



Etone College
PROGRESS FOR ALL

Etone Mental Health

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Parent's Guide to Gender Identity

What is gender identity?

Gender identity is how a person describes their gender. For example, they might identify as a woman or girl, non-binary, transgender, a man or boy, gender fluid, or something different.

Gender identity is different to sex, which describes physical and biological body parts (like the penis, vagina, different hormones or breasts). A child's sex is usually assigned at birth on the basis of these physical body parts, but their gender may be different to the sex they have been assigned.

Gender identity is part of our deep-rooted sense of self. Having a sense of identity in this way, and being seen and accepted by others as who we are, is really important for our mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

If your child is exploring their gender identity, or is transgender, non-binary or something else, you may have lots of questions as a parent – and may be feeling unsure about how you can support them. Here we outline what gender identity is, how it can affect our mental health, and how you can support your child and find professional help if they're struggling.

These are some words people use when talking about gender identity:

Cisgender/cis

Someone who is the same gender as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender

Someone whose gender is different from their sex at birth.

Non-binary/genderqueer/gender fluid

These are gender identities that sit within, outside of, across or between 'male' and 'female'.

Pronouns

These are the terms we use to refer to someone, e.g. 'he', 'she', 'they'.



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Transgender/differences in sex development (DSD)

This is an umbrella term for a variety of biological conditions that affect a person's sex development. This can include differences on the inside and outside of the body, including differences in the development of some hormones or the reproductive organs or genitals. This does not define gender identity. A person who has a DSD/is intersex may identify as male, female, non-binary or something else.

Your child may use different words to describe their gender. For more information about the different terms and gender identities, visit [Stonewall](https://www.stonewall.org).

How can gender identity affect mental health?

Every individual's experience of gender identity is different. For some young people, experiences around gender identity may affect their mental health in different ways.

These can include:

- Finding things confusing, stressful or worrying if they are questioning their gender and feeling unsure at the moment about who they are.
- Feeling distressed when other people do not recognise their gender identity – for example viewing or referring to them as a gender that doesn't feel right.
- Struggling with their body image and how they feel in their own skin if their body does not match their gender.
- Struggling with difficult feelings, or not feeling able to be who they are, if they have experienced stigma, bullying, rejection or hostility from others – which many people unfortunately do.
- Not feeling safe to share or express their gender identity in some groups or situations.



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These and other experiences can sometimes lead to feelings of:

- Anxiety
- Isolation
- Low mood or depression
- Anger
- Wanting to self-harm, or having suicidal thoughts

How can I support my child with their gender identity?

There are things you can do to help your child and make sure they have the right support around them.

- Make it clear you want to support them
- Be patient
- Go at your child's pace
- Find out as much as you can
- Be open-minded
- Ask your child how they want to be addressed
- You don't need to learn all the terms and language
- Respect your child's boundaries
- Finding a supportive group for your child can really help
- It's okay to feel daunted or frightened
- Be alert for signs that your child is struggling

Support available at Etone College

Students can access support through various channels at Etone College. They are able to speak with their Heads of House to ask for a referral to the Success Centre. There is also lots of signposting of support around the school with the contact details to various local and national support groups and charities.