



# SAFE SANCTUARY FOR TRANS YOUTH AND FAMILIES

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# Our Time Together

Myths

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Language

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What brings you here?

# Myths

# Myths

## **Myth: Children are too young to know their gender.**

- Understanding of our gender comes to most of us fairly early in life. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “By age four, most children have a stable sense of their gender identity.” This core aspect of one’s identity comes from within each of us; it is an inherent aspect of a person’s make-up. We don’t question when cisgender children know their gender at a young age, so why do we question when transgender or nonbinary children know their gender at the same age?

# Myths

**Myth: A person is only transgender if they declare it at a very young age.**

- While many transgender people say that they knew they were transgender as soon as they knew what “boys” and “girls” were, for many others, the journey to living openly as their affirmed gender is longer. For some, understanding their gender identity is a complex process that lasts into their teens, adulthood, or even old age. Many people have a general feeling of being “different” but don’t connect that feeling to their gender until they are exposed to new language or find role models in whom they can see themselves reflected.

# Myths

## **Myth: There are only two genders.**

- Gender is a spectrum, and not limited to just two possibilities. A person may have a nonbinary gender, meaning they do not identify strictly as a boy or a girl – they could identify as both, or neither, or as another gender entirely. Agender people do not identify with any gender.

# Myths

## **Myth: Many transgender children “change their mind” about their gender.**

- not all children and youth who express themselves in gender expansive ways are transgender. Gender identity and gender expression are different aspects of our gender.
- What we know from medical and mental health experts as well as from research in the area is that transgender children are at least as certain in their gender identity as other children are in theirs. The longer an identity persists, especially one that is consciously considered and consistently asserted, the less likely it is to change.

# Myths

## **Myth: Being transgender or nonbinary is a sign of mental illness.**

- Being transgender or nonbinary is not a mental illness.
- Some gender-diverse people experience gender dysphoria which is a diagnosis in the DSM. However, this refers to the distress some people experience as a result of a disconnect between their gender and their sex.
- Minority stress factors often take a toll on transgender and nonbinary youth, who then experience levels of depression and anxiety as a result of the harassment, discrimination, bullying and stigmatization they experience. Outside of these minority stress factors research indicates that gender-diverse youth who have parental support and are affirmed in their gender have similar mental health profiles as their cisgender peers.

# Myths

## **Myth: Transgender and nonbinary people are doomed to live unhappy lives.**

- While it is true that transgender and nonbinary youth are at significantly higher risk for suicide, non-suicidal self-injury, substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety and depression compared to their cisgender counterparts, there are known factors that can improve their mental health and well-being. The most significant factor in a gender-expansive young person's well-being is the support of family. Transgender and nonbinary people of all ages find love, create families, and live fulfilling lives.

# Statistics

- 57,000 teens will be sent to conversion therapy before they turn 18
- 42% of suicide crises are students who have undergone conversion therapy
  - 57% of trans/nonbinary
- 1.8 million LGBTQ+ people 13-24 consider suicide each year
- LGBTQ+ students are 3.5 times more likely to consider suicide
- LGBTQ+ youth who consider religion “very important” to them were 38% more likely to have a suicide crisis

# Statistics

- 77% of LGBTQ+ teens suffer from depression
- 95% of LGBTQ+ teens have trouble sleeping
- 40% of trans students have had a suicide crisis
- 26% of trans people report and immediate family member stopped speaking to them or ended their relationship

# Statistics

- 33% of trans people reported a negative experience with a healthcare provider
- 30% of trans people experience homelessness
- 58% of trans people experience some form of police mistreatment
- 77% of trans people experience mistreatment in school
  - 54% verbal harassment
  - 17% physical harassment

# Why Language Matters

# Why Language Matters

- Language is a powerful tool
  - affects how you think, shaping your reality
  - allows you to verbally communicate what you think and feel, to convey who you are to others
- Thoughtful language shows respect, acknowledgment, and acceptance
- How you navigate gendered language speaks volumes about the value you place on the identity of others

# Why Language Matters

- Using non-gendered, non-sexist language
  - communicates that you're listening
  - communicates that you care for the other person(s)
  - communicates that you value their experience
  - Demonstrates sensitivity
  - Is receiver (or listener) oriented or centered

# Why Language Matters

- Man-made everything
  - People, person, individual, human, humankind, humanity
  - Interchange with woman or person equally
- Gender Role Bias
  - Mother/parent; non-custodial parent/father
  - "Innocent women and children"
  - Mama's boy/Daddy's girl
  - "take it like a man"
  - Male Nurse/Female Doctor

# Why Language Matters

- Binary Language
  - Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls
- Hierarchical Language
  - -ette, -ess, -enne, -trix
- Presuming Heteronormativity
  - “Who’s your girlfriend/boyfriend?”
  - “Your future wife/husband...”
  - Pronouns

# Why Language Matters

- “guys” and “dude”
- “manned”
- “ladies and gentlemen”
- “guys and gals”
- “brothers and sisters”
- “mom and dad”
- “lame”
- “dumb”
- Bipolar as an adjective
- Genitalia as derogatory
- Animal
- “man-up!”
- “cry like a girl”
- “all men are created equal”
- “mankind”
- “manpower”
- “brothers and sisters”
- “manly” and “girly”
- “girls’ night” “boys’ night”
- “kingdom”
- “ladylike”

# Pronouns

- Why are they so important?

# Pronouns

- Common Responses
  - “It’s too hard”
  - “It’s unnatural”
  - “It’s not that big of a deal”
  - “It doesn’t make sense grammatically”

# Pronouns

- It's really not that hard. We easily learn to call newlywed people by a new last name. Or use nicknames.
- Language evolves. This is an evolution of language. "They" as a plural was a result of the Oxford movement. Prior to that, it was singular.
- Everything feels "unnatural" at first but then it becomes normalized. We created language, so we can change it!

# Pronouns

- They/them/theirs (Shea ate their food because they were hungry.) This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun and it can be used in the singular. In fact, “they” was voted as the Word of the Year in 2015.
- Ze/hir/hir (Tyler ate hir food because ze was hungry.) Ze is pronounced like “zee” can also be spelled zie or xe, and replaces she/he/they. Hir is pronounced like “here” and replaces her/hers/him/his/they/theirs.
- Just my name please! (Ash ate Ash’s food because Ash was hungry) Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.

# Pronouns

- If you make a mistake: correct, move on.
- Gently correct others without embarrassing the individual being misgendered. Simply say, “Noah, remember, Kai uses they/them pronouns.” And then move on.

# Pronouns

- Should I put my pronouns on emails and name tags?
- What about introductions?

# Practical Considerations

# Practical Considerations

- Taking on an identity vs revealing their identity
- Expressing emotions & asking for support does not equal weakness or selfishness
- Young people are often easily dismissed by many of the adults in their lives
- Wanting people to look at, listen to, and care about you isn't a problem

# Practical Considerations

- The risk of ignoring or not believing a student who is coming out far outweighs any concerns about attention-seeking
- Ignoring them won't "turn off" their process of self-discovery
- Believe what your LGBTQ+ student tells you about themselves as they express and explore their identity. It's a tremendous privilege to accompany them on this important journey

# Practical Considerations

- Implying, wondering, questioning if this is a phase communicates
  - You don't trust them
  - Queerness is chosen or rejected
  - Queerness can be "grown out of" when one gets older

# Practical Considerations

- Can I still have gendered activities?
  - Boys-vs.-girls skit night
  - Girls'/Boys' small groups
  - Girls' spa night
  - Boys' camping trip

# Practical Considerations

- Whenever you think an activity or conversation needs to be gendered, ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this?
  - Does this *really* need to be gendered, or is this just what we've always done?
  - Would *everyone* benefit from this information?

# Practical Considerations

- Create physical, spiritual, emotional room for young people to be themselves as fully as possible when they're at church and with your group
- Help families of LGBTQ+ youth through their teenagers' coming-out process
- Listen to the parents' concerns or questions about what the new identity means
- Encourage them to love and support their child, even if that means shielding their teen from some of the relational fallout that may come

# Practical Considerations

- How Should I Respond When A Student Comes Out?
  - Recognize the courage it takes to come out
  - Celebrate this moment with them
  - Don't editorialize
  - Realize that this is just a step.
  - Establish expectations of confidentiality

# Practical Considerations

- If you're not ready to have this conversation:
  - Get ready. You're gonna have it
  - Push yourself into uncomfortable territory
  - Remember that this is not about you
- If you're confident about having this conversation:
  - Respond with immediate affirmation, acceptance, and an expression of God's love.

# Practical Considerations

- How Can I Create a Culture of Affirmation in My Church?
  - You *are* a culture creator.
    - The games you play
    - The curriculum you use
    - The jokes you laugh at (or tell)
    - The way to talk about God
    - The kinds of events you plan
  - You have spidey senses about the culture of your church
    - That is turned up to 11 for folks who have not traditionally been welcomed or embraced by the church

# Practical Considerations

- LISTEN to queer people
- Do an audit of your physical space
  - What overt and covert messages are being communicated in art, posters, bulletin boards, signage?
  - Gendered language?
  - Homogenous?
  - Make small changes first

# Questions for Discussion

- Talk about a situation where you were aware of gendered language and how it impacted you or someone else.
- Have you tried to neutralize your language? In what ways?
- Where has it been most difficult to do so?
- Identify two places you'd like to change gendered language in your personal life.
- If you had to grade your church in their use of gendered language—what grade would they earn?
- Identify two places you think you could begin to shift the gendered language in your ministry context.

# Questions for Discussion

- How many \_\_\_\_\_ are in lay leadership positions in your church?
- On any given Sunday morning, how often are \_\_\_\_\_ in leadership?
- How many \_\_\_\_\_ clergy are in your church?
- How often is your congregation exposed to \_\_\_\_\_ in your worship space?
  - Women/female
  - LGBTQ+/queer
  - Minorities/BIPOC
- Discuss three ways that you can increase your congregation's exposure to two of the three categories listed above in ministry contexts.

# Breakout Groups

# Resources

# Contact

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