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# The School Counselor's Role in Supporting Transgender and Non-binary Students

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# Learning Objectives

1. Recognize and use appropriate and affirming language;
2. Identify best practices for supporting and affirming all students;
3. Strategize ways to navigate pushback within your school and districts



# The ABCs of LGBTQ+

Lesbian

Gay

Bisexual

Transgender

Queer

and.....

**SOGIE:** Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression



# WHAT IS GENDER IDENTITY?

One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.



## Gender Identity

Who you **ARE**

## Sexual Orientation

Who you **LOVE**

## Gender Expression

How you **DO** gender

## Sex Assigned at Birth

**Cisgender** = when your sex assigned at birth (M, F in the U.S.) corresponds with your gender identity

**Transgender** = when your sex assigned at birth does NOT correspond with your gender identity



**Welcoming Schools**

# Other Terms

- **Sex assigned at birth** refers to the sex (male or female) assigned to an infant at birth based on external physical characteristics.
- **Gender transition** is the process by which some people more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with their outward appearance
- **Gender dysphoria** refers to clinically significant distress caused when a person's gender assigned at birth differs from their gender identity.
- **Gender-expansive** conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression that vary from expected developmental norms. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

A list of terms can be found [here](#)

# What is a Non-Binary Identity?

Non-binary is an identity embraced by some people who do not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between or as falling completely outside of these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender fluid.

A list of terms can be found [here](#)

## What We Are Taught

- Two sexes: male and female
- Two genders: man/boy and woman/girl
- A person's gender is determined by their assigned sex
- "Gender identity" is a new fad, and young people are making up new genders

## What We Now Know

- Even sex is a spectrum, and 2% of babies are intersex
- There are infinite gender identities
- Gender identity does not necessarily align with sex assigned at birth
- Transgender and gender-expansive people have existed throughout time and around the world; language is finally catching up

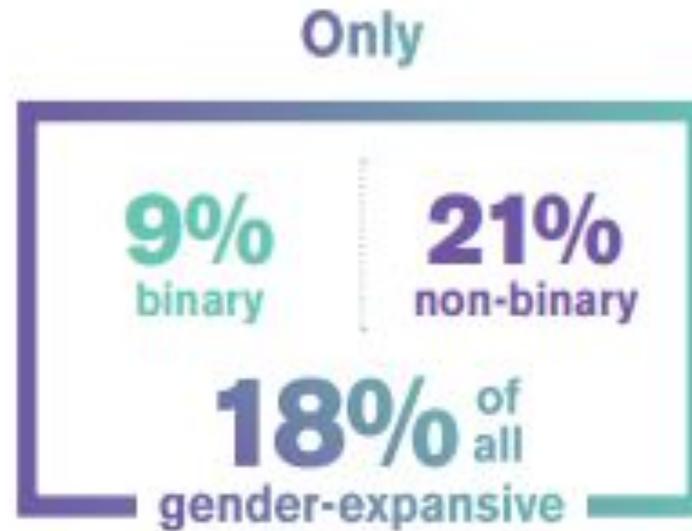


# Mental Health

- More than **half of LGBTQ+ youth (54%)**, **61% of transgender youth** and **61% of questioning youth** are battling symptoms of depression, compared to 29% of non-LGBTQ+ youth.
- **35% of LGBTQ+ youth**, **45% of transgender youth** and **40% of questioning youth** have seriously considered attempting suicide, compared to 13% of non-LGBTQ+ youth.
- **22% of LGBTQ+ youth**, **29% of transgender youth**, **32% of questioning youth** and **27% of LGBTQ youth of color** have attempted suicide, compared to 5% of non-LGBTQ+ youth.

Source: 2019 YRBS  
Data

# At School: Peer Rejection & Bullying



**youth are always  
called their correct  
pronouns at school**

Source: 2019 HRC Bi+ Youth Report, 2018 HRC Gender-Expansive Youth Report

# POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

"The American Academy of Pediatrics stands in support of transgender children and adults, and condemns attempts to stigmatize or marginalize them."

"Transgender children fare much better when they feel supported by their family, school and larger community."

"Although social experiences help to shape a child's gender identity, neither families nor professionals can change that identity, and trying to do so can be extremely harmful."



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# What does it mean? Gender-Affirming Care

- Gender-affirming care draws on various evidence-based medical interventions

As youth reflect on and evaluate their gender identity, various interventions may be considered to better align their gender expression with their underlying identity, such as puberty blockers, or once they reach the developmentally appropriate age, hormone therapy.

# Supporting Trans Identity in Youth

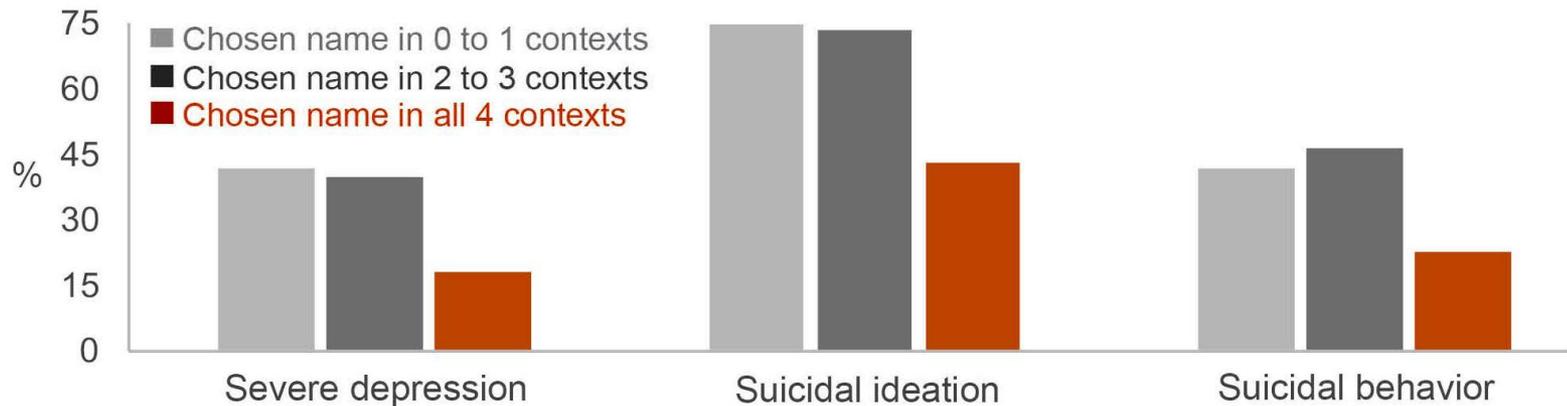
- “Gender Affirming” Approach
- Taking steps toward **transition\***

<b>Social transition may include...</b>	<b>Medical transition may include...</b>	<b>Legal Transition may include...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adopting gender-affirming hairstyles/clothing</li><li>- Changing name</li><li>- Changing gender pronouns</li><li>- Using different restrooms/other facilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Puberty blockers</li><li>- Gender-affirming hormone therapy (testosterone or estrogen)</li><li>- Gender-affirming surgeries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Changing gender and name recorded on birth certificate</li><li>- Updating school records</li><li>- Updating other legal documents</li></ul>

**\*Not all transgender or gender-expansive people medically transition, but for those who need to, it is critical!**

# Names and Well-Being for Trans and Non-Binary Youth

TRANSGENDER YOUTH WHO COULD USE THEIR CHOSEN NAME AT HOME, SCHOOL, WORK, AND WITH FRIENDS HAD THE LOWEST LEVELS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



Credit: Population Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin (2018)



# School Counselor Ethical and Professional Responsibilities

ETHICS



# ASCA Code of Ethics: Preamble

All students have the right to:

Be respected, be treated with dignity and have access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations including but not limited to: ethnic/racial identity, nationality, age, social class, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, **sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression**, family type, religious/spiritual identity, emancipated minors, wards of the state, homeless youth and incarcerated youth. School counselors as social-justice advocates support students from all backgrounds and circumstances and consult when their competence level requires additional support.

# ASCA Code of Ethics: A.1 Supporting Student Development

School Counselors:

f. Respect students' and families' values, beliefs, **sexual orientation, gender identification/expression** and cultural background and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity.

# ASCA Code of Ethics: A.8 Student Peer-Support Program

School Counselors:

e. Understand students have the right to be treated in a manner consistent with their gender identity and to be free from any form of discipline, harassment or discrimination based on their **gender identity or gender expression**.

# ASCA Code of Ethics: B.3 Responsibilities to Self

School Counselors:

i. Monitor and expand personal multicultural and social-justice advocacy awareness, knowledge and skills to be an effective culturally competent school counselor. Understand how prejudice, privilege and various forms of oppression based on ethnicity, racial identity, age, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, **sexual orientation, gender, gender identity expression**, family type, religious/spiritual identity, appearance and living situations (e.g., foster care, homelessness, incarceration) affect students and stakeholders.

# Legal Guidance

LEGAL



# Listening

- Active
- Affirming
  - Acknowledge risks, struggles, and barriers that they may be facing
- Identify areas of strength
  - School
  - Home
  - Peers
- Be mindful of potential risk factors
- Individual or group settings

# Visibility

- Safe Space Stickers/Posters
- Use of pronouns
  - Email signatures
  - Introductions
- Books and resources
- GSA

# Disclosure

- Coming-out process is personal
- To the highest extent possible, honor student's timeline
  - Reflecting
  - Considerations
- Understand the consequences of sharing this information

# Language

- Grouping students by gender
- Defaulting to heterosexual relationships

# Transgender, Non-Binary, and Gender-Fluid Students

- Call the student by their preferred name and pronouns
- Facilitate discussions with students and families to address:
  - Communication of gender identity, name, and pronouns based on student and family wishes
  - Identification of facilities aligned to the student's identity and wishes
  - Records changes and/or updates
  - Participation in any school-related activities that are traditionally delineated by gender

# Postsecondary and Enrichment Opportunities

- Support students in finding postsecondary opportunities that meet their needs as transgender, non-binary, or gender-fluid person
- Be knowledgeable about potential enrichment opportunities that can support student development
  - Summer camps
  - Local organizations
  - Support groups
- [Campus Pride](#)
- [LGBTQ Students](#) (NACAC)

# Connect

- Teachers
- Families
- Administrators
- Community resources

# MAKING CHANGE IN SCHOOLS

Be a visible ally

Professional development for school personnel

Engage with families

Advocate for GSA and other resources

Normalize pronoun use

# **STRONG LEADERSHIP IS KEY**

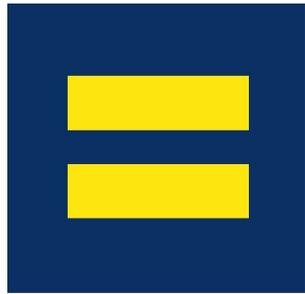
**A Systems Change Approach:** Creating a safe, inclusive organization for transgender (and all LGBTQ) members requires:

- **CLEAR POLICY:** explicitly trans inclusive
- **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS:** ambiguity leads to discriminatory behavior
- **CLEAR COMMUNICATION:** staff, members, students are taking their cues from leaders
- **STAY INFORMED:** build your confidence as a leader and set a tone of inclusion



# Youth Serving School Professionals Resources

- [Guide for LGBTQ Youth](#)
- [Online resources for LGBTQ youth](#)
- [Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#)
- [Tip Sheet for School Counselors](#)
- [Tip Sheet for School Social Workers](#)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children
  - [Anti-Bias Education](#)
- [WelcomingSchools.org](#)



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# Panel Discussion

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