



Discussion Guide

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For Professionals Working with Teens

Sexetc.org

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Lesson for Telling Your Parents... "I'm Transgender"

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1) Define biological sex, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- 2) Describe how gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation.
- 3) Explain how it feels for one teen to tell his parents he is transgender.

TIME NEEDED

50 minutes

MATERIALS

- Copies of "Telling Your Parents . . . 'I'm Transgender'"—one per student
- Copies of "I Didn't Feel Like a Girl"—one per student (This article is available at Sexetc.org at <http://www.sexetc.org/story/glbtcq/5385>.)
- Copies of "The Human Rights Campaign's Glossary of Terms"—one per student
- Chalkboard or flipchart paper and easel
- Chalk or markers
- Index cards—one per student
- Pens—one per student

PREPARATION

Review the glossary of terms to ensure you are familiar with the terms and concepts for this lesson. Gender identity can be very confusing for both teens and professionals, especially when it comes to differentiating it from sexual orientation.

Prepare chalkboard or flipchart with stem sentences as indicated in the procedures below. Keep the stem sentences hidden until you are ready to reveal each sentence to students.

PROCEDURE

1. Review classroom ground rules and tell students that this lesson will cover the issue of gender identity. Explain that there is often confusion about the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. Let students know that before defining gender identity the lesson will begin by having them think and talk about what they have heard about terms like "gender identity" and "sexual orientation." [5 minutes]

2. Distribute an index card to each student and reveal the following stem sentences one at a time on the chalkboard or flipchart. Instruct students to write down the first response that comes to mind to complete the sentence. Once they have written a response to the first stem sentence, reveal the second stem, and so on until all have been revealed.

- Biological sex is . . .
- Sexual orientation is . . .

- Gender identity is . . .
- The difference between being gay and being transgender is . . .
- One thing I've always wanted to know about transgender people is . . . [5 minutes]

3. Once you have revealed all of the stem sentences, go back through them one at a time and ask for volunteers to share their responses with the whole group. Explain some basic definitions using the following as a guide:

- Biological sex is generally assigned at birth as either “boy” or “girl,” usually in reaction to what genitals the baby has.
- Sexual orientation refers to the gender(s) of people someone is attracted to romantically and sexually.
- Gender identity is a person’s sense of their maleness and/or femaleness.

Ask if there are any questions about the definitions and discuss as needed. Be sure to emphasize the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation.

Explain that, in most cases, our biological sex (what our body looks like) matches our gender identity (our inner feelings about whether we are male, female or a combination of the two). Sometimes, however, the physical part doesn’t match the feelings part, which is called being transgender. [10 minutes]

4. Explain that there is a teen, named Cannon, who has written two stories for *Sex, Etc.* about his experience being transgender, which the group will read together. Then, tell students that the first story is about his experience coming to understand that he is transgender and the second is an interview in which he asked his parents about how they felt when he told them he was transgender. [2 minutes]

5. Distribute copies of the article “I Didn’t Feel Like a Girl” to each student and read together. Ask for reactions to the article, and discuss student responses for a few minutes. [8 minutes]

6. Next, ask the group to imagine what it was like for Cannon’s parents to find out their child was transgender. Explain that Cannon decided to

interview his parents about their reaction and write an article about it. Distribute and read together the article “Telling Your Parents . . . ‘I’m Transgender.’ ” [5 minutes]

7. Next, explain that you will give students a series of questions to have mini-discussions about in pairs. Once they have discussed the question, they will rotate pairs and be given a new question to discuss. Ask if there are any questions about the directions, and if not, have students find a partner or pair them up. Explain that the first pair should discuss the following question.

- What did you think about Cannon’s parents’ reaction?

Allow pairs a couple of minutes to discuss. Then, call time and ask pairs to rotate and find a new partner. Repeat process with the next three discussion questions.

- How do you think Cannon felt doing this interview with his parents? Why?
- Why do you think Cannon’s mother thought it would be easier if her son was gay? Do you agree?
- What do you think parents can and should do if their child tells them he or she is transgender?

[8 minutes]

8. Have students return to their original seats and find their index card from the stem sentence exercise. Ask them to complete the following sentence on the back of the index card:

- If I could talk to Cannon, one thing I would ask him is . . .

Ask some volunteers to share their responses. [5 minutes]

9. Explain to students that there are many other terms related to sexual orientation and gender expression. Distribute copies of “The Human Rights Campaign’s Glossary of Terms.” End the lesson by letting students know that this glossary from the Human Rights Campaign will make it easier for them to understand and talk about these issues. [2 minutes]

The Human Rights Campaign's Glossary of Terms*

Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender expression identity because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to help give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable.

bisexual A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously; a bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary as sexual identity develops over time.

coming out The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

gay A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

gender expression How a person behaves, appears or presents him- or herself with regard to societal expectations of gender.

gender identity The gender role that a person claims for his or her self – which may or may not align with his or her physical gender.

genderqueer A word people use to describe their own nonstandard gender identity, or by those who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

GLBT An acronym for “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.”

homophobia The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

internalized homophobia Self-identification of societal stereotypes by a GLBT person, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation or gender identity.

lesbian A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women.

living openly A state in which GLBT people are open with others about being GLBT how and when they choose to be.

outing Exposing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender to others, usually without their permission; in essence “outing” them from the closet.

queer A term that is inclusive of people who are not heterosexual. For many GLBT people, the word has a negative connotation; however, many younger GLBT people are comfortable using it.

The Human Rights Campaign's Glossary of Terms (cont'd)

same-gender loving A term some prefer to use instead of "gay" or "lesbian" to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

sexual orientation An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex orientation, opposite-sex orientation or bisexual orientation.

sexual preference What a person likes or prefers to do sexually; a conscious recognition or choice not to be confused with sexual orientation.

straight supporter A person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic remarks and behaviors and explores and understands these forms of bias within him- or herself.

transgender A term describing a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most people expect. It is an umbrella term that includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender non-conforming.

transphobia The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.

transsexual A medical term describing people whose gender and sex do not line up, and who often seek medical treatment to bring their body and gender identity into alignment.

* *Glossary terms from the Human Rights Campaign Web site at <http://www.hrc.org/issues/3336.htm>.*