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SUPPORTING **GENDER DIVERSITY** IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNERS

Did you know that it is best to talk about all types of diversity in **early childhood**? Kids' brains are the **most expansive** during these early years of development! The more kids are exposed to and directly guided by adults to learn and **understand diversity** the more pieces of **human expression** and experience their minds will hold as they grow!



We know that by the time **kids are 5** they are beginning to show the **same gender biases** that adults have. Kids begin viewing certain genders and gender expressions as having **more positive value** than others. They are also beginning to apply these views to themselves.

Children who learn about **gender diversity early on** will experience **more comfort** with **gender differences** in themselves and others, and also experience **less gender bias** as they grow older.

WHAT IS GENDER DIVERSITY?

All children have a gender, which consists of two key pieces, **gender identity** and **gender expression**.

Gender Identity:

Is a **feeling you have in your heart** about whether you are a girl or a boy, not a girl or a boy at all, both a girl and a boy, in-between girl and boy, or another gender that feels right for you. Gender identity is invisible.

We can only know what a child's gender is if they tell us.

Gender Expression:

Are the ways we choose to decorate our bodies (e.g., clothes, hair) and express ourselves (e.g., mannerisms) to **show our gender identity to the world**. Gender identity and expression can mix and match. For example, some children may identify as a boy and also feel more comfortable with feminine gender expression.

There is an assumption that a child's sex is their gender as well but this is not always the case.

Cisgender: A person is cisgender when the sex they were assigned at birth matches the gender identity they feel internally.

Transgender: This is an umbrella term for individuals whose sex they were assigned at birth does not match the gender identity they feel internally.

Nonbinary: A gender identity in which a child feels in their heart that they are not exclusively a girl or a boy. A child who is nonbinary can be both a girl and boy, in-between girl and boy, neither a girl or a boy, or a unique blend of girl and boy that feels right for them.

HOW TO SUPPORT GENDER DIVERSITY AT SCHOOL

Gender Pronouns:

Gender pronouns are the words we use to call a person that **matches what they feel in their heart** about their gender identity. Some examples are: **"She/her," "they/them," "he/him," and even "ze/zir."**



"I am Mr. Jackson, my pronouns are **he and him**.

Let's have each student introduce themselves, if you like, **share your pronoun**, and tell us **something fun** about your summer!"



When the school year starts, consider providing students with the opportunity to share their pronouns whether on **forms**, during **roll call**, or **introductions**.

It is best for teachers to model!

Use gender free language when addressing students: Research shows that when teachers **call attention to gender** in even simple ways, such as the greeting, "Good morning, boys and girls" children are **more likely** to express **stereotyped views** of what activities are appropriate for "boys" and "girls" (Hillard & Liben, 2010; Russel, 2010).

**3 EASY
GENDER-NEUTRAL
SWAPS!**

GENDERED → **NEUTRAL**

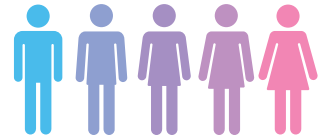
"You guys!" → "Friends" "Children" "Students"

"Listen up girls and boys!" → "Attention Everyone!"

"Boys line up here & girls here" → "Form two lines of 10!"

Gender Inclusive Bathrooms:

This provides children who are transgender, gender nonbinary, or gender nonconforming in their gender expression with a safe and comfortable bathroom option. **Ideally schools have an inclusive bathroom that is not the nurse's bathroom.**



Talk and teach about gender diversity in the classroom:

All early education schools should be talking and teaching about gender diversity. **This is not simply because they have transgender or gender nonbinary students, but because ALL STUDENTS ARE GENDER DIVERSE!**

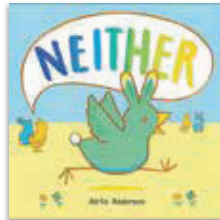
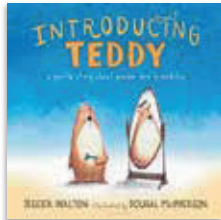
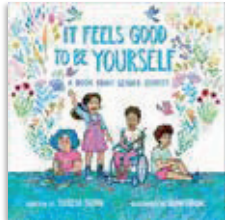
Each student has a gender identity and ways they express their gender that are unique to them. Early education on gender diversity creates great understanding resulting in greater tolerance for gender differences, it also **helps combat gender stereotypes across the lifespan.**

CLASSROOM TOOLS FOR DISCUSSING GENDER DIVERSITY

Check out Human Rights Campaign Welcoming Schools amazing curriculum!

<https://welcomingschools.org/resources/lessons>

Picture Books:



Teachers are the primary models for how other students should **treat and support** transgender or nonbinary students. It is important to use the child's correct pronoun and name and ensure that **other students** do as well.

Talking about **gender diversity** in the classroom for **ALL** students also helps to **increase the internal sense of safety** and support for transgender and nonbinary students **WITHOUT SINGLING THEM OUT.**

NAVIGATING STUDENTS' GENDER BIASES & CURIOSITIES

- + Young children are often curious and may ask about a transgender or nonbinary peer's body or private parts. Gently remind the student that **we do not talk about private parts at school** but that there are **many ways that genders and bodies can mix!**
- + If a child insists that their transgender or nonbinary peer's gender is their sex-assigned-at-birth, remind them that **gender is an invisible feeling** that each child feels in their heart. **We can only know someone's gender if they tell us.**
- + If a child expresses to another child that they should not play or show interest in a certain toy or game because only "boys" or "girls" should like these. Remind the child that **"toys do not have a gender."**



If school parents **disagree** with the discussion of gender diversity in the classroom, you can simply remind them that your school is one that **welcomes diversity** and that you seek to provide a **safe and accepting environment** for **ALL CHILDREN** including their child!

Remember...research shows us that schools that are diverse and who **intentionally talk about diversity** build confidence later in life, promote empathy, **reduces prejudice**, foster creativity and **improve student achievement!**

OTHER RESOURCES

Gender Spectrum: genderspectrum.org

Gender Inclusive Classroom: genderinclusiveclassroom.com

Human Rights Campaign Welcoming Schools: welcomingschools.org

If you have additional questions about supporting transgender and nonbinary students at your school, please feel free to reach out to Dr. Caroline Carter:

Email: caroline@drcarolinecarter.com

Website: drcarolinecarter.com

DR. CAROLINE'S GENDER DIVERSITY KIDS & FAMILY BOOK LIST (EARLY CHILDHOOD)

It Feels Good to Be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity, by Theresa Thorn

Bunnybear, by Andrea Loney

Meet Polkadot, Talcott Broadhead

Neither, by Airlie Anderson

Phoenix Goes to School: A Story to Support Transgender and Gender Diverse Children, Michelle Finch

When Aidan Became a Brother, by Kyle Lukoff

Who Are You?: The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity, by Brook Pessin-Whedbee

Red: A Crayon's Story, by Michael Hall

Introducing Teddy: A gentle story about gender and friendship, by Jessica Walton

Julián Is a Mermaid, by Jessica Love

From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea, by Kai Cheng Thom

Backwards Day, S. Bear Bergman

Every Body is a Rainbow: A Kid's Guide to Bodies Across the Gender Spectrum, Caroline Carter, PsyD

The Adventures of Tulip, Birthday Wish Fairy, S. Bear Bergman

Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope, Joddie Patterson

What Are Your Words?: A Book About Pronouns, Kathryn Locke

