

# Gender studies are for everyone!

Gender is much more complex than “boys” and “girls,” but not too complicated for students of any age to learn about. All students have a gender, express that gender each day, and are affected by gender stereotypes. You can use [GLSEN's Gender Terminology Visual](#) to explain these basic gender terms.

**Gender identity** is how you identify and see yourself. Everyone gets to decide their gender identity for themselves. You may identify as a girl or a boy. If you don't feel like a boy or a girl, you might identify as agender, genderqueer, nonbinary or just as a person. You may choose not to use any specific term to define your gender identity, or you may use a term today that you decide later doesn't fit. You have a right to identify however you want, and your identity should be respected.

**Sex assigned at birth** is the sex that the medical community labels a person when they are born. If your gender identity matches the sex assigned to you at birth, then you are **cisgender**. For example, if you identify as a girl and you were assigned female at birth, then you are **cisgender**. People whose gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth may be **transgender**.

Regardless of our gender identity and sex assigned at birth, people **express** their gender in a variety of ways. This includes the way that we talk, our mannerisms, how we interact with others, our clothing, accessories, hairstyles, activities we enjoy, and much more! You should never use a person's **gender expression** to guess their **gender identity**.

**Gender attribution** describes how your gender is perceived by others. This can change depending on the people you're around, the country you're in, or even the time period. For example, although we might consider dresses to be stereotypically feminine, ancient Romans wore dresses or “togas” regardless of their gender, and a man wearing one at that time would be perceived as masculine.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS:

- Take a moment to think about your **gender identity**. How do you identify today? Is this the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?
- **Gender expression** can be really fun when we give people the space to explore what feels good to them. There are so many different ways to show off our gender and ourselves.
  - What are some ways you are expressing or showing your gender today?
  - How might this change on a different day?
- There are **gender stereotypes** that try to tell us that people who identify as girls or boys should act and dress a certain way. For example, “girls like pink” or “boys don't cry.” These stereotypes can make people feel bad for the things they like to do and for being who they are. Even though nonbinary people aren't boys or girls, they may still be teased for breaking stereotypes associated with their sex assigned at birth or the gender they are perceived as being.
  - What are some ways that you break gender stereotypes?
  - How could you encourage your friends and classmates to express their gender in a way that feels right to them?

- **Cis-privilege:** The more all of these identities are aligned, the more **cis-privilege** you benefit from. For example, if you identify as a boy who was assigned male at birth, and your gender expression stays in what is considered “masculine” in your culture, AND you stay around people who perceive and read your expression as masculine, then your gender is not questioned. You might even get to move through the world without thinking about gender, being **misgendered\***, or feeling limited by gender stereotypes.
- What ways do you experience cis-privilege?
- What changes can you make to make your classroom or GSA more inclusive of transgender people?

## GENDER IS MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN “BOYS” AND “GIRLS.”

### WHY DO WE NEED SO MANY TERMS?

In case you or someone you know are wondering why we have so many terms when talking about gender, here are some talking points:

- We are a language-based society, and using language is the best way that we learn about new things with each other. If you’ve ever seen a paint strip in a hardware store, think about how many words we use to describe shades of one color. And that’s just paint, not people’s identities!
- Inuit people have 50 different words for that we call “snow.” That’s because it’s important to them. We need language to talk about gender and sexual identities because it helps people feel seen and validated when they fall outside of people’s assumptions.
- In addition, having the language to describe one’s gender identity outside of the gender binary is liberating and creates community among people experiencing gender in similar ways. We all have the right to have language to define ourselves.



Check out **GLSEN’s** [Gender Terminology Visual](#).

\***Misgendering** refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than one that a person identifies with. The essential thing to do after learning someone’s pronouns is remembering to use those pronouns when referring to that person. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun when identifying someone, please correct yourself in front of that person and begin using the right pronoun. Everyone makes mistakes, and making visible your work to respect and use someone’s pronoun after a mistake is an important moment to take. It is not the responsibility of the transgender or gender nonconforming person to address your feelings after you misgender them.