



# LGBTQIA+

## ***RESOURCE GUIDE***



BROCKTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## **Purpose of a Resource Toolkit**

To improve the comfort level of School Personnel to provide appropriate gender sensitive interactions and responses to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersexual, Asexual (LGBTQIA+) +. The “+” symbol stands for any additional group not represented by LGBTQIA acronym. The "+" designation in this position statement is used for inclusivity, to encompass other sexual and gender minorities not captured within the acronym LGBTQIA+ (Stokes, 2019).

## **Population: LGBTQIA+ Youth**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQIA+) youth, a diverse group that includes youth who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB; regardless of behavior) and/or identify as transgender or a gender identity that does not conform to prevalent binary gender constructions (Garbers, et al. 2018). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that there are 1.7 million youth of high school age who identify as LGBTQIA+ (Kann et al., 2016). Two common assumptions that nurses make pose barriers to quality care of LGBTQIA+ patients: the idea that all clients are heterosexual and that all people identify as either male or female (Carabez, et al., 2015).

According to the Human Rights Campaign’s survey, Growing Up LGBTQIA+ in America:

- 1 in 5 LGBTQIA+ youth say that feeling they cannot come out is the greatest problem facing them today.
- 1 in 4 LGBTQIA+ youth believe they cannot come out to their families because it will directly affect their well-being.
- 1 in 3 LGBTQIA+ youth do not feel they have a single adult they can talk to about their identity. (IT GETS BETTER PROJECT, 2018)

The key findings in regards solely to the “Hostile School Climate, Educational Outcomes, and Psychological Well-Being” section of the 2017 National School Climate Survey show:

- LGBTQIA+ students who did not plan to graduate high school (e.g., who planned to drop out or were not sure if they would finish high school) most commonly reported mental health concerns and hostile school climate as reasons for leaving school (GLSEN, 2019).

### **LGBTQIA+ students who experienced high levels of in-school victimization:**

- Had lower GPAs than other students
- Were less likely to plan to pursue any post-secondary education
- Were three times as likely to have missed school in the past month because of safety concerns
- Were less likely to feel a sense of belonging to their school community
- Had lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression (GLSEN, 2019).

### **LGBTQIA+ students who experienced discrimination at school:**

- Had lower GPAs than other students
- Were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month because of safety concerns
- Were less likely to feel a sense of belonging to their school community
- Had lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression. (GLSEN, 2019).

## Background and Significance

Educators share many roles and responsibilities in the ever-changing field of education. Assessing a students social, emotional and physical needs are a big part of their roles. School nurses are viewed as trusted individuals who can provide counseling and guidance. LGBTQIA+ students need trusting adults in their lives to navigate such important and transformational times in their lives. With allies and trusted individuals as part of their circle, educators are quite frankly saving the lives of LGBTQIA+ youth.

Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) data are used widely to compare the prevalence of health-related behaviors among subpopulations of students; assess trends in health-related behaviors over time; monitor progress toward achieving 21 national health objectives; provide comparable state and large urban school district data; and take public health actions to decrease health-risk behaviors and improve health outcomes among youth, grades 9-12 (Center for Disease Control, 2017).

According to the 2017 YRBSS, results show LGBTQIA+ youth suffer from harassment, family/school/community discrimination, an increased risk for suicide, depression, substance abuse, and inequities in care (Kahn, et al., 2018). Khan and colleagues (2018) reported that 33 % of LGBTQIA+ youth have been bullied at school or online compared to 19% of heterosexual students. The prevalence of having been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property was higher among gay, lesbian, and bisexual (9.4%) students than heterosexual (5.4%) students. The study reported that more than 47% of LGBTQIA+ students had seriously contemplated suicide; 23% reported having attempted suicide during the past year; and that LGBTQIA+ students are up to five times more likely than other students to report using illegal drugs. According to the Agency for Health Care and Quality (2011), transgender people are more likely to be uninsured and half of transgender people defer care when sick or injured and among uninsured transgender people, 88% postponed care due to cost and some reported provider denied services based on their gender status.

A survey by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) reported that 42% of LGBTQIA+ youth do not feel accepted in their communities (HRC, 2016). Also, the HRC (2016) reported that forty percent of homeless youth identifying as LGBTQIA+ felt rejected by their family. Another study by Robinson and Espelage (2011), found similar results related to LGBTQIA+ youth being at greater risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, harassment by peers, and increased unexcused absences are significant in high school, these gaps are significantly greater in middle school, putting the younger LGBTQIA+ students at more risk for depression and suicidality.

The 2015 National Climate Survey, comprised of middle (11.8%) and high school (88.1%) responses, demonstrated that 57.6% of LGBTQIA+ students felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation and 43.3%, because of their gender expression (Kosciw, et al., 2016). Eighty-two percent of LGBTQIA+ students reported being verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and 54.5 %, because of their gender expression (Kosciw, et al., 2016). Furthermore, Mahdi, et al., (2014) reported that much of school nurses conveyed limited or no experience practicing skills to interact with LGBTQIA+ youth. According to Mahdi and colleagues (2014), only 22% of school nurses had moderate levels of experience referring students to behavioral health providers with LGBTQIA+ experience, compared to 50% of school counselors. Even fewer school nurses (17.6 %) reported they had moderate to high experience intervening to stop LGBTQIA+ harassment compared to 66.7% of school counselors (Mahdi, et al., 2014).

As an advocate for the individual student, the school nurse provides skills and education that encourage self-empowerment, problem solving, effective communication, and collaboration with others (ANA, 2015). Promoting the concept of self-management is an important aspect of the school nurse role and enables the student to manage his/her condition and to make life decisions (Tengland, 2012). The school nurse advocates for safety by participating in the development of school safety plans to address bullying, school violence, and the full range of emergency incidents that may occur at school (Wolfe, 2013).

## **Disparities**

Among the most significant issues identified by the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) (2011) are the following: LGBTQIA+ youth are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety disorders, to be homeless and are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide as mentioned previously. LGBTQIA+ populations have high rates of tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; lesbians are less likely to get preventive services for cancer; lesbians and bisexual women are more likely to be overweight or obese; and gay men are at higher risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, especially among communities of color (Carabez, et al., 2015; Parker, et al., 2018).

In the realm of sexual and reproductive health, disparities among some LGBTQIA+ youth subgroups include higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV among young men who have sex with men compared to other groups and higher sexual risk including rates of unintended pregnancy among lesbian and bisexual young women compared to those who identify as heterosexual (Garbers, et al., 2018). These health disparities may stem from the stigma, discrimination, and victimization faced by LGBTQIA+ youth at home, in their communities, and at school (Garbers, et al., 2018).

Among persons aged 15-19 years, 209,809 births, 488,700 cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis and 1,652 diagnoses of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) were reported (Kann, et al., 2018).

Data from the 2017 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), reported that:

- 33% LGB students were bullied on school property
- 27.1% LGB students were electronically bullied
- 10% LGB students did not go to school due to safety concerns

Even school-based victimization of LGBTQIA+ young people may have profound consequences for students' school success, health and well-being. LGBTQIA+ students skip classes (13-30%) and miss full days of school (20-32%) at alarming rates because they feel unsafe (Snapp, et al., 2015). The most common reason students reported feeling unsafe was related to their appearance or body size followed by sexual orientation and race (U.S. News & World Reports, 2018). Research from population-based studies has found that young people who experienced biased-based harassment (e.g. harassment based on sexual orientation or factors biases such as race) reported higher rates of mental health concerns and drug use, as well as lower grades and higher rates of truancy (Snapp, et al., 2015).

An article by Rasberry, et al. (2015) shares the following responses from High School youth regarding their School Nurse:

*“The nurses could probably reach out more, too, and just pick up more information and learn more about, like, this type of stuff besides the stuff they just regular do like in the office... Because barely nobody just goes there, unless they’re like referral to like take medication during the day, they have to go down there and get like a pill or whatever.”* – Philadelphia youth

*“She’s just there to, like, you break your arm, here’s a Band-Aid. Like, she’s not going to do much. And, like, you can’t even take . . . let’s say you have a headache. She can’t even give you, like, and aspirin or anything”.* – New York City youth

*“I know some people can be annoying...but you should still have patience because you’re a nurse. You’re there to help.”* – Philadelphia youth

School health services directors and supervisory staff should carefully consider implementation of professional development opportunities to help their health services staff better position themselves to work effectively with sexual minority youth (Rasberry, et al., 2015). Professional development may be used to help nurses and other health staff learn how to engage sexual minority youth in culturally competent ways that allow staff to assess each youth’s specific needs while ensuring the youth can feel safe and supported through the process (Rasberry, et al., 2015). The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine’s position that all health care providers who work with adolescents “should be trained to provide competent and nonjudgmental care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) youth” (Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, 2013, p. 506). Professional development may also be used to help a broad range of school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, and GSA advisors) understand the role that school nurses can play in helping teach youth about and connect youth to critical sexual health services (Rasberry, et al., 2015).

# Glossary of Terms

According to the National LGBT Health Education Center (2019), the following is a glossary of appropriate LGBT terms. Be mindful that:

1. Definitions vary across communities; not all of your LGBT individuals will agree with all of these definitions;
2. There are many terms not included on this list; we tried to keep the list as concise and relevant as possible;
3. Terms and definitions change frequently; we will try to update this list to keep up with changing language (National LGBT Health Education Center, 2019).

**Agender** (adj.) – Describes a person who identifies as having no gender.

**Ally** (noun) – A person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBT people.

**Aromantic** (adj.) – An orientation that describes a person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in forming romantic relationships.

**Asexual** (adj.) – Describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others.

Asexuality is not the same as celibacy.

**Assigned male/female at birth** (noun) – This phrase refers to the sex that is assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child's external anatomy.

**Assigned sex at birth** (noun) – The sex (male or female) assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child's external anatomy. Also referred to as birth sex, natal sex, biological sex, or sex.

**Bigender** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity is a combination of two genders.

**Binding** (noun) – The process of tightly wrapping one's chest to minimize the appearance of having breasts. This is achieved using constrictive materials such as cloth strips, elastic or non-elastic bandages, or specially designed undergarments.

**Biological male/female (see assigned male/female at birth)** (noun) – We avoid using the phrases “biological male” and “biological female” because they may not accurately describe a person's physical sex characteristics, and more importantly, they may not reflect how a person identifies regarding their gender.

**Biphobia** (noun) – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexual people or those who are perceived as such.

**Bisexual** (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender and people of other genders.

**Bottom surgery** (noun) – Colloquial way of describing gender affirming genital surgery.

**Cisgender** (adj.) – A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth correspond (i.e., a person who is not transgender).

**Coming out** (noun) – The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexual orientation or gender identity (to come out to oneself). Also, the process by which one shares one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others (to come out to friends, etc.).

**Deadname** (noun) – A deadname is the birth name of someone who has changed it. The term is especially used in the LGBTQ community by people who are transgender and elect to go by their chosen name instead of their given name.

**Disorders of Sex Development (DSD)** (noun) – Group of rare conditions where the reproductive organs and genitals do not develop as expected. Some DSDs include Klinefelter Syndrome and Androgen Sensitivity Syndrome. Sometimes called differences of sex development. Some people prefer to use the term intersex.

**Drag** (verb) – The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically. Those who perform are called Drag Kings and Drag Queens.

**Gay** (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender. It can be used regardless of gender identity, but is more commonly used to describe men.

**Gender affirming surgery (GAS)** (noun) – Surgeries used to modify one's body to be more congruent with one's gender identity. Also referred to as sex reassignment surgery (SRS) or gender confirming surgery (GCS).

**Gender affirming hormone therapy** (noun) – The administration of hormones for those who wish to match their physical secondary sex characteristics to their gender identity. Also referred to as cross-sex hormone therapy.

**Gender binary** (noun) – The idea that there are only two genders, male and female, and that a person must strictly fit into one category or the other.

**Gender dysphoria** (noun) – Distress experienced by some individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their assigned sex at birth. Manifests itself as clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) includes gender dysphoria as a diagnosis.

**Gender expression** (noun) – The way a person acts, dresses, speaks, and behaves (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous). Gender expression does not necessarily correspond to assigned sex at birth or gender identity.

**Gender fluid** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more one gender some days, and another gender on other days.

**Gender identity** (noun) – A person's internal sense of being a man/male, woman/female, both, neither, or another gender.

**Gender non-conforming** (adj.) – Describes a gender expression that differs from a given society's norms for males and females.

**Gender role** (noun) – A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived sex.

**Genderqueer** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary. Other terms for people whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary include gender variant, gender expansive, etc. Sometimes written as two words (gender queer).

**Heteronormativity** (noun) – The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

**Heterosexual** (straight) (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes women who are emotionally and sexually attracted to men, and men who are emotionally and sexually attracted to women.

**Homophobia** (noun) – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of lesbian or gay people or those who are perceived as such.

**Intersectionality** (noun) – The idea that identities are influenced and shaped by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality/sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, physical disability, national origin, etc., as well as by the interconnection of all those characteristics.

**Intersex** (noun) – Group of rare conditions where the reproductive organs and genitals do not develop as expected. Some prefer to use the term disorders (or differences) of sex development. Intersex is also used as an identity term by some community members and advocacy groups.

**Lesbian** (adj., noun) – A sexual orientation that describes a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women.

**Men who have sex with men/Women who have sex with women (MSM/WSW)** (noun) – Categories that are often used in research and public health settings to collectively describe those who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, regardless of their sexual orientation. However, people rarely use the terms MSM or WSW to describe themselves.

**Minority stress** (noun) – Chronic stress faced by members of stigmatized minority groups. Minority stress is caused by external, objective events and conditions, expectations of such events, the internalization of societal attitudes, and/or concealment of one's sexual orientation.

**Outing** (noun) – Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Non-binary** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity falls outside of the traditional gender binary structure. Sometimes abbreviated as NB or "enby." See more at gender binary structure.

**Pangender** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity is comprised of many genders.

**Pansexual** (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people regardless of gender.

**Polyamorous** (adj.) – Describes a person who has or is open to having more than one romantic or sexual relationship at a time, with the knowledge and consent of all their partners. Sometimes abbreviated as poly.

**Preferred pronouns** (see pronouns that you use) (noun) – We avoid using the phrase "preferred pronouns" because it implies that we can choose to respect or not respect a person's gender identity. We should respect the pronouns a person uses.

**Pronouns that you use** (noun) – Pronouns are the words people should use when they are referring to you but not using your name. Examples of pronouns are she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs.

**QPOC** (noun) – An acronym that stands for Queer Person of Color or Queer People of Color.

**Queer** (adj.) – An umbrella term used by some to describe people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms. Some people view the term queer as more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. Due to its history as a derogatory term, the term queer is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBT community.

**Questioning** (adj.) – Describes an individual who is unsure about or is exploring their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Same gender loving (SGL)** (adj.) – A term used as an alternative to the terms gay and lesbian. SGL is more commonly but not exclusively used by members of the African American/Black community.

**Sex** (noun) – See assigned sex at birth.

**Same-sex attraction (SSA)** (noun) – A term that is used to describe the experience of a person who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Individuals using this term may not feel comfortable using the language of sexual orientation (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual) for personal reasons. Use of this term is not indicative of a person's sexual behavior. It is used most commonly in religious communities.

**Sexual orientation** (noun) – How a person characterizes their emotional and sexual attraction to others.

**Social stigma** (noun) – Negative stereotypes and social status of a person or group based on perceived characteristics that separate that person or group from other members of a society.

**Structural stigma** (noun) – Societal conditions, policies, and institutional practices that restrict the opportunities, resources, and well-being of certain groups of people.

**Top surgery** (noun) – Colloquial way of describing gender affirming surgery on the chest.

**Trans man/transgender man/female-to-male (FTM)** (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is male may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will just use the term man.

**Trans woman/transgender woman/male-to-female (MTF)** (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is female may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will just use the term woman.

**Transfeminine** (adj.) – Describes people who were assigned male at birth, but identify with femininity than with masculinity.

**Transgender** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth do not correspond. Also used as an umbrella term to include gender identities outside of male and female. Sometimes abbreviated as trans.

**Transition** (noun) – For transgender people, this refers to the process of coming to recognize, accept, and express one’s gender identity. Most often, this refers to the period when a person makes social, legal, and/or medical changes, such as changing their clothing, name, sex designation, and using medical interventions. Sometimes referred to as gender affirmation process.

**Transmasculine** (adj.) – Describes people who were assigned female at birth, but identify with masculinity than with femininity.

**Transphobia** (noun) – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of transgender or gender non-conforming people or those who are perceived as such.

**Transsexual** (adj.) – Sometimes used in medical literature or by some transgender people to describe those who have transitioned through medical interventions.

**Trauma-informed care** (noun) – an organizational structure and treatment framework that centers on understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma.

**Tucking** (verb)- The process of hiding one’s penis and testes with tape, tight shorts, or specially designed undergarments.

**Two-Spirit** (adj.) – A contemporary term that connects today’s experiences of LGBT Native American and American Indian people with the traditions from their cultures.

**Outdated Terms to Avoid**

The following terms may have been used in the past, but are now considered outdated and sometimes offensive. We recommend replacing these words with the suggested terms provided.

-Berdache	See <b>two-spirit</b>
-Hermaphrodite	See <b>intersex/disorders of sex development</b>
-Homosexual	See <b>gay</b> or <b>lesbian</b>
-Sexual preference	See <b>sexual orientation</b>
-Transgendered/A transgender/Tranny	See <b>transgender</b>
-Sex change	See <b>gender affirmation surgery</b>

# Guidance for Massachusetts Public Schools Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment

*Adapted from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

## **Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity**

An Act Relative to Gender Identity (Chapter 199 of the Acts of 2011),<sup>1</sup> which became effective on July 1, 2012, amended several Massachusetts statutes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of specified categories, to include discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Among the statutes amended is G.L. c. 76, § 5, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity against students who enroll in or attend the public schools. G.L. c. 76, §5 now reads as follows:

**Every person shall have a right to attend the public schools of the town where he actually resides, subject to the following section. No school committee is required to enroll a person who does not actually reside in the town unless said enrollment is authorized by law or by the school committee. Any person who violates or assists in the violation of this provision may be required to remit full restitution to the town of the improperly-attended public schools. No person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation. (Emphasis added)**

In June 2012, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) adopted revised Access to Equal Education Opportunity Regulations, 603 CMR 26.00, and Charter School Regulations, 603 CMR 1.00, to reflect the broadened student anti-discrimination provision in G.L. c. 76, §5. The Board also directed the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) to provide guidance to school districts to assist in implementing the gender identity provision.

All students need a safe and supportive school environment to progress academically and developmentally. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students each play an important part in creating and sustaining that environment. This guidance is intended to help school and district administrators take steps to create a culture in which transgender and gender nonconforming students feel safe, supported, and fully included, and to meet each school's obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, in compliance with G.L. c. 76, §5 and the state regulations. The guidance sets out general principles based on the law, and addresses common issues regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students. It offers case studies based on experiences of schools and students in Massachusetts, and reflects the need to consider issues on a case-by-case basis. The list of issues is not exhaustive, and the examples are intended to be illustrative, not prescriptive.

In preparing this guidance, the Department reviewed policies and guidance from several states, organizations, and athletic associations and consulted with the field. We appreciate the input we received from school and district administrators, advocacy groups, parents, students, and other interested constituents.

## The Law

The gender identity law amended G.L. c. 76, § 5,2 to establish that no person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of gender identity, among other characteristics. The amended Access to Equal Educational Opportunity regulations, 603 CMR 26.00, and the non-discrimination provision of the Charter School regulations, 603 CMR 1.00, require schools to establish policies and procedures, provide training, and implement and monitor practices to ensure that obstacles to equal access to school programs are removed for all students, including transgender and gender nonconforming students.

All districts and schools should review existing policies, handbooks, and other written materials to ensure that they are updated to reflect the new law. At a minimum, this means including the category of "gender identity" within the identification of legally protected characteristics. For example:

*The [ ] Public Schools strives to provide a safe, respectful, and supportive learning environment in which all students can thrive and succeed in its schools. The [ ] Public Schools prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation and ensures that all students have equal rights of access and equal enjoyment of the opportunities, advantages, privileges, and courses of study.*

*The gender identity law reflects the reality that transgender and gender nonconforming students are enrolled in Massachusetts public schools. These students, because of widespread misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about their lives, are at a higher risk for peer ostracism, victimization, and bullying. The 2011 National School Climate Survey by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), found that 75.4% of transgender students had been verbally harassed in the previous year, 32.1% had been physically harassed, and 16.8% had been physically assaulted. Educators play an essential role in advocating for the well-being of these students and creating a school culture that supports them.*

An Act Relative to Gender Identity (The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2019), amended several Massachusetts statutes prohibiting discrimination based on specified categories, to include discrimination based on gender identity. Among the statutes amended is G.L. c. 76, § 5, prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity against students who enroll in or attend the public schools. G.L. c. 76, §5 now reads as follows:

Every person shall have a right to attend the public schools of the town where he resides, subject to the following section. No school committee is required to enroll a person who does not actually reside in the town unless said enrollment is authorized by law or by the school committee. Any person who violates or assists in the violation of this provision may be required to remit full restitution to the town of the improperly attended public schools. No person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation. Some transgender and gender nonconforming students are not open at home about their gender identity for reasons such as lack of acceptance, and safety concerns. A discussion with the student should occur first about parental knowledge of the student's gender identity, names and pronouns before any phone calls are made to the parents.

## Understanding Gender Identity

The gender identity law defines "gender identity" to mean "a person's gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's physiology or assigned sex at birth."<sup>3</sup> The law also states that "[g]ender-related identity may be shown by providing evidence including, but not limited to, medical history, care or treatment of the gender-related identity, consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of a person's core identity; provided, however, that gender-related identity shall not be asserted for any improper purpose."

Transgender youth are those whose assigned birth sex does not match their internalized sense of their gender (their "gender-related identity"), and gender nonconforming youth are those whose gender-related identity does not meet the stereotypically expected norms associated with their assigned sex at birth. A transgender boy, for example, is a youth who was assigned the sex of female at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as male. A transgender girl is a youth who was assigned the sex of male at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as female. Gender nonconforming youth range in the ways in which they identify as male, female, some combination of both, or neither.

The responsibility for determining a student's gender identity rests with the student or, in the case of young students not yet able to advocate for themselves, with the parent.<sup>5</sup> One's gender identity is an innate, largely inflexible characteristic of each individual's personality that is generally established by age four, although the age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial social development.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the person best situated to determine a student's gender identity is that student himself or herself.

*In one Massachusetts town, the parents of a pre-school-age biologically female child noted throughout the child's early years that their child identified as a boy. For as long as the parents could remember, the child preferred to play with boys rather than girls, wanted a short haircut, rejected wearing any clothing that the child identified as "something a girl would wear," and ignored anyone who called him by his stereotypically feminine name. When it was time for the child to enter kindergarten, the child said to his parents, "You have to tell them when I go to kindergarten that I'm a boy."*

Consistent with the statutory standard, a school should accept a student's assertion of his or her gender identity when there is "consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity, or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of a person's core identity." If a student's gender-related identity, appearance, or behavior meets this standard, the only circumstance in which a school may question a student's asserted gender identity is where school personnel have a credible basis for believing that the student's gender-related identity is being asserted for some improper purpose.

In most situations, determining a student's gender identity is simple. A student who says she is a girl and wishes to be regarded that way throughout the school day and throughout every, or almost every, other area of her life, should be respected and treated like a girl. So too with a student who says he is a boy and wishes to be regarded that way throughout the school day and throughout every, or almost every, other area of his life. Such a student should be respected and treated like a boy.

The statute does not require consistent and uniform assertion of gender identity as long as there is "other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of [the] person's core identity." Many transgender people experience discrimination, and some experience violence due to their status. Some environments may feel safe and inclusive, and others less so, challenging a person's ability to live consistently with one gender identity in all aspects of life.

For example, it is possible that a biologically male student with a female gender identity who lives as a girl does not express her female gender identity all the time. In one case, such a student agreed to present as a boy when visiting relatives until the student's parents could explain the student's transgender identity to them. The fact that the student did not exclusively assert her female identity did not alter the fact that she had a female gender identity.

Confirmation of a student's asserted gender identity may include a letter from a parent, health care provider, school staff member familiar with the student (a teacher, guidance counselor, or school psychologist, among others), or other family members or friends. A letter from a social worker, doctor, nurse practitioner, or other health care provider stating that a student is being provided medical care or treatment relating to her/his gender identity is one form of confirmation of an asserted gender identity. It is not, however, the exclusive form upon which the school or student may rely. A letter from a clergy member, coach, family friend, or relative stating that the student has asked to be treated consistent with her/his asserted gender identity, or photographs at public events or family gatherings, are other potential forms of confirmation. These examples are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive.

*In one Massachusetts middle school, a biologically male student explained to her guidance counselor that she was a transgender girl who expressed her female gender identity only at home. The stress associated with having to hide her female gender identity at school was having a negative impact on her mental health, as well as on her academic performance. The student and her parents asked if it would be okay if she expressed her female gender identity at school. The guidance counselor assured the student and her parents that she could do so. The fact that the student presented no documentation to support her gender identity was not a concern since the school had no reason to believe the request was based on anything other than a sincerely held belief that she had a female gender identity.*

## **Gender Transition**

Many, though not all, transgender youth undergo the experience of gender transition. The term "gender transition" describes the experience by which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another. For most youth, and for all young children, the experience of gender transition involves no medical intervention. Rather, most transgender youth will undergo gender transition through a process commonly referred to as "social transition," whereby they begin to live and identify as the gender consistent with their gender-related identity. Some transgender youth who are close to reaching puberty, or after commencing puberty, may complement social transition with medical intervention that may include hormone suppressants, cross-gender hormone therapy, and, for a small number of young people, a range of gender-confirming surgeries. The decision about whether and how to undergo gender transition is personal and depends on the unique circumstances of each individual. There is no threshold medical or mental health diagnosis or treatment requirement that any student must meet in order to have his or her gender identity recognized and respected by a school.

Some transgender and gender nonconforming students are not openly so at home for reasons such as safety concerns or lack of acceptance. School personnel should speak with the student first before discussing a student's gender nonconformity or transgender status with the student's parent or guardian. For the same reasons, school personnel should discuss with the student how the school should refer to the student, e.g., appropriate pronoun use, in written communication to the student's parent or guardian.

## Names and Pronouns

The issue of the name and pronoun to use in referring to a transgender student is one of the first that schools must resolve to create an environment in which that student feels safe and supported. Transgender students often choose to change the name assigned to them at birth to a name that is associated with their gender identity. As with most other issues involved with creating a safe and supportive environment for transgender students, the best course is to engage the student, and in the case of a younger student, the parent, with respect to name and pronoun use, and agree on a plan to initiate that name and pronoun use within the school. The plan also could include when and how this is communicated to students and their parents. In the case of a transgender student who is enrolling at a new school, it is important that the school respect the student's privacy (see the following section) and chosen name.

*In one situation where a transgender girl was entering high school, she and her parent asked the principal to inform her teachers that even though her school records indicate that her name is John, she goes by the name Jane and uses female pronouns. The school principal sent the following memorandum to the student's classroom teachers: "The student John Smith wishes to be referred to by the name Jane Smith, a name that is consistent with the student's female gender identity. Please be certain to use the student's preferred name in all contexts, as well as the corresponding pronouns. It is my expectation that students will similarly refer to the student by her chosen name and preferred pronouns. Your role modeling will help make a smooth transition for all concerned. If students do not act accordingly, you may speak to them privately after class to request that they do. Continued, repeated, and intentional misuse of names and pronouns may erode the educational environment for Jane. It should not be tolerated and can be grounds for student discipline. If you need any assistance to make sure that Jane Smith experiences a safe, nondiscriminatory classroom atmosphere, please contact me or Ms. O'Neill. – Mr. Jones, Principal."*

Massachusetts' law recognizes common law name changes. An individual may adopt a name that is different from the name that appears on his or her birth certificate provided the change of name is done for an honest reason, with no fraudulent intent. Nothing more formal than usage is required.<sup>7</sup> Hence, when requested, schools should accurately record the student's chosen name on all records, whether or not the student, parent, or guardian provides the school with a court order formalizing a name change

.

The Department has a procedure in place to update name changes and gender markers in the Student Information Management System (SIMS) upon request. The document Assigning State Assigned Student Identifiers (SASIDs) to Massachusetts' Public School Students guides schools through changing names and gender markers on school records.

In sum, school personnel should use the student's chosen name and pronouns appropriate to a student's gender identity, regardless of the student's assigned birth sex. For those students who have been attending a school and undergo gender transition while attending the same school, it is important to develop a plan for initiating use of the chosen name and pronouns consistent with the student's gender identity.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) are the two main special education laws. IDEA governs the creation and implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and Section 504 establishes the rules for Section 504 Plans. Although these laws serve similar purposes, the level of supports, services and accommodations a school must provide to meet its legal obligations under IDEA tend to be higher, which translates into more legal protections for students than under Section 504. A student also must be experiencing more significant difficulties in school to qualify for an IEP. Even when the school is fully supportive of a transgender student, having an IEP or Section 504 Plan in place will help ensure that the student receives a consistent level of support throughout any changes in school or district administration, even if the student moves to another school or district (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2019).

## **Privacy, Confidentiality, and Student Records**

Under state law, information about a student's assigned birth sex, name change for gender identity purposes, gender transition, medical or mental health treatment related to gender identity, or any other information of a similar nature, regardless of its form, is part of the individual's student record (see Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.00), is confidential, and must be kept private and secure, except in limited circumstances. 603 CMR § 23.04.8 One circumstance is when authorized school personnel require the information to provide administrative, teaching, counseling, or other services to the student in the performance of their official duties. For transgender students, authorized school personnel could include individuals such as the principal, school nurse, classroom teacher(s), or guidance or adjustment counselor.

When a student new to a school is using a chosen name, the birth name is considered private information and may be disclosed only with authorization as provided under the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations. If the student has previously been known at school or in school records by his or her birth name, the principal should direct school personnel to use the student's chosen name. Every effort should be made to update student records (for example, Individualized Education Programs) with the student's chosen name and not circulate records with the student's assigned birth name. Records with the student's assigned birth name should be kept in a separate, confidential file.

When determining which, if any, staff or students should be informed that a student's gender identity is different from the assigned birth sex, decisions should be made in consultation with the student, or in the case of a young student, the student's parent or guardian. The key question is whether and how sharing the information will benefit the student.

Transgender and gender nonconforming students may decide to discuss and express their gender identity openly and may decide when, with whom, and how much to share private information. A student who is 14 years of age or older, or who has entered the ninth grade, may consent to disclosure of information from his or her student record. If a student is under 14 and is not yet in the ninth grade, the student's parent (alone) has the authority to decide on disclosures and other student record matters.

## Gender Markers on Student Records

A gender marker is the designation on school and other records that indicates a student's gender. For most students, records that include an indication of a student's gender will reflect a student's assigned birth sex. For transgender students, however, a documented gender marker (for example, "male" or "female" on a permanent record) should reflect the student's gender identity, not the student's assigned sex. This means that if a transgender student whose gender identity is male has a school record that reflects an assigned birth sex as female, then upon request by the student or, in the case of young students not yet able to advocate for themselves, by the parent or guardian, the school should change the gender marker on the record to male.<sup>10</sup> Schools are advised to collect or maintain information about students' gender only when necessary.

## Restrooms, Locker Rooms, and Changing Facilities

All students are entitled to have access to restrooms, locker rooms and changing facilities that are sanitary, safe, and adequate, so they can comfortably and fully engage in their school program and activities. In meeting with the transgender student (and parent) to discuss the issues set forth in this memorandum, it is essential that the principal and student address the student's access to the restrooms, locker room and changing facility. Each situation needs to be reviewed and addressed based on the particular circumstances of the student and the school facilities. In all cases, the principal should be clear with the student (and parent) that the student may access the restroom, locker room, and changing facility that corresponds to the student's gender identity. While some transgender students will want that arrangement, others will not be comfortable with it. Transgender students who are uncomfortable using a sex-segregated restroom should be provided with a safe and adequate alternative, such as a single "unisex" restroom or the nurse's restroom. Similarly, some transgender students may not be comfortable undressing in the changing facilities that correspond to the student's gender identity.

The following are examples of ways in which school officials have responded to these situations:

- In one elementary school, a transgender second-grader socially transitioned from female to male. The principal informed the staff: For the remainder of this year, he will use Nurse Margaret's restroom, and toward the end of the year we will make future determinations of restroom use in consultation with his family.
- In one middle school, a male-to-female transgender sixth-grader socially transitioned after spring break. For the rest of the school year, she used the nurse's restroom and the other unisex restrooms at the school. Beginning in seventh grade, she used the girls' restroom.
- In one high school, a transgender male-to-female student was given access to the female changing facility, but the student was uncomfortable using the female changing facility with other female students because there were no private changing areas within the facility. The principal examined the changing facility and determined that curtains could easily be put up along one side of a row of benches near the group lockers, providing private changing areas for any students who wished to use them. After the school put up the curtains, the student was comfortable using the changing facility.

Some students may feel uncomfortable with a transgender student using the same sex-segregated restroom, locker room or changing facility. This discomfort is not a reason to deny access to the transgender student. School administrators and counseling staff should work with students to address the discomfort and to foster understanding of gender identity, to create a school culture that respects and values all students.

The Department strongly recommends that districts include an appropriate number of gender-neutral restrooms commensurate with the size of the school, and at least one gender-neutral changing facility, into the design of new schools and school renovations.

School staff as well as students and their families may find the use of restrooms and changing facilities to be among the more challenging issues presented by the gender identity law, perhaps due to issues of personal privacy. As emphasized in other sections of this guidance, these issues should be resolved on a case-by-case basis, through dialogue with students and parents, and through leadership in creating safe and supportive learning environments.

## **Physical Education Classes and Intramural and Interscholastic Athletic Activities**

Physical education is a required course in all grades in Massachusetts' public schools, and school-based athletics are an important part of many students' lives. Most physical education classes in Massachusetts' schools are coed, so the gender identity of students should not be an issue with respect to these classes. Where there are sex-segregated classes or athletic activities, including intramural and interscholastic athletics, all students must be allowed to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity. With respect to interscholastic athletics, the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association will rely on the gender determination made by the student's district; it will not make separate gender identity determinations.

*At one school, a transgender girl joined the girls' cheerleading squad. The school supported the student's participation on the team. When the team was going to a regional competition, however, several of the team members raised a concern that the school would be made to compete in the coed cheerleading portion of the competition rather than in the all-girls portion for which they prepared. With the permission of the student, the principal wrote a letter that she gave to the coach to take to the competition in case officials at the competition questioned the team's participation in the all-girls' portion of the event. The letter explained: "Student, Jane Smith, is a transgender girl who has been a member of the girls' team since (date). Jane has a sincerely held female gender identity and, therefore, according to state law must be permitted to participate as a girl on the girls' cheerleading team." The team participated in the regional competition without incident.*

## **Other Gender-Based Activities, Rules, Policies, and Practices**

As a general matter, schools should evaluate all gender-based policies, rules, and practices and maintain only those that have a clear and sound pedagogical purpose. Gender-based policies, rules, and practices can have the effect of marginalizing, stigmatizing, and excluding students, whether they are gender nonconforming or not. In some circumstances, these policies, rules, and practices may violate federal and state law. For these reasons, schools should consider alternatives to them.

Whenever students are separated by gender in school activities or are subject to an otherwise lawful gender-specific rule, policy, or practice, students must be permitted to participate in such activities or conform to such rule, policy, or practice consistent with their gender identity.

The new law on gender identity provides a good opportunity for schools to review their gender-distinct policies. For example, some schools require students to wear gender-based garb for graduation or have gender-based dress codes for prom, special events, and daily attire. Schools should eliminate gendered policies and practices such as these. For example, one school that previously had blue graduation gowns for boys and white ones for girls switched to blue gowns for all graduates. The school also changed its gender-based dress code for the National Honor Society ceremony, which had required girls to wear dresses.

Similarly, some classroom teachers may routinely include gender-based practices in the classroom. For example, some teachers may have boys and girls line up separately to leave the classroom to go to lunch, the gymnasium, restrooms, or recess, and may never have considered the educational value of non-gendered alternatives, such as having students line up in the order of their birthdays, or alphabetically by name, or in the order in which they are sitting.<sup>11</sup>

## **Education and Training**

In order to further a safe and supportive school environment for all students, schools should incorporate education and training about transgender and gender nonconforming students into their anti-bullying curriculum, student leadership trainings, and staff professional development.

As with other efforts to promote a positive school culture, it is important that student leaders and school personnel, particularly school administrators, become familiar with the gender identity law, regulations, guidance, and related resources, and that they communicate and model respect for the gender identity of all students.

Professional development for school staff could include topics on gender identity and gender nonconformity such as: the Massachusetts Student Anti-discrimination Law and Regulations; the DESE Guidance on Notifying Parents When a Student Has Been Bullied Based on Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity/Expression; key terms related to gender identity and expression; the development of gender identity; the experiences of transgender and other gender nonconforming students; risk and resilience data regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students; ways to support transgender students and to improve the school climate for gender nonconforming students; gender-neutral language and practices; and this guidance.

## **Communication with School Community and Families**

Superintendents and principals need to review existing policies, handbooks, and other written materials to ensure that they are updated to reflect the inclusion of gender identity in the student antidiscrimination law, and may wish to inform all members of the school community, including school personnel, students, and families, of the recent change to state law and its implications for school policy and practice.

This could take the form of a letter that states the school's commitment to being a supportive, inclusive environment for all students, as well as the school's legal obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Such a letter might include the definitions provided at the beginning of this document and some basic information about transgender and gender nonconforming youth; a link to the school's anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies; a link to this guidance; and other resources, including individuals to contact with additional questions.

## **Conclusion**

This guidance cannot anticipate every situation in which questions may come up in the implementation of this law, and the needs of each transgender or gender nonconforming student should be assessed and addressed on a case-by-case basis. The Department will continue to provide assistance, support, and resources as we work together to create a safe and supportive school environment for all students.

For further information or questions about the content of this guidance, please contact the Safe Schools Program for LGBTQ Students via [Safeschoolsprogram@doe.mass.edu](mailto:Safeschoolsprogram@doe.mass.edu)

# Let's Talk About PRONOUNS

A Guide for Providers, Educators,  
Caregivers & Communities

## WHAT IS A PRONOUN?

A pronoun is a word that refers to the individual speaking, someone, or something that is the focus of discussion.



## Gender Specific PRONOUNS

These are the ways we refer to each other in the third person. Some Transgender or Non-binary folks may decide to change their pronouns during a social transition.

## Gender Neutral PRONOUNS

There is nothing wrong with gender-specific pronouns. However, gender neutral pronouns do not carry the weight of expectations attributed to gender.

### They/Them

These are the most common gender neutral pronouns.

### Ze (Zee)/Sie (See)/Zie (Zee)/Hir (Hear)

These are less common, but should still be respected. They are sometimes referred to as "neo pronouns."

## First Name Basis NO PRONOUNS, please!

Some people do not use pronouns and instead use their given name as a pronoun instead.

## Why are pronouns important?

Asking and correctly referring to someone with the desired pronoun is the most fundamental way to **demonstrate consideration and respect** for others.

*Referring to someone with the incorrect pronoun can result in feelings of dismissal, dysphoria, disempowerment, and devaluation of identity. Refusal to acknowledge and respect pronouns is oppressive behavior that results in force of normative privilege and discounts the respect all individuals deserve.*

## ASK!

### How do I learn someone's pronoun?

Just ask! "What pronouns should I use to refer to you?" "Which pronouns do you use?" "Can you remind me of your pronouns?" While doing so may feel new and even uncomfortable for you, it is appreciated and helps avoid other uncomfortable situations that result from making assumptions or learning about the mistake later.

### It's okay. mistakes do happen.

If you mistakenly used the wrong pronoun(s), the best response is to acknowledge the mistake with an apology, use the correct pronoun, and move on with the conversation. Try to avoid reiteration of guilt, worry, and apology. By moving forward, you avoid creating unnecessary social discomfort for yourself and others.

**Ask!** Do not ever rely on assumption or your own confidence by simply thinking you know. Openly ask about pronouns.

**Learn.** Take some time to familiarize yourself with gender pronouns. Seek out literature and discussion opportunities for continued personal development and understanding.

**Advocate.** Lead by example and be an ally for others through your own conduct. Be mindful of others, and when a friend, neighbor, or colleague makes a mistake — gently correct them.



## Gender Support Checklist for Transgender and Non-Binary Students

### Student's Name

- ☐ What name will the student use?
- ☐ Is the student using a different name at home? What name is the student using with siblings or other family members?
- ☐ Is the student using this name in all school environments or only a few?

### Pronouns

- ☐ Do we know the pronouns this student wants to use? (Some students may not use pronouns at all. You may also have students who use multiple pronouns.)
- ☐ Is the student using these pronouns at home? Is the student using these pronouns with siblings or other family members?
- ☐ Is the student using these pronouns in all school environments or only a few?

### School Database

- ☐ Is the student's name being changed in the school database?
- ☐ What is the procedure for this in our district? Who is the school contact person? Who is the district contact person?
- ☐ Does the family know this is an option (if the student has affirming family members)?
- ☐ Is the student's gender marker being changed in the school database?
- ☐ What is the procedure for this in our district? Who is the school contact person? Who is the district contact person?
- ☐ Does the family know this is an option (if the student has affirming family members)?

### Family Support

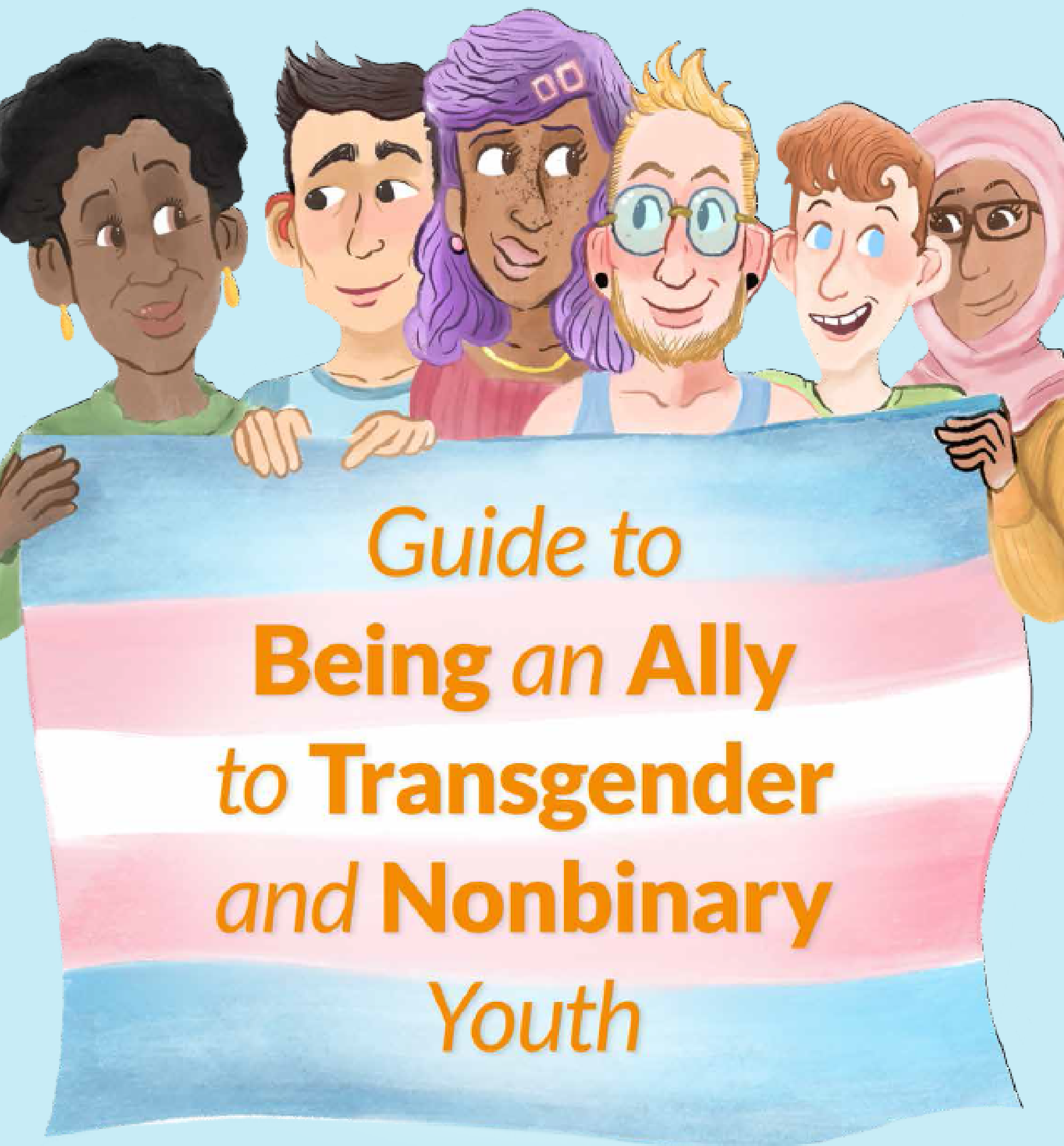
- ☐ Does this student have affirming family members?
- ☐ Is the student currently affirmed by some adults in their home life, but not all?
- ☐ Do appropriate staff know how to communicate with the family while protecting the student's well-being? Every situation is unique.
- ☐ Has the school connected the family to local resources such as a Transgender or Non-Binary Parent Support Group? (Do this only if this is safe for the student. Always ask the student about family dynamics.)

### School Support

- ☐ Has the school designated one or two primary support people for the student who will check in with them at least once a week?
- ☐ Has there been professional development planned for the staff without violating the student's privacy?
- ☐ Are staff aware of policies and procedures to support transgender and non-binary students?
- ☐ Are staff aware of anti-bullying/harassment policies?
- ☐ Who would follow through and develop a plan if bullying or harassment occurred?

### Gendered Facilities and Activities

- ☐ Which restroom(s) will the student use?
- ☐ Will the student need support around where to change clothes for physical education? What locker room will the student use?
- ☐ Will a staff member coordinate supports for field trips and/or overnight school trips?
- ☐ Will a staff member support the student in being fully included in gendered sports aligned with their gender identity?



# SEX AND GENDER: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Many people confuse sex and gender, or use the two interchangeably. Many wrongly assume that sex defines gender, when in reality gender identity is a living, growing experience that can change over time.

It can be tough for transgender and nonbinary people to constantly educate or be subjected to the other's curiosity, so one of the best ways to be an ally is to educate yourself on the basics of gender identity and expression, so you can better support others.

## Gender Identity

### Sex

Sex is the classification of a person as *male*, *female*, or *intersex*. When we are born, doctors usually decide whether female or male will be listed on our birth certificate. This sex assignment at birth is typically based solely on one's genitals, however sex characteristics also include chromosomes, gonads, and sex hormones. Our sex assigned at birth may or may not correspond to our gender.

Someone's sex characteristics are their personal information, and you do not need to know someone's sex assigned at birth to be respectful of their gender identity. When someone shares their gender identity with you, it's inappropriate to assume or try to deduce that person's sex assigned at birth. Rather, believe others when they share their gender identity with you and support them.

### Gender

Gender describes our internal understanding and experience of our own gender identity. Each person's experience of their gender identity is unique and personal, and cannot be known simply by looking at a person. Common genders include:

- **Cisgender:** people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Transgender:** people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many transgender people will transition to align their gender expression with their gender identity, however you do not have to transition in order to be transgender.
- **Nonbinary:** people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as outside of the male-female gender binary. Many other words for identities outside the traditional categories of man and woman may be used, such as genderfluid, genderqueer, polygender, bigender, demigender, or agender. These identities, while similar, are not necessarily interchangeable or synonymous.
- **Two-Spirit:** a term created by First Nations/Native American/Indigenous peoples whose sexual orientation and/or gender/sex exists in ways that challenge colonial constructions of a gender binary. This term should not be appropriated to describe people who are not First Nations/Native American/Indigenous members.

# GENDER EXPRESSION

Gender expression can be a fun, creative, and affirming way to express yourself. You can be an ally to transgender and nonbinary people in your life by refraining from making assumptions about their gender. Be aware of the expectations you project onto others based on their gender, and strive to support others and validate their experiences.

*You can't tell someone's gender by looking at them*

## Expression

Gender expression describes the way in which we present or express our gender, which can include physical appearance, clothing, hairstyles, and behavior. We have control over some elements of our gender expression, such as behavior, body modification, or ornamentation.

## Perception

Our perceived gender is based on other people's evaluation of our bodies, which unlike our gender expression, we cannot control. We cannot visually see someone's sex when we look at them, but people perceive gender based on a variety of visual and social cues, including but not limited to a person's gender expression, secondary sex characteristics, and the social role they are playing relative to the expected gender of that role.



# NAMES AND PRONOUNS

Respecting the language that youth use to self-identify their gender is not only polite, it can save lives. In a recent study of transgender youth, using chosen names at home, at school, at work, and with friends reduced depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior.

## *Forms of Address that Show Respect*

### Names

Some names can seem gendered, and so some transgender and nonbinary people choose a new name, or a variation of their old name, that aligns with their gender. The process of a legal name change can be expensive and complicated, and may not be possible right away for all transgender and nonbinary people. Whether or not a person's name has been legally changed, you can be supportive of transgender and nonbinary people in your life by honoring the name that they ask to be referred to.

Usage of chosen name resulted in a **29% decrease in suicidal ideation** and a **56% decrease in suicidal behavior**\*

### Pronouns

Names and pronouns are a common way to communicate one's gender. Honoring a person's name and pronouns shows respect and acknowledgement of their gender and identity. Here are some examples of pronouns that people use, in order of nominative, objective, possessive determiner, possessive pronoun, and reflexive:

- She, her, her, hers, and herself
- He, him, his, his, and himself
- They, them, their, theirs, and themselves
- Ze/zie, hir, hir, hirs, and hirself
- Xe, xem, xyr, xyrs, and xemself
- Ve, ver, vis, vis, and verself

We cannot assume someone's pronouns, in the same way we cannot assume someone's name. It's always best to confirm with a person what their name and pronouns are. You can do that by asking, or by introducing your own pronouns when you meet a person, which gives them the opportunity to share theirs.

### Honorifics

An honorific is a "respectful title or form of address." The honorific Mr., abbreviated from Mister, is sometimes used for men regardless of marital status or age. Ms. is sometimes used for women regardless of marital status or age, and can be used by women who do not want the associations of either Miss (a young, unmarried woman) or Mrs. (a married woman). Recently, Mx. has become a gender-neutral option to anyone who wants a title that can be used regardless of gender, age, or marital status. If you are using honorifics, for example on an intake form or invitation, confirm with the person you are addressing what honorifics they prefer.

\*Research Brief: Gender-Affirming Care for Youth  
<[www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/01/29/research-brief-gender-affirming-care-for-youth/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/2020/01/29/research-brief-gender-affirming-care-for-youth/)>

# LABELS OR NO LABELS?

## *Your Identity is Yours to Define*

### Why Labels Matter

The LGBTQ acronym is just a small sample of the diversity of the youth The Trevor Project serves. According to our 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, youth respondents identified with more than 100 sexual orientations and more than 100 gender identities.

Labels can be a liberating way to express yourself and find others who relate to your experiences. With the internet, using more specific labels helps to filter through millions of results to connect and build community with other people who share your identity. It's OK if you don't understand all the words being used, but avoid invalidating others for using labels that are unfamiliar to you.

Gender is complicated, and there shouldn't be a limit to the number of words you use to describe your experience of your gender.

### It's OK Not to Label Yourself

If your gender is fluid, sometimes it can feel more liberating to not label yourself. For others who are questioning or exploring their gender, going without a label is more comfortable than committing to one right away.

Be careful not to tell others how you think they should or shouldn't label their gender. Gender is a personal experience. There is no right or wrong way to define your gender, and it's OK if you don't want to label yourself either.



# BEST PRACTICES

## *How You Can Support the Trans and Nonbinary People in Your Life*

### Disclosure

After a friend or loved one shares their experiences with their gender, you may want to inform everyone in your group to make sure that everyone knows to use the correct pronouns, or because you are surprised to find out that someone you know is transgender. Refrain from sharing anyone else's story for them.

Disclosing a transgender or nonbinary person's identity could cause discomfort if they have not come out to others. It could also compromise their safety, as many people or environments can be dangerous for transgender and nonbinary people.

### Transitioning

Transitioning looks different for different people, and there is no right way to express your gender. Some people medically transition, and others do not. This may be related to personal expression, lack of access to gender-affirming healthcare, medical conditions that prevent certain procedures, or other reasons.

Transitioning is more complicated than just a surgery, and can take place over a number of years, involving social, medical, and/or legal aspects of transition. Some people decide not to transition at all. This may be for lack of supportive community, risk to personal safety, or other personal reasons. There is no "right" way to express your gender identity or to live your truth.

Under no circumstances should you ask unprompted questions about a transgender or nonbinary person's body, genitals, medical history, plans for medical procedures, their previous name, or invasive details about their life prior to transition. Imagine how you might feel if a stranger asked you such questions!

### Age

There is no "right" age to understand your gender identity. Some people know their gender from a very young age, and supporting them in this has many positive effects on their mental health and well-being. Other people transition later in life, when they are in an accepting environment to do so and have access to social, medical, or legal resources to support them. Other people explore their gender identity over the course of their entire lives.

### Binary and Nonbinary Genders

Gender is not strictly binary, and while some transgender people are binary in their gender identity and expression, others may express their gender as nonbinary, agender, genderfluid, and many more. Nonbinary people often prefer to identify outside binary categories of gender, whereas binary transgender people usually want to be accepted simply as men or women.

25% of LGBTQ youth identified outside of the gender binary\*

\*Research Brief: Diversity of Youth Gender Identity  
<[www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/10/29/research-brief-diversity-of-youth-gender-identity/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/10/29/research-brief-diversity-of-youth-gender-identity/)>

**MOVEMENT  
SPEECH  
STYLE  
HAIR**  
Someone's  
appearance is not  
indicative of how  
they identify their  
gender. There are  
an infinite amount  
of amazing ways  
to be a person  
of any gender.\*

Sexuality

Transgender and nonbinary people identify with a wide variety of sexualities. Just because you know someone's gender does not mean you automatically know their sexual orientation.

“Passing”

“Passing” is a term used to describe whether or not a person is perceived as a certain gender; for example, “passing as a woman” or “passing as a man.” For many transgender people, being able to “pass” as the gender they align with is important for a sense of well-being, and “passing privilege” can allow one to move safely through environments where being perceived as transgender is a danger.

However, the term can be considered problematic because it implies that being perceived as cisgender is the ultimate goal for transgender and nonbinary people. The word “passing” can imply that a person has to “convince” others of their gender, rather than being able to simply express their true self. Implying that transgender people are lying, tricking, or deceiving other people is wrong and hurtful.

Misgendering

To misgender someone means to use the wrong name, pronouns, or form of address for a person's gender. Whether misgendering happens as an innocent mistake or a malicious attempt to invalidate a person, it is deeply hurtful and can even put a person's safety at risk if they are outed as transgender in an environment that is not tolerant.

Purposefully misgendering is not OK, and you can be a good ally by standing up for others if you witness someone being harassed for their gender. If you misgender someone by accident, apologize swiftly without making an excessive show out of the mistake or your guilt, which can create even more discomfort for the person who has been misgendered. Show that you care by doing better moving forward.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are everyday comments and questions that can be hurtful or stigmatizing to marginalized people and groups. Microaggressions are subtle, and the person committing the microaggression may have no idea that their comments are harmful.

For example, a common comment that transgender people may hear is, “You don't look trans!” This is often phrased as a compliment, however it implies that being transgender is a negative thing, or that all people want to be perceived as cisgender. Since microaggressions are subtle, do your best and listen to any feedback you may receive. If someone's feelings are hurt by something you've said or done, take the time to understand and to learn from the experience.

\*Trevor Support Center: Coming Out  
<[www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr\\_support\\_center/coming-out/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/coming-out/)>

# MISTAKES AND SAYING SORRY

## *What To Do If You've Offended Someone*

While we rarely intend to hurt others, common mistakes such as forgetting a person's pronouns, using their birth name instead of their chosen name, or misgendering a person can hurt feelings or even put another person's safety at risk. In these moments, it's good to have a roadmap for how to make things right. We recommend the three simple steps of listening, being accountable, and doing better next time.

### 1. Listen

Unfortunately, it's common to avoid listening to those we've hurt whether intentional or not, as it inspires uncomfortable feelings of guilt and shame. Stay in your discomfort and be willing to listen, because this is how we can grow.

Seek to understand and empathize with the other person's lived experience.

### 2. Be Accountable

Take responsibility for your actions, privileges, and experiences that you hold which could contribute to your biases. Don't dismiss what the person is sharing with you, justify your behavior, or defend your intentions. It isn't helpful to the people who have been hurt, and it shifts the focus away from the people who have been harmed and onto your personal feelings of guilt, shame, or defensiveness.

Remember, intention is not impact. The best apology is one that doesn't make excuses or invalidate the other person's feelings.

### 3. Commit To Do Better

Treat it as a learning experience. The most authentic apology is meaningless if there is no change or if the behavior is repeated consistently in the future.

Show you care by doing better next time.





The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning young people.



@TheTrevorProject



@TrevorProject

# Resources for LGBTQ+ Brockton Youth

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Health Imperatives

## **BrAGLY**

Our BrAGLY support group is for LGBTQIA+ youth from ages 14 to 19. The group is run by youth and supported by adult mentors. It meets weekly via Zoom to provide peer support, opportunities for discussion, leadership development, health education, and recreational activities. The youth also produce a quarterly newsletter.

## **ADVOCACY**

We help LGBTQIA+ youth to advocate for policies that support their needs on issues such as violence and school bullying, homelessness, and health.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

BrAGLY meets at our Brockton office, which is located at 942 West Chestnut Street. For more information, contact Brittany Badgett at [bbadgett@healthimperatives.org](mailto:bbadgett@healthimperatives.org) or email the group at [BrAGLY@HealthImperatives.org](mailto:BrAGLY@HealthImperatives.org)

## **Other agencies outside of Brockton, MA**

### **The Trevor Project**

[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)

24/7 Trevor Lifeline: 1 (866) 488-7386

- The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

### **Boston GLASS Community Center**

75 Amory St. Boston, MA 02119

(857) 399-1920

<https://jri.org/services/health-and-housing/health/boston-glass>

- A drop-in center for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning young people between the ages of 13 and 25. You can get something to eat, use the computers to build a resume, or talk to a staff person and get help or support on everything from housing issues to health care.

# Resources for LGBTQ+ Brockton Youth

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## Other agencies outside of Brockton, MA

### **GLSEN- Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network**

GLSEN MA PO Box 51243, Boston, MA 02205

(617) 684-5736

email: [Massachusetts@chapters.glsen.org](mailto:Massachusetts@chapters.glsen.org)

<http://www.glsen.org/chapters/massachusetts>

- (GLSEN) is a national organization making schools safer for ALL students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Since homophobia and heterosexism undermine a healthy school climate, they work to educate teachers, students, and the public at large about the damaging effects these forces have on youth and adults alike.

### **OUT Metrowest**

PO Box 2122, Framingham MA, 01703

(508) 875 2122

email: [info@outmetrowest.org](mailto:info@outmetrowest.org)

<http://outmetrowest.org/>

- The mission of OUT MetroWest is to support the health and emotional well-being of LGBTQ teens in the Boston MetroWest area by offering youth-led and adult-supported social and educational programs.
- Umbrella is a peer group specifically intended to provide additional support for transgender and gender-nonconforming youth.
- Nexus is a first-in-the-Commonwealth program for middle school youth that meets monthly. Nexus provides a safe space to explore questions relating to sexual orientation and gender identity and includes a light dinner, group discussions, and diverse activities.

### **Greater Boston PFLAG**

85 River St., Suite 3A P.O. Box 541619 Waltham, MA 02454

(781) 891-5966

[www.gbpflag.org](http://www.gbpflag.org)

- Greater Boston PFLAG offers help for LGBT youth, their families, and communities around the topic of sexual identity. They are a group of parents, families, friends, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Greater Boston PFLAG helps change attitudes and creates an environment of understanding so that our gay family members and friends can live in a world that is safe and inclusive.

# MORE RESOURCES FOR THE YOUTH

- **Q Chat Space** is a bully-free online community of LGBTQ teens that can chat with other LGBTQ teens and trained staff from LGBTQ centers around the country. You can access Q Chat Space at [www.qchatspace.org](http://www.qchatspace.org)
- **Gender Spectrum Lounge** is a global online community for gender-expansive teens, their families and support professionals to connect, collaborate and find resources. You can access the Gender Spectrum Lounge at [genderspectrum.org/lounge](http://genderspectrum.org/lounge)
- **National Runaway Safeline** is a federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth, available 24/7/365, providing access to resources and listening professionals. You can call NRS at 1-800-RUNAWAY or at [1800runaway.org](http://1800runaway.org)
- **The Validation Station** is a free texting service that sends daily gender-affirming and uplifting text messages to trans and non-binary youth in lockdown. You can access The Validation Station at [validationstation.net](http://validationstation.net)
- **Trans Lifeline Hotline** is a peer support service run by trans people located all over the US and Canada, for trans and questioning callers. You can call Trans Lifeline Hotline at 877-565-8860
- **The LGBT National Help Center** offers a talkline and weekly chatrooms for youth, providing confidential peer-support, information, local resources and community. You can call the LGBT National Youth Talkline at 800-246-7743
- You can access the **Weekly Youth Chatrooms** at [glbthotline.org/youthchatrooms](http://glbthotline.org/youthchatrooms)
- **True Colors United** has created an online COVID-19 Action & Resource center providing the most up-to-date resources for youth and adults experiencing homelessness. They include resources for folks working in the field, advocates making a difference, and young people looking for help. You can access the Action & Resource Center at [truecolorsunited.org/coronavirus-action-resource-center/](http://truecolorsunited.org/coronavirus-action-resource-center/)
- Many **PFLAG** chapters are meeting virtually or providing 1:1 virtual support as requested for parents/guardians or LGBTQ youth. Go to [pflag.org/find](http://pflag.org/find) to look up the PFLAG chapter in your area and reach out by phone, email or on social media to learn more about their virtual support options.

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