



## AFFIRMING GENDER IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: SOCIAL TRANSITIONING

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One of the first steps that all people—adults or children—take, if they feel their internal sense of gender and their sex assigned at birth do not match, is to socially transition. This means adults and children live their lives in a way that expresses their internal sense of who they are—their gender identity. A person may use a new name and/or different pronouns than before. Some might change their gender expression—wear different clothes or have a new hairstyle. Students usually want to—and have the right to—use facilities or join school activities that align with their gender identity.

### PLANNING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Social transitioning goes more smoothly for a student when school personnel and parents/guardians (when affirming) work together and maintain regular communication and check-ins.
- Assess steps needed for your particular school and district to become more gender affirming.
  - What will help transgender and non-binary students—and all students—to feel safe at school?
  - Do you need [professional development](#) or advice to understand gender transitions and develop specific steps that your school could take?
  - Who do you need to communicate with in your school or district?
  - What policies or forms need to be reviewed, such as dress codes, bullying and harassment policies and student information systems?
- Develop common language on gender and social transitions that educators can use when talking with parents, families and colleagues while maintaining confidentiality for students. Help people understand the [meaning of words](#) related to gender and transitioning.
- Have [resources](#) available for adults to help them understand transgender and non-binary children.
- Each student and each family have different concerns about privacy and confidentiality around social transition. Ensure privacy and share information with school staff only on a need-to-know basis. Legally, it should be handled the same as a medical issue under FERPA and a student's right to privacy.
- Educators should support students on their gender journey even if they do not have affirming family. School can be a supportive, affirming space for children to be themselves.
- Children are more resilient and able to cope when they feel affirmed and supported. Often, students who are transgender or non-binary have endured teasing and may not have felt safe to report it. Identify a safe person or people on staff for a student to talk to who will check in with them weekly while at school.
- Students have the right to talk about their transition with other students, but adults must carefully guard confidentiality. It is possible to have gender affirming schools without compromising the privacy of individual students.
- In school, it is the adults' responsibility to help other students understand transitioning and gender, not the student's.
- Identify key personnel responsible for answering more difficult [questions or concerns](#) parents and families may have and who can serve as a resource to others.
- If the media contacts your school or district, make sure that someone is prepared to respond and protect student privacy.

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## RESPECTING A STUDENT'S AFFIRMED GENDER

- Honor a student's pronoun and name. Discuss with the student and their affirming parents/caregivers what name to use on forms and which gender marker to check. (Note: ensure your forms allow students' gender identity to be written in rather than including only M or F as options.) Allow students and families to have the name that a student uses on lists that could be seen by other students or families, such as class lists, grade postings or seating charts.
- Ensure that students are welcome and safe to wear the clothes, hairstyle and accessories that reflect their affirmed gender.
- Be thoughtful about class placement for transgender or non-binary students. Take into consideration the classroom teacher's experience and training—in particular, their skills at developing a gender inclusive, welcoming classroom. Think about peer connections for the student.
- Be clear about restroom accessibility. Allow students to use the facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Have gender neutral restrooms available for all students who desire privacy for any reason.
- Avoid situations that force children to make gendered choices, such as lining up by boys and girls. Instead, divide students by last names, colors they're wearing or common interests.

## STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING A GENDER AFFIRMING SCHOOL

- Building a strong sense of community and a climate of acceptance in the classroom and school is a critical proactive strategy for creating a safe environment for all students, including those who identify as transgender and non-binary.
- Provide [professional development](#) for all school personnel—teachers, aides, counselors, administrative staff, bus drivers and cafeteria workers—on strategies to prevent and stop LGBTQ and gender based bullying.
- Educate adults in the school about the complexity of gender and the importance of gender inclusive classrooms for all students. Consider Welcoming Schools [training](#) on “Gender Inclusive Schools” and “Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students.”
- Adults in the school need time to practice and [be prepared for questions and put-downs on gender](#) with simple phrases to stop gendered teasing and bullying. Staff need practice intervening when students are limiting each other based on gender stereotypes, and they need to be ready to educate students on why it is wrong or hurtful.
- Listen for name-calling and [bullying based](#) on gender stereotypes, gender identity or gender expression, so that you can interrupt it and be clear that all students are welcome and respected in your school. Develop plans to have extra coverage in hallways, the playground and the lunchroom to monitor and stop hurtful teasing and bullying behavior.
- Work with the students in your school to help them think of ways to be allies when someone is teased or bullied for any reason. (See the Welcoming Schools lesson: [Making Decisions: Ally or Bystander](#).)
- [Talk with students](#) about the harmful effects of stereotyping and prejudice. Help your students see their potential to be all of who they are.
- Share with students [diverse books](#) with many gender identities and expressions. Use [lesson plans](#) to help students understand and discuss gender.