

Gender Confusion

Children may enjoy playing with toys or wearing costumes that are typically associated with the opposite sex. But the odds of a child having gender identity disorder (or transsexualism) are rare, according to MedlinePlus. Those with transsexualism strongly identify themselves as being a member of the opposite sex. They may even present themselves as members of the other gender.

Top 7 Symptoms of Gender Identity Disorder in Children, from MedlinePlus

1. Children with gender identity disorder are disgusted by their own genitals.
2. They are rejected by their peers and feel isolated.
3. They believe that they will grow up to become the opposite sex.
4. They have depression or anxiety.
5. Children with gender identity disorder say that they want to be the opposite sex.
6. They cross-dress and display habits usually associated with the opposite sex.
7. They withdraw from social interaction.

The cause of gender identity disorder is unknown, according to Medline Plus, but hormones in the womb, genes, and environmental factors may play a part. Gender identity disorder is not the same as being gay.

What Moms Can Do about Gender Confusion

Psychologist Dr. Chrystal Evans shares advice for moms about gender confusion:

Most psychologists believe that all of us are born with a tendency toward certain temperaments. With the issue of gender nonconformity, difference, or nontraditional gender roles, we sometimes refer to temperament, which refers to a characteristic way of reacting to what goes on around us. Temperaments determine -- to some extent -- which things in our environment we are attracted to and which things we dislike.

The confusion of temperament and gender role expectations is particularly problematic for boys. Boys are given much more negative feedback when they engage in gender nonconforming play than girls who do the same -- at least until adolescence.

Tips for Parents of Gender-Diverse Children:

- Don't make your child feel bad about his/her interests, style, or choices. Although these might be different from yours and from those you would have liked for your

child, encourage him/her to be proud and cultivate independence and self-acceptance. Remember that positive self-esteem and positive image start with the parent. If issues begin to surface, it is often due to the parents' embarrassment, shame, and insecurities.

- Don't make your child feel ashamed of his/her choices. Ask yourself: Who is the child's behavior harming? Why am I so bothered or embarrassed by my child?
- Encourage your child to play with both traditionally male and traditionally female toys. This allows him/her to explore interests and likes in a nonjudgmental environment. You may also find that some role confusion that initially concerned you is resolved because your child learns that although he doesn't like one toy typically associated with his/her given gender, he/she may like another.
- Be cautious not to inadvertently label your child's temperamental style as a sickness. Parents can over-pathologize a child's normal behavior by referring to it as "strange," or using other derogatory terms; or by rushing him/her to a doctor to find out "what's wrong" with him/her. Although typically defined by preteen years, sex-role identification can be defined throughout adolescence.
- Don't blame anyone. A child's nonconforming preferences are likely unrelated to any specific things you or others have done.
- It's great to identify difference in a parent and a child's temperament, or choices. Acknowledge it first to yourself, then to your child. Continue to set parental limits, but try to identify shared activities that you can participate in. Each may enjoy a different aspect of the activity. A son, for example, who doesn't like to play basketball, may still enjoy attending a basketball game with his father.
- Do be hypersensitive to how he/she is being accepted at school or socially. Look for and talk about any signs of being teased, bullied, or ridiculed. Encourage teachers to work with you to support his/her nonconforming attitudes and behaviors. Be sure he/she is in a supportive, diverse environment that is accepting of difference.
- Continue to keep communication open with your child. Explain that other children, and some adults, who have not had the opportunity to experience different behaviors, attitudes, and temperaments don't always know how to respond, so they resort to cruel, insensitive responses. Help him/her to find appropriate ways to feel safe and comfortable in addressing it.

Most importantly, relax, love, and accept your child for all his/her uniqueness. Children are healthiest when they have the love and support of their parents.

Connect with Other Moms about Gender Confusion

Join the conversation:

- [Boys in Dresses](#)
- [Children Dealing with Gender Confusion](#)
- [What If Your Little Girl Wants To Be a Football Player Instead of a Cheerleader?](#)

Related Momlogic Stories on Gender Confusion

1. [My Pretty Little Man](#)
2. [Transgender Kids: Boys Will Be Girls](#)
3. [Is 16 Too Young for a Sex Change?](#)

Additional Resources for Gender Confusion

- [American Psychological Association](#)
- [MedlinePlus](#)
- [Psychology Today](#)