Gender-Inclusive Puberty and Health Education

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Creating a gender-inclusive world for all children and youth.

Thank You to Our Partners

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Agenda

• Framing the Guide
• An overview of the “Principles of Gender Inclusive Puberty and Health Education”
• Quick discussion regarding separating students when teaching PHE
• Q&A

Tell Us A Bit About You...

• Where are you from?
• What do you do?
• Are you a parent?
• Who do you work with?

Gender-Inclusive PHE Principles

• What the document is
  – A set of guiding principles on how to be more gender-inclusive in talking and teaching about puberty
  – A framework supporting healthy bodies and relationships
• What the document isn’t
  – A curriculum
  – A training about sex, sex development, gender or sexual orientation

These principles are applicable to all children and youth!
What is Puberty and Health Education?

• Describes changing bodies during adolescence
• Addresses (sometimes) healthy relationships, sexuality, and pregnancy/STI prevention
• Often introduced in grades 4 – 6

Let’s Hear From You

• When did you received puberty education?

What is a Gender Inclusive School?

• Recognizes gender diversity
• Intentionally demonstrates a commitment to respecting each student’s gender

Gender-inclusive schools ask:
*How are we accounting for the unique gender of all students?*

Why Gender-Inclusive Puberty and Health Education?
Creates Better Learning and Life Outcomes for All

- Supports **academic success**
- Improves **overall school climate**
- Increases **well-being in intimate relationships**
- Reduces **sexual harassment and dating violence**

Benefits Every Student

**Life-Affirming for All**
- Puberty is a critical time for every adolescent

**Life-Saving for Some**
- Transgender and non-binary youth are often invisible and stigmatized in schools
- Increased probability of depression, disordered eating, substance abuse, self-harm and high-risk sexual behaviors

Principles: Gender Inclusive Puberty and Health Education

1. **Establish Gender Literacy**
2. **Distinguish Patterns from Rules**
3. **Emphasize Physiology Rather Than Gender**
4. **Describe Many Pathways to Adult Bodies**
5. **Describe Many Pathways to Families**

Principle 1: Establish Gender Literacy
Three Dimensions of Gender

- **Body**: includes our relationship to our sex (male, female, intersex), as well as our experience of our own body, how society genders our body and interacts with us based on our body.
- **Identity**: our deeply held, internal sense of self as masculine, feminine, a blend of both, neither, or something else. Identity also includes the name(s) we use to convey this sense of self.
- **Expression**: our social gender. How we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender.

Gender Congruence & Personal Gender

- Each of us seeks to experience **congruence** (agreement, harmony) in the 3 dimensions of our gender.
- We are all more than our gender: we are also our race, ethnicity, class, faith community, sense of geographic place, family history and expectations, etc. Our gender is **personal** because while we share some of these aspects of self with others, the way that all of these identities, influences, and characteristics come together is unique to each of us.

Differentiate Gender & Sexual Orientation

Gender (personal)
- Body
- Identity
- Expression

Sexual orientation (interpersonal)
- A person’s physical, sexual, and/or romantic attraction to others

Implementation Tip

Incorporate language that reflects gender diversity in lessons and every day conversation, such as:

- “What a person likes to wear isn’t determined by their gender.”
- “We don’t know what someone’s gender is just by looking at them.”
- “While many of us have been taught that genitals define our gender, our gender is richer and more complex than that.”
Why Gender Literacy Matters

- Critical to help youth know that there is not just one way to be any gender; part of our job as parents is to open up possibilities for our kids instead of limiting them
- Provides them with a tool to help them figure out their own gender; we think our kids understand gender but they don’t have the framework
- Talking about this with your kids also sends important message that you are open to hearing about their gender and creates space for them to share

Principle 2: Distinguish Patterns from Rules

Where Do Patterns Vs Rules Show Up in PHE?

Bodies
Some people are intersex, which means that they were born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

Gender Identity
Often people have a gender identity that is associated with the sex they were assigned when they were born, but sometimes they do not.

Expression
Many boys don’t wear dresses but some do.

Implementation Tip!

Use non-binary language such as:

“That may be true for some people, but not all people”

“More common and less common”

“Frequently, but not always”
Patterns vs. Rules Lasts a Lifetime!

- Helps even very young children to begin seeing the world beyond absolutes; it describes the world they see all around them!
- Deepens critical thinking
- Supports them to be better citizens as they confront complex issues facing our country

Principle 3: Emphasize Physiology Not Gender

In Practice

Convey important physiological terms and definitions & Describe the parts (with their functions) that different bodies have

... without connecting them to a particular gender.

Implementation Tip: Sample Language

For those who have ovaries, the pituitary glands and ovaries interact to start menstruation.

For those who have testicles, that is where sperm cells are produced.

Explain the rationale for this language to students.
Learning the Language of Bodies

- Promotes attention to one’s physical health and ability to understand when there may be an issue
- Increases a young person’s confidence as they use appropriate language
- Reduces shame about bodies, as they come to be understood as something that is part of every human’s experience

Principle 4: Communicate Many Pathways to Adult Bodies

Examples

- Describe the tremendous diversity in human bodies and their development:
  - Age of puberty
  - Appearance
  - Changes associated with puberty
- Describe various medical approaches for managing puberty (when necessary)

Implementation Tip!

Ask students...

- How does the media and popular culture create and reinforce expectations about what it means to develop into a woman or a man? How are people who don’t fit these expectations portrayed?
- Do these expectations work for everyone? For anyone?
Many Roads to the Future

• Describing multiple pathways makes each child’s individual journey uniquely their own
• Deepens empathy for peers having experiences that are not the same as others’
• Celebrates the incredible complexity of how our bodies work!

Key Components

• Basic Reproductive Processes
  – Fertilization and conception
  – Embryonic growth
  – Developmental milestones

• Family Formation
  – Egg and sperm donors
  – Blended families
  – Surrogacy
  – Adoption
  – Families without children

Principle 5: Communicate Diverse Pathways to Families

Implementation Tip!

Use current events and inclusive books

Michelle Obama, wrote in her memoir, that she and President Obama used reproductive technologies so they could have children.

In the last 30 years over one million babies have been born in the US with the help of assisted reproductive technologies.

A young adult book about a multi-racial family with a transgender parent.

Between 1/3 and 1/2 of transgender people in the US are parents.
Children’s Literature Promotes Family Diversity Too!

- Celebrating the many ways that families are formed deepens appreciation for the things that make each one unique, including its traditions and histories
- When children see that families come in all shapes and sizes, they can also begin to understand that love is the unifying experience
- Respecting the many ways families are created strengthens the communities that are formed in the process

We are Family...

To Separate or Not To Separate?

How was puberty education organized when you were in school?

Let’s hear from you...
**Common Fears**

- Students will be embarrassed to ask questions in front of other kids with different genders (especially girls)
- Kids will "show off" (especially boys)
- Parents will object
- It’s always been done this way!

**Weighing the Tradeoffs**

Separating …

- Misses the opportunity to foster respect & communication across all genders and sexes
- Conveys “otherness” of different bodies and genders
- Prevents students from learning how to speak to one another about sensitive topics in a respectful manner
- Forces students to pick one or the other (sex or gender) and therefore miss essential information for their health

**Good Teaching Mitigates Challenges**

**Common Strategies**

- Set ground rules
- Normalize discomfort
- Use question boxes to allow students to submit questions anonymously
- Anticipate commonly asked questions

“I work with dozens of schools that do not divide students based on sex. Most use an anonymous questions box so that all students can have their questions answered. They generally say that students behave better and more respectfuily in mixed groups.”

Wendy Sellers, Michigan Teacher
Author of Puberty: The Wonder Years
5 Principles: Review

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Stay in Touch!

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