about and engage with different societies, across geography, culture and time, and reflect on how societies can make sense of all the different manifestations of gender expression and identity.

### **Unit 4: What now?**

*Why is it important to understand gender?*

Learning Goals: Students will be asked to use all that they've learned about gender to reflect upon how they can apply those understandings to themselves and others.. This unit will encourage them to consider some of the ways in which they have been affected by expectations and assumptions about their gender. It will also explore strategies for responding when they or those around them experience gender-based mistreatment.