

Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other.

People often use the terms "sex" and "gender" interchangeably, but this is incorrect. Sex and gender are different, and it is crucial to understand why.

"Sex" refers to the physical differences between people who are male, female, or intersex. A person typically has their sex assigned at birth based on physiological characteristics, including their genitalia and chromosome composition. This assigned sex is called a person's "natal sex."

Gender, on the other hand, involves how a person identifies. Unlike natal sex, gender is not made up of binary forms. Instead, gender is a broad spectrum. A person may identify at any point within this spectrum or outside of it entirely.

People may identify with genders that are different from their natal sex or with none at all. These identities may include transgender, nonbinary, or gender-neutral. There are many other ways in which a person may define their own gender.

Gender also exists as social constructs — as gender "roles" or "norms." These are defined as the socially constructed roles, behaviours, and attributes that a society considers appropriate for men and women.

Gender identity

Gender identity is a way to describe how someone feels about their gender. For example, some people may identify as a boy or a girl, while others may find neither of these terms feel right for them, and identify as neither or somewhere in the middle. Although people often confuse them, gender identity is different from someone's biological sex or assigned gender at birth and from sexuality or who someone's attracted to.

While many people identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, for others gender is more of a spectrum, with lots of different possible identities. Gender identity is a personal feeling, and a child or young person will be the best person to know what matches how they feel. Children and young people can also question or feel unsure about their gender identity, or find that their gender identity changes over time. This is sometimes called 'gender fluid'.

Gender expression is how someone chooses to express their gender identity. This could be through the way they dress, speak or act. For example, by wearing dresses or choosing to shave. How someone looks or dresses does not always reflect their gender identity. Children and young people will feel comfortable expressing their gender identity at different ages and in different ways.

Types of gender identity

Some of the terms a young person or child might use to describe their gender identity are:

- **Trans or transgender:** this is when someone feels their gender is different from the gender they were assigned at birth.
- **Non-binary, gender fluid or gender queer:** this means someone doesn't identify as either male or female. They could identify as both, or neither.
- **Cisgender:** this is when someone's gender identity is the same as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Resources:

The gender spectrum

Coming Out – A handbook for LGBTQ young people

LGBTQ Voices

Understanding Gender

<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/understanding-gender>

Gender identity for beginners

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/LGBTQ-equality/gender-identity-beginners-guide-trans-allies>

A Guide To Gender Identity Terms

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/02/996319297/gender-identity-pronouns-expression-guide-lgbtq?t=1649348021182>

Gender identity

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sex-relationships/gender-identity/>

LGBTQ Voices

<https://apply.army.mod.uk/base/lessons/lgbtq-voices?cid=semp8367827837>