



## What is Gender?

Gender is part of who we are. It includes how we internally feel (Gender Identity) and how we outwardly express ourselves (Gender Expression).

- Gender is not the same as sexual orientation.
- A person's gender may or may not be the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.
- The ideas around gender are formed by culture, time, place, and other intersecting areas of society. This is why it is defined as a "social construct".
- Some children know their gender early, some explore and express it over time.
- There is no right way to be any gender .

## Other Resources

**Caring for Kids - Information for Parents from Canada's Paediatricians (Gender Identity)**

<https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/gender-identity>

**Egale Canada - Supporting Your Gender Diverse Child**

<https://egale.ca/awareness/supporting-gender-diverse-child/>

**Gender Diversity in Children: A Resource Guide for Parents (McGill)**

[https://www.mcgill.ca/familycare/files/familycare/gender\\_diversity\\_in\\_children\\_resource\\_guide\\_for\\_parents\\_final.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/familycare/files/familycare/gender_diversity_in_children_resource_guide_for_parents_final.pdf)

**Rainbow Health Ontario - Brochure set on supporting and advocating for Gender Independent Children**

<https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/2slgbtq-health/rho-publications-resources/>

**Sherbourne Health - 2SLGBTQ+ Family Resources**

<https://sherbourne.on.ca/community-health-programs/2slgbtq-family-resources/>

**Today's Parent - An age-by-age guide to talking to your kids about gender**

<https://www.todaysparent.com/family/parenting/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-gender-age-by-age-guide/>

## Understanding Gender and Child Development

**Supporting your child's sense of self, belonging, and confidence**



**A resource for Parents and Caregivers**

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# Gender and Child Development

## Quick Facts:

- 1 Children are more likely to become resilient and successful when they are valued and feel that they belong
- 2 At young ages the more opportunity children have to play with all toys, hear many stories and perspectives, and explore gender and other areas of dramatic play, it increases their cognitive and problem solving abilities as well as empathy and social skills.
- 3 Children learn the social meaning of gender from adults, culture, beliefs etc. These are called “gender norms.”
- 4 Anyone (trans or cis alike) may not fit with every gender norm imposed from society.
- 5 Children who are trans are usually consistent and insistent with their need to be recognized for who they are.
- 6 Being trans is part of one's innate sense of self. No two experiences of gender identity development are alike. Some children may know from a very early age. Others may not have the language to articulate their sense of self until much later.

# Gender and Child Development

**Ages 0-3:** Children understand gender from the world around them. It is common to role play in many different genders, occupations, animals etc. Imaginative play is important and an essential part of development at this age.

**Ages 3-4:** Most children feel comfortable and can easily identify and express their gender, this goes for gender diverse children too. Some children's identities may be stable while other may change, even during the same day. This is normal exploration for this age.

**Ages 4 - 6:** Thinking can be rigid and binary at this stage and they will become more aware of stereotypes. Some children will have a stable gender identity at this age and others may change.

**Ages 7 - 10:** Kids begin to understand more nuanced concepts. Many children will continue to have a gender identity that matches their assigned sex at birth. Children who feel their gender identity is different may start to have increased anxiety.

**Ages 10 - 13:** Fitting in and being accepted is very important at this age. Pre-teens and teens will continue to develop their gender identity through looking inwards and outwards (friends, environment etc.) for input.



## How Parents or Caregivers can support

- Learn more about gender, children and youth, and also reflect on your own perception of your gender and what experiences have shaped that for you.
- Discouraging your child from expressing their gender can cause shame or confusion. Offer them unconditional love and support. This is not you shaping their gender, just accepting who they are and how they feel.
- Give children the language to be able to express themselves to you. Trust and respect them in who they are.
- Find spaces for you and your child to express your feelings and find community.
- Make sure the people around your child are respectful and know how to refer to them.

**There is no harm in trusting and supporting your child in who they are!**

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