

Learning the Lingo

Gender Expansive: Children or adults who do not conform to their culture's expectations for boys or girls, men or women. Being transgender or nonbinary is one way of being gender-expansive, but not all gender-expansive individuals identify with these specific words. It's best to discuss with your child what terminology they feel represents them best.

Gender dysphoria: Dysphoria is a word often used to explain the physical and mental discomfort that can result from a misalignment with one's bodily or perceived gender and one's internally felt gender. Dysphoria can be hard to quantify, and can take a number of forms. It may not be obvious, and not every trans or gender-expansive person will experience the same dysphoria. What feels bad to one person may feel good or neutral to another, and vice versa.

Euphoria is the opposite of dysphoria, and in this context refers to the feelings of happiness, pleasure, or simple calm acceptance that can come from aligning an internal and external gender. Framing gender through a lens of joy or euphoria can allow your child to more identify with the positive, wonderful parts of being gender-expansive than the painful and dysphoric parts.

AMAB/AFAB/AGAB: Assigned (Male/Female/Gender) At Birth: these terms are used mainly in a medical context in order to describe what sex doctors observed someone to be at birth. It would be considered offensive or at best impolite to refer to someone as AMAB or AFAB -- use the gender-affirming terms below instead.

Trans boy/man: People assigned female at birth who align themselves more with boys or men.

Trans girl/woman: People assigned male at birth who align themselves more with girls or women.

Non-Binary: The term for children and adults who don't identify as male or female. Non-binary is both an identity and a descriptor: for example, a person can identify as both a trans woman and nonbinary, and many people think being trans in general falls under the non-binary umbrella. There are culturally specific non-binary terms that have existed for centuries or millenia.

Understanding and properly using affirming terms is one of the easiest and most important steps in the often confusing process of making your child feel accepted and understood.

Affirmed Gender: This is the phrase we use to discuss the gender role or term that most describes how someone sees themselves

Gender affirming interventions: Medical or nonmedical changes that are pursued in order to more align oneself with their affirmed gender and the body they desire. Nonmedically, this can take the form of a name change, shift in presentation (clothing, hair), or using different pronouns. Medically, these can include:

Transitioning: A broad word used to describe the many ways people shift into a different gendered place. Transitioning can be social, physical, or internal, and is a framework that is slowly being moved away from. There is no moment that one "becomes the other gender" or "has a sex change". Transitioning is a long, often slow and measured process that many say never truly finishes.

Puberty blocker: GnRHA drugs that are used in order to block the advancement of puberty in adolescents. These have a long history of use in medical settings beyond treatment of gender dysphoria, and are reversible with no long-term negative side effects. They are most often prescribed in order to allow someone the space to think about their body and self without the pressure of an undesired puberty -- something that can cause untold stress and trauma.

Hormone Replacement Therapy: Bioidentical hormones (testosterone or estrogen) taken in order to produce changes in secondary sexual characteristics, as well as corresponding alleviation of the anxiety and depression caused by gender dysphoria. Hormone therapy is safe and can be pursued in any number of forms, including low-dose or cycles.

Gender Affirming Surgeries: There are many gender-affirming surgeries that vary in complexity, cost, and recovery time. Different people will desire surgeries to different degrees, in different orders, and with different goals in mind. Some people will choose to not pursue surgery in any capacity -- and doing so or not has no bearing on the legitimacy or truthfulness of a gender-expansive self. Surgeries are often difficult and expensive to be approved for due to medical gatekeeping.