

Tip Sheet: Talking to Your Class & Other Students About Gender Affirmation

Having a trans, gender diverse or non-binary student in class may require introduction and lead to questions from their peers. Whether it is a new student to the school, or a student in the process of affirming their identity, it is important to prepare for an age-appropriate, affirming and confidence-building discussion with the child's class.

This tip sheet is intended for cases when a student might be affirming their identity during the school year, or from one year to the next. It is natural for their peers to be curious about what this means and how to be inclusive of, and respectful towards their classmate.

In this tip sheet, you will find some tips, examples of situations, questions, or answers that can be used to help teachers start a conversation, deal with a range of queries and to help students understand how to be respectful and uphold the values of the school and the rights of all students while adjusting.

For parents and students, this tip sheet could be used to give you some ideas about how to prepare for a discussion, respond to queries from other students and to help your child's teachers.

Remember, trans, gender diverse and non-binary students have a right to, and deserve to be respected, report any bullying or harassment to the school.

Things for parents and carers to consider before speaking with a child's class or other students

- Do you want to be there for the conversation? If not, what information would you like the teacher to be sharing with the class? Perhaps you could prepare some speaking points for the teacher.
- If you are going to be there, will you say something as well or just let the teacher say everything? How will you prepare — will you write it down, like a letter or speech?
- Will you stay for the whole session?
- Do you want to answer questions from students?
- Would you like the conversation to be specifically about you or would you like it to be kept as a general conversation/lesson about gender diversity?
- Does it need to be a direct discussion regarding gender or can it be incorporated into other subjects discussed in class for example PE, Humanities?
- How would you like the teacher to follow up with the class about the conversation?

Suggestions for the Teacher/Adult Facilitating the Conversation

- Use a rights perspective when discussing why respecting the identity of the student is so important. You may be able to link this back to your school values and expectations.
- It might also be useful to have a member of the wellbeing team in the class for this conversation.
- Always focus on identity and expression, not body parts.
- Be prepared to have follow up conversations and sessions with the class. Make sure students know that they can approach you with questions after the discussion.
- Ensure that you check in with the student after the session and regularly from then on.

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Classroom Discussion Narrative

Begin the Conversation

- Set the scene and create space for a confidential and sensitive conversation. Use a meeting space that is usual for your class.
- Let students know that you are about to discuss something important that requires careful listening and thoughtfulness. Remind students of expectations/norms about respect.
- Start the conversation with something similar to: “A friend of ours has chosen to share some important information with you all, that person is someone that most of you know as _____. _____ would like you to know that they identify as trans/gender diverse/nonbinary.”
- Ask students if they understand what this means - allow this to become a conversation, and not just you informing them.

Clarify Students’ Understanding with the Following Explanations

- Trans/gender diverse/nonbinary means that a person’s gender identity differs from that which was assigned at birth. For example, a person who was assigned a female identity at birth may identify as male.
- In _____’s case, they have always identified as male but this didn’t match the female gender they were assigned at birth. By sharing this information with you, we are affirming their gender identity as male.
- It is not just about how a person expresses their identity — i.e. how they look on the outside or present themselves to the world — but about how they feel inside.
- Allow think time and avoid rushing through this — students may need some moments to process.
- Invite clarifications, but make sure students understand that it may not be appropriate to answer all questions (see notes below about how to respond to inappropriate questions).

Discuss What it Means for the Student, Our Class and School

- The first priority is to celebrate and support _____. It takes a lot of courage to share something so personal and we would like you to take a moment to recognise how brave this is.
- _____ would like you to know that he identifies as a male/as a boy and from today on would like everyone to use the pronouns ‘he/him’.
- His chosen name is _____ and he would like you all to start using this. You will hear all his teachers use this name from now on.
- You don’t need to do anything more than this and you can go about your interactions with him as per normal and maintain your usual level of friendship.
- _____ is exactly the same person you have always known — his personality, likes/dislikes/hobbies/sense of humour/skills haven’t changed.
- The best thing you can do is be inclusive and friendly — that way _____ will know you are being supportive without you having to say/do anything more.
- You can refer to _____ as a boy/male, you do not need to refer to him as a transgender male/boy.
- Maintain _____’s privacy — understand that he has willingly chosen to share this information with you, but it is not yours to share on. Use his name and his pronouns openly, but do not walk around sharing his confidential information. (But you should let students know that they can come and talk to you, or to their parents/carers if they have any questions).
- We will look out for _____ and make sure that people are being respectful and inclusive — tell an adult if you suspect that someone is being neither of those things.
- Allow time for thoughts and invite clarifications, but make sure students understand that it may not be appropriate to answer all questions (see notes below about how to respond to inappropriate questions).

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Pre-empt Questions from Students

What do I do if I accidentally say 'she/her' or use their old name?

- Don't panic: _____ understands it might take people a little while to get used to using a different name. • Try and correct yourself on the spot, if able to do so without making a big fuss.
- Help each other use _____ /he/him.
- Avoid making a big deal if you hear someone else you know use _____ she/her.

Am I allowed to ask _____ questions?

- If you think it's a question you would ask any other friend — then think carefully and go ahead if you're sure.
- If you think you wouldn't ask another friend the same question, then perhaps check with your parents or teacher first.
- If you wouldn't be comfortable with someone asking you the same question — don't ask it.
- Always ask yourself: do I need to know?

A student might ask if this means _____ is gay/or might be confused with the differences between gender and sexuality.

- You might need to clarify that gender identity and sexuality are two different things.
- Sexuality is about who you are attracted to.
- Gender identity is about how you identify — as a male or female or neither male nor female.

What to do if a student asks an inappropriate question?

- Remember it's natural for students to ask questions — if they ask something that we recognise as being inappropriate, avoid telling them off and instead explain why that question is not OK.
- Examples might be: what genitals do they have? What sexuality are they? etc.
- Refer students back to: 'Do we usually ask this information about each other?' No ... so we don't need to do so in this case either.
- A basic response to any inappropriate questions is to guide students to consider whether they would ask the same question of anyone else. If the answer is 'Maybe' or 'No', then it is perhaps best to stop and check the question with an adult.

Finish the Session

- I'm really proud of the way you have listened/shared your understandings during this conversation etc.
- Set high expectations: eg: we all know you will be supportive and confidential about this. We expect to see things continue as per usual, and we expect to hear stories of support and acceptance.
- This isn't a topic for conversation in the school yard or on social media - remember this is not your story/ information to share. You are a person who has been trusted to look after this information. Again, remind the students to come and speak to you if they have any questions.