

A Quick Guide on Gender & Sexual Identity[©]

As humans, we like to label things. Labeling, or categorizing, the world helps our minds process the enormous amount of information that we take in regularly, and the people we interact with are no exception. We know people can categorize themselves in multiple ways (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, etc.), however this sheet will focus specifically on gender and sexual identity. We typically think of words as male and female, masculine and feminine, when discussing gender and sex. Below we will provide explanations of terms commonly used and how these concepts differ from one another.

Words to Know

Basic Terms

Sex: anatomical or biological makeup comprised of things like genitals, chromosomes, and hormones

Gender Identity: how you see yourself, your internal representation of your gender

Gender expression: the external display of one's gender through a combination of dress, behavior, social norms, and other forms of presentation

Sexual Orientation: the type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others. Generally labeled based on the gender relationship

Some Others

Intersex: term for a combination of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal sex organs, and genitals that differs from the expected patterns of male or female

Cisgender: a person whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity match

Transgender: a person who lives as a person of a gender other than that assigned at birth

Gender Variant: someone who does not conform to gender-based expectations of society

Non-Binary: a form of identity that refers to any gender identity that does not fall into the category of male or female

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "By age four, most children have a stable sense of their gender identity."

Gender vs Sex

Typically, in the United States when a baby is born the doctor determines a newborn's sex by looking at the external genitalia. If the baby has a penis they are labeled as male and if the baby has a vagina they are labeled as female. Sometimes a baby can be born with ambiguous genitalia (intersex), and a doctor typically determines which sex to assign the child.

After a newborn is assigned a sex, we assume the gender of the child aligns with this sex. However, not all individuals identify as the gender they are assumed to be at birth.

Gender is a complex interrelationship between our body, our identity, and our expression. An individual whose gender identity (their internal

representation of their gender) *does not align* with their sex assigned at birth is transgender. An individual whose assigned sex at birth *does align* with their gender identity is cisgender. Gender is personal, and can only be described and labeled by the individual experiencing it.

Gender expression is how an individual communicates their gender to others.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is typically labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to. Only an individual can label their own sexual orientation, just like gender.

Some common terms to describe sexual orientation are:

Straight: men attracted to women, women attracted to men

Gay: men attracted to men

Lesbian: women attracted to women

Bi-sexual: an individual attracted to both men and women

Asexual: an individual who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others and/or lack of interest in sexual relationships/behaviors

Pansexual: an individual who experiences attraction to members of all gender

Want More Information?

This guide is meant to be a brief introduction to these concepts, so if you would like to explore further please contact us at Children's Friend, we have a Gender Resource Specialist on staff specifically to help individuals learn more about these topics.

CHILDREN'S FRIEND, INC.

20 Cedar St

Worcester, MA 01609

Phone: (508)753-5425

Fax: (508)753-9625

<http://www.sevenhills.org/affiliates/childrens-friend>