

# TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

The following information is borrowed from

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Transgender is an “umbrella” term used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, and is used to refer to many types of people, including transsexual people; crossdressers; androgynous people; genderqueers; and other gender non-conforming people whose appearance or characteristics are perceived to be gender atypical. In its broadest sense, “transgender” encompasses anyone whose identity or behavior falls outside stereotypical gender expectations.

It is important to understand that some people may identify as transgender but not fall into one of the subcategories discussed here. This publication attempts to identify many of the ways in which transgender individuals identify and express themselves, but this listing is in no way complete. Furthermore, it is particularly important to realize that many individuals, despite the fact that they may appear transgender to some, do not consider themselves to be transgender. It is important that we not label people transgender based on our perceptions, but instead use the words they use to describe themselves. All people have a gender identity. Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female or something else. For most people, one’s gender identity matches the sex assigned to them at birth—for example, a person born female typically identifies as a girl, and later, as a woman. For many transgender people, there may not be a match.

All people also have a gender expression. Gender expression refers to all of the ways that people express their gender (or gender identity) to the outside world, including through dress, appearance, and behavior. For many transgender people, their gender expression doesn’t match what society thinks it should be. The following is an attempt to describe more specifically some of the ways of being transgender.

## TRANSSEXUALS

Some transgender people are transsexual, identifying psychologically and emotionally as a gender different than their assigned sex at birth. Transsexuals may desire to modify their bodies through hormones and/or sexual reassignment surgery in order to bring their physical appearance into line with their gender identity. The process of identifying and living in one’s new gender is called “transition,” and it may or may not include surgery and/or hormone treatment. Many people who would like surgery to alter their bodies cannot afford it or are not medically able to have surgery. “Transgender women” refers to transgender people who were born male but now live as women. “Transgender men” refers to people who were born female but now live as men. Note that not all people who transition from one sex to the other identify as transsexual.

## CROSS-DRESSERS

Cross-dressers are people who dress in clothing stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who have no intent to change their gender. Typically, cross-dressers cross-dress on a part-time or limited basis.

## ANDROGYNOUS PEOPLE, GENDERQUEERS, AND OTHER IDENTITIES

Androgynous people and those who identify as “genderqueer” typically have gender identities that are somewhere between what is stereotypically considered to be male and female. Other terms include “femme queens,” “bois,” “butch bois” or “drags.” They may be born as male or as female, but identify as neither now—or as a bit of both.

## GENDER NON-CONFORMING PEOPLE

“Gender non-conforming” refers to people whose gender expressions do not match stereotypes of how girls/women or boys/men are “supposed to” look and act. In reality, most people in general don’t meet all gender expectations and stereotypes either; almost nobody is perfectly masculine or perfectly feminine. The reason gender nonconforming people are included in the list of transgender people is that there are some people who identify as transgender but are not transitioning gender, and do not consider themselves cross-dressers, androgynous, or genderqueer.

## HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

Many people are confused about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity or gender expression. Some people believe that all gay, lesbian and bisexual people are transgender, or vice versa. In fact, however, sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct concepts. Sexual orientation refers to a person's attraction to members of the same sex or different sex—whether a person is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual. On the other hand, gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female or something else. Everyone has both a sexual orientation and a gender identity. The fact that a person is transgender says nothing about their sexual orientation. A transgender person may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

## GENDER IS AN INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

The definitions provided above are designed to make readers familiar with some basic concepts and terms often used to describe transgender people. Please understand that these descriptions are not complete. It is important to realize how much people can differ from one another when it comes to gender identity or expression. No two people experience their gender, gender identity, or gender expression the same way. For example, some Native Americans use the term “two-spirit” as the preferred term for a transgender person. Other people identify as “bi-gendered,” the meaning of which is different for different people. Language and terms relating to gender identity and expression are constantly changing.

## WHAT ABOUT INTERSEX PEOPLE?

Intersex people are distinct from transgender people. People with intersex conditions are born with sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system that are not considered “standard” for either male or female. Overall, there are at least 15 different medical causes of intersexuality, and only a small percentage of these cases result in ambiguous genitalia at birth. Other intersex conditions are learned of at the time of puberty, while still others appear later in life. Doctors perform surgery on one or two babies per 1,000 births in a misguided effort to “correct” ambiguous genitalia. The Intersex Society of North America, along with other groups, has exposed the fact that these surgeries are harmful to many intersex people and that performing genital surgery on infants is often not in the best interests of the child. Some intersex people identify as transgender if they were assigned one sex at birth but transition to the other later in life.

For more information about intersex people, go to Bodies Like Ours, [www.bodieslikeours.org](http://www.bodieslikeours.org), the Intersex Initiative of Portland,

[www.ipdx.org](http://www.ipdx.org), Intersex Society of North America, [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org), or Queer Bodies, [www.queerbodies.org](http://www.queerbodies.org) (specific to youth).

## SOME DEFINITIONS

**Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth, including but not limited to transsexuals, crossdressers, androgynous people, genderqueers, and gender non-conforming people.

**Transgender Man:** A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a man (see also “FTM”).

**Transgender Woman:** A term for a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman (see also “MTF”).

**Gender Identity:** An individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else. Since gender identity is internal, one's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.

**Gender Expression:** How a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics.

**Transsexual:** A term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth. Often, but not always, transsexual people alter their bodies through hormones or surgery in order to make it match their gender identity.

**Cross-dresser:** A term for people who dress in clothing traditionally or stereotypically worn by the other sex, but who generally have no intent to live full-time as the other gender.

**Transvestite:** A term for a cross-dresser that is considered derogatory by many.

**Genderqueer:** A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female. Genderqueer is an identity more common among young people.

**Gender Non-conforming:** A term for individuals whose gender expression is different from the societal

expectations based on their assigned sex at birth.

**Bi-gendered:** One who has a significant gender identity that encompasses both genders, male and female. Some may feel that one side or the other is stronger, but both sides are there.

**Two-spirit:** The definition of a two-spirit person varies across the Native American cultures in which they appear. In general, two-spirit people are born one sex, and end up fulfilling the roles assigned to both sexes, or other roles reserved for two-spirit people. Some people consider two-spirit a term that can refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, while others think it is best used only for transgender people.

**FTM:** A person who has transitioned from “female-to-male,” meaning a person who was assigned female at birth, but now identifies and lives as a male. Also known as a “transgender man.”

**MTF:** A person who has transitioned from “male-to-female,” meaning a person who was assigned male at birth, but now identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a “transgender woman.”

**Passing:** A term used by transgender people to mean that they are seen as the gender they self-identify as. For example, a transgender man (born female) who most people see as a man.

**Sex Reassignment Surgery:** Surgical procedures that change one’s body to make it conform to a person’s gender identity. This may include “top surgery” (breast augmentation or removal) or “bottom surgery” (altering genitals). Contrary to popular belief, there is not one surgery; in fact there are many different surgeries. “Sex change surgery” is considered a derogatory term by many.

**Sexual Orientation:** A term describing a person’s attraction to members of the same sex or different sex. Usually defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual.

**Transition:** The period during which a person begins to live as their new gender. Transitioning may include changing one’s name, taking hormones, having surgery, or changing legal documents (e.g. driver’s license, Social Security number, birth certificate) to reflect their new gender.

**Intersex:** A term used for people who are born with external genitalia, chromosomes, or internal reproductive systems that are not traditionally associated with either a “standard” male or female women.

According to [Safe Schools South Florida](#), national statistics state that:

- ← Gay and lesbian youth are two to six times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth.
- ← Over 30 percent of all reported teen suicides each year are committed by gay and lesbian youth.
- ← Fifty percent of all gay and lesbian youth report that their parents reject them because of their sexual orientation.
- ← Twenty-six percent of gay and lesbian youth are forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual orientation.
- ←  In a study of 194 gay and lesbian youth, 25 percent reported that they were verbally abused by their parents, and nearly 10 percent reported dealing with threatened or actual violence.

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**A Case Study:**

In ninth grade, Joshua began wearing skirts, nail polish, and makeup. He insists on being called “Amanda” instead of “Joshua” and being referred to as “she” instead of “he.” Some students are diligent about observing the requests, but others respond with bullying behavior, including insults, physical violence, and threats. “Joshua’s” teachers wonder if they are obligated to refer to “him” as “Amanda” and whether doing so would be in “his” best interest. The gym teacher has requested guidance as to which locker room “Joshua” can use and which would be most safe. “Joshua” has also asked to use the women’s bathroom, but other students have complained. The principal wonders if forcing “him” to stop this behavior would be a legal and effective way to address the bullying and other issues. There has been no communication from “Joshua’s” parents. “Joshua” begins to withdraw socially and show signs of depression, and “his” academic performance slips. The principal calls together the student support team to determine the school’s responsibilities and options for addressing the bullying issues, meeting “Joshua’s” facility needs, and addressing “his” mental and emotional health concerns.

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**Identity Development and Challenges:**

Transgender is an umbrella term for people who self-identify as other than their birth sex (male or female). The exploration of gender nonconformance occurs among people across all ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups. Transgender or questioning students may have unique challenges and stressors in their daily lives, including school. Often, educators and other school professionals can work with those students to address challenges and facilitate the students' safe participation in all school activities while supporting their exploration of or decisions about their gender identity.

### **Stressors and Special Needs:**

Because transgender identity can involve the presentation of one's body as a gender that is different than one's physiology, a transgender student may face body shame, ridicule, harassment, or violence. Changing names, pronouns, clothing, or appearance or pursuing medical services to physically transition can be difficult processes, but they can also be straightforward and affirming when pursued with the support and empathy of adult advocates, such as school professionals, mentors, and family members.

### **Identification Language:**

Many transgender individuals choose names that are more appropriate to their gender identity than their physiological sex. For example, a student born physiologically female may choose a male name and request that name and male pronouns (he/him) be used instead of his birth name and female pronouns (she/her). It is not uncommon for a student to choose a genderneutral name or request that pronouns be avoided whenever possible. It may become an administrator's responsibility to create a formal policy or to clarify existing policies to resolve any contention regarding a transgender student's right to use a chosen name or pronoun or dress in preferred genderspecific clothing. Administrators who are unsure of how to interpret certain policies or need help locating up-to-date legal information or best practices can contact national advocacy groups for guidance and resources.

### **Sex, Dating, and Sexual Identity:**

Transgender does not refer to a sexual orientation. Transgender youth may self-identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer (a word that is gaining popularity as a term for flexible, gender-nonspecific sexual orientation). Navigating sex and dating relationships is difficult for anyone and especially so for students who are exploring or questioning their gender identity. Peer support from existing friendships; diversity groups, such as gay-straight alliances (GSAs); and online Web sites for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth can be essential.

Culture and sexual identity. Both gender and sexual identity manifest uniquely according to an individual's culture and community. Transgender and gender-variant identities exist in all cultures, but the language used and the ways that transitioning or transgender identity manifests itself vary widely. Internet resource searches that combine cultural language with transgender (i.e., "American Indian" and "transgender") may help identify culture-specific language, history, and information. Effective services can be provided by focusing on the individual's needs and communities, rather than looking exclusively to published knowledge about the relevant cultures or identities.

### **Identify Exploration and Expression:**

Transgender or questioning youth may face frustrations, fears, and risks as they explore their gender identity.

Confusion and frustration. Although individuals explore trans-gender identity for highly individual reasons, many youth report a deep feeling of discomfort or a pervasive sense that their physiological sex is "wrong." These feelings can contribute to a sense of shame; isolation; body image dysphoria (dissatisfaction); depression; and, in particular, distress regarding gendered body development during puberty. Transgender youth may not have the language to express what their feelings may mean for their identity or role models to help them understand. Often, it is reassuring to hear about people in media or pop culture who are transgender or gender nonconforming.

### **Fear and Risk:**

Transgender youth may fear losing the acceptance or respect of their families, peers, and religious or cultural communities. They may fear losing current or future housing, financial support, medical care, or other essential services. Those concerns may compound an already stressful or confusing exploration of identity and may prevent youth from coming out or reaching out for the support they need.

### **Identity Disclosure:**

Transgender individuals may or may not choose to publicly identify themselves as transgender and may or may not choose to outwardly present themselves as the gender with which they identify. For example, a youth who was physiologically male at birth and who identifies personally as female may choose to use female pronouns and a female name; dress in female clothing, pursue medical services, such as female hormones (estrogen) or surgery to acquire female secondary sex characteristics; and make physical body changes to facilitate a female appearance. An other student might choose only some of those actions—or none at all—on the basis of what that student feels is necessary to feel healthy and whole or on the basis of limitations of services or support. Although minors may have difficulty accessing medical services without parental consent, other support services—such as transgender support groups and counseling—can provide essential, confidential mental health support even if a youth's parents are not aware that their child is

questioning his or her gender identity or are not supportive of the process.

**Role of Administrators:**

Administrators usually become involved when a transgender student reports bullying or harassment or when others complain about the presence of a transgender student at the school. It may become an administrator's responsibility to facilitate effective resolutions among all parties. This can mean providing intervention, discipline, new policies, or other support to prevent, discourage, or terminate harassment or bullying that targets a transgender student. It can also mean working with parents, students, educators, or community members to establish a norm of tolerance and respect for transgender students in the school and asserting that every student is entitled to and will receive the services that are needed to ensure his or her safety. To effectively provide those services, however, principals must evaluate their own beliefs about transgender students and gender non-conformance.

**Personal Bias:**

In a 2008 study done by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and NASSP of principals' perspectives regarding bullying in schools, administrators reported far fewer protections for LGBTQ students who experience bullying or harassment compared with the protections and resources that are available for students who are victimized because of their racial or religious identities (The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2008). In fact, principals reported that anti-bullying programs, education resources, and other support systems were the least inclusive of transgender students among all minority identities listed. Clearly, schools do not have the resources or policies in place to be effective advocates for transgender students. Negative attitudes about transgender inclusion, lack of funding, and lack of expertise or resources pose serious barriers to providing effective advocacy for and ensuring the safety of transgender students. Administrators can provide basic advocacy and support to transgender students simply through thoughtful and concerted efforts to use the administrative tools they already have. School psychologists and other health professionals can be instrumental in helping administrators, teachers, and staff members assess and overcome their own biases to provide a safe and positive educational experience for transgender and questioning students.

**Role and Responsibilities:**

Administrators are responsible for creating a backbone of support for students and staff members; ensuring students' rights and safety. All students deserve protection from harm and harassment at school, and any administrator equipped to provide such protection can effectively meet the safety needs of transgender students. Existing policies regarding bullying, harassment, and physical accommodation of students who are unable to effectively use school facilities can often be applied or easily adapted to address the unique needs of transgender or questioning youth. Students may face concerns about the safety of using such facilities as restrooms, locker rooms, showers, and pools or of adhering to school dress codes. They may feel subject to harassment in gendered spaces or they may feel that using a gender-specific facility (or wearing gender-specific athletic attire or uniforms) negates their gender identity. For example, a student who was physiologically female at birth but who identifies as male may feel uncomfortable or unsafe wearing a skirt as part of a school uniform and may fear harassment in both male and female-specific locker rooms.

**Providing Accommodations:**

It is the responsibility of school administrators to facilitate transgender students' full participation in school activities. Teachers and staff members are often willing and able to create effective arrangements and enforce them, but they will likely need support from administrators in the form of policies—and enforcement of the policies—that protect the student. Such accommodations may include creating a unisex restroom in the building or allowing transgender students to use a staff restroom or allowing students to use the nurse's office instead of gender-specific locker rooms.

**Facilitating Names and Pronouns:**

Many transgender individuals want to use names and pronouns that are consistent with their identified genders. Often, having a principal inform teachers and other professionals of a student's preferred name and pronoun change is an essential form of advocacy because students may be afraid, uncomfortable, or unable to request that their preferences be honored by their teachers, coaches, and other school professionals. Policy and policy enforcement, as well as professional development, can be essential components in the successful and smooth implementation of these practices. By setting a strong and clear expectation for compliance, administrators ensure that these practices are uniform and do not create conflict.

**Support Systems and Interventions:**

Presently, there is a dearth of quantitative research on transgender youth and their needs. Anecdotal evidence that has been provided by educators and social service professionals who work with transgender youth, as well as testimonials from transgender youth themselves, indicate that transgender youth need strong and diverse networks of support, including peers; other transgender people and role models; parents or adult mentors; and advocates, such as educators, adult community members, religious leaders, and transgender-

positive health care professionals.

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**Richland School District:**

The principal of Richland High School, in Cambria County, reports that a female student requested to be placed on the ballot for Homecoming King because she identified as male. The district refused in accordance with its policy and after consultation with its solicitor. The student then requested a change of policy and also of the policy governing bullying. Both requests were denied. No legal action was forthcoming.

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**Resources**

The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals. S. A. Brill & R. Pepper. 2008. San Francisco: Cleis Press.  
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender Issues Bibliography. National Association of School Psychologists & M. Ludeke. In Helping Children at Home and School III: Handouts for Families and Educators, A. Canter, L. Z. Paige, & S. Shaw (Eds.). 2010. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.  
Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Issues in Education: Programs, Policies, and Practices. J. T. Sears. 2005. New York: Routledge.  
The Principal’s Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment: A Survey of Public School Principals. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. 2008. Retrieved from [www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN\\_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/001/1167-2.pdf](http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/001/1167-2.pdf)  
Transgender Community and Ally Organizations (Online)  
Advocates for Youth [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org) Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)  
[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)  
National Coalition for GLBT Youth  
[www.queeramerica.com](http://www.queeramerica.com)  
National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) [www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org)  
Parents and Families of Gays and Lesbians (PFLAG) [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)  
Transgender Youth Support Network  
[www.transyouthsupportnetwork.org](http://www.transyouthsupportnetwork.org) Transyouth Family Allies [www.imatyfa.org](http://www.imatyfa.org)  
Hotlines  
LYRIC Youth Talkline: 800-246-7743 Monday–Saturday, 9:30 p.m.–midnight ET; peer talkline staffed by LGBT youth ages 16–24.  
National LGBT Youth Hotline: 800-246-PRIDE Monday–Friday, 8 p.m.–midnight ET; free and confidential peer talkline that addresses coming-out issues, relationship concerns, parent issues, school problems, HIV/AIDS anxiety, and safer-sex information.  
The National Runaway Switchboard: 800-RUNAWAY This 24-hour hotline for U.S. parents and youth offers crisis intervention, message service, educational information, referrals, and runaway searches.  
Peer Listening Line for GLBT Youth: 800-399-PEER Trained volunteers address safer sex, coming out, where to find gay-friendly establishments, HIV and AIDS, depression, suicide, and antigay and anti-lesbian harassment and violence.  
The Trevor Project: 866-488-7386 A free and confidential service that offers hope and someone to talk to, 24/7.  
Transgender Rights and Other Law Information (Online)  
American Civil Liberties Union, Know your rights!  
A quick guide for LGBT high school students: [www.aclu.org/lgbt/youth/28338res20070209.html](http://www.aclu.org/lgbt/youth/28338res20070209.html)  
Lambda Legal, Rights of transgender people  
[www.lambdalegal.org/our-work/issues/rights-of-transgender-people](http://www.lambdalegal.org/our-work/issues/rights-of-transgender-people); 212-809-8585  
National Center for Transgender Equity  
[www.nctequality.org](http://www.nctequality.org); 202-903-0112  
Transgender Law and Policy Institute  
[www.transgenderlaw.org](http://www.transgenderlaw.org)  
Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund  
[www.transgenderlegal.org](http://www.transgenderlegal.org)  
Transgender Health Care Information (Online)  
Many states and cities have transgender health organizations, projects, and provider lists for update information specific to your locale. A basic Internet search that includes your state and a search term like “transgender health” may bring up available local resources.  
Transgender Care [www.transgencare.com](http://www.transgencare.com) World Professional Association for Transgender Health [www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)  
Intersex Conditions  
The Intersex Initiative (IPDX) [www.intersexinitiative.org](http://www.intersexinitiative.org) Intersex Society of North America [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org)

Examples of Transgender People in Popular Culture (Online)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_transgender\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_transgender_people)