

TEACHING ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY IN SCHOOL IS AGE-APPROPRIATE

Everyone has a gender identity. Most people's sense of their gender (known as their gender identity) matches their sex assigned at birth. For some, however, their sense of their gender does not match their sex assigned at birth. Most typically, children between the ages of 18 months and 2 to 3 years begin to articulate some understanding of their gender identity,^{5,6,7} and children have a clear sense of their gender identity by age 4 or 5.⁸ At these ages, children also begin to develop speech and may begin to communicate how they understand their gender. Often, transgender children will state with confidence at young ages, "I am a boy" or "Do not call me a 'girl.'"

It is also true that general expressions of gender exploration in children are common and do not always indicate gender variance. Directly addressing and deconstructing gender stereotypes in the classroom is one way to create a safe space for students to express themselves through dress, language, and play.

An inclusive curriculum leads to improved academic and health outcomes for youth. According to GLSEN, students who experienced an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum:

- Were less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- Were less likely to miss school.
- Felt greater belonging to their school community.
- Reported better psychological well-being, including higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and a lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year.

CREATING LGBTQ-INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming students can be of any sexual orientation and are at particular risk for teasing, bullying, and/or social isolation. They are also often rendered invisible by a curriculum and rarely see themselves or people like them in lessons and teachers' examples throughout a curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to work actively against stereotyped assumptions about how their students should behave based on gender. By offering students the widest possible opportunities for self-expression, teachers can help all students develop more complex and nuanced ways of understanding gender.

More information and research related to the importance of expanding concepts of gender expression for all students are available from [Gender Spectrum](#).

The lessons in *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* are specifically written to challenge the gender binary and to be inclusive, respectful, and supportive of all gender expressions. There are many great resources offering additional ways for teachers to support transgender and non-binary students. They include:

- Advocates for Youth's [Trans-Affirming Schools Project Resource Guide](#)
- [Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network \(GLSEN\)](#)
- *The Teaching Transgender Toolkit* available for purchase at www.TeachingTransgender.com

Advocates for Youth does not support separating students by gender for instruction because this practice is not aligned with the 3Rs approaches to gender identity and expression and our commitment to creating inclusive learning environments for all students. In particular, the needs of students who identify as non-binary and/or genderqueer make it harmful to separate students based on a binary sense of gender.

More information about creating safe learning environments for students who identify as LGBTQ can be found in this short [video](#).

More information about creating safe learning environments for students who identify as transgender, non-binary, or gender-expansive can be found in this short [video](#).

5. Olson KR, Durwood L, DeMeules M, McLaughlin, KA. (2016, February). Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities. *Pediatrics*. doi:10.1542/peds.2015-3223

6. World Professional Association for Transgender Health. (2012). Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender-Nonconforming People. Retrieved from https://www.wpath.org/media/cms/Documents/SOC%20v7/SOC%20V7_English2012.pdf?_t=1613669341

7. Wyckoff, AS. (2022, January 6). AAP [American Academy of Pediatrics] continues to support care of transgender youths as more states push restrictions. *AAP News*. Retrieved from <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/19021/AAP-continues-to-support-care-of-transgender?autologincheck=redirected>

8. Bright Futures, an initiative of the American Academy of Pediatrics. (2022, July). Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents, Fourth Edition. Downloaded from <https://www.aap.org/en/practice-management/bright-futures/bright-futures-materials-and-tools/bright-futures-guidelines-and-pocket-guide/>