

# TIP SHEET: THE ABC'S OF SEX, GENDER, & GENDER IDENTITY

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENDER AND SEX?

- Although they have been used interchangeably, gender ≠ sex.
- **Sex** = assigned at birth and usually based on external anatomy.
- **Gender** = socially constructed, and based on behaviors and societal norms.
  - **Gender expression** = visual presentation of gender, like how they dress.
  - **Gender identity** = internal sense of who someone is and their gender. Gender identity is not visible.
- **Cisgender** people's gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth. For **nonbinary** and **transgender** people, their gender identity and sex assigned at birth are not the same.
- **Agender** people do not identify with a gender at all.

## ARE GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION THE SAME?

- **Sexual orientation** ≠ **gender identity**.
- **Sexual orientation** = the physical, romantic, or emotional attraction that someone feels for another person.
- A person's gender doesn't determine their sexual orientation.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE NONBINARY?

- For people who are **nonbinary**, their gender identity falls outside the two binary genders: male and female.
- Nonbinary individuals experience and express gender in many ways. There is **not** one definition or way to look.
- Some other terms include: **genderqueer, gender-fluid, gender expansive, and gender nonconforming**.
  - If you're not sure how your child describes their gender identity, ask! This shows you're willing to listen, learn, and affirm their identity.

## WHAT ARE PRONOUNS AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

- Pronouns are how we refer to people without using their name.
- Some common pronouns are **she/her, he/him, and they/them**.
  - **They/them** have become popular as singular personal pronouns, especially for nonbinary people. If they/them pronouns are new to you, you can read more about them [here](#).
  - Some people feel more comfortable using **neopronouns** like **ze/zir**.
- Using a person's correct pronouns shows respect and affirms their gender identity and experiences.
  - For transgender and nonbinary children, it can improve their mental health and self-esteem, as well as reduce negative physical health outcomes.

## HOW CAN I TALK WITH MY CHILD ABOUT THEIR PRONOUNS?

- Learn from your child and follow their lead. Listen to the ways they describe and refer to themselves. When unsure, ask questions. Also, be willing to do your own research.
- Some people are more comfortable talking about their pronouns and gender identity than others. If your child seems reluctant, don't push them to share.
- Before discussing with others, ask your child how they would like to be referred to so that you don't out them before they're ready.

## HOW CAN I BE A GOOD ALLY?

- Consider using your own pronouns when introducing yourself. For example, "My name is Madison and my pronouns are she/her." Include your pronouns on social media profiles, email signature, Zoom name, etc.
- If you make a mistake, apologize and correct yourself; we are all learning. The important thing is to keep trying.

## RESOURCES

- First Church Belmont Trans/Nonbinary Parenting Support Group. Contact [landerson@uu.belmont.org](mailto:landerson@uu.belmont.org)
- [OUT MetroWest](#)
- [Greater Boston PFLAG](#) parent support groups
- [Belmont Public Library's Pride Month Library Latest LGBTQ+ Memoirs](#)

### Main References:

- [Resources, Important Facts for Kids and Parents: Understanding Nonbinary Identities \(WBUR\)](#)
- [A Guide to Gender Identity Terms \(NPR\)](#)
- [I Just Feel Like Myself, A Nonbinary Child and Their Family Explore Identity \(WBUR\)](#)
- [Using a Child's Identified Pronouns Might Feel Complicated, But It's Crucial. Here's Why. \(Washington Post\)](#)