



# U Choose to Know

May 2018

## Working with Youth Who Are Transgender and/or Gender Nonconforming

In our last digest, we talked about the importance of being an ally to youth who are LGBTQ. In this digest, we'd like to focus on how best to serve a group within that community: youth who are transgender and/or gender nonconforming.

Before we move on to tips for engaging with this group of students, let's clarify a few definitions. To be an ally to youth who are transgender and/or gender nonconforming, it's important to know what these terms mean and to be able to use them appropriately. GLSEN lays out these terms nicely:

**Gender** : A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles – codified as feminine or masculine – that are assigned to people, based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construct, it is possible to reject or modify the assignment made, and develop something that feels truer and just to oneself.

**Gender Identity**: How an individual identifies in terms of their gender. Gender identities may include “male,” “female,” “androgynous,” “transgender,” “genderqueer” and many others, or a combination thereof.

**Gender Expression**: The multiple ways (e.g., behaviors, dress) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.

**Cisgender**: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.

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### Why youth who are transgender and/or gender nonconforming need YOU as an ally:

Transgender youth don't feel safe at school. They experience bullying based on their gender often and report that school personnel rarely intervene. Almost all transgender students have been harassed verbally and more than half have been harassed physically.<sup>1</sup> Because of this shaming and stigma, many transgender youth lack access to sexual education programs and even medical providers who meet their needs. It is our job to ensure students' comfort and safety in our schools and classrooms.

**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity and/or expression is not aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth. “Transgender” is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a large number of identities related to gender nonconformity.

**Gender Nonconforming:** A descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

### Here are 5 ways YOU can be an ally:

1. Make all young people feel accepted and safe to express their gender identity. Encourage and support young people to wear whatever clothes they feel expresses their gender identity, and to challenge dress code policies that may restrict them. Part of making youth who are transgender and/or gender nonconforming comfortable and safe is protecting their privacy. A student who is “out” to you may not be “out” to other students, faculty, or even their parents. Be sure you ask the student if they are willing to share who knows that they are “out” and protect their privacy. (The only exception, of course, is if that student or other students are at risk of harm, since all teachers are mandated reporters).
2. Make it clear that you do not tolerate transphobic language, bias, or bullying. Address any incidents quickly. This includes comments coming from co-workers, principals, administrators, and even parents. Shut it down!
3. Be sure to use students’ chosen (i.e. preferred) names and pronouns. Ask all of your students at the beginning of the year what names and gender pronouns they want you to use, that way you aren’t singling any student out. Then, be sure to use them.
4. Allow access to gender-neutral bathrooms or faculty bathrooms for students who are transgender. A sex segregated bathroom can sometimes be an awkward or even dangerous place for students who are transgender and/or gender nonconforming.
5. [Make sure your GSA is inclusive of students who are transgender and/or gender non-conforming.](#)

### Extra implementation tips:

- Remember to facilitate using a trauma-informed lens, since students who are transgender and/or gender nonconforming experience more harassment and often trauma.
- Know basic healthcare protocols for transgender individuals. Learn more [here](#). This will help you teach in a relevant way for all students.
- Be sure you know about good [resources](#) (both medical and mental health) in your community specifically for students who are transgender, as not all providers are allies to the LGBTQ community.

### Keep Learning!

- [IMPACT: The LGBT Health and Development Program at Northwestern University](#)
- Check out [this privilege checklist](#) to better understand the experience of transgender youth.
- Make sure your classroom environment is welcome and safe by reading [ETR’s resource on understanding self-identify](#).
- Reach out to [The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Baltimore and Central Maryland \(GLCCB\)](#) for more resources.



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