

# What Is Sex Assigned at Birth?

When we are born, doctors decide whether “female” or “male” will be listed on our birth certificate. This is often one of the first instances when gender is ascribed to us. This sex assignment at birth is typically based solely on one’s genitals. Just like a lot of the concepts in this handbook, sex assignment at birth is far more intricate than meets the eye.

The label of one’s sex assignment at birth is often attributed to a child before they can speak, walk, or know for themselves what their gender identity is. As such, sex assignment does not take into account one’s true gender identity. Your true gender may be different than the gender that a doctor assigned you, which is perfectly normal, valid, and wonderful.

Additionally, there is so much diversity between bodies. For some babies, their bodies do not fit neatly into the category of “male” or “female.” These people may come to identify themselves as intersex, which is a term used for “a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male” (Intersex Society of North America).

It is not always an easy process to figure out what your sex assignment at birth and your gender mean to you, so we want to take a moment to recognize all that it took to discover who you are.

# What Is Gender?

Some people say that gender looks like this:



Others say that gender is this:



In actuality, gender often looks a lot like this:



Now, let's zoom in!

## Gender Identity

Gender Identity describes our internal understanding and experience of our own gender. Each person's experience with their gender identity is unique and personal.

Some people think that there are only two gender identities possible: boy or girl. But, in fact, thousands and thousands of people experience their gender outside of this gender binary (*binary meaning made up of two things*). Some people identify as being both a boy and a girl, or being neither a boy nor a girl. Some folks identify as a gender that is different than boy or girl, or they don't experience gender at all. Non-binary is a term that refers to people who don't experience their gender(s) as completely a girl/woman or boy/man.

Think of how many different ways there are to be a boy or a girl; there are millions of different ways to be non-binary too. Throughout the course of history and all around the world, there have always been people who experience their gender(s) in diverse ways.

While many people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, some people may find that their gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Exploring your gender is normal at all ages and at any stage of life. All of these experiences are equally valid.

***How do I experience my gender?***

***How do I feel in relation to the sex I was assigned at birth?***

***What does gender mean to me?***

It can be helpful to visualize how you experience gender. Below is a Gender Identity map where you can mark how you identify in terms of gender identity. Maybe you can make a single dot on this graphic, maybe you place yourself using five separate dots, maybe your identity needs a circle around one large area, or more. We give you the freedom to mark the map one way today, and an entirely different way tomorrow, a month, or a year from now. Your identity may shift fluidly or stay the same. All experiences are welcome here!



## Gender Expression

Gender Expression describes the way in which we present ourselves, which can include physical appearance, clothing, hairstyles, and behavior.

Gender identity is not the same as gender expression. It is important to not assume that the way that someone moves, talks, dresses, or styles their hair is indicative of how they identify their gender. There are an infinite amount of amazing ways to be a person of any gender. Some boys wear dresses, some girls have short hair, and some non-binary folks wear makeup. Gender expression is all about

how you want to present. If you are not currently able to express your gender the way that you wish you could, we stand with you. You are still you!

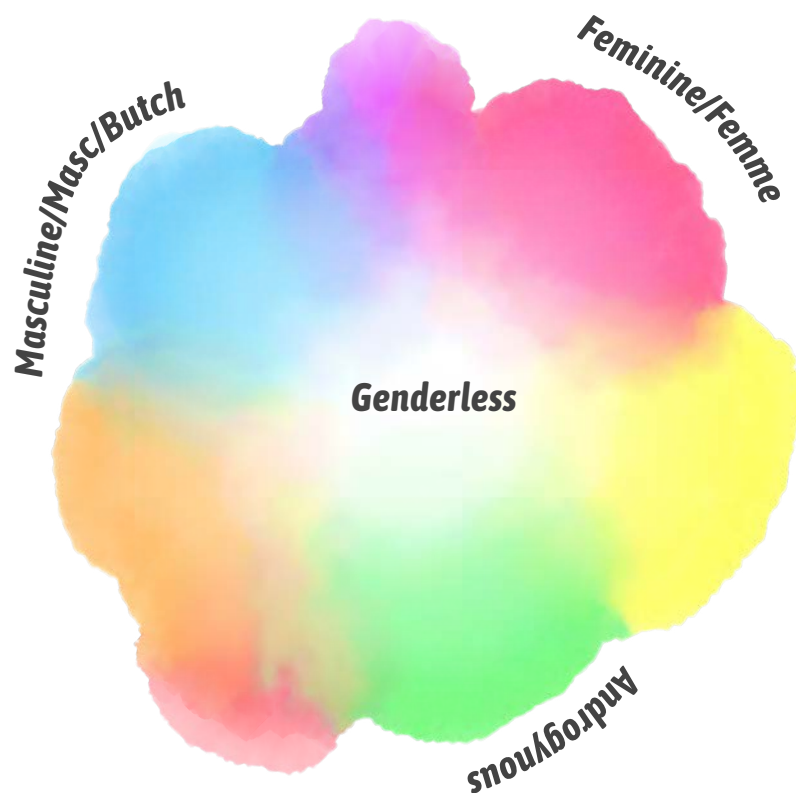
***How do I like to present my gender?***

***In an ideal situation, how would I want to express my gender?***

***What aspects of gender expression make me feel happy and authentically myself?***

***What aspects of gender expression make me feel sad and not like myself?***

If you like, you can mark on the Gender Expression Map below with how you experience your gender expression. It is always more than okay to allow room for feelings to shift over time. Maybe your gender expression stays mostly in the androgynous part of the map, or maybe it fluctuates between masculine and feminine, or somewhere in between. Maybe you prefer to express yourself in a genderless way. Your map gets to reflect the personal relationship you have with your gender expression.



## Transitioning

Some people might go through a process called transitioning. Transitioning can refer to any social, legal, and/or medical steps individuals take to affirm their gender identity or gender expression. Not everyone wants to take some or any of these steps, and that is okay — this doesn't make them any less of who they are. Transitioning for some looks like using a new set of pronouns or wearing different clothing and/or going through the process of changing one's name on legal documents or changing one's gender marker on a driver's license and/or going on hormones or getting surgery to affirm one's gender. Not all people who identify with gender(s) other than the one they were assigned at birth choose to transition. And for those who do, the process can look millions of different ways.