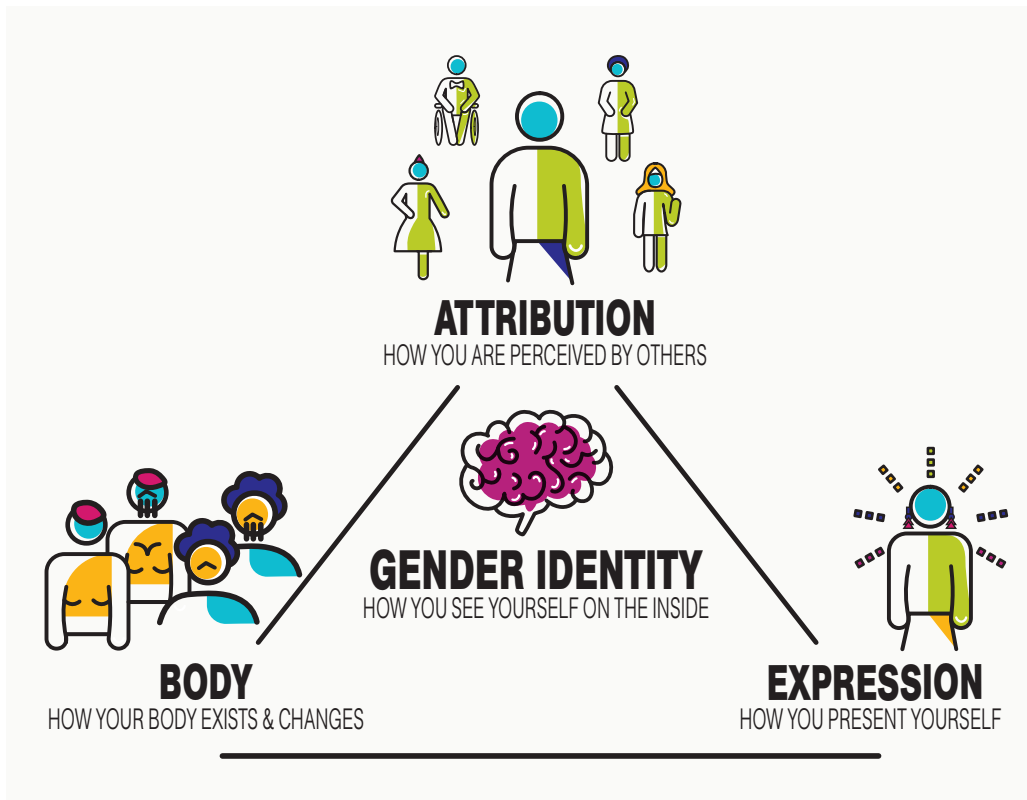


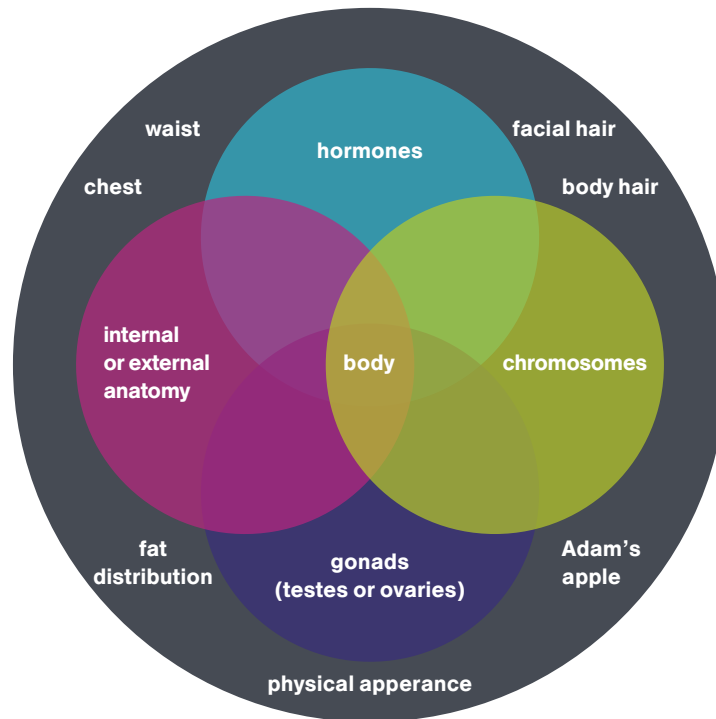
GENDER TRIANGLE EDUCATION GUIDE



GLSEN and **interACT** developed the **Gender Triangle** as an educational tool to highlight the main components that revolve around gender identity—our bodies, how we use our bodies to express ourselves, and how the world around us reads our bodies based on the cultural and social codes of our time and place.

First, everyone has a **BODY**. And how our bodies exist and develop over time is unique. Although ideas about gender are often imposed on our bodies—facial hair attributed to manhood or chest development to womanhood—these physical traits do not always inform our identity. Instead, assumptions are made because of how others interpret our **BODILY CHARACTERISTICS**. Upon birth, we are typically categorized into one of two genders (boy or girl) depending on how our genitals are read. Throughout our lives, however, our many bodily characteristics work together to create a unique path of development, causing some of us to grow really tall, and others to remain short, or some of us to grow hair under our armpits and legs, while others remain bare. While this development often happens on its own during puberty, this change can also be administered through medicine, such as hormone replacement therapy. Since our society often conflates our bodies (or genitalia) with our gender identity, it is critical that we allow space for people to self-identify. Some may feel that their bodies are distinct from their gender while others feel that the two are interrelated. Our bodily development is different, and so are our understandings of the relationship between our bodies and our genders. To learn about the different secondary sex characteristics and how they affect our bodies, study this Venn diagram from interACT:

SECONDARY BODILY CHARACTERISTICS



EXPRESSION is simply how we use our body to present ourselves. This includes the way that we talk, our mannerisms, how we interact with others, our clothing, accessories, hairstyles, what activities we enjoy, and much more! However, you should never use a person’s presentation to guess their gender identity. This is important because our gender expression is often guided by our feelings of safety or acceptance. As a result, there can often be incongruence between how we identify on the inside and how we express ourselves on the outside. Expression of our gender or selves, whether that be through hair styles, makeup, or personal fashion, changes over the course of our lives.

ATTRIBUTION simply describes how we are perceived by others. This can change depending on the people you’re around, the country you’re in, or even the time period in which you live. For example, although we might consider dresses to be stereotypically feminine, ancient Romans wore “togas” regardless of their gender, and a man wearing one would even be perceived as masculine. Due to cultural and generational differences, others’ interpretations of our bodies may not always match our internal sense of self, which can also lead to uncomfortable interactions. **MISGENDERING** refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than the one you are. One way to acknowledge someone’s right to self-identify is to ask for their **PRONOUNS**—the small words used in replace of names such as she/her, he/him, or they/them—rather than making an assumption. If you accidentally use the wrong pronouns for someone, make sure to correct yourself going forward.

Finally, **GENDER IDENTITY** sits the core of this triangle to demonstrate that gender identity is how you see yourself at your core. Everyone gets to decide their gender identity for themselves and this designation can also change over time. You may identify as a girl or boy, woman or man, or you might identify as agender, genderqueer, nonbinary, or just as a person. You may choose not to use any specific term to define your gender identity, or you may use a term today that you decide later doesn’t fit. Everyone can identify

however feels right to them, and our gender identity—as our internal sense of self—is indisputable.

The more all of these aspects align, the more you may identify as **CISGENDER** and experience **CIS-PRIVILEGE**. For example, if you identify as a boy with bodily traits and expression that are attributed to masculinity within your culture, then you experience privilege. Cisgender people often get to move through the world without thinking about gender, being misgendered, or feeling limited by gender stereotypes. Those who find tension among these four components, mainly the world’s perception of their body and their internal gender identity, may identify as **TRANSGENDER**. Transgender often serves as an umbrella term for myriad other gender identities such as nonbinary, genderqueer, or agender. In working with youth, it’s important to reflect on our own gender and consider the privileges we hold. Doing this is an important step towards understanding the many parts of our students’ identities to ultimately create safer and more affirming schools for all.

SELF-REFLECTION

Now that we’ve covered the main components that factor into gender identity, start thinking about how this all relates to you as an individual. The following questions will encourage you to self-reflect on your own gender in order to think critically about how each of these elements manifest around you:

- ▼ Take a moment to think about your gender identity. *How do you identify today? Is this the same as when you were a child?*
- ▼ Self-expression can be really fun when we give people the space to explore what feels good to them. There are so many different ways to present and express ourselves to the world! *What are some ways you are expressing or showing your gender today? How might this change on a different day or in a different setting?*
- ▼ There are gender stereotypes that try to tell us that people who identify as girls or boys should act or dress a certain way; i.e. “girls like dresses” or “boys don’t cry.” These stereotypes can make people feel bad for the things they like to do, and erases people who may identify or express themselves outside of the binary of masculinity/femininity or gender altogether. *What are some ways that you break gender stereotypes attached to the norms attributed to your gender?*
- ▼ The attribution of our gender identity by others is dependent on factors like culture, language, and age. *How does attribution change depending on what spaces you’re in and who you’re around? Can you think of moments when you may have read or addressed someone in a way that may not have honored how they identified on the inside?*

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!
EMAIL US AT EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG.