



Supporting Queer Autistic Individuals: Applying The Lessons of Universal Design to Gender and Sexuality

Definitions of Commonly Used Terms

SEX

An individual's physical attributes, including internal and external genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes. You may encounter some terms related to sex, including:

- Sex assigned at birth: Typically, children are given a label of male or female at birth. This is their assigned sex. You might see this concept abbreviated as AMAB (assigned male at birth) or AFAB (assigned female at birth).
- Intersex: An individual whose body falls outside of the strict male/female binary. There are many intersex presentations that can include variations in primary and secondary sex characteristics, hormones, and chromosomes.

GENDER

The cultural understanding of what makes an individual feminine or masculine. It is both a cultural and socially constructed concept. It includes norms, roles, and relationships of individuals. You may also encounter some specific gender terms such as:

- Nonbinary: An individual whose gender does not fall into the gender binary/categories of man and woman.
- Transgender or Trans: An individual's gender orientation, gender identity (what individuals label themselves) and gender expression (how individuals present themselves) are different from the individual's sex assigned at birth.
- Cisgender: An individual's gender orientation, gender identity, and expression are consistent with the individual's sex assigned at birth.

GENDER BINARY

The belief that there are only two genders and/or everyone is either male or female. It can be abbreviated as "enby".

THE GENDER UNICORN

This graphic is a helpful way to visualize the components of gender and sex, as well as how they combine to influence sexuality and identity. While this is a simplification and does not include every nuance, it's useful as a starting point.

PRONOUNS

We all use pronouns. The traditional pronouns for an individual are she and he. Nonbinary or gender nonconforming folks may use neopronouns (for example Mx. or Ze), the singular they (as in "they went to the store") or other variations in pronouns. It is considered polite to ask someone for their pronouns rather than assuming.

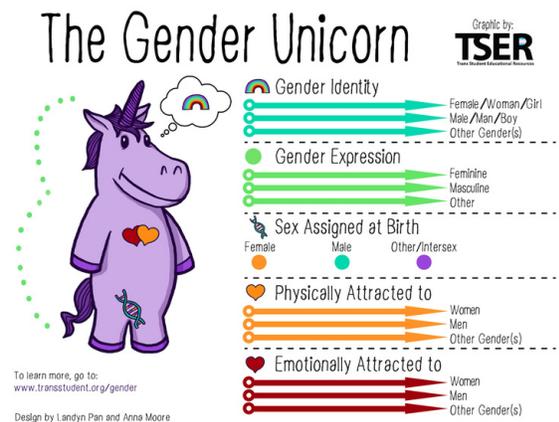
SEXUALITY

While sexuality can be related to gender and sex, it is not the same thing. Sexuality includes who you are attracted to, types of attraction (including romantic, sexual, platonic), and how much attraction you feel. There are many common terms related to sexuality you might encounter. Some of these include:

- Lesbian or gay: a person who is attracted to individuals of the same gender as themselves.
- Bisexual: a person who is attracted to more than one gender.
- Asexual: a person who does not experience sexual attraction.
- Demisexual: a person who only feels sexual attraction after they have an emotional bond with someone.
- Pansexual: a person who is attracted to all genders.

BLANKET TERMS

You are also likely to encounter some terms that refer to the community as a whole, for example LGBTQIA. This is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual. Another blanket term is "queer" which is a general term for those whose gender or sexuality fall outside the majority.



Common Questions and Concerns

WHAT IF I MAKE A MISTAKE OR DON'T KNOW A TERM?

All of us make mistakes at times. Many terms and conventions around gender and sexuality are changing quickly. If you don't know something, make an effort to find the answer (Googling is often a great first step), then ask for clarification. If you make a mistake, the most important thing you can do is work to correct it. Apologize, follow up with the individual in private if necessary, and move forward from it.

HOW AND WHY SHOULD I ASK FOR SOMEONE'S PRONOUNS?

An individual's name and pronouns are important. Think of how disrespected you might feel if someone refused to use your correct name. A dead name is an individual's birth name that they no longer use. Using someone's dead name is disrespectful and not necessary. Do not share someone's dead name if you know it. It can be challenging to acclimate to a new name or new pronouns, but you can learn by practicing using the correct ones. When you meet someone new, ask for their pronouns just ask like you're asking for their name. You can introduce yourself and your pronouns to alleviate stress of asking. Example: "Hi my name is _ and I use _ pronouns."

USING SINGULAR THEY AND NEOPRONOUNS

You may find someone who says their pronouns are "they/them/theirs", or even someone who uses pronouns you don't recognize. Don't panic. You can always ask for clarification or help with pronunciation. Once you learn someone's pronouns, simply place them in a sentence where you would traditionally say he or she, his or hers, him or her. For example you might say "They went to the store yesterday," or "I heard zir laugh." In these cases "they" and "zir" are the pronouns.

TRANS IS AN UMBRELLA TERM

One important thing to know about the term trans or transgender is that many people with a variety of genders fall under this umbrella. There are **binary trans** individuals who are assigned one binary gender at birth and transition to the other binary gender. However, **nonbinary** folks are also trans: their gender does not match the one they were assigned at birth. They may transition as well.

It's also good to remember that transitioning looks different for everyone. It can include **medical and social transition**.

Medical transition is the process of physically changing your body to more appropriately match your gender. Medical transition can look different for each individual. Medical transition can include taking hormones, using puberty blockers, plastic surgery, or other forms of surgery. Not all trans individuals medically transition. This does not make them more or less trans, and it is their own, personal decision.

Social transition is an individual's development of a gender expression that matches their identity. It's the process of coming out to friends, family and colleagues; changing one's name and sex on legal documents; and dressing, speaking, or behaving differently.

BASIC GUIDELINES TO INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Every individual has different boundaries and preferences when it comes to their gender and sexuality. In order to be sensitive and respectful, ask the individual what is ok for you to discuss with them. Here are some examples of common questions or comments that are generally considered offensive:

- What's your real name?
- If someone is "really" trans.
- Questions about their body.
- What's wrong with being a (birth gender)?
- You look like a (birth gender).
- You're a convincing (gender).
- Compare Drag Kings/Queens to trans individuals.
- Referring to someone as it, thing or tranny (this is a slur).
- You're only a real (gender) if you have a (genitalia).
- How can you be trans and gay?
- Unless given permission, do not "out" an individual as trans. Let the individual decide whether someone gets to know that information.