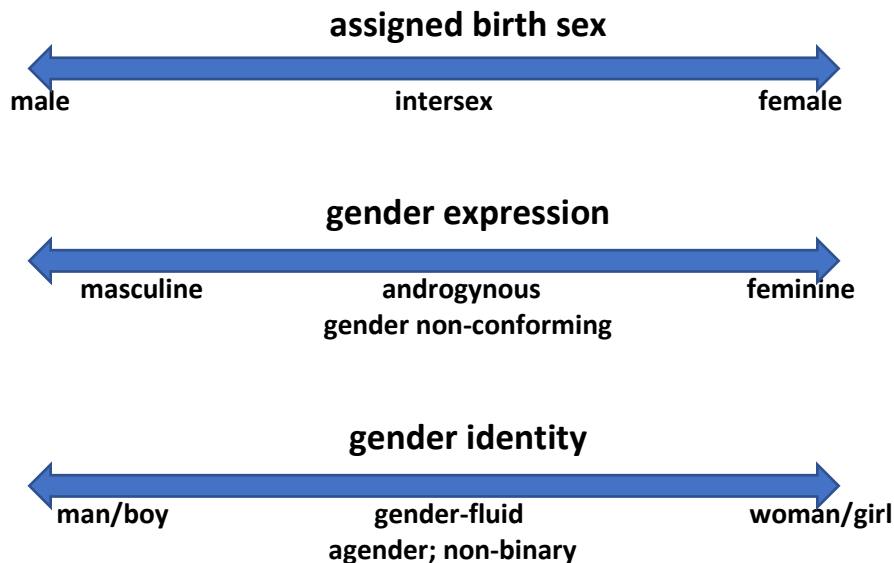


Understanding the differences

There is a difference between:

- **Gender:** what a society has determined around masculinity and femininity; these notions can change based on location, culture, time, etc. Historically across some cultures, more than two genders are recognized.
- **Assigned birth sex:** what the doctor or ultrasound decided based on observable genitalia. Many people align with assigned birth sex while others do not.
- **Gender identity:** what a person sees/feels as their gender; language around these changes over time, among cultures, etc. ONLY THE PERSON CAN SAY WHAT THEIR GENDER IDENTITY IS
- **Gender expression:** how the person presents to others, typically through clothing, hair, accessories, etc. This expression is often categorized based on the society's notions of gender. Gender expression DOES NOT indicate gender identity
- **Sexual orientation:** how a person identifies based on sexual attraction and interest. Only the person can say what their sexual orientation is.

While identities are not linear, some people find it helpful to view them on a continuum. A person can be at any point on these 3 lines and often is at different points across the 3 lines.



Some more helpful terms and ideas.

Gender Binary: only recognizing two genders and not making distinctions between assigned sex, gender identity and gender expression.

Gender non-conforming: someone that may or may not identify with assigned sex at birth but does not adhere to binary expectations of gender expression and perhaps gender identity. May or may not identify as transgender.

Cisgender: anyone that identifies with their assigned sex at birth.

Transgender: anyone that does not identify with their assigned sex at birth.

-Can include non-binary, agender, gender fluid, etc. but not every person who is non-binary, etc. will identify as transgender.

*There are also other cultures that have terms for different gender identities but these are only appropriate to use if you are part of that culture.

Non-binary: A person who does not identify their gender identity along the gender binary. Some people see themselves as both boy and girl, some as neither boy, or girl and some change who they align with in terms of femininity, masculinity, or androgyny moment to moment. There are many different terms that can be included with non-binary

Transition: the process of changing to better align with one's gender identity/authentic self. May also be used to denote a specific time when the person initially socially transitioned. E.g. "My child transitioned at age 7"

Social transition: Changing outwardly evident factors to align with one's gender identity; may include hair, clothing, accessories, voice, name, pronouns. The only transition that occurs pre-puberty and for some people even post puberty.

Medical transition: Changing bodily factors to align with one's gender identity; may include hormone blockers, taking hormones, surgeries. Not all transgender people undergo medical transition.

Helpful links about pronouns:

Why using pronouns is important <https://pronouns.org/what-and-why>

How to use pronouns <https://pronouns.org/how>

600 yr History of the singular they <https://www.mentalfloss.com/posts/singular-they-history>

Using they/them pronouns https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAiA_URUL8A

Qualities of an Ally (from the PFLAG Trans Ally Guide 2020)

Rather than developing a stiff set of requirements or beliefs for someone to be an ally, we created a list of some of the qualities people—regardless of where they are on their ally journey—possess:

- **Allies want to learn.** Allies are people who don't necessarily know all that can be known on LGBTQ+ issues or about people who are LGBTQ+, but want to learn more.
- **Allies address their barriers.** Allies are people who might have to grapple with some barriers to being openly and actively supportive of people who are LGBTQ+, and they're willing to take on the challenge.
- **Allies are people who know that "support" comes in many forms.** It can mean something super-public (think covering yourself in rainbow glitter and heading to a Pride celebration with a sign reading, "PROUD ALLY"*). But it can also mean expressing support in more personal ways through the language we use, conversations we choose to have, and signals that we send. And true allies know that all aspects of ally expression are important, effective, and should be valued equally.
- **Allies are diverse.** Allies are people who know that there's no one way to be an ally, and that everyone gets to adopt the term in a different way...and that's ok.

Why is the ally spectrum useful?

First, it acknowledges that allies can be found across the spectrum of support, from the people who say, "Not my issue...but I'll listen to you," to those who feel comfortable finally saying "LGBTQ+" and talking about issues out loud, to those who get the LGB part, but want to understand the T and the Q (and that plus, too), right through our super allies, who are off and taking care of things on their own.

Second, it is a reminder that no matter where people are on the spectrum, they are allies. No need to become an advanced ally before you claim the title. There are things to learn and things to do at every single point.

Finally, it gets rid of that icky feeling that we all get when we're forced to ignore all of the characteristics, background, and experiences that make people who they are and try to squeeze them into a box to fit our own ideas about who they ought to be. Shake free the chains of being just a list or one definition, people! Now is your time to embrace your ally diversity.

Ally Spectrum <https://straightforequality.org/allyspectrum>



Some responses to the most commonly asked questions.

1. “Aren’t elementary school children too young to be introduced to the topic of gender diversity?”:

Our youth are capable of processing a LOT more complicated issues and ideas than they are traditionally given credit for.

2. “Will seeing LGBTQIA+ people represented in books, turn my kid gay or trans?” [let’s be honest no one is asking this but plenty of people are thinking it]

Providing LGBTQIA+ information and representation, does not make kids gay or trans. If mere exposure to ideas made kids a certain way, then the history of mostly straight cisgender representation would have yielded no LGBTQIA+ kids in the world.

Think of it like trying to make a left-handed person be right handed ([read the history of oppression of lefthandness](#)), OR like trying to get a kid with no interest in sports to be an athlete, OR think of it as someone trying to convince you, you were a gender or had attraction you did not. The theory that there is a social contagion that causes kids to identify as transgender has not been held up by [research](#). ([another article here](#))

If you are worried that your kid will turn gay or trans, you may want to explore what the fear is about and what messages you have been given about what that means. Maybe if you were exposed to positive representations when you were younger, you might not have those same fears. (*watch the documentary Disclosure on Netflix for a look at the ways media portrayals have impacted us all and the ideas we have specifically about transgender people*)

3. “I am afraid that there are people out there trying to turn a bunch of kids trans and gay in order to take advantage of them sexually”

Let’s be clear- NO ONE wants this! There is a narrative that people are trying to “groom” kids. [Grooming](#), in its definition (see also [Dictionary.com](#)) means ‘the action by a pedophile of preparing a child for a meeting, especially via an internet chat room, with the intention of committing a sexual offense’. We all can agree that this is something we should actively work against. People who are using grooming as a term related to LGBTQIA+ youth are purposely trying to liken trans and non-binary people, or their allies, to pedophiles and sexual deviants. This is unfair and we need actively put a stop to this sort of harmful messaging. ([read more](#))

Representation of LGBTQIA+ people in youth curriculum is about acknowledging that there are many different people who exist in a community in order to support those children that otherwise feel ostracized. Representation is about saving children’s lives and livelihood. Some children may identify with characters that are represented and the hope is that if they do they have safe communities to support them as they discover and determine their identities, whatever that might be.

We also need to make a distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity here. Talking about gender identity has nothing to do with sex. In fact it’s way more inappropriate when people make conversations having to do with gender identity about genitalia. This is no one’s business.

Sexual orientation is something already talked about and represented to young children all the time, even at very early ages. For example, Disney princess movies; that conversation had when you and your best friend’s babies were born around the same time and you betrothed them; the question that

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Compilation of Resources and Information Gathered by Parents & Allies for Allies 2022

grandpa asks to your 3 year old about “her little boyfriend”; the wedding your child attended at age 5; and the times your kids see you and your partner kiss or caress are all examples of ways your children are being exposed to notions around sexual orientation. As we can see, kids are exposed to sexual orientation all the time. The problem is when they only get a limited view of the possible positive and healthy relationships that can exist.

There are clearly different approaches to talking about sex and a wide range of different ideas about how and when to do this. Exposing kids to the fact that LGBTQIA+ people exist, is not the same as telling kids about sex.

4. “Why does it matter that kids understand LGBTQIA+ people exist” What we are doing when we provide representation, is acknowledging the diversity that exists in humans and supporting people to be seen. It matters when children get to see representations of themselves and their families and directly correlates to better mental health outcomes. The kid that is LGBTQIA+ benefits when they get to see positive representations of themselves. The kids that are not LGBTQIA+ get to think of that kid as just another kid, rather than something to be feared.

Your kids may not be LGBTQIA+ but chances are they are interacting with kids who are or have family members who are LGBTQIA+. And the world is a better place when we can honor and accept that there are many different kinds of people and families. And in the case that your kid is LGBTQIA+, wouldn't you want them to feel comfortable and for them to know they are accepted and loved. We all want that for our kids.

5. "Can't adults just discuss themes of kindness and inclusion without referring to the terminology of “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” “transgender,” “queer,” “intersex,” and “asexual?” It is wonderful to start with kindness and inclusion of everyone. Kids are often the most accepting so helping them understand that there are many different types of people is an important lesson. Using terminology to identify people from an early age helps stigmatize those words. Even if children do not fully understand the terminology, it is helpful to hear it used in a respectful and supportive way. They will come in contact with LGBTQIA+ people whom are part of our larger community. When young children hear these terms they will not understand the nuances of what they mean (let's be honest, many adults don't either) but as they get older they can approach learning more about these identities without stigma getting in the way.

3. "But I feel ill-equipped to say these words. I'm not an expert. . . I was never formally trained at this so I'm going to mess this up." Making mistakes will happen. Everyone makes them. However, silence and tendency toward making LGBTQIA experience a taboo topic has historically been interpreted to mean the person is taboo and their existence is forbidden.

Engaging in this conversation CAN make adults feel uncomfortable. If you feel a bit of discomfort for discussing this with your children, just imagine the level of discomfort for the children who just want to exist, be recognized, and be affirmed for who they are. You are engaging in allyship in a way that LITERALLY SAVES LIVES. Silence can no longer be our default. We can ALL become more knowledgeable by investing time into self-education. It's important to know that if we DO make mistakes, we can continue to improve. Commit to ending the default silence even if it is at the risk of being uncomfortable.