gdhr | Growing & developing healthy relationships

Key messages

- It is important to **recognise gender diversity** in the classroom.
- There is a **difference between 'sex' and 'gender'.**
- **Gender refers to how someone knows themselves to be in regard to female, male, no gender or another gender.**
- Some other **terms to describe gender** include: transgender, cisgender, non-binary, gender diverse, gender fluid.
- **Models to help explain gender** (and how it differs from sexual orientation) are included.
- 75% of gender questioning young people **experience discrimination** - 80% of this happens **at school.**
- **Teaching tips** and ways to teach about gender diversity across the curriculum are listed.

Recognising diversity

When teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools, it is important to recognise the diversity in the range and variation of people's gender and sexual orientation. Teachers need to ensure that lessons cater for all students including those who are not heterosexual and cisgender.

It is common for people to confuse sex, gender, gender identity and sexual identity, but they are all very different things. (See: Sexual orientation and Intersex variations for more information)

The difference between sex and gender

The terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often used interchangeably, but the two terms are not equivalent.

Sex

When a child is born, they are usually assigned to be either male or female in accordance with the outward attributes and appearance of the baby's genitalia. This is referred to as the **sex assigned at birth** and it is usually recorded on the birth certificate as M or F. Some people call the sex assigned at birth '**biological sex'**, but sex assigned at birth may or may not align with complex biological, anatomical and chromosomal variations that can naturally occur.

Gender

Gender is about who we know ourselves to be, in regard to female, male, no gender or another gender. It is our internal sense of self, it is not determined by your body or what other people think your body should look like.

A person's gender can be the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g. when a person's gender is a female and their sex assigned at birth is female, or when a person's gender is male and their sex assigned at

birth is male) and this is referred to as being **cisgender**.

For some people, their gender is different to their sex assigned at birth (e.g. when a person's gender is male and their sex assigned a birth is female, or when a person's gender is a woman and their sex assigned at birth is male). This is often referred to as being **transgender**.

Some people don't feel like they identify with male or female, and may identify as **non-binary**, **gender diverse** or **agender**. Other people's gender identity changes over time and they may identify as **gender-fluid**.

Many cultures recognise and celebrate multiple genders and have a broader idea of gender beyond the binary 'male' and 'female' and have done so for many centuries. This map (external site) shows the societies around the world that have their own long-established traditions for multiple genders.

Gender expression

The way that people express their gender is unique to each person - what they wear, how they cut their hair, how they talk, walk and act. Quite often the way that the world sees someone's gender is based on the stereotypes and expectations that society, media and culture have assigned to being 'masculine' and 'feminine'. These stereotypes are limiting and potentially harmful and they are not an accurate reflection of human diversity and gender expression.

Almost all children begin expressing their gender at 2-3 years of age through their preference for particular clothing, toys and interests. If these expressions do not fit stereotypes and expectations, it may mean that a child is role playing as a normal part of developmental play, or it may mean that the child is simply not conforming to rigid gender stereotypes. It may mean that the child may be transgender or gender diverse. Most people's gender matches their sex assigned at birth, but for a small number, it does not. This is part of the natural spectrum of human diversity.

Gender stereotypes

Each culture has beliefs and 'rules' about how they think people should act when they are perceived as male/masculine or female/feminine. **Gender stereotypes** are the fixed and specific roles for males and females that are learned from a very young age by family, friends, teachers, leaders, religion, schools, workplaces, advertising, television, songs, movies, the internet, etc.

This stereotyping behaviour can include the colours we dress children in, the toys children are given, the sports which are encouraged, subjects studied in schools, and what interests and hobbies are pursued. The rigid application of stereotyping can have detrimental effects, such as people having false assumptions about others, their behaviour and how they believe people 'should' behave.

Children can be exposed to bullying and teasing when they are seen to not conform to gender stereotypes and expectations. Restricting what people can and can't do based on gender stereotypes only limits what they can achieve. It can affect a person's social, work and legal privileges. We want to maximise our students' potential and challenge stereotypes and discriminatory behaviour.

Key definitions

To follow are some descriptions of some common terms that are used to help understand some aspects of gender. It is important to remember that these are simple descriptions and, just as with all aspects of people's individuality and identity, the lived experiences of people who are gender diverse hold many more variations and self-descriptors.



Cisgender

Cisgender is used describe someone whose gender is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender

Transgender is used describe someone whose gender is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Sometimes you see the term gender diverse used as an umbrella term in place of transgender.

Transgender man / trans man

Someone whose gender is male and their sex assigned at birth is female.

Transgender woman / trans woman

Someone whose gender is female and their sex assigned at birth is male.

Non-binary

Non-binary is the term that includes people whose gender is not male or female.

Cisgender man / cis man

Someone whose gender is male and their sex assigned at birth is male.

Cisgender woman / cis woman

Someone whose gender is male and their sex assigned at birth is male.

Pronouns



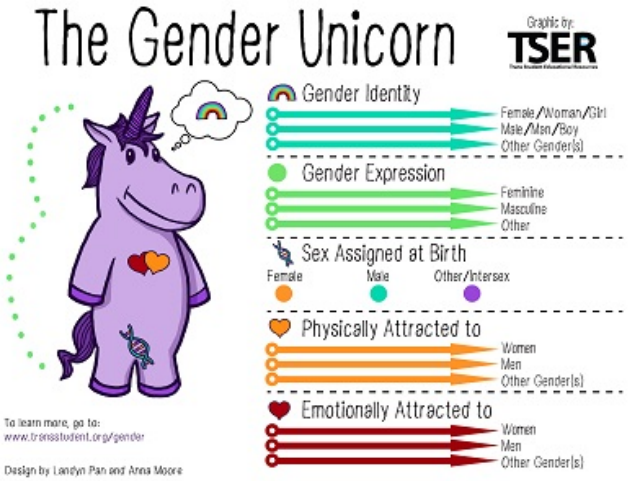
Pronouns are words we use in the place of someone's name. Some common pronouns include: she/her/her (typically feminine) and he/him/hers (typically masculine). Some people prefer gender neutral pronouns such as they/them/theirs. Using the correct pronouns (and names) shows that you respect that person and their identity.

People who are cisgender aren't likely to have given their personal pronouns much thought, but for someone who is transgender or gender diverse it can be a very important part of affirming their gender.

Everyone has the right to decide how they are referred to by others. Just as people choose to be called by their full name (e.g. Elizabeth instead of Liz), by a nickname (e.g. Bill instead of William), or as Miss/Ms/Mr, people also use the pronouns that affirms their gender identity.

It can be useful to think about how you would feel if someone called you the wrong name as pronouns are the words we use instead of someone's name - so being called the wrong name is like being called the wrong pronoun.

A model that can help to explain the difference between sex, gender and sexual orientation



- The Gender Unicorn (external site)

Experiences of trans people in Australia

When do people work out they are transgender?

Most children understand gender at a young age. From a study in the US of transgender adults, 58% began to realise their different was different to the sex before the age of 11.[1]

How many trans people are there?

It has been estimated that between 1.2% and 4% of Australian young people are gender diverse or transgender.[2, 3] This means that, in a school of 1000 students, between 12 and 40 students may identify as transgender.

What is the experience of trans young people in Australian schools?

Young people that identify as transgender can have huge difficulties at school – Do they feel safe to share their true gender with peers, other students, teachers? Will they be bullied or discriminated for sharing their true gender identity? Which toilets and change rooms should they use? What uniform should they wear? What if they go to an all-girls or all-boys school? Schools need to be conscious that there may be students in their school who may identify as transgender or be questioning their gender identity. These students may not feel safe expressing this at school (or home or both).

Discrimination

Transgender people may experience harassment or discrimination from people who are scared or uncomfortable with such identities. This is referred to as transphobia. It is the fear, hatred, disbelief, disrespect, exclusion or mistrust of people who are, or who are thought to be, transgender or gender diverse.

School can and should be a nurturing place, and there are lots of stories of young people being supported and celebrated in their identity, but schools can also be a place where young people experience bullying, exclusion and abuse.

From Writing Themselves In 4 - 67.7% of trans women, 74.3% of trans man and 65.8% of non-binary respondents said they unsafe or uncomfortable due their sexual orientation or gender in the past 12 months at an educational setting.[4]

The types of harassment and discrimination trans people reported experiencing at school include:

- discriminatory language
- social exclusion
- deliberate use of the wrong pronouns
- humiliation
- rumours
- online bullying
- written abuse
- graffiti
- verbal abuse
- physical abuse.[5]

The impact of this discrimination at school can lead to:

- inability to focus in class
- truancy
- poor academic performance
- self-isolation during break times for personal protection
- missing days at school
- complete disengagement with the school system.[5]

Discrimination related to gender identity can have a significant impact on mental wellbeing. The statistics are alarming, with

48% of transgender people having attempted suicide

and 80% having self-harmed in their lifetime.[6]

All school staff need to ensure that they are providing a safe environment for all of their students. There are many helpful services and resources that help support students, schools and families listed in the resource section below.

What do teachers and schools need to know about transitioning?

Transitioning refers to the steps a trans person takes to affirm or experience their gender to the outside world. This is often broken down into three categories.

Social transition: Changing your gender expression in social contexts. This is often the first type of transition someone does as it can be done "overnight" or without the need to get others involved. These include things like changing the clothing you typically wear, wearing make-up (or stopping wearing make-up), cutting your hair short or growing it out, changing the name or pronouns you use.

Legal transition: Changing your gender marker and name on legal documents.

Medical transition: With the support of medical professionals, seeking treatments to change your body to better align with your gender. These can include taking puberty blockers, taking hormones, or things such as seeing a speech pathologist to help make your voice deeper or higher.

Schools are not involved in legal or medical transition for a student. Schools are involved in the social transition of a student - for example calling a student by the name they want, allowing them to wear the uniform which aligns with their gender.

Teachers need to be particularly cognisant of how lessons on puberty and related topics might affect young people going through these potential challenges. As with all sensitive topics, it is best that teachers do not make presumptions about their students' life experiences - private personal information is not always shared and the challenges someone is going through are not always visible. See Teaching tips below for ways to deliver inclusive lessons and be a supportive school.

Further professional reading/viewing:

- You can’t ask that: Transgender (external site) 27min video from ABC (M-rating).
- Nevo’s story (external site) – 10.49 min video of a young person who is transgender.

Outdated, inaccurate or offensive terms

Although some people may use the following terms to describe their own gender, most of the terms are considered outdated, inaccurate and/or offensive:

Gender Identity Disorder - the preferred term is **gender dysphoria**.

Sex change operation - the preferred term is **gender affirming surgery**.

Pre-operative (pre-op) and post-operative (post-op) - terms to describe if a transgender person has had gender affirming surgeries or not. Many transgender people do not want or do not have access to surgeries. Focusing on whether someone has had surgery is invasive and a violation of privacy.

Transsexual - an older term that some people used to describe trans people and many find offensive.

Tranny - while some transgender people refer to their gender by this term, most find it highly offensive.

Teaching tips

- Remember that sex, gender, gender identity and sexual identity are not the same thing.
- Be aware and respectful of the potential gender diversity within your class/school. Be mindful that just because you don't know of any transgender or gender diverse young people in your school/class, does not mean that there are not any. It may be that they do not feel safe to share this at school (or home, or both).
- Ensure displays in the school show examples of people in non-stereotypical ways and promote diversity. e.g. men wearing pink, girls playing with trucks, male nurses, female firefighters, stay-at-home dads, male child care workers.
- Avoid unnecessary division of students into boy/girl groups or arranging seats boy, girl, boy, girl. See Teaching strategies: Grouping for ways to group students in a variety of ways.
- Replace binary language with more inclusive terms:

Instead of...	Try...
welcome ladies and gentlemen/boys and girls	welcome everyone/welcome teachers and students
attention boys and girls	attention artists/scientists/writers
ok boys and girls	ok year fives/class/team
both boys and girls like...	all genders like...

- Puberty can be a particularly challenging time for people who are transgender and gender diverse. Being mindful that some lessons may be triggers for young people and ensure that you have created a safe space with a group agreement in place.
- Try to use inclusive language. Using words that are not absolute can go a long way to helping all people to feel more included (not just people who are transgender or gender diverse). Use words like 'most', 'many' and 'some' instead of 'all' or 'everyone'. Regular reminders that there is a wide range of 'normal' helps too. For example,
    - "**Most** people with a uterus will get their period during puberty".
    - "Puberty can start as young as 8 for **some** people, for **some** it **may not** start until 16. **Most** people start puberty around 10 or 11."
    - "**Most** people with a uterus will then be able to make a baby."
- At the start of the year, invite ALL students to share the name and pronouns they use. You can include pronouns on name badges, email signatures, whiteboard, office door, student workbooks, etc.

- Teachers play an important role in modelling the correct use of someone's pronouns. If you make a mistake, address your mistake as quickly as possible and move on with the conversation/lesson. If you hear someone else make a mistake, quickly and politely correct them, and move on. For example,
    - "He was walking.... sorry, they were walking down the corridor."
    - "Sorry, Jo uses the pronouns they/them/their."
- Ensure that school forms provide a space for students to identify their gender and pronouns. A simple way to do this is to provide a free text box rather than a checkbox. For example,
    - Title:_____ First name:_____ Surname:_____ Gender: _____ Pronouns:_____
- Be aware that bullying, teasing and physical abuse for children and adolescents who express their gender in non-conforming ways can occur at schools. It is imperative that schools provide a supportive environment for these students and develop and implement policies and practices which do not tolerate teasing and bullying. Equal Opportunities Commission - Guidelines for Supporting Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools offer support and guidelines for this.
- Develop uniform policies that are not gender-based and allow all students to choose which uniform items they are most comfortable to wear (i.e. not stipulating skirts for girls and trousers for boys).
- Be senstive to the need for toilets and change rooms that are private and safe for transgender and gender diverse young people.
- Challenge gender-based put downs such as 'you throw like a girl' and 'boys don't cry'.
- Ensure that your students are aware of mental health and sexual health services that can support them:
    - School counsellor or school nurse
    - Kids helpline (external site)
    - Reachout (external site)
    - Headspace (external site)
    - Beyondblue - young people (external site)
    - Freedom Centre (external site)
    - QLife (external site)
    - TransFolk of WA (external site)
- Being an ally is about respecting individuals and allowing them to be the expert about themselves.
- Showing that you are an ally can be as simple as adding LGBTI+ stickers on your clipboard, notebook, door and displaying posters that show your classroom is a safe space (e.g. This is a safe space).
- Videos and resources that offer personal stories and perspectives of LGBTIQA+ young people are listed below. Educators should preview all videos prior to presenting them to their class to determine the suitability for their students (Department of Education Resources: Use of texts in education settings (external site)). These videos should only be used by educators who know their class well and have the skills to facilitate safe and sensitive discussions and activities. Resources such as these can bring up issues for viewers who are struggling with their own gender identity or experiencing bullying or discrimination. Teachers and other staff members in the room need to be aware of protective interrupting techniques, how to manage disclosures, and be familiar with school procedures/policies on how to refer young people who require further support.

Cross curricular ideas

English

- Persuasive writing/Debates
    - e.g. ‘Female AFL/football players should be paid as much as male AFL football players'.
    - e.g. 2 ‘Men should get as much parental leave as women’.
- Grammar

    - Look at the history of pronouns – How were they used in Shakespearean times? How does language change over time? e.g The story of 'you' (external site).
- Viewing
    - Explore the ways that media portray gender and how gender is marketed to kids. For example:
        - Compare the colours, text and practicality of clothing for boys vs girls
        - Why is there a boys/girls section of clothing and toys?
        - How do adverts/music videos/billboards reinforce stereotypes? Why do they do this?
- Examining and responding to literature
    - Some of the best gender positive children's books (external site)
    - Great diverse children's books with transgender, non-binary and gender expansive children (external site)
    - 8 books that teach kids about the fluidity of gender and the importance of acceptance (external site)

The Arts

- Drama
    - Allow students to play any part in school productions/assemblies, rather than roles based on gender.
- Music
    - Listen to songs that celebrate non-stereotypical gender roles and gender diversity. (NB: Songs and video clips often contains sexualised content that may not be appropriate for student viewing).
    - Look at music artists that challenge gender stereotypes and roles. e.g. Pink, Harry Styles, Prince, Miley Cyrus, David Bowie and Elton John
- Visual Arts
    - Explore artwork that explores concepts of gender.

Languages

- Explore the ways that different languages refer to gender. e.g. In French, pronouns, nouns and adjectives reflect the gender of the object they refer to.

Humanities and Social Sciences

- Look at the ways that gender is understood and celebrated in different cultures.
- Study places in the world that recognise third/fourth/multiple genders – map
- Explore historical figures who have challenged gender stereotypes and gender discrimination. For example:
    - suffragettes
    - women who have competed in 'male only' sports
    - men fighting for rights to use baby rooms to feed/change their children
    - sportspeople who identify as transgender.

Maths

- Create a graph or chart showing how many times adverts represent stereotypical gender roles versus non-stereotypical roles. Analyse what impact this has on society.
- Look at survey statistics on how many people identify as transgender or gender diverse.

External resources

For teachers

- Sexuality and gender-based bullying in schools - fact sheet for staff, Equal Opportunity Commission WA
- Supporting and caring for transgender children – The Gender Centre
- The Gender Unicorn is a graphic developed by Trans Student Educational Resources (US) which helps to explain the differences between gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, physical attraction, and emotional attraction.
- Guide for schools: Supporting and affirming gender diverse students - Transforming Families

For students

- Sexuality and gender-based bullying in schools - fact sheet for students from Equal Opportunity Commission
- Freedom Centre
    - Definitions for many terms related to diverse sexuality and gender can be found in the Glossary of the Freedom Centre website.
- TransFolk of WA
    - A statewide support for and by transgender and gender diverse people, also offering support for families.
- You're not alone - Info for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer and questioning young people, Freedom Centre

Related learning activities

- Reproductive systems
- Gender expectations
- Puberty part 2
- Reproductive systems revision

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