

Understanding Gender from Birth Through Adolescence

A Broader View of Gender

The idea that people are strictly “male” or “female” doesn’t capture the full picture of gender in today’s society. Gender involves a mix of anatomy, hormones, and cultural influences. Some young people don’t see themselves fitting neatly into “male” or “female” categories. For those who feel otherwise, it is not uncommon for them to face social rejection and be at risk for a host of negative health and psychological consequences. As parents, recognizing gender as a spectrum and supporting your son’s place on that spectrum is vital for his wellbeing.

Making Sense of Gender Terms

The language around gender can be confusing and is always changing. Therefore, it’s important to use the right terms to support your son’s true self. Below are some current terms.

Asexual: No sexual attraction to males or females but may still have romantic feelings.

Bisexual: Attraction to both males and females.

Cisgender: Gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth.

Gender Fluid: Gender identity that changes over time.

Heterosexual: Attraction to the opposite gender; often called “straight.”

Homosexual: Attraction to the same gender; often called “gay.”

Nonbinary: Does not identify strictly as male or female.

Pansexual: Attraction to all genders.

Questioning: Unsure about sexual orientation and exploring options.

Transgender: Gender identity does not match the sex assigned at birth.

In addition, selected gender pronouns that are chosen by individuals vary significantly and may be ever-changing. Some of those pronouns include he, him, his, she, her hers, they, them, theirs, ze, hir and others. If you are unsure about what pronouns are preferred, politely ask.

Supporting Your Child’s Gender Identity

Sexual orientation and gender identity are key parts of a young person’s self-perception. Not all young males are heterosexual or cisgender. Understanding this helps parents support their children through unique challenges. Open communication is crucial as is finding a healthcare provider who is experienced with issues related to sexual and gender minority young people.

Being Proactive

By being informed and sensitive to these issues, you position yourself to support your son in the best way possible. If you have any specific questions or need more information on how to support your child, feel free to ask a trusted healthcare provider.

