

A photograph of two young boys walking away from the camera on a stone path in a lush, green garden. The boy on the left is wearing a blue and white striped t-shirt and grey shorts. The boy on the right is wearing a light grey polo shirt and dark blue shorts. They are holding hands. The path is surrounded by various plants, including a large white-flowered plant on the right and a dark lattice fence in the background.

Creating Affirming Homes

VOLUME ONE

©2023 This series was developed by Abra Vigna, Ph.D. of Inner Compass Counseling and Consulting, LLC., on behalf of Dane County Human Services.

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Welcome!



We're so glad you are interested in being a foster parent! Caring for children is one of the most meaningful things we can do. It's also one of the hardest. Parenting has many surprises. No two children are alike, and just as our children are on a journey of discovery, we, too, are learning about ourselves as parents.

So much about caring for a young person will surprise you, delight you, and challenge you. To some degree, all parents struggle with how their children turn out different from their expectations. Sometimes, children don't like our favorite foods, don't care to follow in our footsteps as musicians or sports fans, and sometimes children affirm an identity we didn't expect.

In this series, we hope to prepare future foster parents to support young people as they grow to understand their gender identity and sexuality. While these two parts of the self are not linked, people often think they are. Both parts are considered private and public and are strongly influenced by our biology yet reflect our unique choices.



In this first volume of *Creating Affirming Homes*, we explain how gender and sexuality help us to understand how and where we fit in the community. Figuring out our place in the community is a critical developmental milestone of childhood. First, we will cover some terminology for understanding gender that may be new to you. Then, we explore the ages and stages of gender identity development. After that, we will explore how we teach children about gender. Finally, we will provide several ways to create a healing and nourishing home that is supportive of a secure attachment between you and your foster child. This is particularly important for foster parents because, on top of navigating all the typical challenges of growing up, foster children are also working to integrate and heal the trauma of being removed from their family of origin.

Making sure your home is welcoming and affirming to all the different ways children understand themselves is the best strategy for creating the safety needed to heal from the wounds of separation. This includes welcoming a child's racial identity, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

In the next two volumes of this series, we will zoom in on the tensions that emerge when children reach adolescence, take a deep dive in how to support your foster child to heal through trauma and lay out some strategies to care for the caregiver: YOU!

Children with nontraditional gender identities or expressions, and those who find the direction of their attraction to others is not purely heterosexual, are over-represented in the foster care system.

This means that as a foster parent, there is a good chance you will have the honor of creating a space of love and support for the young people who receive it least frequently out in the world. If this feels overwhelming—you're not alone! Feeling unprepared is the hallmark of parenting. In this booklet, you will find resources for you, too.



This series' third and final volume will cover resources for advocating for your foster children as they move through childhood and into adulthood.

The ultimate goal of this series is to help you understand how to show up for your foster kiddo and yourself when parenthood takes some unexpected twists and turns.


Why learn about all this?

Because we all need to be seen and understood, loved without conditions, and enjoyed by our caregivers.



And gender is one way we know ourselves and seek to be known by others. This series is designed to give you the tools to see and understand your young person with unconditional acceptance so you can more fully enjoy the journey of becoming a family.

By learning to see and accept your young person as they are in each moment, you build the foundation for a secure attachment. More importantly, your enjoyment of your young person as they are instills a sense that they are lovable and deserving of love, which is the greatest gift a caregiver can give a child.



**Section 1:
New words
& ideas**

Understanding every child's gender journey begins with understanding how bodies grow.



Everything that grows grows in its own way.

Although most of us have been taught that gender has a biological basis and that the human body grows one of two ways, the truth is much more complicated. As it turns out, some people born with a vulva and a vagina have XY chromosomes. Some people born with XX chromosomes develop full facial beards. And some people are born with XXX or XXYY chromosomes (See Appendix A & B for more detail).

Regardless of our genetic code, some people have little mammary tissue, and others have a lot. Some people's testicles are very symmetrical; some people's are not. Most mothers grow facial hair, but some fathers never do. Bodies are wondrous and don't fit neatly into one or two categories, but the conviction that we are supposed to harms all of us.

For example, Who feels entirely at ease with their body? Who has never compared their body parts to an idea of "normal" and feared they fell short? Few people are pleased with the shape or size of their chest, hips, or genitalia.

Western cultures' fixation on perfection and creating an ideal that few fit into means that folks whose bodies have shown the full expansiveness of beauty are often shamed into hiding their bodies, studied as a medical anomaly even though their bodies function just fine, and many have had their bodies changed in infancy or childhood without permission.

We now know that variation in how our bodies develop is normal, present in every species, and rarely requires intervention to live a happy, healthy, and pleasurable life. More importantly, we're learning how past interventions caused much more harm than they ever prevented.

To promote healthy gender development in children, it helps to understand how bodies develop, our long-held assumptions about what is normal, how these assumptions relate to gender identity, and how identity forms in each person's mind. Let's start with some terms used to describe these ideas.

Sex, Biological Sex, and Sex Assigned at Birth

Sex refers to a person's anatomy and physical attributes, such as external sex organs, sex chromosomes, and internal reproductive structures.

For most people, the anatomical traits we associate with sex develop in a way typically understood as male or female. However, sometimes testes have not descended, or the tissue that forms into either a penis or a clitoris is not clearly either. Sometimes the urethral opening is not at the tip of the penis but below it, like in a vulva. The variations go on and on.

When this happens in societies that believe you are either male or female (we call this a **binary** when only two options are allowable), doctors will declare the person intersex.

Intersex is an umbrella term for differences in sex traits or reproductive anatomy that result in bodies that don't neatly fit into binary options. Some intersex features are noticed at birth. Others don't show up until puberty or later in life.



Think of the sex spectrum like the color spectrum

“There’s no question that in nature, there are different wavelengths that translate into colors most of us see as red, blue, orange, and yellow. But the decision to distinguish between orange and red-orange is made only when we need it—like when we ask for a particular paint color. Sometimes, social necessity leads us to make color distinctions that otherwise would seem incorrect or irrational, as, for instance, when we call certain people “black” who are shades of brown or “white” when they peach-toned.

In the same way, nature presents us with sex anatomy spectrums. Breasts, penises, clitorises, scrotums, labia, and gonads vary in size, shape, and morphology. So-called “sex” chromosomes can vary quite a bit, too. But in human cultures, sex categories get simplified into male, female, and sometimes intersex.

Nature doesn’t decide where the category of “male” ends and the category of “intersex” begins or where the category of “intersex” ends and the category of “female” begins. Humans decide. Humans (today, typically doctors) decide how small a penis has to be or how unusual a combination of parts has to be before it counts as intersex.”

-former Intersex Society of North America

Intersex variations occur in all species, including in **1-2 out of every 100** human births!*

[*isna.org/faq/frequency](https://isna.org/faq/frequency)

There are many different ways someone can be intersex. See Appendix A & B for more details on the development of intersex variation. Click on the video below to hear about what it is like to be intersex:



<https://youtu.be/cAUDKEI4QKl?si=3cRv2jlxw5XmllH9>



Each body grows in its own way.

Most importantly, bodies grow in so many different ways that having only two options for describing them causes challenges.

Some people are easily labeled by their genitalia at birth and learn only later that their internal anatomy and or chromosomes don't match the expectations documented on one's birth certificate.

Yet, the sex indicated on our paperwork at birth (this is called legal sex) sets the course of options for us for the rest of our lives. Also, it is very hard to change if and when it turns out to be incorrect.



If you have a child who's intersex, the best thing you can do is support them and love them for who they are. It's also a good idea to find some support from other parents with children who are intersex and to make sure your child has opportunities to connect with other children who are intersex. An excellent place to start is [InterACT](#).

Why not just say, “biological sex?”



By using the phrase “assigned male at birth” or “assigned female at birth,” we acknowledge our gender categories are not bound to some predestined, easily identifiable biological sequence of development but instead that someone (often a doctor) is deciding for someone else.

Since our biology doesn't always fall into male/female categories, and we don't get to weigh in on the decision at birth, it is more accurate to describe our legal sex as assigned at birth.

Okay, so what's the difference between **Sex** & **Gender**?

Sex is the idea that people can be grouped by biological & physical characteristics associated with reproduction. As we've discussed, our differences are too varied to break us into two discrete groups.

Gender Refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and ways of dressing that a given society or culture considers normal for people based on reproductive potential.

Assigned Sex refers to what was put on your birth certificate (this is also called legal sex) and serves as shorthand for how your culture expects you to act based on your body.



Gender Identity is your internal truth about which gender category describes you and is not limited to two options.



Gender Expression is how you use your body to show the world your gender through your appearance and actions.

Gender Roles are the activities, interests, and behaviors a society attaches to a gender category. Sometimes, we don't realize we hold them.... until somebody violates them, and it seems "wrong." See Appendix C for more detail.



CISGENDER, TRANSGENDER, & GENDER-EXPANSIVE.

Words for navigating a binary culture.

The *cis* and *trans* prefixes come from Latin; you may recognize them from chemistry. *Trans* means “across” or “over,” whereas *cis* means “the same side.”

Many people feel that they are male and others female. Some people feel neither male nor female and choose other labels such as genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, gender fluid, or non-binary.

Some people’s assigned sex and gender identity are pretty much the same or in line with each other. These people are called **cisgender**.



Cisgender is an important word because it names the dominant but NOT the default experience. Individuals whose assigned sex and gender identity “match” rarely think about the alignment of biology and identity because they have the privilege of being considered normal by society.

Transgender describes people who feel mislabeled by their sex assignment at birth (i.e., assigned sex is female, but gender identity is male). For these individuals, there is a disconnect between how others perceive them based on outside physical characteristics and their internal sense of themselves. Note: “trans” is acceptable, but never “tranny”.

Non-binary is a term for people who don’t feel represented by male/female options. A trans person may also identify as non-binary. Non-binary is one example of a gender-expansive identity.

Gender-expansive is another term for people who don’t feel adequately described by the gender binary. These individuals may identify as both male and female or neither, or they may feel at home with their assigned sex but not with the expectations surrounding it.

TNG Is a popular acronym to refer to folks who are not cisgender. It stands for Transgender, Non-binary, or Gender-expansive.

Gender Expansive

Transgender

More likely to be distressed by their body parts, or need some sort of physical change to feel comfortable in their body

While all transgender children are gender-expansive, **Not all gender-expansive children are transgender.**

What does sexual orientation have to do with gender?



Sexual Orientation refers to how we claim the direction of our attraction. If we are sexually attracted exclusively to the same gender in a sex binary, this is considered homosexual, with some of the most well-known terms being **lesbian, gay, or same-gender loving**. If we are solely attracted to the opposite gender in a sex binary, this is considered **heterosexual** or straight. If we are attracted to both gender categories, this is considered **bisexual**. If we do not experience sexual attraction, we may describe ourselves as **asexual** or **ace**.



If we don't want to define our sexual or romantic attractions within the sex binary, we may choose words like **queer, pansexual, demisexual, same-gender loving**, and more.

Some TNG folks identify as heterosexual, some as queer, and others asexual.

Although many gender minorities are also sexual minorities, not all are. Many people think that if a person's gender expression is nontraditional, their sexual orientation and gender identity must be, too. Similarly, many sexual minorities are very comfortable within the sexual binary and are frequently told, "You don't look gay!"

LGBQ+ is an acronym to refer to an ever-evolving list of sexual-minority identities. It stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning and more. The order of identities and which ones are listed in the acronym vs the plus sign reflect racialized power structures within the queer community in the U.S. In other words, the most well-known terms are the words used in white communities, and the order of terms reflects power, too.



SOGIE are connected, but not dependent on one another



SOGIE stands for:

Sexual **O**rientation

The direction of your attraction to people (or the lack thereof)



Gender **I**dentify

Who you know yourself to be



Expression

How you show the world who you are

Contrary to popular opinion, our sense of self and interest in one another is rarely 100% solely feminine or masculine. Rather, research suggests that most people affirm both “masculine” and “feminine” traits and attractions. However, the balance of each tends to be as unique as each person. See Appendix B.

The Gender Unicorn (below) was created by [Trans Student Educational Resources](#) to help us understand that these aspects of our identity don’t exist on bipolar spectrums but that most of us possess different degrees of masculine and feminine (and androgynous) qualities and attractions.

THE GENDER UNICORN

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) are independent, yet most assume that if they know how a person identifies in one area, they know how they will identify in other areas.

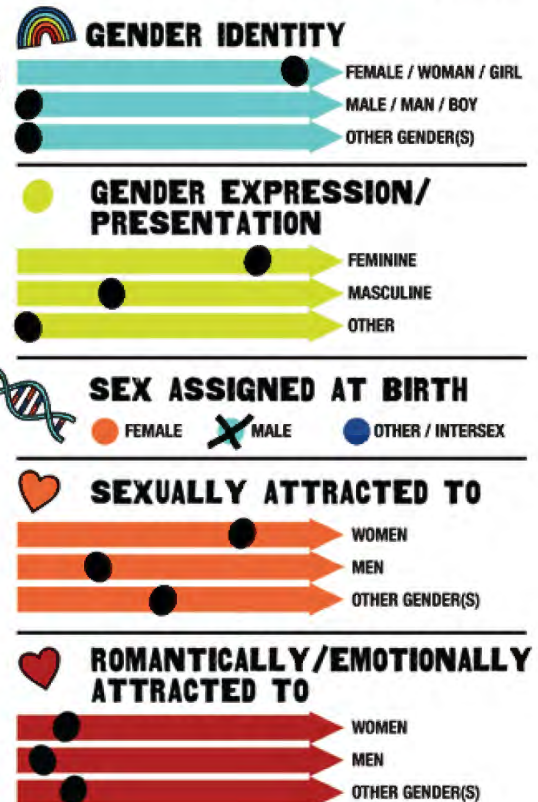


image: adapted: by 216teens, a website for families in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

Why are people of diverse SOGIE described as one group?

While getting grouped together does not help people to understand that sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression are NOT linked, there are three good reasons for referring to LGBTQ+ and TNG folks as one group.

1

All are mistreated for violating the gender binary and its focus on reproduction. So they rally together to be heard.

2

Because of this stigma, there is limited data. Many surveys don't dare ask about variations in sexual orientation or gender. Putting everyone in one group allows statisticians to make comparisons between LGBTQ+ and TNG folks and those who are not.

3

Similar environmental changes would improve the well-being of people that fall into either group.





Section 2:
**How gender identity
develops**

Gender understanding matures with us

As our bodies grow and change, our ability to understand and describe ourselves grows and changes, too



In neurotypical early childhood, we understand we are unique from our caretakers around age 2. At this time, we make our initial bids/demands for setting our own agenda for the day. The onset of a sudden, strong announcement of a conflicting opinion is known to many as the terrible twos.

As language expands, so does the ability to sort things into categories. Through this sorting process, we begin to understand the sex assigned to us at birth and whether or not it corresponds to our internal sense of being a boy, girl, neither, or something else.



By age four, most children have a stable sense of their gender identity.”

American Academy of Pediatrics

As we age, we typically know ourselves with greater detail and learn new words that better describe what kind of girl or boy we are or if we've never felt like we fit in either category.

When our internal sense of self does not match who others tell us we are, it is confusing and upsetting. Since exposure to language that gives a name to the diversity of gender typically comes later in life, many TNG people don't express (or even understand) their gender identity until they are teens or adults.



Early & Middle Childhood

As our brains grow and develop, the desire for the world to be more predictable and to know where one fits in it intensifies. This is likely why peer pressure to conform is the most intense in neurotypical middle childhood.

For cisgender children with traditional interests and self-expression, being in gender-specific spaces can bring a sense of ease. For TNG children, not fitting into their assigned gender space is physically painful.

Whenever humans are isolated from social support while managing pain, we suffer in ways that are visible to others. This is why children with diverse SOGIE are at a higher risk of struggling academically and emotionally.

In later neurotypical childhood/early adolescence, we either find our people and feel the joy of being known by a community or suffer in isolation.

Much like around age 2, adolescence is known for the turbulent process through which we sense our truth and explore how we differ from others.

Most of us spend time exploring us/them, thinking to make sense of the world. “I’m the sort of person who.... Would never hurt an animal...” vs. “....is a fantastic hunter.” Some teens view their own family as the “other” from which they define themselves, and others pick differences in identities to satisfy the need to differentiate.

Because of this pressure to conform and harassment when you do not, gender-expansive youth without sufficient adult support are at a much higher risk of self-harm and suicide than their gender-conforming, cisgender peers.

Those who don’t feel entirely welcome in gender-specific spaces have four choices.

1. They can suppress their differences and emphasize their sameness to satisfy the need to belong.
2. They can ask for help finding welcoming spaces.
3. They can go through steps to transition to another gender to fit into a space that feels like home. Or
4. They can withdraw from the world and self-isolate.

While each option has risks, suppression and withdrawal create abiding fears of one’s truth being known. Hiding oneself at all times leads people to feel alone even among companions.



Adolescence



As interest in romantic relationships and sex increase with the hormonal changes of puberty, so does the focus on one's SOGIE.

In adolescence, all people are driven to understand themselves better. Humans often do so by fixating on what we are not or sensing how we differ from others. For example, "I'm not a girly girl," or "Unlike you, I just *love* makeup!"

Sometimes, morals or religious beliefs are attached to these choices, adding a layer of anxiety to this developmental process. Now, in addition to figuring out who you are to yourself, you worry about where you belong in this life *and* the next.


You'll notice each new generation of teens create their own words to describe "in" or "out" groups based upon similar types of appearance (e.g., emo or goth), interests (e.g., sporty or nerds), music, and sexuality. There is a plus at the end of LGBTQ+ for this reason. Every generation the list grows.

Importantly, during high school, children have greater independence and so find themselves in increasingly risky situations, which they need the skills and trusted adult guidance to navigate safely.

It is for this time of life we need to build secure and trusting relationships with our children. How we greet their unique selves in early childhood lays the foundation for later trust or abiding distrust.

See Appendix F for a summary of gender across childhood, and go to volume two for a deep dive into adolescence.





**Section 3:
How we
teach kids
about
gender**

Kids learn about gender through objects



Children learn their culture's gender expectations by picking up patterns in the world around them.

Societal expectations of gender expression are reinforced in almost every area of life, including toys, colors, clothes, games, and jokes about people who don't fit into the norms.

It begins with the style of clothes and toys gifted at birth. It intensifies when we treat children differently based on their assigned sex: comforting boys less frequently when they cry, greeting little girls with compliments on their appearance, etc.



All children's play is communication, and the toys we provide to children are vocabularies.

Baby dolls and kitchens are a vocabulary of nurturing. Superheroes and action figures are a vocabulary of power. Train sets are a vocabulary of problem-solving, and so on.

Giving children only certain toys limits their vocabulary and expectations for acceptable interests and self-expression."

- Helen Hargreaves.



Kids learn about gender from what we uplift and what/who we put down



In binary societies, expectations for gender roles and expression are built on the belief that bodies were created to either carry babies or protect babies.

Under this assumption, things associated with nurturing life are considered feminine, and things related to ending life are considered masculine.

While there may be patterns of expression more common for one gender than another, these patterns are not biologically determined rules. See Appendix C for more detail on gender roles.

However, we know that an interest in caretaking is innately human, as is the desire to be seen and known in all our messy and cute ways.

People who don't express themselves in stereotypical "masculine" or "feminine" ways expected of their assigned sex— are considered gender nonconforming or gender creative.

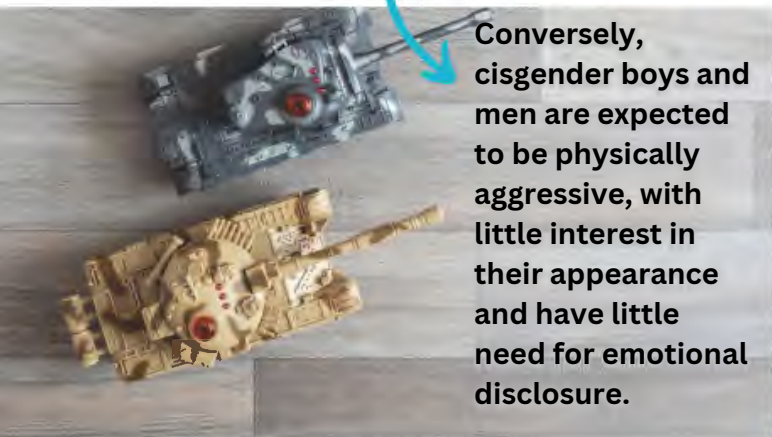
Since gender is more idea than biology, the **expectations differ across cultures and change within the same cultures over time.**



For example, cisgender girls and women are assumed to want to be mothers, have some innate capacity for caretaking & put everyone else first.



For example, in the 17th century, it was considered very masculine for wealthy, European white men to wear skirts, sport long hair or wigs, and wear visible makeup.



Conversely, cisgender boys and men are expected to be physically aggressive, with little interest in their appearance and have little need for emotional disclosure.

Today, any cisgender man in 17th-century masculine attire would be considered gender creative in the U.S. and would likely be made fun of.



Our word choices and story plots set the range of expectations and possibilities



Look for the stories under the stories

TV shows, movies, commercials, and other forms of popular culture often portray gender traditionally. For example, boys are shown as strong and adventurous, while girls are typically portrayed as pretty and passive or deferring to the boys around them. Meanwhile, gender-creative folks don't exist in most mediums.

Be curious. How often do girls solve the mystery or save the day? How frequently do people of different sizes, shapes, colors, and genders headline the adventure or love story? See Appendix D for a sample of gender-affirming books.

Modifying a title with female declares the norm to be male

Phrases like “girl boss” or “girl scientist” diminish an adult's accomplishment and communicate that it is considered unnatural or surprising for a woman to hold such a position.



The website Critical Media has a broad selection of examples of how we are taught gender in commercials and TV shows: <https://criticalmediaproject.org/playlists/gender/>

At age 5, children don't differentiate between boys and girls in expectations of 'really, really smart.'

But by age 6, girls were prepared to lump more boys into the 'really, really smart' category and steer themselves away from games intended for the 'really, really smart.' ”

If we don't proactively teach different messages to children about gender, they will simply absorb the messages out there – and we all lose out.*

Gender socialization is NOT BAD: it helps us understand and navigate the world.

It becomes a problem when the expectations of what is acceptable are not flexible enough to welcome all people.



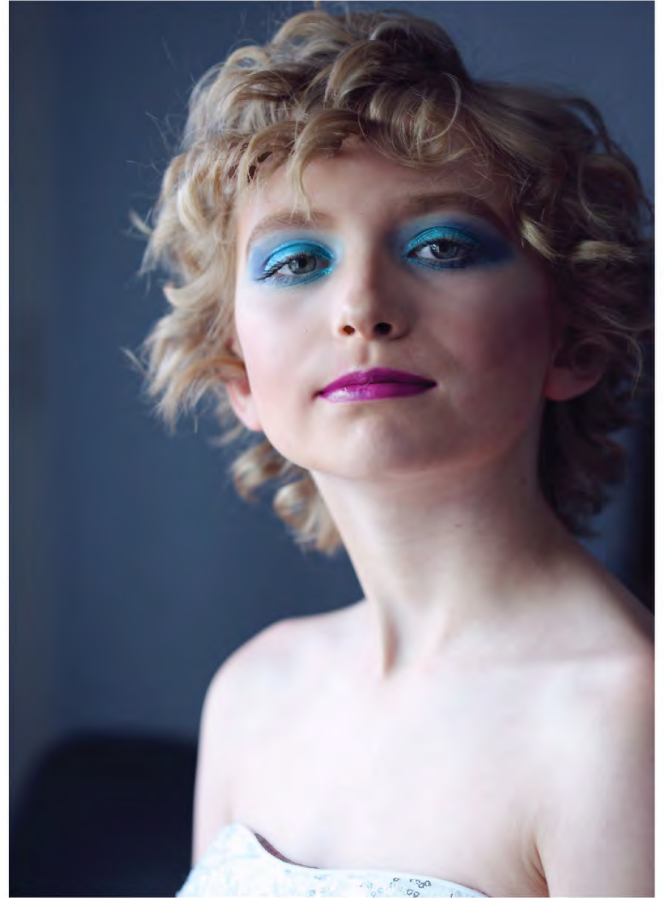
Kids learn about gender from how we (over)react to their play

Play is a language of learning and creativity. Until we become fluent in the language of our family, we process the world through our play. It's stressful to be separated from caregivers, so children will mimic caregivers leaving or set up "meetings" themselves as a way to discharge that tension. It is natural for young children to engage in activities that some people think as only appropriate for certain genders.

But an interest in dressing up, pretending to cook, getting dirty, or staying clean has nothing to do with our genitalia or innate sense of gender. Remember, the idea that only kiddos born with uteruses want to caretake and only those born without them want to be physically active or aggressive is a myth.

Doing things considered unusual for your gender group doesn't mean you are unaware of expected gender roles; it just means you are not yet fearful of living outside of them.

Even longer-term play preferences are normal and nothing to stress about. Think of a boy who prefers dolls and dress-up play or a girl who wears short hair and refuses skirts. These children, who are non-typical in their gender expression, were once labeled "tomboys" or "sissies" – and adults sometimes presumed they'd grow up to be gay or lesbian. Today, we know that how we play or dress is not a reliable indicator of current or future gender identity or sexual orientation in adulthood.



If a child announces that they are "now a dog/astronaut/boy" to you....

Instead of telling them they are being silly, greet them as they are and ask them about their day. This shows the child you take them seriously and won't dismiss them in the future.



So what does it mean when “cross-gender” play persists?

it’s important to remember that our bodies don’t actually make us more or less interested in the things a certain culture thinks of as “girly” or boyish.” This means there isn’t any truly cross-gender play.

That said, most kids are comfortable enough with the sex assigned to them at birth that they conform to gender norms about that sex early on. Some kids feel much more at home in their bodies when they don’t conform to these norms and feel more joy when they dress and act in gender-expansive ways. But they may not yet have the words to tell you how they want you to see or describe them.

Some gender-creative or expansive kids don’t feel at home in their bodies or how we’ve put expectations on their bodies and typically wind up identifying as transgender. Transgender kids are more likely to express a persistent discomfort or desire to be rid of their genitals or wish they’d been “born in a different body.” They might say, “I am...” rather than “I wish I were...”

Like all children, transgender boys and girls don’t always conform to gender stereotypes. For instance, a transgender girl may prefer to wear her hair short, and a transgender boy may maintain a love of sparkles and pink.

If your young person is insistent, consistent, and persistent about their gender in ways outside of societal norms, they may be telling you something.

Most gender-expansive children don’t say they feel they were born in the wrong body. Instead, they may say things like, “I’m a boy girl,” eventually finding the language names feeling at odds with the expectations the world places upon men and women. Some present themselves exclusively as a boy or girl, with names, pronouns, and appearances all typical for that gender. Some regularly switch their gender expression to match how they feel each day. Others “mix and match” traits, such as using their original pronouns while changing their dress.



Ok, but how common is it for a kiddo to be a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

LGBTQ+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer or Questioning, Transgender, Nonbinary, Gender Expansive, and more.

SOGIE = Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression.

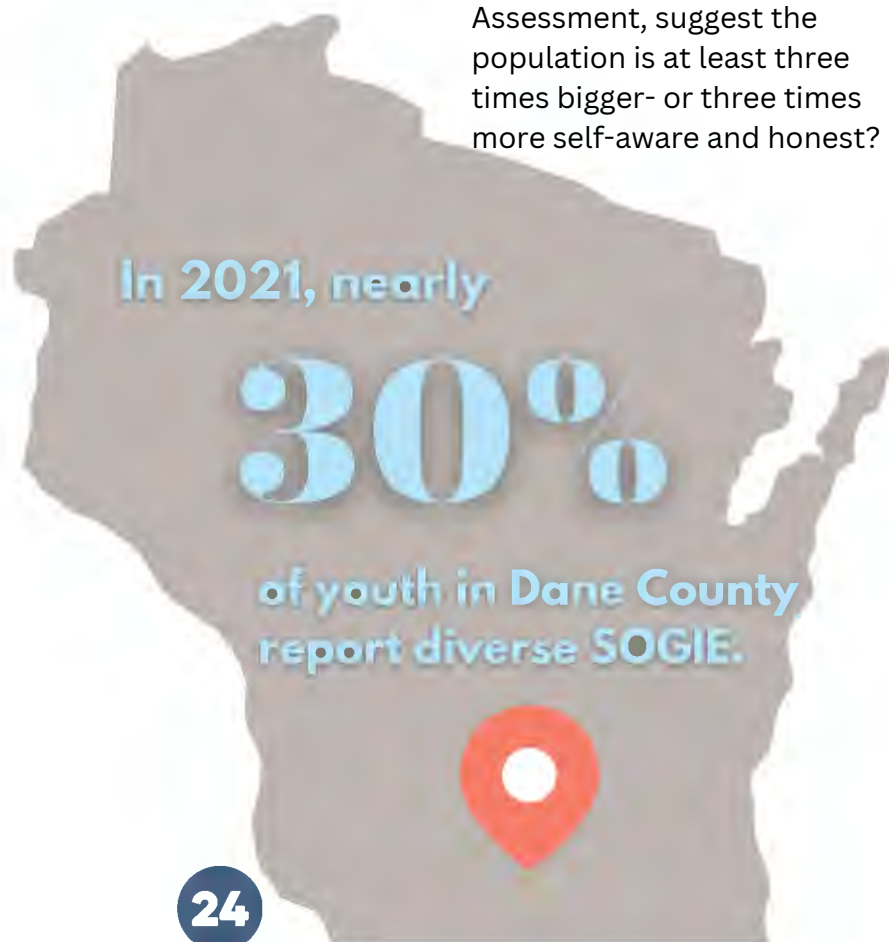
Even though we know sexual orientation is entirely independent of sex, gender identity, and gender expression, many people assume they are. This is probably because it's common for people to be both gender expansive and not heterosexual.

No one knows why this is. Survey research from the 1950s suggests most people are not strictly heterosexual in their attractions, behaviors, or identities, yet the myth persists that it is "normal" to be straight. This myth likely persists because people fear being excluded or hurt by others if they are honest, so they suppress these feelings and needs.

So, for folks who are already facing rejection because of how they dress, what more do you have to lose if you're honest about how you feel/who you like? Your family can't disown you twice, right?

As more and more places begin to collect data on SOGIE, we are seeing an uptick in the percentages of young people who report diverse SOGIE. This uptick supports the theory that variation in SOGIE is more common than we once thought and that people are becoming more truthful about it as they become less afraid of rejection.

For example, early population-level surveys of SOGIE estimated that anywhere between 5-10% of the general population experienced non-heterosexual sexual attraction, while only 2% identified as transgender. However, responses to more recent surveys, like the 2021 Dane County Youth Assessment, suggest the population is at least three times bigger- or three times more self-aware and honest?





**Section 4:
Creating a
Gender-Expansive
Affirming Home**

*Love
who
you
are*

All children in care need a safe place to process their grief, the freedom to express who they are, and the structure to support them in becoming responsible, healthy adults.

Creating a welcoming and affirming foster home for LGBTQTN+ youth is not that different from creating a safe and supportive home for any youth.





Caregivers often fear that others may try to hurt their LGBTQ+ or TNG young person.

This fear can make us hesitate to support LGBTQ+ or TNG young people for fear of their safety. But discouraging someone's authentic expression of self, encouraging them to change themselves to fit in, or refusing to allow a person to find others like themselves is harmful.

Because caregivers see these behaviors as loving or caring for a young person, they are often surprised to learn that their young person experienced these reactions as rejection or abuse.

The most important way caregivers or families can help an LGBTQ+ or TNG young person is by offering love and connection without conditions.

Every young person needs to know that the adults in their life have their back and that they do NOT need to do anything to earn their love. Such knowledge solidifies an abiding of self-worth and is the MOST effective way to prevent a young person from internalizing the message that they are defective or shouldn't expect to be treated with dignity and admiration.

This last section will provide guidance, tips, and best practices for cultivating a home that builds that sense that their life is treasured, no matter what they do with it, that they are enough, and that they are loved beyond measure.

I see you, and
I think you are great.

Nothing you say or do could
ever diminish my love for you.
Love only grows.



But their identity keeps changing!

Sometimes, a young person's SOGIE changes repeatedly. Or, the young person may behave very differently at school vs at home, express very masculine *and* feminine traits, or role-play as a girl one day and a boy the next.

Young people may come up with their own explanations, like being “a boy who likes girl things,” “both a boy and a girl,” or a “rainbow kid.” Some young people will always feel “in between” genders and may grow up to identify as non-binary, not exclusively male or female.

Because we are provided with limited language for gender and sexuality, it may take some time to discover or create the language that best communicates these internal experiences. This does not necessarily mean their gender has changed, but rather that the words for it are shifting.

Sometimes kids are just afraid to share their truth with YOU.

In multiple studies, LGBTQ+ youth reported being aware of their sexual orientation during elementary school but waited to disclose it until middle or high school.

There's no downside to trusting a child to know who they are.

Some young people don't question their assigned gender or presumed heterosexuality until adolescence. **The fact that it wasn't persistent or insistent since age two doesn't make it less real.**

Similarly, changing their mind doesn't change their need for support TODAY. Make sure every young person has what they need to feel at home in their body based on what they are experiencing each day. If the young person isn't distressed, your role is to affirm their gender expression: reassuring them that they don't need to worry about “boy clothes” or “girl things,” you'll love them however they share themselves and whoever they grow up to be.

If the young person is experiencing distress about the mismatch between their internal sense of self and how others interact with them, seek help. Find a gender-affirming specialist to help you navigate this distress so it doesn't become a toxic stressor. Your Dane County social worker is here to help you with this.

Remember, gender identity and sexual orientation are inherent aspects of a person's make-up. Individuals do not choose their gender or sexuality, nor can they be made to change it.

Prove to your foster child you don't sweat the small stuff and they'll come to you with big stuff.



A trusting relationship with a caring adult is one of the strongest protective factors you can offer. Young people who are confident they have a loving adult in their corner are less likely to self-harm, struggle in school, or abuse substances than are young people without a caring adult.

We teach each other how honest we can be based on our reactions to disappointment.

Our ability to remain calm, predictable, and kind when a child breaks the rules or behaves poorly shapes the young person's sense of self as inherently lovable.

By staying calm and kind when the disappointments are minor, you show your young person they can come to you for help or comfort when the stakes are much higher in adolescence.

Make your home a place where possibility is acknowledged and welcome



Model inclusive language as you navigate your world.

Use gender-neutral language if you haven't asked a person their pronouns. Ask about their friends rather than "girlfriends."

When corralling young people rather than calling out "ladies and gentlemen," consider something neutral or fun like "friends!" or "They-dies and Gentlethems!"

Inquire about their "adults" or "parents" instead of assuming they have a mom and a dad.

Discuss stories about gender as you encounter them to encourage perspective-taking.

While watching shows and reading books together, you'll have plenty of opportunities to show that you don't expect everyone to be the same way.

Provide language to name all the unspoken messages under the patterns in plots. Common unspoken messages we internalize through the identities selected to tell a story include the myths that girls are not natural leaders, boys are not natural nurturers, Black people are dangerous, Jewish people are cheap, etc.

If you hear slurs or stereotypes repeated in your home, ask your young person what they mean and explain what you heard. Then, offer alternatives.

INSTEAD OF...

Sister/Brother

Daughter/Son

Niece/Nephew

**Granddaughter/
Grandson**

TRY . . .

Sibling

Child, Kid, Kiddo

Nibbling, My sister's child

Grandchild/Grandkid

Be curious, "I wonder why all the female characters are wearing heels. It seems impractical for this activity!"

Share your thoughts

"It bothers me that all the shows we watch keep having only white boys solve the mystery- in my life, many different types of people know what to do."

Ask your kiddo what they think and listen to the answer.

"I wonder why people keep writing it this one way. What do you think?"



Talk about gender & sexuality together

Ask open-ended questions and meet them where they are at.

Let their responses to your questions guide the conversation. Make sure you're talking positively about all the diversity in our communities and world. Mirror their language.

Lead with love.

You may hold religious or moral beliefs that disapprove of your young person's identities, or you may just not like them because you don't. Remember, a caregiver's job isn't to agree with them but to keep them safe and help them feel loved.

Be ready to learn and to get it wrong.

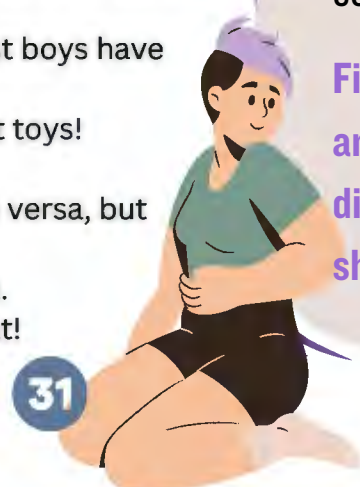
The way teens today describe gender identity and sexuality is different from previous generations. Expect your young person to say things you don't understand. Respond with, 'I don't know what that means. Can you help explain that to me?' or 'How can I support you?' Sometimes, kids just need to know there is a safe place to discuss this.

Reflect on and share your gender journey.

This could be facilitated by printing multiple copies of the gender unicorn and filling them out together. (See Appendix F).

Key ideas to hit

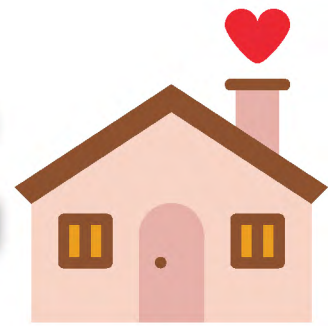
- Everyone's gender is unique. There are many ways to be a girl, a boy, or a person who is neither or both.
- There have always been gender-diverse people in the world.
- You can't tell a person's gender just by looking at them.
- You are the only expert on you. No one else knows your truth, and it is always a gift when you share it with others.
- Many people don't care about the gender of their partner—but not all.
- Most girls have vulvas, but not all do. Most boys have penises, but not all do.
- There aren't boy or girl toys; there are just toys!
- Families come in all sorts of ways.
- Many women want to marry men and vice versa, but not all.
- All gender rules are made up and optional.
- Love is love, and I love you no matter what!



Gender is a normal part of growing up; don't wait for an incident to talk about it. The conversations don't need to be serious or complex.

Figuring out who we are and sharing that discovery with loved ones should be joyful!

More ideas for creating an explicitly gender-affirming home include:



Be intentional about how you praise kids.

Girls are often praised for their appearance or being sweet or kind, while boys are praised for being big, tough, or independent. If you hear this praise from other adults, consider jumping in with different kinds of praise.

Question and explore your own biases.

For example, how do you feel about boys who wear nail polish and girls who want to shop in the boy's department for clothes? What messages about gender expression were you given as a child?

Stock up on materials that affirm various interests and strengths for people across races, physical ability, immigration status, and SOGIE. Offer children's books, games, or coloring books showing men and women in non-stereotypical and diverse gender roles (stay-at-home dads, working moms, male nurses, and female CEOs or construction workers, for example).

Home-themed toys like dolls and cookware that allow children to process their world through play are great gifts for all children, regardless of their genitals. See Appendix F for a booklist.

Mix up gender language when reading stories to your kids. Before they can read, you don't need to find gender-creative books- switch around the pronouns you use in the books you have around, and BOOM! Gender-expansive characters are everywhere!

Don't push same-sex activities. It's more than okay if your young person only wants to play with members of their gender or is interested in sports and other activities associated with their gender. Giving them a chance to decide shows that you are open to their response- even if it is unexpected.

Acknowledge that the world isn't fair and people who don't fit in are often hurt but focus on all the helpers. Point out LGBTQ+ or TNG celebrities and role models of various races and ability levels who have fought against unfairness and continue to inspire us today.

Support your young person's efforts at self-expression and their appearance without hesitation. Confidence spooks easily but sticks around when praised for effort and creativity. Engage in conversations with them about their clothing choices, jewelry, hairstyle, friends, and room decorations. Don't mock them or make light of their choices to soothe your discomfort. Support and encourage their self-expression.

Let young people in your care know you will listen and talk with them about anything.

Say it. You may think they already know it. Say it again.

See Appendix H for age-appropriate suggestions for creating an affirming environment that shows your child you'll accept them.

What to do if your foster child comes out as gender diverse or LGBTQ+?

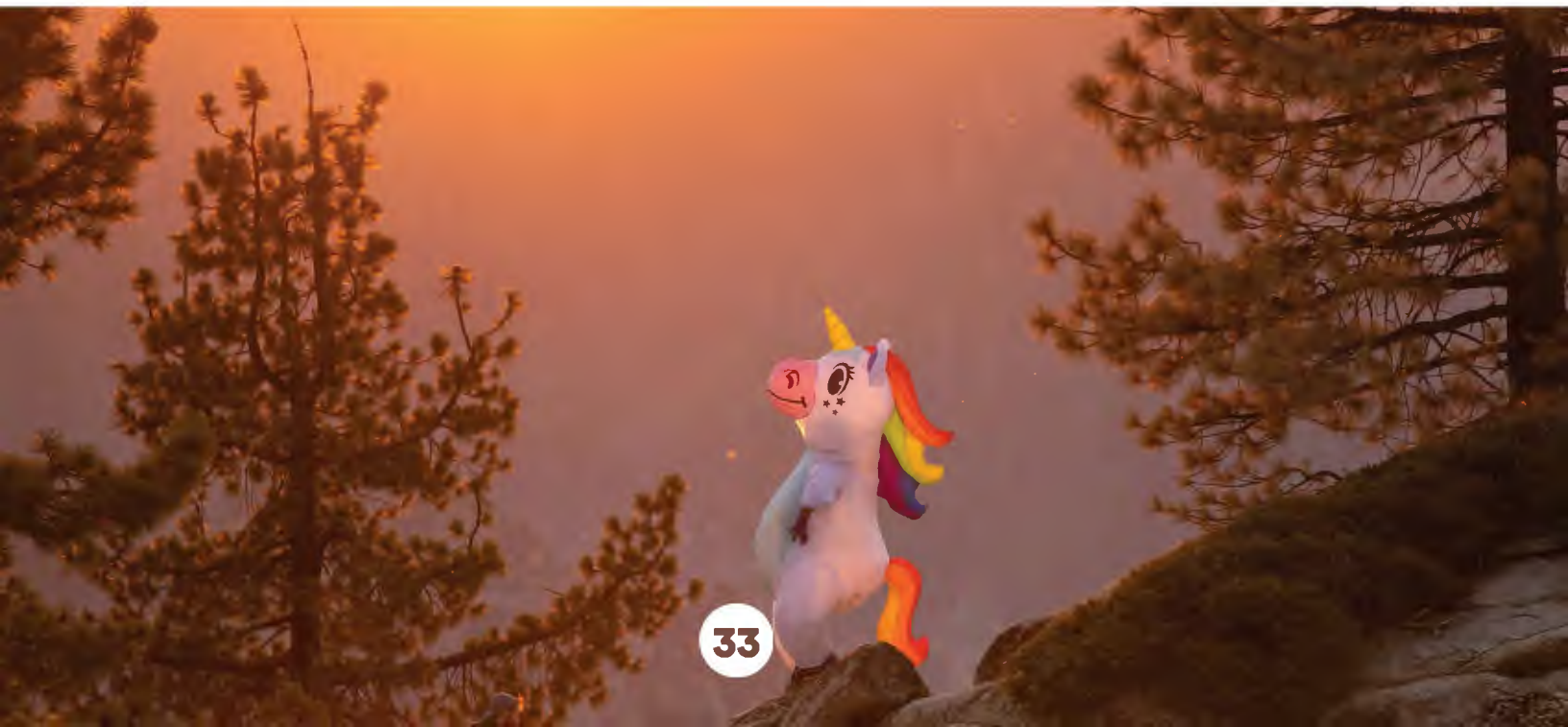
Youth in care may have difficulty trusting adults (many with good reason), so you may not learn their true gender identity or sexual orientation until you earn their trust.

Avoid making assumptions about gender identity or sexual orientation and gently encourage any young person in your care to show their full selves to you.

When you show through your words, actions, and the objects you display in your home that you truly celebrate and accept diversity, your young people may come to see you a safe person to trust with their full selves. This benefits all youth in your care- even those that affirm a traditional gender expression or heterosexual orientation.

At the time of disclosure, show your support in the following ways:

- **Respond with warmth and appreciation**, such as "Thank you for telling me. How can I support you? Would you like others to know?"
- **Ask how they prefer to be addressed**. Use the name and pronouns (such as he, she, or they) they want to go by. Offer to help them find a name.
- **Respect their privacy**. Let them decide when to come out and to whom. Share only with your young person's express permission.
- **Avoid double standards**: Allow them to discuss feelings of attraction and engage in age-appropriate romantic relationships, just as you would for youth who do not identify as TNG or LGBTQ+.
- **Ask about their safety** at school and home.



Coming out takes courage. While it can come as a shock or throw you for a loop, remember it is also an invitation to get to know your young person's authentic self. Below are parenting moves you can make in response that will either serve to strengthen or weaken your relationship with your young person.

Parenting moves associated with a secure and stable relationship

- Believing them.
- With their permission, talking to family and community members beforehand to save your child from the stress of coming out repeatedly.
- Inviting and welcoming their LGBTQ+ friends or partners at family get-togethers.
- Connecting them with LGBTQ+ organizations, resources, and events.
- Seeking an LGBTQ+ adult role model for them, if possible.
- Educating yourself on LGBTQ+ issues through reading books, watching films, and attending workshops.
- Standing up for them when they are mistreated or disrespected.
- Asking them about their safety.
- Getting permission before telling anyone.
- Using their pronouns or new name choices.
- Telling them you are proud of them.
- Telling them you love them no matter what.

"When my daughter was little, I spent so much time fussing over how she looked. I should have been concerned about how she felt. The school helped us find a counselor, and that's when we found out how hopeless she felt. I wanted to make sure others didn't reject her, but instead, I was the one who was rejecting her. I'm so grateful I could change things before it was too late."

Brianna, mother of 12-year old transgender youth

Parenting moves associated with really poor outcomes for the child and the parent/child relationships

- Telling them that it is "just a phase."
- Trying to change their identity.
- Refusing to talk with them about it.
- Ignoring their request to use a different name and/or pronouns.
- Telling them God won't love them or will punish them.
- Telling others ("outing") your young person without their permission.
- Excluding LGBT youth from family events and activities.
- Blocking access to LGBT friends, events, and resources.
- Blaming them when they are discriminated against.
- Pressuring them to be more (or less) masculine or feminine.
- Telling them you are ashamed of them or how they look or act will shame the family.
- Making them keep their identity a secret.
- Hitting, slapping, or physically hurting them.

When disclosing their gender-diverse identity or sexual orientation, some kids might expect immediate acceptance and understanding.

However, many loved ones move through a process that begins with discomfort and ends with acceptance or even affirmation. This process may follow the stages of grief: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, and acceptance.

Just as gender-diverse children do best when their feelings are explored and validated, **some caregivers may need their own emotional support. They may also have many questions along their young person's journey.**

It's ok to freak out inside.

Just don't lead with fear. Lead with your love and gratitude for their trust.



When a young person “comes out” the following feelings are common:

- Fear or guilt that something you did or may have “caused” this.
- Shame or embarrassment about how others will judge you or your young person.
- Concern that they will be put in physical danger.
- Sadness that they will not have the future you envisioned.

Most caregivers have hopes and dreams for their young person. Many are worried those dreams are no longer available when their young person self-expresses or identifies their gender in nontraditional ways or affirms non heterosexual desires.

You may want your child to marry or have children or, at a minimum, share interests or the interests of the gender you assigned to them. The disappointment that arises when our young people have different interests, hopes, and dreams for themselves can be overwhelming. However, common fears around the possible future for LGBTQ+ or TNG+ young people are not inevitable outcomes. Most LGBTQ+ and TNG young people grow up to live healthy and happy lives, deeply connected to a sense of faith and as valued members of many communities.

Instead of pushing young people to conform to these pressures and put other people's expectations over their well-being, you can model what it looks like to accept things we may not understand and advocate for the well-being of everyone.

Having mixed feelings about your young person's self-discoveries is a normal response to our children showing us how they are different from us. It is also a developmental milestone- meaning every person does this in some way as they grow up. No matter what, each young person has strengths and interests that will serve them across their lives. Our work is to uplift these natural strengths, not force new ones on them.


This time may be difficult, but it can also be freeing if you can let go of the need to respond to the concerns of those around you and instead focus on your young person's needs.

It takes courage to share a part of ourselves that many perceive as wrong, sinful, or different.

Celebrating a person for doing so nourishes a foundation of seeing one's truest self as worthy of love and dignity. For some, acceptance is lifesaving.

If you want to keep your young person safe in the long run, keep your heart open now

THE IMPACTS OF ACCEPTING MOVES




Child feels loved for who they really are and not who they think we want them to be

Child receives confirmation that all of who they are is lovable

Trust that you can be relied upon as a source of support is deepened

Current and future relationship preserved

Child more capable of managing a hateful world without hating themselves



Impacts of Discouraging Moves



Child feels rejected


Child receives confirmation of the fear they are inherently unwanted



Child no longer trusts you are a resource for support



Current and future parent/child relationship uncertain



Child more likely to act out, skip, or struggle in school



Child more likely to take risks, harm self, or end their life



Some suggestions to make sure you are not your young person's biggest bully

- Acknowledge that youth in your care may be LGBTQ+ – don't assume all are cisgender or heterosexual.
- Become familiar with your own gender journey.
- Confront your anxieties so that you're not making fear-based decisions.
- Meet other youth and adults who are LGBTQ+ or TNG.
- Educate yourself on LGBTQ+ issues through reading books, watching films, researching on the internet, and attending workshops.
- Understand that being LGBTQ+ isn't a "choice" or something a young person can change.
- Remember that youth in care should never be subjected to "conversion" or "reparative" therapies to change their SOGIE.
- Know that *your* acceptance or rejection affects the health and well-being of the LGBTQ+ youth in your care.
- Recognize there's more to an individual than just one's SOGIE.
- Avoid making assumptions about a young person based on their SOGIE.
- Don't assume that every struggle faced by LGBTQ+ youth is the result of this aspect of their identity. Most of their struggles result from the lack of support from their caretakers and peers.
- **Practice setting limits calmly with compassion and love so that the child is confident you won't have a scary reaction when they need support with things you may not love** (see appendix F for age-specific recommendations for this)
- **Accept and love your young person as they are.** Try to understand what they are feeling and experiencing. Despite disagreements, they need your support and validation to develop into healthy teens and adults.

Summary



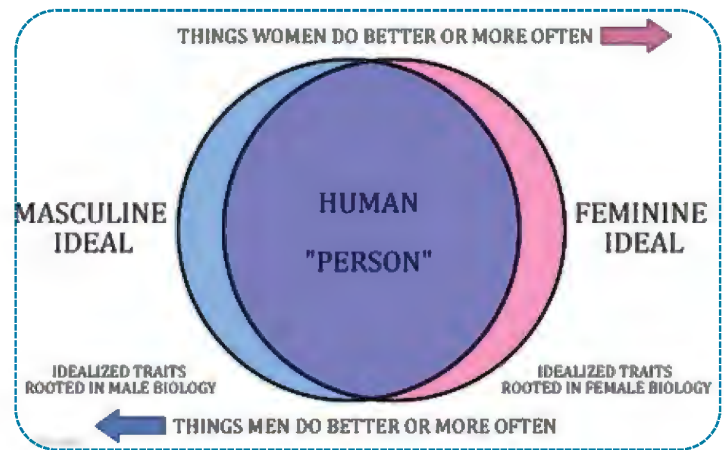
Making sure your home instills a sense of safety and predictability is one of the biggest gifts you can give a foster child as they make sense of wounds of separation. Taking steps to welcome and affirm a child's racial identity, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation shows the young person they can trust you with their precious selves.

In this first volume of a 3-part series, we've covered how misconceptions about human development and gender can make it hard to create an affirming home.

Remember, teaching a young person about gender is not a bad thing. Gender is an idea that helps us to sort all the information in the world. It gets us into trouble when we overestimate exactly how reliable of an indicator it is of people's interests or behaviors. It's a tool of harm when it's used to justify disallowing people to follow their joy. Since everything that grows grows in its own way, how our bodies are shaped and what they can do does not inform what we like or who we like.

Knowing that gender is not based in biology helps us to understand that expressing one's gender outside of the commonly understood norms of male and female is perfectly healthy and normal. This gender diversity is a part of human expression, documented across cultures, faith traditions, recorded history, and around the globe.

Every caregiver wonders if they are doing the right thing. While no one knows what the "right" thing is in every situation, we do have some solid evidence regarding what is harmful.




Discouraging exploration of gender and sexuality is one of those things we can say with certainty is the wrong thing for caregivers to do. Rather than protect children from the harsh world, it makes the home another place where foster kids are on their own.

We all have an innate desire to know ourselves, be known by others, and be unconditionally accepted for who we are. Because of this, the gender binary hurts everyone, but the less you fit into it, the more frequently other people who believe in it will hurt you.

In the next two volumes, we will dive deeper into how our bodies change throughout adolescence, how trauma impacts adolescence and resources for supporting caregivers and young people when foster kiddos come out as LGBTQ+ or TNG.





Section 5: Appendices

Resources used to create this booklet

Some of the information contained in this guide has been adapted from the following websites and publications:

- [Achieving Permanency for LGBTQ+ youth \(Kinnect\)](#)
- [Affirm.Me resources](#)
- [DCF's LGBTQIA2S+ Resource Hub](#)
- [Healthy Children.org](#)
- [HRC All Children All Families](#)
- [interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth.](#)
- [Gender Spectrum](#)
- [Learning for Justice](#)
- [National SOGIE Center](#)
- [Trevor Project](#)
- [Youth Acceptance Project](#)
- [PFLAG International](#)
- [Planned Parenthood](#)

Barz, E., & Owen, L. (2019). ***Our Trans Loved Ones: Questions and Answers for Parents, Families, and Friends of People Who Are Transgender and Gender Expansive.*** PFLAG National. Retrieved from [PFLAG.org](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2021). **Supporting LGBTQ+ youth: A guide for foster parents.** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/LGBTQyouth/>

Nonbinary, Gender-Fluid & Gender Expansive Youth FAQ for Parents and Guardians. Washington, D.C.: The Human Rights Campaign Foundation.

Perry, J.R. & Green, E.R. (2017). **Safe & Respected: Policy, Best Practices & Guidance for Serving Transgender, Gender Expansive, and Non-Binary Children and Youth Involved in the Child Welfare, Detention, and Juvenile Justice Systems.** New York City, NY: New York City's Administration for Children's Services. Retrieved from: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/lgbtq/SAFEAndRespectedUpdate061417.pdf>

Ryan, C. (2009). **Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Children.** Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development.

Ryan, C. **Supportive families, healthy children: Helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender children.** San Francisco, CA: Family Acceptance Project, Marian Wright Edelman Institute, San Francisco State University, 2009.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, **A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children.** HHS Publication No. PEP14-LGBTKIDS. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

Appendix A.

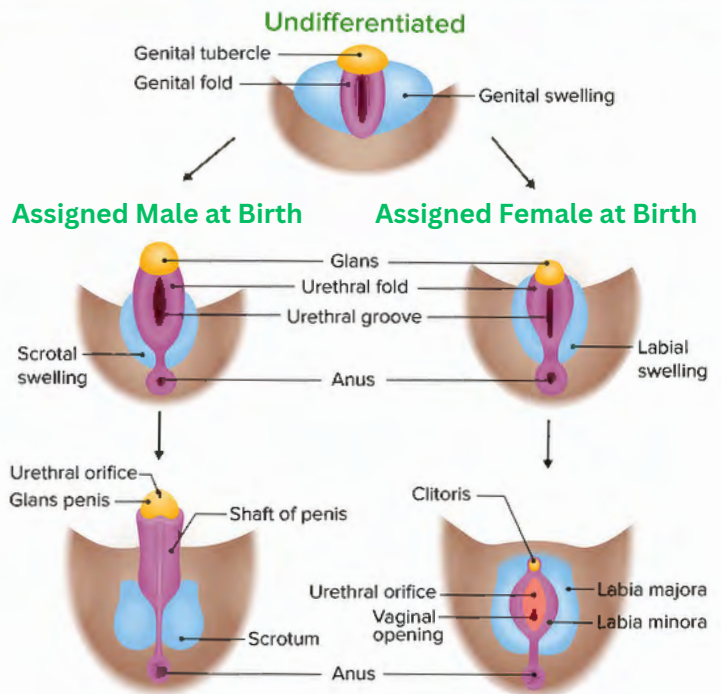
Intersex Development



Being intersex is a naturally occurring variation in humans, and it isn't a medical problem – therefore, medical interventions (like surgeries or hormone therapy) on children usually aren't medically necessary. Being intersex is also more common than most people realize. It's hard to know how many people are intersex, but estimates suggest that about 1-2 in 100 people born in the U.S. are intersex.

The factors related to the sex we are assigned at birth – meaning, put on our birth certificates and all subsequent legal paperwork from there on- begin as early as fertilization.

- Each sperm has either an X or a Y chromosome in it. All eggs have an X chromosome.
- When sperm fertilizes an egg, its X or Y chromosome combines with the X chromosome of the egg.
- A person with XX chromosomes typically has female sex and reproductive organs and is therefore typically assigned biologically female.
- A person with XY chromosomes typically has male sex and reproductive organs and is therefore typically assigned biologically male.
- Other arrangements of chromosomes, hormones, and body parts can happen, which results in someone being intersex.
- There are many different ways someone can be intersex. Some intersex people have genitals or internal sex organs that fall outside the male/female categories, such as those with both ovarian and testicular tissues. Other intersex people have combinations of chromosomes different from XY (typically associated with males) and XX (typically associated with females), like XXY.



The same tissues make vulvas and penises. This means that the genitalia of all fetuses look the same from conception to week 7, then develop along different lines under the influence of hormones. See the figure above. Our genes tell our gonads to release hormones that shape the development of our genitalia. Higher androgens relative to estrogens results in genitalia typically assigned male at birth, whereas bodies with higher levels of estrogen relative to androgens typically develop in genitalia that is assigned female at birth. Sometimes bodies develop genitalia that is a mix of features and are considered intersex

On the next page, you will find a chart describing the different ways bodies can develop as intersex. In all, the person can live a healthy, happy, and pleasure-filled life without any medical intervention.

Text adapted from:

Image adapted from: Lecturio.com:

<https://www.lecturio.com/concepts/sex-determination/>

Appendix B.

Table of Intersex Variations

from InterACT: <https://interactadvocates.org/faq/>



Medical Term	Chromosomes	External	Internal	Puberty
Complete Androgen Insensitivity	XY	Vulva, clitoris	Testes, no uterus, sometimes partial vagina, or complete vagina	If testes are left alone, body goes through puberty via converting testosterone into estrogen
Partial Androgen Insensitivity	XY	Vulva and visibly large clitoris, or other differences	Testes, no uterus, varies	If testes are left alone, body has varying levels of response to testosterone
Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia	XX	Vulva (labia may be fused), often visibly large clitoris	Ovaries, uterus, sometimes partial vagina or complete vagina	May be early, higher testosterone can lead to features such as facial hair, changed fat distribution
Swyer's	XY	Vulva, clitoris	Streak gonads, uterus, sometimes partial vagina or complete vagina	No puberty because streak gonads do not produce any hormones
Klinefelter's	XXY	Penis, small testicles	May have low sperm count	Low T may cause breast development or other atypical features, may be very tall
Hypospadias	Varies by cause (often XY)	Penis (with urethral opening somewhere other than tip) and testicles; or small penis (with urethra near base or perineum) and open labioscrotal folds; or other differences		Varies by cause (often typical testosterone puberty)

Appendix C.

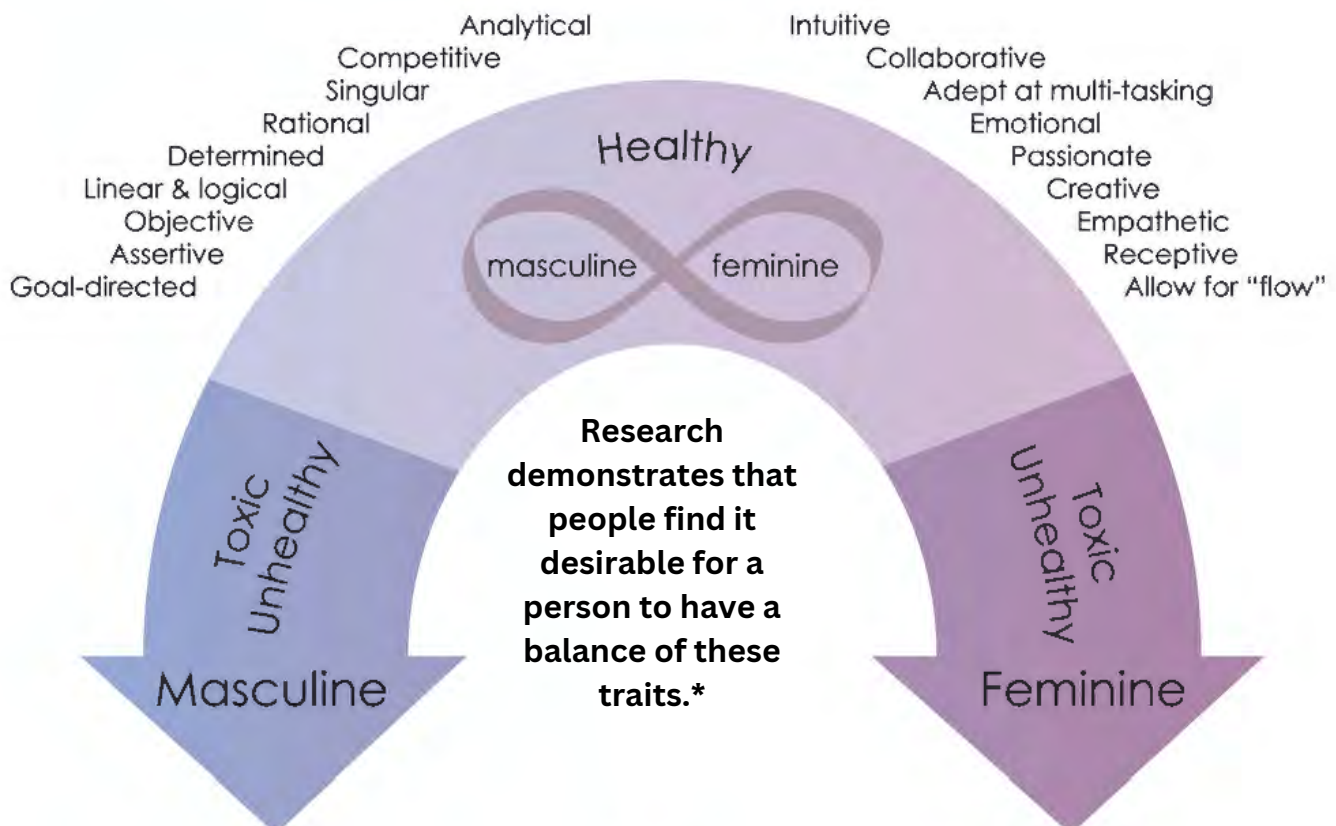
Gender Roles & Stereotypes

Traditional Gender Stereotypes.

<u><i>Feminine.</i></u>	<u><i>Masculine.</i></u>
<i>Not aggressive.</i>	<i>Aggressive.</i>
<i>Dependent.</i>	<i>Independent.</i>
<i>Easily influenced.</i>	<i>Not easily influenced.</i>
<i>Submissive.</i>	<i>Dominant.</i>
<i>Passive.</i>	<i>Active.</i>
<i>Home-oriented.</i>	<i>Worldly.</i>
<i>Easily hurt emotionally.</i>	<i>Not easily hurt emotionally.</i>
<i>Indecisive.</i>	<i>Decisive.</i>
<i>Talkative.</i>	<i>Not at all talkative.</i>
<i>Gentle.</i>	<i>Tough.</i>
<i>Sensitive to other's feelings.</i>	<i>Less sensitive to other's feelings.</i>
<i>Very desirous of security.</i>	<i>Not very desirous of security.</i>
<i>Cries a lot.</i>	<i>Rarely cries.</i>
<i>Emotional.</i>	<i>Logical.</i>
<i>Verbal.</i>	<i>Analytical.</i>
<i>Kind.</i>	<i>Cruel.</i>
<i>Tactful.</i>	<i>Blunt.</i>
<i>Nurturing.</i>	<i>Not nurturing.</i>

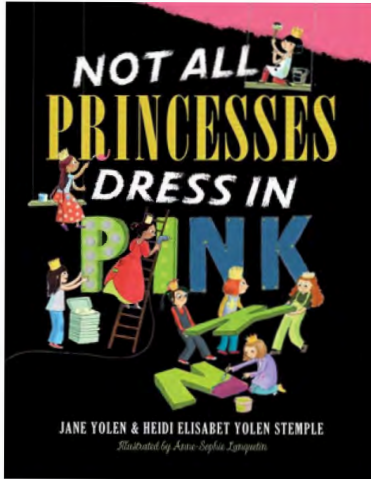
A gender role, or sex role, refers to the range of behaviors and interests considered appropriate or desirable for a person based on their assigned sex. These are also known as traditional stereotypes.

image source: <https://qph.fs.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-7993445933f73ffdc9c086c9a1290a88>



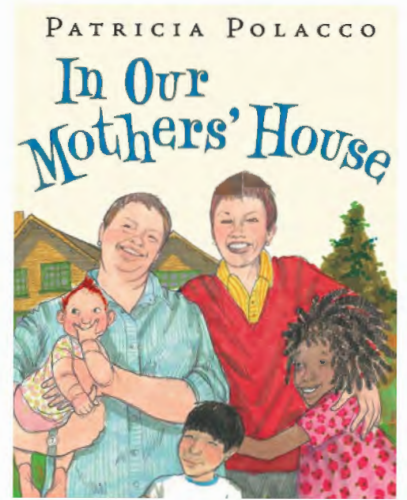
*Auster, C. J., & Ohm, S. C. (2000). Masculinity and femininity in contemporary American society: A reevaluation using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. *Sex roles*, 43, 499-528.

Appendix D. Booklist for stocking up a gender-affirming house

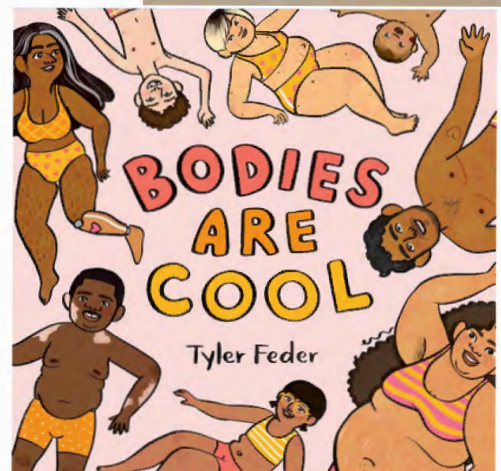
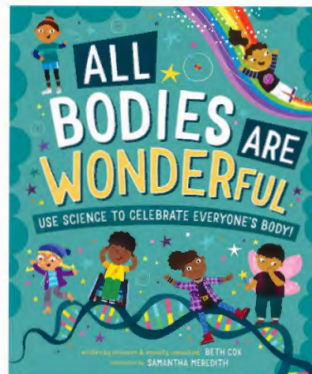


Madison Public Library.
Librarians keep several
updated booklists

Check out this link to find a list of books you can borrow from a library if you live in Madison- or ask to borrow from WorldCat and have them delivered to your library.



<https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/reading-and-viewing/book-lists/transgender-non-binary-and-gender-expansive-characters>



Appendix E. The Developmental Gender Journey

The information below offers a condensed overview of childhood and adolescent development basics and includes the stages where gender identity and gender expression first emerge.

Early Childhood (2 years - 6 years)

Physical Development

- Ability to use body.
- Motor skills improve.
- The brain grows to 90% of its weight.

Cognitive Development

- Increased memory
- Basic vocabulary and grammar
- Increased knowledge about physical laws and properties of objects
- Learning the “rules” of the world, like gender norms
- Focus is on categorizing things, and thinking can be pretty rigid, for example, “Girls have long hair and boys have short hair,” even when family members don’t adhere to these rules.

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Increased abilities to regulate thoughts and actions.
- Emergence of gender and ethnic identities
- Concepts of gender role behaviors

Gender Journey Foundations

- Children label their gender between ages 2-3.5 (“I feel like a boy,” “I am a girl,” etc.)
- Gender-segregated play emerges in preschool.
- Children learn “gender-role stability” (“girls grow up to be women,” “boys grow up to be men”) between ages 3.5-4.5

Middle Childhood (6 years - 12 years)

Physical Development

- Body strength increases
- Sex differences in motor skills occur.
- Mid-growth spurts begin.

Cognitive Development

- Capacity to sort and classify matures.
- Increased memory and attention.
- Efficiency in storing and retrieving information.
- Interested in learning about more abstract patterns- like social rules, who made them, and why.

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Emergence of peer social structure & social comparison.
- Social relationships regulate moral behavior.
- Better at making friends.
- The motivation to fit in is strong; being seen as “different” is experienced as a physically and emotionally painful threat.

Gender Journey Foundations

- Toys are a vocabulary of the world, so giving children many options allows them to explore and share their interests and feelings.
- Gender-typed behaviors increase.
- Youth begin identifying gender based on self-identification and feel pressure to conform.
- Puberty and the emergence of secondary sex characteristics begin and can create an extremely traumatic experience for TNG youth.
- Gender-specific activities in school are more prominent.

Best Practice: Trust that the young person knows themselves best. Always meet a TNG young person where they are at, respect how they identify, and always validate their internal sense of gender, as they describe it. Just support them with who they say they are.

Practice to Avoid: Don’t compare your young person to others or pressure them to be different or consistent in their self-expression. Don’t mock their appearance or suggest they are simply being “silly.”

Adolescence (12 years - 24 years)

Physical Development

- Rapid height and weight increase
- Hormone influx stimulates the functioning of reproductive organs.
- Change in brain regions associated with impulse control and decision-making.

Cognitive Development

- Local reasoning
- Ability to think abstractly, higher-level problem-solving skills.
- Can use reasoning to make moral judgments.

Social/Emotional Milestones

- Thinking more about “right” and “wrong.”
- More self-conscious, especially regarding physical appearance.
- Influenced more by friends.

Gender Journey Foundations

- Gender-typed behaviors increase.
- Puberty and the emergence of secondary sex characteristics continue and can create an extremely traumatic experience for TNG youth.
- Physical appearance assumes paramount importance to fit in the “norm” of the “in” group.



Best Practice: Youth in foster care are eligible to receive gender-affirming clothing like binders and health care related to their gender presentation. Help them to acquire these self-affirming clothing. Do your best to validate a TNG young person during this development period and connect them with TNG knowledgeable & affirming professionals who can offer support that will respect, affirm, and meet their individual needs.

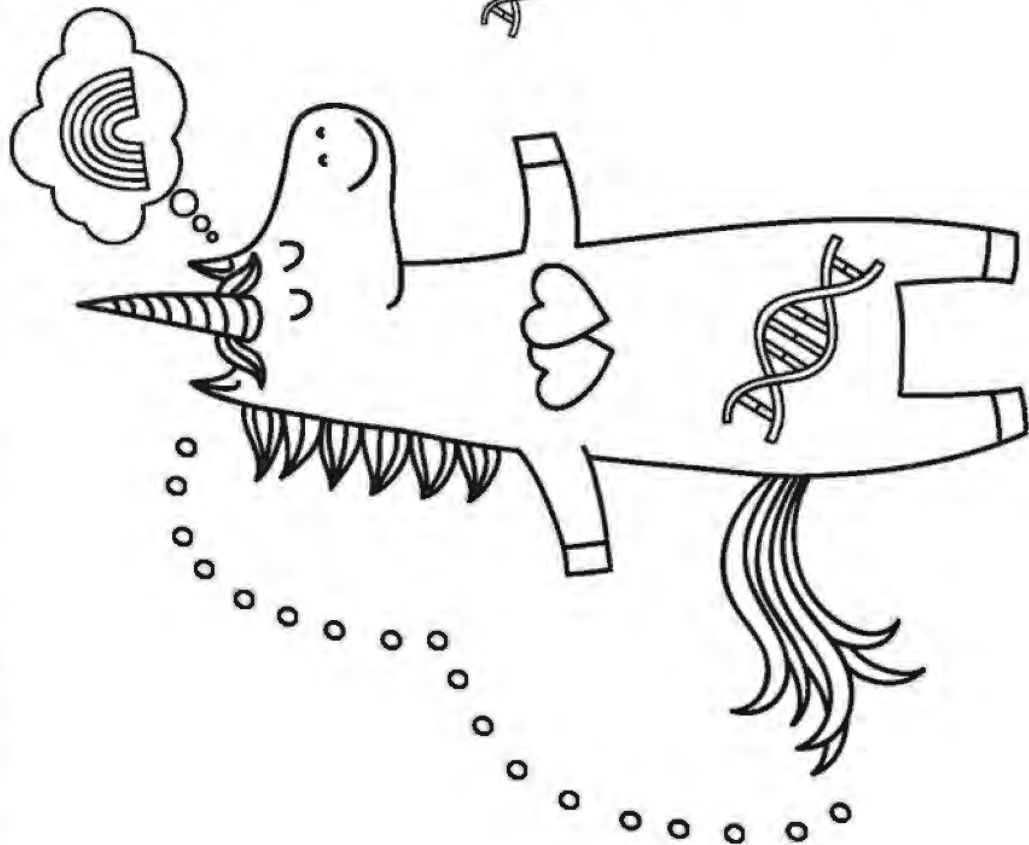
Practice to Avoid: Provide every young TNG person with their options. Do not attempt to dissuade or withhold options related to a TNG young person’s legal or medical transition should they wish to pursue either.


Appendix B was adapted from:

Perry, J.R. & Green, E.R. (2017). Safe & Respected: Policy, Best Practices & Guidance for Serving Transgender, Gender Expansive, and Non-Binary Children and Youth Involved in the Child Welfare, Detention, and Juvenile Justice Systems. New York City, NY: New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services. Retrieved from: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/acs/pdf/lgbtq/SAFEAndRespectedUpdate061417.pdf>

Appendix F. Gender Unicorn Worksheet

THE GENDER UNICORN




 **GENDER IDENTITY**

FEMALE / WOMAN / GIRL
 MALE / MAN / BOY
 OTHER GENDER(S)

**GENDER EXPRESSION/
PRESENTATION**

FEMININE
 MASCULINE
 OTHER

 **SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH**

FEMALE MALE OTHER / INTERSEX

SEXUALLY ATTRACTED TO

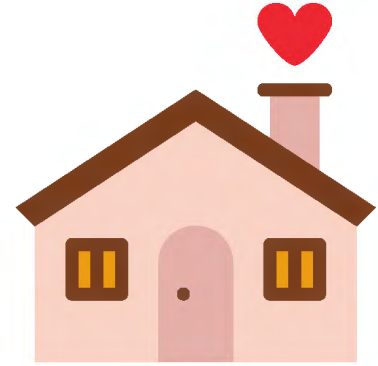
WOMEN
 MEN
 OTHER GENDER(S)

**ROMANTICALLY/EMOTIONALLY
ATTRACTED TO**

WOMEN
 MEN
 OTHER GENDER(S)

Appendix B.

Creating a gender-affirming home at any age



On the following pages you will find age-specific suggestions regarding the below topics:

1

Creating an affirming environment that shows your child you'll accept them.

2

Using language that builds an understanding of the world characterized by a trusting relationships with our bodies and with each other.

3

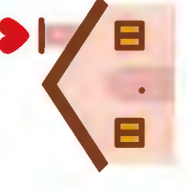
Demonstrating a welcoming heart through adult behavior.

4

Growing secure attachments by setting limits calmly with love, compassion, and mutual appreciation.



Early Childhood (0-3)



Provide materials for self discovery



Build vocabulary for gender

Provide accurate, affirming vocabulary to describe body parts, experiences, and body sensations:

"Look at that person over there- I love their hair!"



Use accurate names for body parts, especially "private" parts.



Offer simple explanations for gender and bodies that match their language skills.

"There are boys, girls, and people that don't feel like either."

Coach body awareness

"What is your body telling you? Is it telling you to slow down and rest?"

Show them you see them and accept them by helping them name their feelings.

"That surprised you!"

"You want to do X, but I won't let you, which makes you mad!"

"Do you need a hug?"
"I think you're telling me you are hungry"

Calmly explain your own needs as they arise and how you are meeting them:

"I feel light-headed and short-tempered; I think my body is telling me it needs food- I'm going to ask Mary to watch you while I get food."

Give child control whenever possible

Provide options whenever possible:

"Would you like broccoli or carrots?"



"Is your belly full?"



"Are you ready to go, or do you need five more minutes?"

"I'm going to change your diaper now. Are you ready?"

"Would you like to wear this or that?"



Set limits calmly & compassionately

Validate their experiences & express understanding when kids misbehave:

"You really wanted to run into the street, but I stopped you and that was frustrating! It's ok to be mad, I'll be right here."

Help them control their bodies if they start to lash out, or provide them with safe materials to destroy.

"I can't let you hurt your sister, but I can let you destroy this box- would that help?"

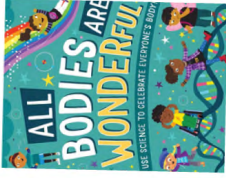
Respond to hard emotions with tenderness:

"That hurt! Of course, you're crying- let it out!"

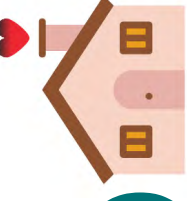
"It's hard to wait- I hate it too!"

"I'm so sorry that was so cold!"

Tell your child you love them no matter what.



Late Childhood (Ages 7-10)



Encourage self exploration

Offer your child opportunities to learn a variety of skills regardless of their gender. For example, cooking, baking, knitting, fixing a bike, building a fire, woodwork, jewelry making, etc.

You·ology
A PUBERTY GUIDE FOR EVERY BODY



Display art that feature bodies of diverse sizes, able-bodiedness, races, gender expansiveness, etc.

Bring your child to concerts and other community events celebrating gender diversity/expansiveness. Continue to provide a range of clothing options.

Discuss gender & the world

Emphasize the values your family tries to embody
“Some people say boys shouldn’t cry, but we know it’s healthy to feel your feelings in our family.”

Stick with simple and consistent messages

“Make-up is for everyone and no one; it’s up to you to decide if it feels right.”

Gradually increase the complexity of explanations and include abstract ideas when the child is ready:

“Gender is who you feel on the inside; it’s not something we can guess about other people- it’s best to ask.”

“People assigned male at birth often, but not always....”

“Some people deal with their pain by seeing what it is like to make others feel it. But look around; there are always helpers!”

Show trust in your child’s inner wisdom & enjoyment in their growth

Ask your child how they identify their gender and what pronouns they prefer- even if they seem comfortable with the one assigned.



When they show you new parts of themselves, tell them how glad you are to get to know them better!

“I LOVE getting to know you better!”

Model self-awareness & self-kindness

Admit when you make mistakes and engage in repair work.

“I don’t like how I handled that. I’m sorry I yelled, you deserve to be treated with respect, too.”



Be mindful of what you say and do- are you treating your body like its primary purpose is to be liked by others or to do things for others? Does your child see you rest or practice self-love?

Be transparent & consistent with limits

Ask your child what they think the rules of the house should be. Talk through your reasoning behind your limits outside of times when they need to be enforced.

Together, create a plan to help the child remember the limit and what to do when they don’t.

Name it, Claim it, Stop it.

If your child makes negative comments about someone’s appearance or identity- including their own, gently intervene:

“When you say you look fat, I feel sad that you aren’t treating someone I love with kindness. Please be nice to my love.”

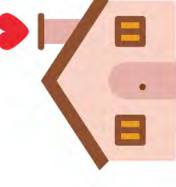
Initiate repair/reconnection work after limits are reinforced.

“hey, I would really like to do something fun together, would you?”



Tell your child you love them no matter what.

Early Adolescence (Ages 11-13)



Provide fuel for self-discovery

Update your media library to match their developmental interests (e.g., chapter books or graphic novels; musical artists, etc.).



Facilitate access to clothing, footwear, jewelry, etc. that affirm the child's internal sense of artistry, beauty, and gender.

Provide journals and art supplies for self-exploration and expression.



Explore interests that are considered outside of gender norms for how you identify yourself and invite your child along on your journey.

Provide language to make sense of and figure out their place in the world

"Everything that grows grows in its own way."

"Only you know what you need, want and who you are. Same goes for everybody else."

Increase the complexity of your explanations for human behavior, adding abstract concepts like systems of power- and collective experiences like intergenerational trauma, etc.



Help your child make

connections between the

pressure they feel to be gender conforming and other political efforts to concentrate power in the hands of the few (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, ageism, etc).

Gradually increase your child's freedom to make decisions for themselves- and respect their decisions if they are not

harmful to their health or immediate safety:

"Your body, your choice."

"I trust you know yourself best; please trust my love for you is behind my recommendations."

Share your hopes and desires for a trusting relationship.

"I want you to share your truth with me- what could I have done better?"

Provide positive and true feedback everyday.

"I really appreciated how you said that, it opened my eyes."

Engage the child in limit setting

Update limits based upon the child's growth.

Don't tolerate jokes about body size, appearance, or identity in your home.

"I don't think that is funny and I know it's not kind."

Return to consistent, clear, and simple messaging around the values/goals that guide your parenting:

"It's my job to protect you from big consequences that your brain cannot yet see."

Negotiate consequences to limit crossing before they must be enforced; remind your child of the agreed-upon consequences when they consider pushing a limit.

Model self-awareness & self-kindness

Share your personal strategies for moving through despair

Be sure to speak of your body with appreciation and of your mistakes with kindness.

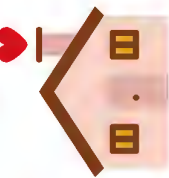
Role model what it looks like to be accountable for our mistakes:

"Everyone gets it wrong sometimes- especially me. I want you to know I'm always on your side and rooting for you, even when I set limits."



Remind the child that your love for them is independent of their behavior and can only grow.

Mid-Late Adolescence (Ages 14-18)

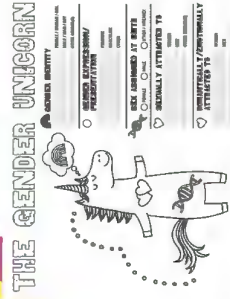


Provide fuel for self-discovery

Gift clothing and accessory options that affirm the child's internal sense of beauty and gender.

Suggest options for fiction and nonfiction stories of gender-diverse people in and out of intimate relationships.

Fill the home with books about gender or created by people gender expansive folks and highlight these resources.



Hold a mirror up to their inherent goodness

Repeat statements that affirm their unconditional worthiness
"You are enough exactly as you are."

"You don't need to prove to anyone that you are worthy-you already are."

"Our decisions do not define us-everyone deserves a second chance."

"You deserve to be treated with respect and to feel safe in all relationships."

Provide counter-narratives to the myth of perfection:

No one gets to tell you who to like, how to dress or celebrate being alive. Self-presentation is communication- depending on your goals, it can help to be fluent in many languages.

Show you trust your child & enjoy their growth

Ask your teen their opinion on all sorts of things, including why they think people do the things they do. Gently offer alternative possibilities if the child puts forth gendered explanations like boys will be boys or girls are catty/mean to each other, etc.



When talking about the future, share your confidence that your child will live a full and happy life surrounded by community. If you

doubt this will happen, experiment with believing it is possible- and focus time on supporting your child and developing the skills or cultivating a community that celebrates them for who they are as they are.

Engage them in relationship maintenance

Set up a weekly check-in for your relationship

- *"How are we showing up as roommates to one another?"*
- *"How did we show each other respect and admiration over the past week?"*
- *"In what ways did we feel disrespected or unappreciated?"*
- *"What changes to how we talk to each other do we each want to see?"*

• *"How can I better show up for you as a caregiver/parent?"*

And then explore why you can or cannot meet these requests.

If your late adolescent is reluctant to respect your limits or engage with you, discuss how that discourages you from providing bonus resources or makes you consider removing or ceasing to offer bonus resources for your child that are a drain on you- like an allowance or other non-necessities.

Model healthy vulnerability & humility

Talk about your experiences with gender identity and expression growing up and now. Ask about theirs. Use the gender unicorn worksheet as a tool to open the discussion.

Ask your teen their thoughts on current events and give them your full attention if they answer. Thank them for sharing and only provide your thoughts if asked. If they ask, don't lecture or teach...be open to disagreement.

Tell your child you love them no matter what.



Create an environment with objects that show your child you'll accept them.

Note: The suggestions under each developmental stage add to rather than replace earlier skills.

YOUNG CHILDREN (AGES 0-3)	EARLY CHILDHOOD (AGES 4-6)	LATE CHILDHOOD (AGES 7-10)	EARLY ADOLESCENCE (AGES 10-13)	LATE ADOLESCENCE (AGES 14-18)
<p>Read books to the child that reflect the diversity of genders, gender expression, and families. Find or alter toys, puzzles, and coloring books to portray all genders demonstrating athleticism, leadership qualities, nurturing qualities, and heroism.</p> <p>Decorate the child's room with resources encouraging diverse interests beyond gender norms. For example, every child should have cookware, trucks, and dinosaurs to play with, regardless of assigned sex.</p>	<p>Update books, games, toys, etc., to reflect the child's increased attention capacity, vocabulary, and reading level.</p> <p>Add in movies or kids shows that normalize a wide range of preferences, jobs, and interests independent of body parts of gender expression.</p> <p>Provide diverse clothing options for the child to self-select.</p> <p>Provide art supplies for exploring and expressing their feelings.</p> <p>Agency: Fill out forms for camp, school, or activities with your child. When you get to the question of gender, ask them, "Should I put boy, girl, or other?"</p>	<p>Introduce non-fiction books about puberty and stories about kids who struggle to fit in.</p> <p>Put art and other signs around your house that feature bodies of diverse sizes, able-bodiedness, races, gender expansiveness, etc.</p> <p>Post safe space signs that state exactly WHO is welcome in your home.</p> <p>Engage in various sports and other activities regardless of the child's gender as a family or sign youth up for after-school or summer camp (e.g., sign a boy up for a knitting class through MSCR, if interested).</p>	<p>Build on earlier age materials, updated to match their developmental interests (e.g., chapter books or graphic novels; musical artists, etc.).</p> <p>Bring your child to concerts and other community events celebrating gender diversity/expansiveness.</p> <p>Clothing, footwear, jewelry, etc. that affirm the child's internal sense of artistry, beauty, and gender.</p> <p>Provide journals and art supplies for self-expression and exploration.</p>	<p>Posters, concert tickets, clothing, and accessory options that affirm the child's internal sense of beauty and gender.</p> <p>Provide options for fiction and nonfiction stories of gender-diverse people in and out of intimate relationships.</p>

Demonstrate a welcoming heart by modeling humility and self-reflection.

Note: The suggestions under each developmental stage add to rather than replace earlier skills.

YOUNG CHILDREN (AGES 0-3)	EARLY CHILDHOOD (AGES 4-6)	LATE CHILDHOOD (AGES 7-10)	EARLY ADOLESCENCE (AGES 10-13)	LATE ADOLESCENCE (AGES 14-18)
<p>Play with using neutral pronouns when reading books with gendered pronouns.</p> <p>Use “they/them” pronouns when pointing out people you don’t know.</p> <p>Tell your child you love them no matter what.</p> <p>Calmly explain your own needs as they arise and how you are meeting them: “I feel light-headed and short-tempered; I think my body is telling me it needs food- I’m going to ask Mary to watch you while I get food.”</p> <p>Teach children about <i>all</i> body parts. Use simple statements like “most boys have penises, but not all do” and “lots of girls have a vulva and vagina” to set a standard early that genitals are not of gender identity. This also leaves room for <u>intersex children</u>,</p>	<p>Talk about the patterns around gender you see in the media.</p> <p>Give the child options for toys/games and follow their lead.</p> <p>Praise all your child’s efforts to dress themselves or participate in chores.</p> <p>Tell your child you love them no matter what.</p> <p>Calmly name your emotions and take time-outs if you are approaching your limit.</p> <p>Apologize when you don’t like how you handled something.</p> <p>Ask for and use other people for their pronouns in front of your children.</p> <p>Ask about children’s “adults” or “parents” rather than mom or dad.</p> <p>Reconsider calling things you do girly or masculine or talk about how you love it when men are good at makeup, and women can fix cars.</p> <p>Reflect on what makes an activity suitable for a “girls night” or a “man cave”</p>	<p>Ask your child how they identify their gender and what pronouns they prefer- even if they seem comfortable with the one assigned.</p> <p>Attend events that affirm gender expansiveness yourself- invite your child along.</p> <p>Tell your child you love them no matter what.</p> <p>When they show you new parts of themselves, tell them how glad you are to get to know them better!</p> <p>Ask your child how you can better support them.</p> <p>Admit when you make mistakes and engage in repair work.</p> <p>Show your child that adults also have big emotions and how adults work through them without taking them out on others or asking others to control them.</p> <p>Be mindful of what you say and do- are you treating your body like its primary purpose is to be liked by others or to do things for others? Does your child see you rest or practice self-love?</p>	<p>If your child affirms gender-expansive expression- mirror this in your dress to demonstrate support/solidarity.</p> <p>With your child’s permission, proactively contact family/friends to inform them of the changes in pronouns, names, etc, so your child doesn’t have to.</p> <p>Ask about significant others rather than assuming Bf or Gf’s.</p> <p>Explore interests that are considered outside of gender norms for how you identify yourself and invite your child along on the journey.</p> <p>Make expressive art together and take turns appreciating each other’s creations.</p> <p>Help your child make connections between the pressure they feel to be gender conforming and other political efforts to concentrate power in the hands of the few (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, ableism, etc).</p> <p>Model self-appreciation, affection for your own body, and the pursuit of contentment.</p>	<p>Openly reflect on how you were/are encouraged to conform to gender norms and how you did/do struggle with these expectations.”</p> <p>When talking about adulthood, share your confidence that your child will live a full and happy life surrounded by community. If you doubt this will happen, experiment with believing it is possible- and focus time on supporting your child and developing the skills or cultivating a community that celebrates them for who they are as they are.</p> <p>Reflect on our experiences in our schools and communities and efforts to advance legislation to control bodies. Ask your kiddos what they think and talk about with their friends.</p>

Use language that builds an understanding of the world characterized by a trusting relationship with our bodies and with each other.

Note: The suggestions under each developmental stage add to rather than replace earlier skills.

YOUNG CHILDREN (AGES 0-3)	EARLY CHILDHOOD (AGES 4-6)	LATE CHILDHOOD (AGES 7-10)	EARLY ADOLESCENCE (AGES 10-13)	LATE ADOLESCENCE (AGES 14-18)
<p>Set the stage by providing accurate, affirming vocabulary to describe body parts, experiences, and body sensations: “Look at that person over there- I love their hair!” “Some boys have a vulva, and some girls have a penis.” “There are boys, girls, and people that don’t feel like either.” Begin to provide options for young children to exercise choice: “Would you like broccoli or carrots? Are you done eating?” Encourage the child to listen to the messages they receive from their body: “What is your body telling you? Is it telling you to slow down and rest?”</p>	<p>Slowly expand the feelings vocabulary for all children, regardless of their gender. “That’s right, let it out, feel your feelings! It’s hard not to get your way!” Emphasize consent whenever possible. “Your body belongs to you. Unless I need to touch you to keep you safe, you get to decide who touches you and for how long.” Gradually increase the complexity of your explanations- keep them to 1-2 short sentences. “Colors are for everybody! Pink is for boys and nonbinary kids too- it’s not just for girls.” When the child wants to talk about gender norms, talk about fairness “It’s not fair that girls are not allowed to go topless, but boys are.” Provide explanations for why people sometimes hurt each other that don’t focus on gender: Rather than saying, “Boys aren’t as good as girls at communicating,” try “Hmmm, I wonder why that person is not using their words to ask for what they need. Do you think they know how?”</p>	<p>Tie preferred norms to your family’s values. “Some people say boys shouldn’t cry, but we know it’s healthy to feel your feelings in our family.” Stick with simple and consistent messages, especially around consent “Make-up is for everyone and no one; it’s up to you to decide if it feels right.” Gradually increase the complexity of explanations and include abstract ideas if the child is ready: “Gender is who you feel on the inside; it’s not something we can guess about other people- it’s best to ask.” Affirm diversity using increasingly complex ideas: “People assigned male at birth often, but not always....” Gradually increase the complexity of your explanations: “While many men happen to like X, certainly not all men do, and so do some women and nonbinary folk.” Or “Some people deal with their pain by seeing what it is like to make others feel it. But look around; there are always helpers!”</p>	<p>Return to consistent, clear, and simple messaging around the values/goals that guide your parenting: It’s my job to protect you from big consequences that your brain cannot yet see.” “you are powerful and loved beyond measure, no matter what.” Gradually increase your child’s freedom to make decisions for themselves- and respect their decisions if they are not harmful to their health or immediate safety: “Your body, your choice.” “I trust you know yourself best; please trust my love for you is behind my recommendations.” Be transparent in your hopes and desires for a trusting relationship. “I want you to share your truth with me- what could I have done better?” Continue to increase the complexity of your explanations for human behavior, adding abstract concepts like systems of power- and collective experiences like intergenerational trauma, etc.</p>	<p>Repeat statements that affirm their unconditional worthiness You are enough exactly as you are. You don’t need to prove to anyone that you are worthy- you already are. Role model what it looks like to be accountable for our mistakes: Everyone gets it wrong sometimes- especially me. I want you to know I’m always on your side and rooting for you, even when I set limits. Our decisions do not define us- everyone deserves a second chance. Provide counter-narratives to the myth of perfection: No one gets to tell you who to like, how to dress or celebrate being alive. Self-presentation is communication- depending on your goals, it can help to be fluent in many languages. Ask your teen why they think people do the things they do. Gently offer alternative possibilities if the child puts forth gendered explanations like boys will be boys or girls are catty/mean to each other, etc.</p>

Grow secure attachments by setting limits calmly with love, compassion, and mutual appreciation.

Note: The suggestions under each developmental stage add to rather than replace earlier skills.

YOUNG CHILDREN (AGES 0-3)	EARLY CHILDHOOD, (AGES 4-6)	LATE CHILDHOOD, (AGES 7-10)	EARLY ADOLESCENCE (AGES 10-13)	LATE ADOLESCENCE (AGES 14-18)
<p>Focus on validating experiences and expressing understanding when kids misbehave- avoid phrases like, “Big boys/girls don’t cry” or “You’re okay!”</p> <p>Help them name their feelings- “That surprised you!” You want to do X, but I won’t let you, which makes you mad!”</p> <p>And help them to control their bodies if they are expressing their anger or frustration through their bodies. “I won’t let you hit,” while holding them in a gentle embrace.</p> <p>Rather than telling them they are okay when they are clearly not feeling ok, tell them they are safe, loved, and not alone.</p> <p>"I see you are upset because your face looks sad, and you are hiding in the corner. I'm right here, and I'm not leaving you. You are safe. You can have space, or you can come here for a hug. What does your body need?"</p>	<p>Limits should be communicated calmly, preferably before a situation when they might need to be enforced.</p> <p>You don't need to raise your voice or threaten the child. Remember, you have all the power.</p> <p>Remind your child you are ready with a hug whenever they are ready to receive it. Show them you are not afraid of their big feelings. Stay with them when they have meltdowns- share your calm, don't join their storm.</p> <p>“You’re not alone. You’re safe. I am here, and we will get through this together.”</p> <p>Help them control their bodies if they start to lash out, or provide them with safe materials to destroy.</p> <p>“I can’t let you hurt your sister, but I can let you destroy this box- would that help?”</p> <p>Ask your child what their limits are with their bodies and respect them-</p> <p>“I have a hug for you. Would you like it?”</p>	<p>Ask your child what they think their limits should be. Talk through your reasoning behind your limits outside of times when they need to be enforced.</p> <p>Together, create a plan to help the child remember the limit and what to do when they don't.</p> <p>Ask your child about their limits and either respect them or explain why you cannot (because of health or safety).</p> <p>If comparisons about family limits arise, connect statements to your family's values to help kids focus on your messages above those they receive through media or classmates because they feel invested in your family.</p> <p>Provide options and respect your child's choices as much as possible.</p>	<p>Revisit your earlier discussion of agreed-upon limits and re-update to accommodate developmental changes/needs as the child ages and is ready for more independence.</p> <p>Revisit your explanations/justification for different limits to increase the complexity of your reasoning as your child's ability to understand nuance deepens.</p> <p>Negotiate consequences to limit crossing before they must be enforced; remind your child of the agreed-upon consequences when considering pushing a limit.</p> <p>Initiate repair/reconnection work after limits are reinforced.</p> <p>Remind the child that your love for them is independent of their behavior and can only grow.</p>	<p>Set up a weekly check-in for your relationship and discuss the following prompts: How are we showing up as roommates to one another? How did we show each other respect and admiration over the past week? In what ways did we feel disrespected or unappreciated? What changes to how we talk to each other do we each want to see? How can I better show up for you as a parent?</p> <p>And then explore why you can or cannot meet these requests.</p> <p>If your late adolescent is reluctant to respect your limits or engage with you, discuss how that discourages you from providing bonus resources or makes you consider removing or ceasing to offer bonus resources for your child that are a drain on you- like an allowance or other non-necessities.</p>