



## REMEMBER

- Finding your identity is a significant and challenging part of adolescence. When it involves questions about sexuality and gender it can be a confusing and overwhelming task.
- Trans teens have high levels of mental health concerns including a higher risk of self-harm, major depressive episode, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts than mainstream teens
- When trans teens sense a strong emotional investment from a positive adult, suicide rates drop by 73%. Ask a trans youth how you can best support them.
- Standing between a trans youth and their “accusers” looks a lot like Jesus. He put himself at risk to stand between the woman caught in adultery and the religious leaders of his day. What does that look like in your world?
- God has made all teens and knows them intimately. No matter where they see themselves on the gender spectrum, God is in love with them - right here and right now.



## RECOGNIZE

- Gender today is seen by teens on more of a spectrum. Young people are curious about whether there might be a better fit for them than their gender assigned at birth. They don't want to miss out on the possibility of feeling more comfortable in their own skin.
- Just over 1% of teens say they feel a deep disconnect between the gender they were assigned at birth and their true gender identity. In Canada, Gen Z are 7 times more likely to identify as trans than adults.
- Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man, woman or someone in between. Sexual orientation is different than gender identity so don't make assumptions about who the youth is attracted to, based on their stated gender.
- Non-binary is the term used when someone feels their gender doesn't fit with either man or woman. Those who feel a congruence between sex at birth and gender identity are called cisgender.
- Gender expression is the way that a person outwardly reflects their internal sense of gender through things like clothing, hair, voice and body language.
- Intersexuality, or those who are born with both male and female genitalia leaving the choice of gender up to the parents, occurs in almost 2% of the population.



## RESPOND

- **Make your spaces safe.** Questions, wonderings, fears and hopes are sacred things that are part of every youth's formation. No matter the topic, teens need spaces to express these without correction.
- **Don't minimize.** Telling a teen “it's just a phase” is harmful and dismissive. If a teen has chosen to confide in you, choose to listen and reflect back what you are hearing in their words. Ask questions to help understand the impact that their gender uncertainty has had on them and mourn the losses they have experienced in their journey.
- **Do the work.** Ask compassionate questions and listen to their story without assuming or planning what you will say next. Push yourself to understand how it feels to walk in their shoes. Apologize for the people of faith that may have done intentional or unintentional harm - including you.
- **Show hospitality.** When a teen asks you to use a certain name or pronoun, do your best to use it. They've invited you to step toward them and remembering a name accepts the invitation. Asking what pronouns they use or what name they want to be called is an important act of welcoming.
- **Provide tangible care.** Young people exploring their gender identity have a deep sense of not feeling ok in their skin. We need to recognize how difficult that is and we need to be supporting them through this vulnerable time in ways that matter to them. Ask them what actions and words they need from you. Make time to build a positive relationship with them and affirm and encourage them regularly for the good things you see that God has deposited inside of them.
- **Don't pretend to have the answers.** This is complicated. Admit the smallness of your understanding and testify to the bigness of God's heart!



## RESOURCES

**Understanding Gender Dysphoria:** Mark Yarhouse invites the church to come alongside the vulnerable and listen to their stories. This book is a rich combination of research, counselling practice, theology and compassion.

**Understanding the Complexities of Gender.** This TedTalk introduces the idea of gender on a spectrum through the eyes of gender minorities.

**The Genderbread Man v.4.** A visual guide that offers clarity on the common words used around gender and sexuality.