

What is gender identity and transgender?

Each person has a sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. Biological sex refers to bodily characteristics including chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. Sexual orientation is a person's internal sexual identity, or the gender identities that a person is attracted to relative to their own gender identity.

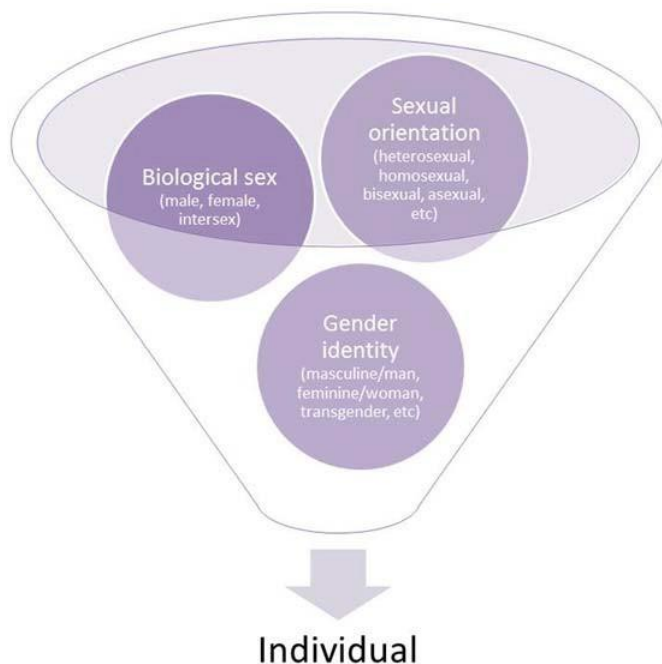


Figure adapted from the sex-gender-sexual orientation triangle. Marciano, n.d. www.transawareness.org

Gender identity

Gender identity is how a person identifies their gender, regardless of the sex assigned at birth. It is the inner sense of being a male, female, or somewhere in between these identities. Gender expression is how a person expresses their gender identity, or the characteristics (e.g. mannerisms, dress etc) that allow someone to identify

another person's gender. It encompasses a person's level of masculinity, femininity or androgyny.

See *The Genderbread Person v2.0* for a diagram explaining these ideas: <http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com>

Transgender

Transgender is a person whose gender identity, gender expression, or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with their sex assigned at birth. Related terms include gender non-conforming or third gender. Culture and religion may impact on gender identity, gender expression and preferred terms for transgender (e.g. sistergirls and Yimpininni in Indigenous Australians).

A child who exhibits transgender characteristics or experiences distress at their gender identity may not necessarily be transgender as an adult. For example some of these children may be homosexual, bisexual or express other gender and sexual identities as adults. From adolescence gender identities tend to be more persistent than during early childhood.

Being transgender differs from being intersex. Intersex describes a person with physical characteristics that vary from the conventional male or female characteristics, including variation in reproductive organs, chromosomes and other physical sex characteristics.

Why is it important to understand?

There is little data on the prevalence of transgender, although it is estimated internationally that around 1 in 20 per 10,000 people identify as transgender (Rosenstreich, 2013).

People who are transgender or experience difficulties with gender identity face substantial stigma. They may experience negative reactions and dismissiveness from others including their family, friends and peers, teachers, medical professionals, general community and the media. Many transgender people lead happy and healthy lives.



However, often people who are transgender experience bullying (by peers and teachers); social isolation; anxiety; depression; suicidal ideation and behaviour; and risky behaviour (e.g. risky sexual behaviour, use of drugs and alcohol).

Puberty can be a particularly difficult time for transgender young people as they have heightened body awareness that may highlight the difference between gender mindset and physical appearance.

What can teachers and schools do?

Schools should take an attitude that respects students' gender identity and expression. This includes:

- Developing a plan with the student and their family as a child transitions from one gender identity to another;
- Using a student's preferred name and gender pronouns;
- Respecting a student's confidentiality regarding gender identity and intersex conditions;
- Sensitive administrative practices such as official records relating to preferred names and gender;
- Evaluating accessibility to bathrooms and sex-segregated spaces (e.g. locker rooms); whether this is to create gender neutral spaces, single stall bathrooms, or allowing a transgender child to use the bathroom congruent with their gender identity; and
- Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of transgender students, including access to confidential counselling, and watching for, intervening in and preventing bullying by students and staff.

Regardless of whether a school community includes people who have identified as transgender, schools

should promote an attitude that encourages gender diversity and inclusivity.

Further Information

American Psychological Association. (2011). *Answers to your questions about transgender people, gender identity, and gender expression*. Available from: www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/transgender

Gender Centre: www.gendercentre.org.au

Gender Identity Australia:
www.genderidentityaustralia.com

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition:
www.masstpc.org/issues/education

National LGBTI Health Alliance: www.lgbthealth.org.au

Queensland Association for Healthy Communities:
www.qahc.org.au

Rosenstreich, G. (2013) *LGBTI People Mental Health and Suicide*. Revised 2nd Edition. National LGBTI Health Alliance. Sydney. Available from lgbtihealth.org.au/mindoutresources

Trans* Awareness Project: www.transawareness.org

Victorian Government, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2013). *Gender identity (students with transgender or intersex status)*. Available from: www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/health/pages/genderidentity.aspx

Zucker, K. J. (2005). Gender identity disorder in children and adolescents. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 1, 467-492.