

# Relationships, Day 2: Gender Identification

Special Education: Secondary, Lesson #4

## **Student Learning Objectives:**

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To be able to...

1. Correctly label pictures of people as male or female, boy or girl, man or woman
2. Correctly identify themselves and their classmates as male or female
3. Discuss advantages and disadvantages of being male or female
4. Indicate which restroom they should use in the community given two choices

## **Materials Needed:**

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- Magazine pictures of males and females, boys and girls, men and women, (individuals, same sex groups and in mixed groups)
- *Restroom Flash Cards* (copied, cut out and pasted onto cards)
- One copy of the *Worksheet: "Reasons Why It's Great to Be A ...."* for each student

## **Agenda:**

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1. Defining genders
2. Picture sorting
3. The "Gender Game"
4. *Worksheet: "Reasons Why It's Great to Be A ...."*
5. Debrief worksheet and discussion
6. *Restroom Flash Cards* exercise

Gender & gender roles, recognizing the differences (and similarities) between males and females, boys and girls, men and women, is an integral part of understanding who we are as individuals and where we fit in our world. Students will consider the advantages of being male or female, exploring some of the cultural role expectations that accompany gender issues in our society.

Clear self image and social ease within Western culture depends in part on recognizing and acknowledging all that goes with gender - from grooming and hygiene issues to manners. Knowing which restroom to use in the community is an important social skill.

That said, some students may be manifesting gender variance, rather than confusion due to developmental disability. In other words, a student may be **transgender** (experiencing a profound sense of being a different gender emotionally and spiritually than the sex of the body into which they were born). Or a student might be **intersex** (born into a body with chromosomes, anatomy or physiology aren't typical for male or female). Or a student might simply feel totally awkward trying to conform to the culture's stereotyped expectations for people of a particular biological sex. In other words, a student may just be a more masculine female or feminine male. The challenge here comes in teaching socially appropriate gender norms while respecting diversity of gender expression and avoiding negative connotations with regards to gender variance.

If you have one or more students who may be transgender, intersex or gender variant in some other way, rather than simply intellectually confused about gender, we recommend modifying or omitting this lesson. It will not be helpful, and could even do a child considerable harm, to try to apply your authority or your students' peer pressure, to "convince" a young person that his or her identity is "wrong." We recommend consulting a mental health professional who is familiar with gender variance and then discussing the matter in private with the student and the parent or guardian(s).

See the resources here, to learn more about gender variant youth:

[http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-gender\\_nonconforming\\_trans\\_youth.html](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-gender_nonconforming_trans_youth.html)

And here, to learn more about intersex youth:

<http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-intersexuality.html>

## Activities

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**Find out what term students use to define their gender. If they say "boy" or "girl" when asked what "sex are you?", then use their terms and be consistent throughout the rest of the exercises.**

### 1. Defining genders

- A. On the blackboard or a piece of butcher paper, write these two headings:



- B. Ask students to define the words you've put up, to explain what they mean and give you synonyms for these terms. Write their synonyms under the appropriate heading. The lists might look like this:

*male female*  
*boy girl*  
*man woman*  
*guy gal*  
*gentleman lady*  
*him her*  
*he she*

- C. Point out to students that although we divide people into two genders or sexes in Western culture, we are all human beings. Make a third heading, placed above the other two, called human beings and have students brainstorm synonyms. (individual, person, people, homo sapien, citizen, somebody, someone, mortal).
- D. Explain that there are some people, both boys and girls, who may seem or feel more like the opposite sex or they may feel or fit somewhere in between boy and girl / male and female. This is ok, too. But most people are either boys or girls / male or female.

**Match pictures to samples that students have already identified. Work one-to one.**

## **2. Picture sorting**

- A. This exercise can be done by the class as a whole, or with the class divided into small groups, each with a facilitator.
- B. Using the magazine pictures you've prepared, show them to the students and ask them whether the person is male or female. Ask how they can tell (hair, clothes, body shape, make-up). Include biological genital differences - penis and vagina. Have them sort pictures into two piles.
- C. Then (to prepare for future puberty work), have them sort the female pile into two other piles - girls and women, the male pile into boys and men.

**Ask non-verbal students to point to (or touch on the shoulder) all the females in the group (or all the males). Remember to use the student's language.**

## **3. The gender game**

- A. Start by asking for students to raise their hand if they are male/man/boy; then if they are female/woman/girl. If a student gets it "wrong," stop and discuss the issue in private in order not to embarrass the student, while trying to decipher whether you are facing intellectual confusion or actual gender variance. If it seems to be a matter of intellectual confusion, correct the confusion. Otherwise, see the discussion on page 2 of how to proceed.
- B. Have your students sit in a circle. Go around the circle and have students say whether they are male or female.
- C. Repeat the exercise, but this time have them say

**Ask students to tell you (verbally or by drawing or pointing to pictures) what they like best about being male or female. Then ask what they like least about it.**

whether they are a boy or a girl.

- D. Then, if all is going well, have them state the gender of the student to their left. Try to go as quickly as possible.

#### **4. Complete the worksheet**

- A. This worksheet can be done individually by the students, in small groups, or as a large group discussion exercise.
- B. Explain to the students that:  
*"It's important to know what gender we are - male or female. All genders or sexes are special. There are many things that both males and females can do. There are other things that are different - only males do them or only females do them. In this exercise we're going to think of things that are advantages ("good") about being male or female."*
- C. Hand out the worksheet. If using this as a large group exercise, have students brainstorm and write their ideas on the board.
- D. If students have trouble coming up with a list, ask them  
*"What are things a girl or a woman might be able to do that some boys or men might feel embarrassed doing, or find impossible to do.... and vice versa."*

#### **5. Debrief the worksheet**

- A. Ask students to share their lists as a large group. Write their responses on the blackboard.
- B. Make sure to review the students' lists and discuss which "advantages" of being male or female are just myths ... that is, things that people of a different gender could ALSO do. If, for example, they say it would be good to be male because you could be a doctor or good to be female so that you could be a stay-at-home parent, point out that plenty of women do become doctors and that a growing number of fathers stay home to take care of their children. In other words, help students distinguish these stereotypes from true biological or legal differences:
- *Men, on average, can lift heavier objects or reach higher shelves.*
  - *Most women can give birth, though not all women choose to do so.*
  - *Men can legally go without shirts in hot weather. [In some countries, women can't*

*go outdoors without covering their heads, too.]*

- *Women can breastfeed, if they choose to.*
- *In some countries – and in the United States until 1920 – only men can vote.*

- C. Students can write or tell a story about what it would be like if they were of another gender. “If I were a....”

## 6. Restroom Signs Exercise

- A. Discuss with the class that since males and females use different bathrooms in public, it is important to know where to go. If you use the wrong bathroom, people may think you are strange. Sometimes restroom signs can be confusing. The next exercise will help Students practice knowing which restroom they should use when they are out in the community.
- B. The restroom signs worksheet can be used in two ways. **You can either**
- copy the worksheet onto heavier stock paper and cut into flash cards, or
  - create a transparency from the worksheet and point to words as you go.
- C. There are many ways to use this exercise.
- Divide students into two groups, male and female and have them raise their hand when the card fits their group, or stand up when the card is appropriate.
  - Have individuals draw a card from the deck of flash cards and then decide whether or not the restroom indicated would be **OK** or **NOT OK** for them to use personally.
  - Using the magazine pictures from the previous picture sorting exercise, pass out the flashcards and have students place the card on the appropriate group of pictures - male or female.
- D. Sometimes there are **not separate** restrooms for males and females. Be sure students know how to handle any generic “restroom” signs they may encounter.
- E. This exercise is a wonderful time to discuss appropriate public restroom etiquette. Issues include:
- asking someone for directions to get to the restroom,
  - standing in line to wait to use the toilet,
  - using the urinal,
  - making sure the toilet seat is clean before you sit down, and wiping it with toilet paper if it is not,

**Consider the actual restrooms used in your student’s experience - either at school, work or during recreational activities. Make a set of flash cards that uses just those names, or better yet, take a “Polaroid” picture of the restroom signs for use in this exercise.**

**Encourage students to look for other clues when deciding which restroom to use - Is a male or a female coming out the restroom door? Are there drawings (figures dressed in skirts/slacks) that help as cues?**

- flushing the toilet,
- not using broken or plugged toilets,
- informing an attendant or other appropriate person if the facility needs to be cleaned or if paper is gone.
- using the wide variety of hand-washing tools available - different sink taps, hand towels on rollers, paper towel on rollers and crank machines, air blower dryers.

Remember the importance of practicing gender identification in other school and non-school activities. When you are visiting a non-school environment, you might remind students of the above exercise as you point out the restrooms.

If you have a transgender or gender variant student for whom it could be an issue, we recommend that you discuss restroom safety options in private with the student and, with the student's permission, the parent/guardian(s). Sometimes, the safest, most respectful thing you can do is to help the school identify a single stall restroom somewhere in the building that a student or employee of any gender could use and where a student could safely change for PE. In other cases, a student may prefer not to be singled out for that sort of protection, but rather to have the school teach respect for gender variance and establish and firmly, consistently enforce an anti-harassment policy that explicitly prohibits bullying based on gender identity and expression.

# Dear Trusted Adult,

*In class we explored the concept of gender role identification - differences and similarities between males and females.*

*We discussed advantages of being male or female, and talked about society's expectations for us based on our gender. We also spent time working on which restroom we should use in the community.*

*To support today's learning, you could:*

- *Spend some time discussing your feelings about being male or female.*
- *Discuss the pros of each gender from your perspective - what do you like best about being male/female - what do you like least!*
- *When you're in the community, look for non-traditional restroom signs and ask your young adult which one they would use.*
- *Count the males and the females, discretely, next time you're waiting in a line or an office waiting area.*
- *Comment to your child discretely when people's appearance makes it hard to tell their gender - and ask your child for help deciding whether a person is male or female.*
- *List family members (or any other group) and identify their genders.*
- *Watch TV for an evening and write down the names of three male and three female characters*

*All of these activities will support learning about gender role identity, and will add to social skillfulness in the community.*

*If you have any questions or comments, please call me.*

Sincerely,

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Teacher, Principal or Nurse

**NOTE: All Trusted Adult Exercises are Optional.**

# Worksheet: Reasons why it's great to be a ...

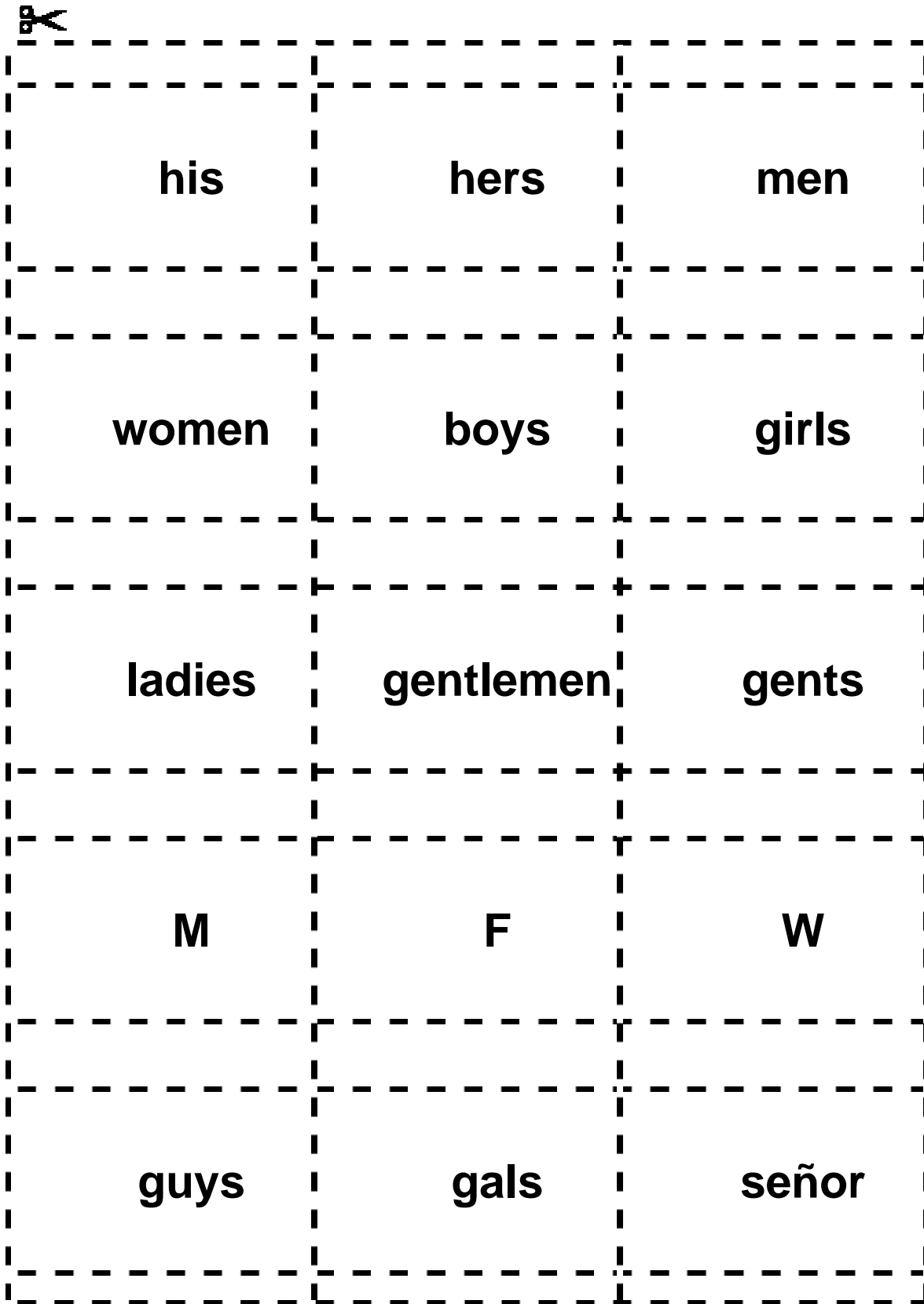
woman/girl/female





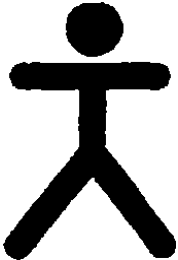





man/boy/male







<p><b>señorita</b></p>		
		<p><b>Family restroom</b></p>
		
 <p><b>family</b></p>	