

gender spectrum

Reflecting on Gender: Self-Exploration for Child- & Youth-Serving Professionals

Toolkit

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Reflecting on Gender Toolkit

Professionals working with families and their children play an important role helping create the conditions where children can feel safer in authentically expressing and identifying their gender. By embracing the richness of the gender spectrum, teachers, coaches, counselors, therapists and other adults working with kids can help to broaden their own as well as children's understandings of gender, and in so doing, help every child feel seen and recognized. An important part of that work is to consider one's own experiences, messages, and beliefs about gender, both growing up as well as in your professional role.

Spend a few minutes looking over and answering the following questions. Write your answers down and hang on to them. You may find it interesting to revisit your reflections at some point in the future, after you have had a chance to learn more about gender and gender diversity. Know that there are no "right" answers; each of us comes by our own understandings of gender in a context.

These reflections are entirely private unless you choose to share them. There's no requirement to discuss your responses with colleagues or supervisors. This is your personal space for honest self-examination. Some professionals find it helpful to complete this exercise before attending training sessions or workshops on gender inclusion, as it can deepen the learning experience.

Messages and traditions associated with gender are complex reflections of society, family, culture, community and other socializing forces. Use this opportunity to pause and examine your own gender history. Greater self-awareness equips us to create safer, more affirming spaces for every young person.

The exercise is divided into two parts: the first asks you to think about your own personal experiences with gender, while the second looks at your professional experiences.



Greater self-awareness equips us to create safer, more affirming spaces for every young person.

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Personal Experience

1. Growing up, did you think of yourself as a boy, a girl, both, neither or in some other way? When did you first realize this? How did you come to that recognition?

Understanding your own gender journey helps you recognize that every young person you work with is also navigating questions of identity and self-understanding, though their path may look very different from yours..

2. What messages did you receive from those around you about how people 'should' look, behave, or feel based on gender? Did those messages make sense to you?

3. How did race/ethnicity, culture, faith, socioeconomic status, or disability shape those messages?

4. What's your first memory of gender defining or impacting your life?

Personal Experience

5. Recall a moment when you felt pressure to conform to gender expectations. What emotions surfaced?

6. Recall a moment of gender congruence – when your gender expression and identity felt especially authentic. What made it feel that way?

7. How were students who did not fit into expectations about gender treated in school by other students? By the adults around them? By you?

8. Has anyone ever misread, questioned or been confused by your gender? How did that feel? What thoughts came up?

Personal Experience

9. Is there anyone in your immediate circle (family, close friends, colleagues) who is transgender, nonbinary, or gender-expansive? How would you characterize your comfort level with their gender?

10. If you were to describe your gender without talking about how you look or what you do, what would you share?



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Professional Experience

1. Describe a recent interaction with a young person whose gender expression surprised you. How did you respond outwardly and inwardly?

2. How have issues of gender and gender diversity "shown up" in your work with families and/or youth?

3. Is there a child with whom you have worked that was/is transgender, nonbinary, or gender-expansive? What was your level of comfort in the situation?

4. What training have you received about gender, gender diversity, and/or gender-inclusive practices?

Professional Experience

5. How would you characterize your school or organization's overall level of acceptance for gender-diverse children or youth? Has that changed over time?

6. What is your own comfort level with discussing issues of gender diversity with:

Colleagues? _____

Parents? _____

Children/Youth? _____

7. Based on your personal and professional reflections, how do you believe your own previous experiences with gender influence the work you do? In what ways do those experiences enhance your ability to create greater gender inclusiveness?

8. Are there ways in which your personal experiences with gender might limit or inhibit your ability to create gender-inclusive spaces? If so, how?

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Professional Experience

9. Do you have any final reflections? Are there any goals you wish to set for yourself, personally? Professionally?

Moving Forward

Every step you take toward greater awareness contributes to safer, more affirming spaces for the children and families you serve. By reflecting honestly on your own journey and your professional practice, you model the openness and courage that help young people thrive.

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