

TRANSGENDER CHILDREN: BEYOND THE MYTHS

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A Learning
Opportunity
for
Professionals
who work with
Young
Children



Parents of Gender Creative Kids - NL

MYTH #1: “HUMAN BEINGS ONLY COME IN PINK AND BLUE”

Gender Identity: an individual's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender.¹ Researchers do not know the exact origins of gender identity, but agree it is primarily biological and located in the brain.^{2,3,4}

Some people identify as women or girls, some as men or boys, others somewhere in between, as a combination of genders, or as no gender.

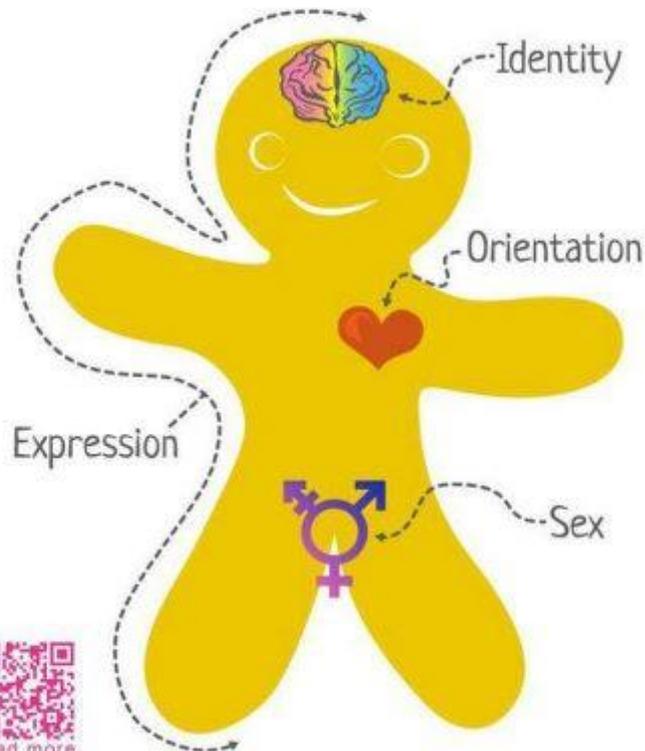


Gender diversity is
normal and healthy.^{2,4,5}

MYTH #2: “YOU ARE DEFINED BY YOUR CHROMOSOMES”

The Genderbread Person

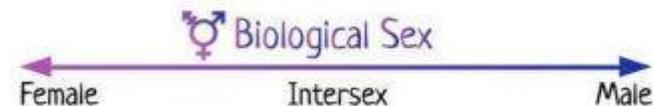
by www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com



Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It's the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.



Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.



Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.



Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.

MYTH #3: “BEING TRANSGENDER IS A DISORDER”

Transgender: a term to describe a person whose gender identity differs from what others expect of their assigned sex.¹ Some Aboriginal people use the term “two-spirited.”

Transgender children may also be called **gender-creative**, **gender-independent**, **gender-nonconforming**, or **gender-variant**.³

Once pathologized as a mental disorder, we now know that being transgender or gender-creative is simply a **normal** part of human diversity.^{3,5}

Transgender people existed throughout history and live today in all parts of the world.⁶

Researchers estimate that 1 in 300 people are transgender.⁷



DR. DIANE EHRENSAFT

Dr. Diane Ehrensaft, clinical psychologist, talks about the origins of gender diversity.

http://www.kidsinthehouse.com/teenager/sexuality/transgender/where-gender-non-conformity-comes?qt-more_videos=1#qt-more_videos

MYTH #4: “KIDS ARE TOO YOUNG TO REALLY KNOW WHO THEY ARE”



Transgender people have long described awareness of their gender identities from a very young age.⁸

Now, current research confirms that children become aware of their gender identity by the age of **3 to 5 years.**

It is often at this age that young transgender children try to express their sense of discomfort with their assigned gender.^{2,3}

MYTH #5: “IT’S JUST A PHASE!”



Yes, it could be. Many children experiment with gender occasionally in play or dress.



However, researchers estimate that 2-8% of children regularly express their gender differently from how others expect.⁹



Gender-independent kids who simply enjoy play or dress different from gender stereotypes usually continue to identify with their assigned gender. However, they may still need support to express themselves freely.^{2,3}



“BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A CHILD IS TRANSGENDER?”

There is no way to know for certain how *any* child will identify as an adult.⁵



However, a child may be considered transgender when they **insistently, consistently, persistently** identify as a gender other than how they were assigned at birth.^{2,3}

MYTH #6: “YOU SHOULDN’T ENCOURAGE KIDS TO BE DIFFERENT”

Interventions that try to force children to deny their gender identity are now considered **harmful and unethical**.⁶

Recent research shows that gender-independent children who are **pressured to conform** have higher rates of behavioural and emotional health problems than those who are supported and affirmed.¹⁰

A provincial study in Ontario revealed that the majority (57%) of transgender youth who lacked parental support had attempted

suicide in the previous year.¹¹ Strong support from parents reduced attempted suicide rates by **93%**.¹¹



MYTH #7: “KIDS ARE TOO YOUNG TO TRANSITION... WHAT IF THEY REGRET IT?”



Social Transition: Changing pronouns, name, clothing or appearance to better fit a child’s gender identity. Social transition can greatly improve a transgender child’s emotional well-being.^{2,3,5}

A small number of children who socially transition may later decide to revert to their assigned gender. However, if these children are supported, this second transition need not cause undue distress, but can be accepted as part of the journey of clarifying the child’s gender identity.¹²

Ultimately, there are no guarantees as to how a child will identify as they grow, but by **listening** to them, we can understand how to best support them for what they need right now.⁵

Children do best
if they are loved and supported for
who they are,
not for
who we expected them to be.

MYTH #8: “BUT I’VE NEVER MET A TRANSGENDER CHILD!”

You may have worked with young children for a long time without recognizing a transgender child.

Transgender children are an **invisible** population.¹³

Because of the lack of awareness of gender diversity in our society, transgender kids may not recognize their gender identity until later in life. Even when children are aware of their gender diversity, they may

hide their identities from their schools, communities, and even their families.^{3,14}



**AND IF YOU STILL THINK YOU'VE NEVER
MET A TRANSGENDER CHILD...**

MAY I INTRODUCE...

*(With gratitude to members of the confidential peer support group,
Canadian Parents of Transgender Children/Parents des enfants transgenres
canadiens, and their wonderful children!)*

Sofia, 5



Mathieu, 2



Ben, 11



Emery, 4



Sarah, 3½



Ryland, 6

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAHCqnux2fk>

BEYOND MYTHS: HOW CAN WE SUPPORT CHILDREN'S GENDER DIVERSITY?

- Respect every child's gender identity. Ask children's preferred pronouns and name, and use them.
- Support parents in affirming their child's gender identity.
- Develop a gender diversity policy for your organization.
- Use gender-inclusive language.
- Avoid dividing children by gender, e.g. into groups of girls and boys.
- Avoid gender stereotyping – e.g clothes are just clothes, not “boy's clothes” and “girl's clothes”
- Stand up to transphobia, homophobia, and sexism.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Gender Creative Kids Canada:

<http://www.gendercreativekids.ca>

Rainbow Health Ontario

<http://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca>

Gender Spectrum (U.S.)

<http://www.genderspectrum.org>

***Supporting Transgender and Gender Creative Youth (2014)*, by E. Meyer and A. Pullen Sansfaçon**

***The Transgender Child (2008)*, by S. Brill & R. Pepper**

***Gender Born, Gender Made (2011)*, by D. Ehrensaft**



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Parents des enfants transgenres canadiens

Gender Creative Kids Canada

and

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- 3 Ehrensaft, D. (2011). *Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Healthy Gender Non-Conforming Children*. New York: The Experiment.
- 4 Erickson-Schroth, L., Gilbert, M.A., & Smith, T.E. (2014). Sex and gender development. In Erickson-Schroth, L. (Ed.) *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*. (pp. 80-101). New York: Oxford University Press.

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- 7 Gates, G. (2011). *How many people are LGBT?* Los Angeles: UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute.
<http://www3.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/pdf/How-many-people-are-LGBT-Final.pdf>
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