

GENDER INCLUSION

STAFF & VOLUNTEER TIPSHEET



How to use this document

This tipsheet offers strategies and tools for including people of all genders in educational programming. These tools can be used with youth and adult audiences alike.

Introduction

Everyone – youth and adults – comes to a learning environment with a gender. The way we were raised affects how we look at gender. This can make some people feel included, while others may feel excluded. It's important for programs to be a safe and welcoming places for all youth and adults, no matter their identity.

Gender is determined by a person's:

- Personal identity – how they see and understand themselves
- Emotions – how they feel
- Presentation or expression – how they choose to dress and look
- Behavior – how they choose to act
- Socialization – how they were raised and how their community thinks about gender

Gender-inclusive teachers:

- Recognize that gender impacts ALL students
- Interrupt binary notions of gender
- Normalize gender diversity
- Question limited portrayals of gender
- Support students' self-reflection by asking non-judgmental, open-ended questions
- Teach empathy and respect



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Key concepts

- **Allyship:** Allyship is the practice of supporting someone (or some group) who is impacted by a particular type of inequality more than you are.
- **Cisgender:** A cisgender person is either someone who is assigned male at birth and identifies as a boy/man, or someone who is assigned female at birth and identifies as a girl/woman.
- **Gender binary:** The false understanding that there are only two genders (“man” and “woman”) and that these genders always align with two sexes (“male” and “female”), and two kinds of presentation (“masculine” and “feminine”).
- **Gender identity:** Someone’s gender identity is their self-understanding related to concepts like man, woman, genderqueer, trans, and others. This can shift throughout someone’s life and we can’t necessarily tell someone’s gender identity just by looking at them.
- **Gender presentation:** Someone’s gender presentation is how someone chooses to present themselves through hairstyles, clothing, mannerisms, makeup, etc. Unlike gender identity, this can be observed from the outside.
- **Misgendering:** Misgendering happens when a person intentionally or unintentionally refers to someone else with the inaccurate gender. This might mean using the wrong pronouns, name, or inaccurately referring to someone as “sir” or “ma’am”.



- **Nonbinary:** Someone is nonbinary when they do not identify as a man or a woman. If they are **genderqueer**, they might identify with qualities of both. If they are **agender**, they might not identify with qualities of either. If they are **gender fluid**, their gender identity might shift from day to day.
- **Pronouns:** Pronouns (commonly “she,” “he,” and “they”) are words that people use to describe themselves and each other in the third person. For example, “**she** is learning a lot”, “**he** is an attentive listener”, or “**they** are a great friend” are all examples of pronouns in context.
- **Transgender (or trans):** A transgender person is someone who is assigned male at birth and does not identify as a man/boy, or someone who is assigned female at birth and does not identify as a girl/woman. A trans man is a man who was assigned female at birth, and a trans woman is a woman who was assigned male at birth.
- **Transition:** Transition is the process of shifting one’s presentation in one or more of the following ways to better reflect their identity:
 - by changing their **gender presentation** (e.g. their hairstyle, clothing, use of makeup, mannerisms)
 - by changing their **anatomy** (e.g. by taking hormones or getting gender-affirming surgery)
 - by changing their **legal/clerical status** (e.g. by legally changing one’s name and/or gender marker wherever it is documented)
 - by changing their **relationships** (e.g. from son to daughter, from niece to sibling).
- **Queer/LGBTQIA+:** These umbrella terms exist to describe anyone who isn’t cisgender and/or heterosexual.
- **Sex assigned at birth:** A person’s sex is assigned to them by doctors when they are born. Someone can be assigned female, male, or intersex at birth based on their genetics and internal/external reproductive organs.
- **Sexual orientation:** Someone’s sexual orientation describes who someone is attracted to, including sexual and emotional attraction as well as partnership decisions. Orientation can also shape a person’s identity and community.
- **Two-Spirit, Muxe, Hijra, and other terms:** Many Indigenous and non-Western cultures have categories for gender identity that are different from the ones shared here. This is because these cultures have gender identities that predate their contact with Western culture and gender norms.



Entry points

There are four ways that gender can show up in programming: **personal**, **interpersonal**, **instructional**, and **structural**. We encourage you to start with the personal and notice how the other three show up in your programming environment! Tools such as the [Learning Empowerment and Self-Identification Activity](#) and the [Gender Triangle](#) can help us become aware of our gender socialization.

Personal

To create spaces that are inclusive of all genders, it helps for each of us to first reflect on how we were raised to relate to gender. By bringing our own gender awareness to programming, we can understand the messages that we send to youth.

Here are some questions to reflect on:

- What kinds of messages about gender were you raised with?
- Did you encounter norms that didn't feel like a good fit for you? How did that go?
- How did the adults around you respond to people who didn't follow gender norms? For example, what kinds of spoken or unspoken messages did they communicate to boys who were seen as feminine?
- How might people be affected by being raised within the gender binary?
- Think about a time when you have felt isolated or alone. How did you want to be treated? What helped you start to feel safe, respected, and welcome?

Interpersonal

Interpersonal entry points are the kinds of interactions and conversations that people have around gender. There are several ways that people can support gender inclusion in conversation. Below are some recommended phrases that can be used in the context of youth programming.

Phrases/questions that encourage pride in diversity:

- Think about a group of people trying to solve a problem. Why might it be helpful for them to be different from one another?
- There are many different ways for people to be in the world! What's something unique about you that you're proud of?
- There have been gender-diverse people in every culture, every religion, all over the world throughout time.

Interpersonal (continued)

Phrases/questions that teach empathy and respect:

- “How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your gender or pointing you out? What would you prefer them to do?”
- “Have you ever been teased? How does it feel when you are teased or treated as an outsider? Is there something you can do when you see someone else getting teased?”
- “If you wanted someone to feel included, what could you do?”

Phrases/questions that challenge gender norms:

- Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes. What would the world look like if none of these things were off-limits to half the population?
- What kinds of limitations have you noticed about what boys and girls are allowed to do (from your friends, from adults, or from TV or music)? Do you think those are fair?
- Who decided what things are for boys and what things are for girls?

Phrases/questions that challenge the gender binary:

- People with some bodies are thought of as girls and people with other bodies are thought of as boys, but that’s not true for everyone. No one can tell you who you are inside!
- Your gender is what you know yourself to be in your heart (and has nothing to do with a person’s body parts)
- Whether you feel like a girl, a boy, both, or neither, that’s who you are. And you’re allowed to change your mind!
- 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 people can’t tell just by looking at you!

Modeling inclusive practices:

- Rather than “boys and girls,” “ladies and gentlemen,” etc., refer to students as “students,” “children,” or other non-gendered terms.
- If you use the wrong name or pronouns for someone, just say sorry, correct yourself, and move on. You can also commit to practicing the right name and pronouns on your own time. Don’t make a big deal out of it or put someone on the spot.



Instructional

Instructional approaches to supporting gender diversity include teaching specifically about gender. This is the most direct way to initiate important conversations with youth. If circumstances do not allow this to happen, then other, less-direct approaches are still helpful.

Examples of instructional approaches:

- Designing lesson plans to improve understanding of gender diversity
- Exploring current curriculum areas for natural opportunities to talk about gender diversity issues or topics
- Using literature that has themes raising gender diversity issues
- Exploring gender through the arts
- Using advisory programs or classroom meetings to talk about gender-related themes
- Assigning open-ended projects that include gender-related topics, readings, or news
- Arranging for transgender or other gender nonconforming individuals, including those who work for greater gender equity, to present or work in classrooms
- Using video or other media that explore gender topics or issues
- Creating space for students to share their own understandings and beliefs about gender
- Integrating gender into curriculum areas through story problems, writing prompts, readings, art assignments, or research projects

Structural

In our societies, certain structures (like single-gender bathrooms and administrative forms with only “male” and “female” categories) enforce the gender binary, excluding gender non-conforming people.

Once we develop an awareness of gender, we can change these structures to be actively affirming of all genders.

Examples of structural changes we can implement:

- Policies and regulations that establish institutional support for gender diversity
- Systematic staff training that helps all staff support gender diversity
- Reference materials and information about gender diversity
- Visuals celebrating gender diversity
- Registration and information systems allowing families and youth to self-identify their gender, name, and pronouns
- Restrooms and facilities that provide options for privacy without stigmatizing any students
- Processes that are gender inclusive (for example, dividing youth by where their first initials are in the alphabet rather than into groups of boys and girls).
- Forms that include a full range of gender identities, along with a provision of confidentiality. We recommend the following format:

Gender (select all that apply):

- Man
- Woman
- Transgender
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to respond



ABOUT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

This information in this tipsheet was developed through UW-Madison Extension’s Curriculum Jams process.

Curriculum Jams bring together people with lived experience to review and recommend learning resources.

Check out our website to learn more.



REFERENCES:

- Gender Spectrum. (2016). Gender Inclusive Teaching. https://acsa.org/application/files/9714/6672/4173/00_Gender_Inclusive_Teaching_2.pdf
- White, A. and Widdison, D. (2024). Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee. <https://access-equity-belonging.extension.org/about/lgbtq-youth-community/>
- Images courtesy of istockphoto.com and freepik.com.

GENDER INCLUSION TRAINING

TEACHING RESOURCES

The **Learning Empowerment and Self-Identification Activity** is a resource that addresses stereotypes and self-identified labels through the use of a scripted lesson, a video, group discussion questions, and hands-on activities.

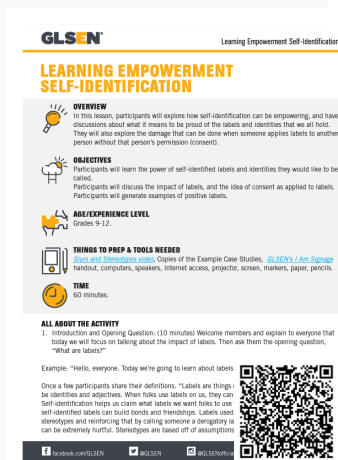
Format:

- 5-page document
- includes script, glossary, and case studies

Audience:

- High school aged students

Source: GLSEN



These resources have been recommended through the Curriculum Jams process for teaching about Gender Inclusion.

The **Gender Triangle** is a resource that highlights and defines key concepts related to gender identity, including gender, misgendering, pronouns, bodily characteristics, expression, and attribution.

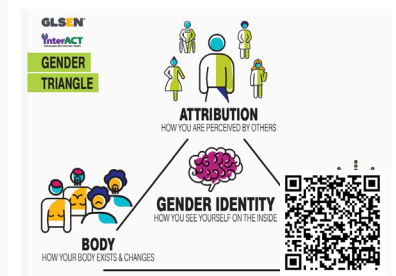
Format:

- 3-page document
- includes key terms and definitions

Audience:

- Unspecified, but language level is accessible to most high school aged students and older

Source: GLSEN and InterACT



BACKGROUND RESOURCES

These resources have been recommended through the Curriculum Jams process for developing background knowledge about gender inclusion.

Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Young People discusses how to support trans and nonbinary youth. It covers the basics of gender, common mistakes, and recommended responses.

Format:

- website
- also available as a 14-page document

Audience:

- youth and adults

Additional notes:

- useful as an introductory resource
- written in clear, accessible language
- straightforward advice



Source: The Trevor Project

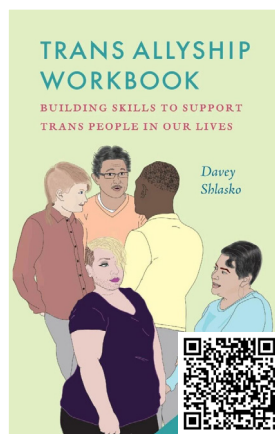
The **Trans Allyship Workbook** offers an in-depth foundation of allyship to transgender people. It addresses identity, coming out and transition, intersectionality, children and youth, discrimination, pronouns, and allyship.

Format:

- includes reflection questions, scenarios, and a glossary
- book or ebook

Audience:

- adults



Source: Davey Shlasko

The **Trans 101 Video Series** is a set of videos that addresses the basics of trans identity, allyship, friends and family, neurodiversity, and trans people of color.

Format:

- online videos

Audience:

- adults and advanced youth

Additional notes:

- videos use plain language but contain some captioning issues
- see Curriculum Jams website for list of reviewed videos



Source: Minus 18



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