

The number of new experiences, emotions, relationships, and expectations can be overwhelming for any teen. Add gender into the mix, and it gets considerably more confusing.

Welcome to Gender Spectrum's Teen Page! Below you'll find resources to help teens, between the ages of 13 and 19, navigate their Gender identity at school or home, with their doctor, and even their friends. If you're looking for something and not finding it, [contact us so we can help](#).

Check out our latest Instagram posts @gender_spectrum:

Understanding Your Gender

Identity and Coming Out

One's gender identity is their innermost concept of self as male, female, both, or neither. It also means that one's gender identity can be the same or different than their sex assigned at birth. If you are someone whose gender identity is different from your sex, you may be looking for support.

Telling a friend or an adult about your gender identity can be a very emotional journey. Telling someone, or "coming out," should happen when and if you are ready to. But sometimes, we may not have control over our "coming out" journey. If telling others about your gender identity is important to you, Gender Spectrum would like to help - take a look at our resources and our "[Questions to Consider When Coming Out](#)". [We are also available by phone, email, and social media](#). If your gender identity was disclosed before you were ready for it to be shared, it might help to connect with others who understand what you're going through. We care about your emotional and mental well-being as well as your physical safety. Reach out to us if we can help in any way.

While there are support groups, some feel safer to be themselves and explore issues online rather than sitting across the table from someone. If you're between the age of 13 and 19 and are looking to connect with other Gender-expansive youth and their allies, you can join our online community at the [Gender Spectrum Lounge](#).

If you or a loved one is in crisis and need immediate support please contact:

The Trevor Project at 1-866-4-U-TREVOR ([866-488-7386](tel:866-488-7386)) or [visit their website](#)

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or [visit their website](#)

Words Matter

What does "gender fluidity" mean? Is "transvestite" a bad word? Language has the power to shape our views of other people. And that is because different people have different

experiences with words. When it comes to your own understanding and ability to talk about gender, we recommend reviewing some of the working definitions we've created in our handout, "[The Language of Gender](#)." Having an understanding of the basics, and where we are starting from, will give you the tools to have conversations around gender.

We also recognize that gender is always shifting in our culture and that the vocabulary of gender continues to evolve as well. Youth across the country (and other parts of the world) have been paving the way in how people think about gender. Words like "Genderqueer" or "gender fabulous" are terms more recently developed. You have the power and ability to define what your gender means to you. If you want to share this with the rest of the world, we invite you to post your new term on our [online community forum](#). The youth voice is always important because it introduces innovative ways of thinking.

My Body

When it comes to your body, the decision on how you want your gender to appear to the rest of the world should be yours. We know this can be difficult when there is pressure from peers, parents and other adults, and society in general, to conform. However, gender identity and Gender expression go beyond male and female. Whenever you make a decision about your body, we want you to think about whether you're doing it because you want to, or because you feel the need to conform to certain gender expectations. Sometimes, it's hard to know the difference. As society's views on gender continue to evolve, be open to how different communities in the U.S., and other cultures around the world, are changing their understanding of gender. An exercise you might try is imagining what a person who identifies as both male and female, or neither, might look like.

"Hey, I am not my hair, I am not this skin, I am not your expectations, no, no ... I am not my hair, I am not this skin, I am a soul that lives within." - India Arie, I Am Not My Hair (Lyrics)

Finding Medical Care

Gender Spectrum works closely with medical and mental health professionals who have a deep knowledge and understanding of gender and who have experience providing care to gender-expansive young people. Many providers will tell you they work with gender-expansive youth, but that does not mean they understand [what supportive treatment looks like](#). On the other hand, a doctor or therapist may not have a great deal of experience or knowledge, but is committed to following your lead and learning.

We're here to help you find the right professional who can take care of your specific needs when it comes to your gender. A growing network of experienced and caring professionals are prepared to support you along this journey. We are in touch with professionals throughout the country and can connect you with someone regardless of where you live. [Let us help you find the right one for you!](#)

In the California Bay Area, Gender Spectrum is part of a multi-disciplinary clinic called The Child and Adolescent Gender Center (CAGC) housed at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in San Francisco. To learn more, email or call us directly. For more information on CAGC, visit

http://www.ucsfbenioffchildrens.org/clinics/child_and_adolescent_gender_center/.

Teen Dating & Relationships

Having a crush and telling that person you like them is hard for anyone. What if they freak out? What if they don't feel the same? Has your crush ever had a conversation about gender expectations? Do they have friends that are gender-expansive? You may be nervous, [but there are ways you can be prepared](#).

If you are in a relationship, know that you can reassess your relationship at any time for any reason. Being in a romantic relationship should always be a choice.

There is no golden rule when it comes to dating, but here are some tips:

1. Find a supportive friend who will listen to your feelings and respect your privacy. While you're figuring out what to do about your crush or partner, it can help to have someone to talk to. This person could also be a school counselor or another adult ally.
2. Your safety is always the priority. Do an assessment of the situation, and if there is any chance that your crush or partner might react unkindly or violently towards you at any time then that person isn't right for you. Whether it's in a relationship or at home, you never have to live with abuse. Remember, you ALWAYS have a right to be safe and set your own limits!
3. When it comes to sex and intimacy, negotiating is very important. In other words, you should always voice your thoughts and opinions. If your partner doesn't bring up protection, you should take the lead. Your body and health are your responsibility.
4. The pressure of wanting to make your partner happy can be immense, but you don't have to do anything you don't want to. You never have to "prove" your gender by being sexually active. If your partner ever says anything along the lines of, "But a real man/woman would do it ..." then this should be a warning for you. It can also help to talk to a friend or counselor if you have questions about being intimate.

Being an Ally

Anyone, no matter what your gender is, can be an ally. Being an ally means recognizing the privileges your gender might grant you, not taking those privileges for granted, and using your privilege to work towards gender inclusion at all levels. For example, if you are someone who can use the restroom without fear of verbal abuse, physical intimidation, or arrest, then what are ways you support those who have to face this difficult issue every day? You can always begin with yourself. Challenge your personal stereotypes and judgments you may have been taught about gender growing up. When you are ready, you can start having conversations with others about their understanding of gender. Gender Spectrum has great tools for youth who want to create gender inclusive spaces, including our [resources for allies](#).

If you would like to connect with other allies around the world, or if you feel like it's hard to find other allies who believe what you do, there are support groups online. Gender Spectrum has an online community forum where teens can connect with other teens. If you're between the age of 13 and 19 and are looking to connect with other gender-expansive youth and their allies, you can [sign up by clicking here](#).

Know Your Rights

Many of the rights mentioned below will only apply to public schools. If you are a student at a private school and are experiencing any of the issues listed below, [you may contact Gender Spectrum](#)– we’re happy to talk with you about how to address issues in your particular school situation.

School Safety and Bullying

You have a right to be safe at school. Bullying can take on many forms and includes teasing, taunting, and threatening behavior. It can also be more subtle, like when another student (or even teachers/administration) intentionally exclude you. Most schools are adopting programs and policies to create environments that do not allow or tolerate bullying. Your school may not specifically name gender expression or identity as reasons for bullying, but know that your school has a duty to keep you safe.

It is never OK for students, parents, and school staff to mistreat you for expressing your gender identity. [There are federal protections and many state laws that protect you](#). Even if you live in a state without these protections, there may be local or district/school policies that can help you. If you are being harmed by anyone at school, write down all of the details about what happened (including place, date, time, witnesses), and tell the principal or another school-related adult. Be aware that if you tell someone at school about being mistreated, the school will contact your parent or guardian. You may want to speak to your parent or guardian first so that they hear about what happened directly from you. If you are concerned about talking with your parent or guardian, consider having an adult-ally, like a teacher, relative, or family friend be there when you talk to them. Your physical safety is very important.

If you are still being physically harmed, contact the police right away and notify someone at your school. There are also free legal services to support you. [Contact Gender Spectrum](#) if you are being physically harmed or bullied at school and have difficulties finding support. Also, read more on your right to be safe at school [from the ACLU](#).

Names and Pronouns

Do the name and gender listed on your state-issued identification documents not accurately reflect your name and gender? You can approach your school and request that you be called by your preferred name. There are no laws preventing schools from calling you by your chosen name.

[Contact Gender Spectrum](#) if you’d [like help in getting your school to use your chosen name and pronoun](#) on internal school documents without having to legally change your name. This process will allow teachers and staff who view your name on class rosters or other school documents to address you as how you identify. With a bit of education, we can help your school understand that calling a student by their preferred name is the right thing to do. If you can, involve your parents or guardians, speak with your doctor about [getting a medical carry letter](#), or reach out to supportive teachers.

Dress Code

Gender-expansive and Transgender students have the [right to dress in a way that is consistent with their gender identity and expression](#). Your gender expression is protected by federal law. Your right to free expression includes your choice of clothes. As long as the clothing you want to wear would be appropriate if worn by other students (whether a boy or a girl) then you should be able to wear that clothing regardless of your gender identity. School dress codes have to treat all students equally. Schools should not adopt dress codes that restrict your clothing or appearance on the basis of gender. If you need help, contact the American Civil Liberties Union LGBT Project at aclu.org/safeschools or at (212) 549-2673. [You can also read more on this issue in our Resources section.](#)

You Are Your Best Ally

You should always be respectful and follow school rules that are put in place to protect your safety and the safety of other students. Whether you're getting ready to have a talk with your principal or about to [file a formal complaint](#) with your school district, you should get in the habit of writing everything down.

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Did you tell anyone?
- Were there any witnesses?

We want to emphasize that while there are moments where you might feel like the whole world is against you, [you can always reach out to Gender Spectrum](#). You can even copy materials [from our website to give out as a resource](#). You don't have to do all the work by yourself. We are here to help.

If you ever run into any problems at school, one way we might help is by you giving your principal our number and asking them to give us a call to help talk things through. And you don't always have to talk to people in person. You can send an email to any adult and lay out what you might be thinking and wanting to happen, especially if you are nervous about talking to authorities. You might even ask an ally on campus for support, or to go with you when you talk to an adult. Maybe that ally can talk to the adult for you. These are just a few examples of how you might ask for help.

Restrooms

You have the right to a safe and appropriate restroom at school. [In some states](#), you have the right to use a restroom that corresponds to your gender identity, regardless of your sex assigned at birth. That also means that you do not have to "prove" your gender. Your school should not require you to get a doctor's letter or show your ID. Your self-identification is enough to establish your gender.

If you do not feel safe using the restroom at school, tell your parent or a school administrator. A temporary solution may be for you to use the staff restroom. Other times you may need to map out the location of the closest gender-neutral restroom to your school. If you are comfortable, talk to your school counselor about whether your school can create a unisex single stall bathroom for use by any student. Some schools will make accommodations for

you without notifying your parents or other students at school. [Gender Spectrum](#) can help you develop an action plan if access to restrooms remains an issue for you.

If you are using a public restroom outside of school, be sure to always check your surroundings. It may be inconvenient, but if it's not safe, try to find an alternate restroom nearby. [Contact Gender Spectrum](#) if you are having problems finding a safe restroom to use at school.

Playing Sports in your Affirmed gender

The realm of sports and athletics can be difficult to navigate as nearly all sports are segregated by gender. A growing number of states are [implementing policies for transgender students to participate in high school athletics](#). As of 2014, there are approximately 10 states that allow transgender athletes to participate in sports not restricted to their birth sex. And some of these states still have some restrictive measures like requiring sex reassignment surgery and/or hormone therapy. If you are ever told that you can't play on a team because of your gender, you can [contact Gender Spectrum](#).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) [does not prohibit transgender students from participating in NCAA sponsored events](#), but recommends that NCAA member institutions use a student's official identity documents (birth certificate, driver's license or passport) to determine whether a student-athlete is eligible to compete on the men's or women's team. Because different states have different requirements for changing identity documents, inequality still exists for many students depending on which state they are enrolled in school.

“Will transgender students make some other children uncomfortable? Perhaps. I don't want to minimize that, but new experiences are often uncomfortable. That can't be an excuse for prejudice.” – California Assemblyman Tom Ammiano

Family Relationships

What to Do When You Don't Have Family Support

Support groups can be a great way to talk about whatever is on your mind. You'll find teen and adult allies that will understand the issues you are facing and provide some support. You aren't alone and just having someone that you know you can go to, who will listen, can make a huge difference. Check to see if your town has a local LGBTQ or community center that offers a support group around gender identity. You can also see if your school has a support group, or you and a friend could start one! If you find yourself unable to find a group, or if you feel like it's hard to fit in, there are also support groups online. Gender Spectrum has an online community where teens can connect with other teens. If you're between the age of 13 and 19 and are looking to connect with other gender-expansive youth, [you can sign up by clicking here](#).

Fear, misunderstandings, lack of knowledge, cultural and language barriers, may all play a part in leading to a family member's struggle with accepting gender diversity. That doesn't mean they will never come around. If you are unable to find support from someone within your family at the moment, don't give up. Many schools have formed diversity clubs and gay-straight alliances that may be a supportive place for you while at school. If you feel comfortable enough, try attending one of their meetings. Again, if your school does not have one of these groups, a local organization or nonprofit may have a youth support group.

Sibling Support

As a sibling, you can be the best ally or worst enemy to someone who is gender-expansive. That is because siblings often have the ability to "out" their gender diverse sibling. That's a lot of power and responsibility to hold, and it can be difficult when you feel like you're keeping a "secret." It's important for your well-being that you talk to your family if you feel like there's too much pressure (in any part of your life).

Sometimes, you may be pressured to bully or tease your sibling so that you don't draw extra attention to yourself, and other times you might find yourself defending your gender-expansive sibling. We understand that it can be difficult being the sibling of someone who is gender-expansive or transgender. That's why it's important to find your own support.

Talking about gender may not be how you want to spend your time. But talking to your parents about how you're feeling is an important step in getting the support you need, and also supporting your gender-expansive sibling. If you feel like your parents or guardians, or your sibling, are asking you to step outside of your comfort zone and/or do too much, let them know. They're less likely to make any changes if they're unaware that there's a problem.

If your parents or guardians can't provide the support you need right now, try talking to other relatives or adults close to your family. You can also speak with a school counselor or talk to another sibling. Try to find a place where you can air out your own feelings. If you need help finding additional support, [you can contact us](#).

Having Hard Conversations

Here are a few tips about navigating boundaries, how to have hard conversations, and how to address your parents' concerns with your safety.

1. Keep the channels of communication open. You may be at a point where you don't want to talk to anyone about anything. And while privacy is important and should be respected, if you are struggling with your gender, it's valuable to convey your thoughts and feelings to family members that are open to listening. You can start with a simple update of how your day went, whether it was good or bad. If you hide yourself away, then no one will know how you're feeling, and your family might become more worried.
2. Set your own boundaries and ask the adults in your life to follow your lead. Note that while you may have your own thoughts about your life, your parents and caregivers may still weigh in with their thoughts and opinions. We encourage both adults and teens to be open to negotiation. When it comes to boundaries around your identity and your body, it helps to remind the adults that you have to live your life the way you want in order to be happy. If your family members have questions around your gender that

you are not yet ready or comfortable to answer, just let them know that you still need time to sort things out for yourself. Keep in mind that conversations around boundaries are always constant.

3. Try to see things from another person's perspective. This is a great tip for life in general. Parents and caregivers may start setting new rules and curfews when they learn that their child is gender-expansive. It's not because they want to punish you. Quite often, it's because they're worried about your safety. These overprotective reactions often come from a place of love mixed with a bit of ignorance. If you can appreciate their sense of perspective, that's at least one-step in trying to hold a calm conversation.

Offering Support for Your Parent/Caregiver

Despite popular beliefs, children sometimes have a lesson or two to share with the adults in their lives. As understandings of gender change and evolve all the time, it's not uncommon for a divide between generations when it comes to gender. Young people expose adults to new ideas and ways of thinking all the time. You may find yourself in a position where your parent or caregiver ends up asking you to clarify or explain when you tell them that you're genderqueer, or that you feel like both a boy and a girl, or that you feel like you don't identify with the male or female gender.

Don't feel like you have to provide all the answers. And while the internet is great for research, it holds both useful and harmful information. If you want to direct your parent/caregiver to a reliable online resource, [Gender Spectrum's Parenting & Family section](#) has useful information. Gender Spectrum also has a [parent support group](#) that meets once a month in the California Bay Area. If your family is elsewhere, [we have a call-in support group](#) that happens once a month as well. Our call-in support group is [also available in Spanish](#). You can also share with your family that we have [an online community forum](#) where moms can connect with other moms and dads can connect with other dads. Because gender is so diverse, we have specific groups for parents and caregivers dealing with various questions around raising someone who lives outside of "traditional" gender boxes.