

Gender Identity

Children usually begin to show interest in their gender early in life. At 2 to 3 years old, they see the differences between male and female bodies. Most children will call themselves either a “boy” or a “girl.” This may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth, and it may change over time.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Most children will identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Others may realize that their gender identity doesn't match their assigned sex. Some children may switch between calling themselves a “boy” and a “girl,” or avoid being labelled at all. All children may express their identity in creative ways.

This exploration of gender identity is a normal and healthy part of every child's development. And all children do best when they know they're loved and accepted for who they are.



DID YOU KNOW?

You can't tell a child's gender identity from their choice of toys or clothes. How a child expresses themselves (*gender expression*) does not necessarily signal who they know themselves to be (*gender identity*).

What is assigned sex?

The sex assigned to a baby at birth. When a newborn has a penis, the assigned sex is “male.” When a newborn has a vulva, the assigned sex is “female.” In rare cases, a child is born with external sex organs that are not clearly male or female in which the assigned sex is “intersex.”

What is gender identity?

Who a person feels themselves to be. A child may identify as a boy or girl – or they may not identify as either. Or they may be uncertain, and that's OK too.

What is gender expression?

How a person expresses themselves to others. This can include how they act, what they wear, how they do their hair and the name they choose to go by. Gender expression is not necessarily the same as gender identity. A boy may like to dress up in dresses, for example, but not identify as a girl.

What is transgender (*trans*)?

A person whose gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.

What is Two-Spirit?

A term used by many Indigenous people who have diverse genders and sexualities. Two-Spirit people were historically revered in most nations, and may have different roles, gifts, language and appearances depending on the nation they're from. Two-Spirit identity is very closely connected to Indigenous culture and spirituality, and this term can't be personally used by someone who is non-Indigenous.



HOW TO

Support healthy gender development in your child

- ✓ Love your child and be proud of them for who they are. Don't pressure them to change.
- ✓ Talk with your child about gender and show them examples of different gender expressions.
- ✓ Allow your child to wear the clothes and play with the toys they like.
- ✓ Show your child that people of all genders exist and live happy lives.
- ✓ Watch out for any bullying your child may face.

Finding Support

Many parents and caregivers have a hard time accepting that their child's gender identity may be different than their assigned sex. At the same time, a child who's worried about their gender may be depressed, anxious or have trouble concentrating. Transgender children may be especially uncomfortable with their assigned sex at the start of puberty, when their bodies begin to change.

For support in parenting your transgender or gender-creative child, contact:

Trans Care BC at 1-866-999-1514 or phsa.ca/transcarebc

Pflag Canada at pflagcanada.ca

Support is also available through:

- mental health professionals who specialize in the care of transgender and gender-creative children
- your family doctor or pediatrician
- Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Elders or leaders
- other parents and caregivers of transgender and gender-creative children



DID YOU KNOW?

There is nothing physically or psychologically wrong with your child if their gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.

