

Trans terminology for schools

Terminology in the trans field changes constantly, and there is great variation in how terms are used between different groups and individuals. Where a young person or teacher transitions in school, it is best to ask the individual concerned about their choice of language.

Sex is categorised as male or female and is assigned at birth, based on the appearance of the genitalia. Sex describes the biological characteristics of the body: genitalia, reproductive organs, chromosomes, genes, brain and overall build including bone and muscle development. Some people may have mixed or ambiguous sex characteristics, which are classified as intersex.

Gender identity describes how individuals see themselves fitting into the typical socially constructed categories of boys or girls: men or women. Sex and gender identity are not the same thing, although many people do not understand the difference and frequently use the terms interchangeably. In trans people there is a mismatch between the gender identity and the sex assigned at birth.

There is a spectrum of gender identities. Those identifying as neither man nor woman, but in between the two, may describe themselves as non-binary, gender queer or gender neutral and use terms such as pan-gender, poly-gender, bi-gender, third gender, neutrois, or gender fluid (fluctuating). Some reject the gender concept altogether and regard themselves as non-gender.

Trans is often preferred to the term transgender, but both these terms include all variations of gender identity that are not typically associated with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender diverse, gender non-conforming and gender variant are also terms that cover a wide range of gender expressions that differ from the majority of the population. These terms may be preferred, particularly when referring to children.

Cisgender or cis describes the majority of the population in whom the gender identity is regarded as matching their sex as assigned at birth. A person assigned male at birth and identifying as a boy or man, or vice versa, would be regarded as cisgender.

Pronouns Those who identify as boys or men use the pronouns 'he', 'his'; those who identify as girls or women use 'she', 'her'. Those who identify as non-binary/gender queer may prefer pronouns such as 'they', 'zie', 'fey' or many other alternatives; non-gender people may use 'per', which is simply short for 'person'. Using the correct pronoun is very important to a person's sense of identity and self-esteem; using a pronoun which does not reflect a person's gender identity is mis-gendering. If you are uncertain about an individual's pronouns, it's best to ask. Dead-naming - that is, using a person's previous name - is disrespectful, and also undermines the person's sense of self

Trans men or trans masculine individuals are assigned female at birth and identify as boys/men or towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum. Sometimes the abbreviation FtM is used, but it's not regarded as polite.

Trans women or trans feminine individuals are assigned male at birth and identify as girls/women or towards the feminine end of the gender spectrum. Sometimes the abbreviation MtF is used but it's not regarded as polite.

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The Anti- Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic Bullying Alliance

Transition is the point at which a trans person starts to live, publicly, in accordance with their gender identity, rather than their assigned sex. So, a person assigned male at birth, will start living as a girl/woman, or vice versa. This includes change in gender expression, names and pronouns. Non-binary or non-gender people also make visible adjustments to their gender expression. Children of any age may transition socially. Trans people may or may not undertake medical interventions to support transition and, in any case, not before puberty.

Gender expression/gender role describe the dress, hairstyle and overall appearance. These are likely to be changed or modified by a person who undergoes transition. Non-binary and non-gender people might choose an androgynous style – a mixed man/woman expression.

Gender incongruence describes the mismatch between the assigned sex, and the gender identity. This term may be used to replace 'transsexualism' which is now seldom used except in legislation.

Gender dysphoria describes the discomfort associated with gender incongruence. This arises at two levels: social interactions feel inappropriate, and sometimes the sex characteristics feel alien, since these contradict the inner sense of gender identity.

Affirmed gender is the process of bringing the gender role and gender expression into alignment with the gender identity, 'affirms' that identity. Thus the term 'affirmed' gender, describes the post-transition gender status.

Sexual orientation is a separate issue from gender identity. Sexual orientation describes the sexual attraction between one person and another. Trans people may be gay, straight, bisexual or, occasionally, asexual. They may have sexual relationships with other trans people so these terms don't always apply. Their sexual orientation may remain the same through the transition process or, occasionally, it may shift;

Cross-dressing refers to intermittent changes of gender expression, often for recreational reasons. The older term, transvestite is now seldom used.

Gender affirming treatment applies to medical interventions, such as hormone treatments and sometimes surgeries. Children are not offered any medical intervention before the start of puberty.

Hormone blockers may be offered to children in early puberty to suspend the development of their unwanted secondary sex characteristics (including breast development in trans boys or deepening of the voice in trans girls) which may be highly distressing. This treatment is reversible.

Hormone therapy refers to the gender affirming hormones, to feminise or masculinise the appearance, may be offered to adolescents and adults.

Surgery is surgical interventions to modify the sex characteristics and bring them more in line with the gender identity, are not undertaken under 17 years old. Genital surgery may be described as 'lower or bottom surgery'; breast/ chest surgery may be described as 'top' surgery.

More Information: For additional information, please contact the authors of this fact sheet: GIRES www.gires.org.uk or Mermaids www.mermaidsuk.org.uk. Many other national and local support groups are listed in the TranzWiki directory www.TranzWiki.net

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