



GENDER IDENTITY

PARENT GUIDE

 **Talk About™**

POWERED BY

 Awana®

PREPARED BY

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THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- » How does culture think about gender and gender identity?
- » Why is Gen Z concerned with gender identity?
- » What does Scripture have to say about gender?
- » What is God's design for our identity?
- » How does culture influence young people's understanding of gender?
- » Why is it important to talk about gender identity?

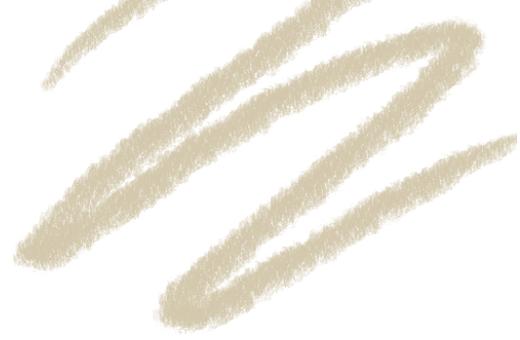
IN ADDRESSING THE BEHAVIOR THAT HAS COME TO PROMINENCE THROUGH THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION, WE ARE ACTUALLY NOT SO MUCH SPEAKING OF PRACTICES AS WE ARE SPEAKING OF IDENTITIES. AND WHEN WE ARE SPEAKING OF IDENTITIES, THE PUBLIC, POLITICAL STAKES ARE INCREDIBLY HIGH AND RAISE A WHOLE DIFFERENT SET OF ISSUES.

CARL R. TRUEMAN,

THE RISE AND TRIUMPH OF THE MODERN SELF



IT'S ALL UP TO YOU.



In his book *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz explores the consequences of our culture offering us so many choices in every part of our lives — from the [17,000+ titles on Netflix](#) for our entertainment to the [1,500+ dating apps](#) to help us find love to the [80,000+ different ways you can order at Starbucks](#). Schwartz argues it is our very freedom to choose that makes us miserable.

Though Schwartz' work focuses on consumerism in the West, he notes a trend that runs so much deeper. The 21st century offers us limitless options to choose not only what we buy, but where we go, what we do, and most significantly, who we are. Nowhere is this more evident than in our culture's treatment of gender.

A question, which 100 years ago would have sounded like pure gibberish to the average person, has now become commonplace: "What if the body I'm in doesn't match the gender I feel I really am?"

Medical News Today declares, "Genetic factors typically define a person's sex, but gender refers to how they identify on the inside. Only an individual can determine their own gender identity, and it does not need to be fixed." They assert there cannot ever be a complete list of ways to identify gender. And if, as Schwartz argues, 15 different toothpaste brands in the local grocery store are enough to paralyze us, how are we supposed to function with an infinite number of ways to think about something as essential as gender?

In his groundbreaking work, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl R. Trueman says,

In short, the sexual revolution is simply one manifestation of the larger revolution of the self that has taken place in the West. And it is only as we come to understand that wider context that we can truly understand the dynamics of the sexual politics that now dominate our culture."

The question of gender is only the most recent expression of the ways our culture thinks about what it means to be a person.

However, just because this issue is complicated and can feel overwhelming does not mean we have to give in to the cultural narrative. We believe there is a God who created gender as meaningful and essential to His design of humankind; and that no matter what theories humans exchange for the truth of Scripture, that does not make Scripture any less true. The sun shines with equal brightness and warmth no matter how many clouds obscure it. The perfect and holy God created humans *in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them.* (*Gen. 1:27*)

This guide is not meant to be a treatise on gender, selfhood and the modern age; for that, we leave you in the capable hands of Mr. Trueman. Instead, our goal is to come alongside you as a parent or caring adult and give you:

- » a biblical basis and justification of God's design for gender, and
- » practical tools for having conversations with young people who are growing up in a world that denies every part of that design.

Above all else, remember our God is defined by [order](#), [purity](#), [hope](#) and [truth](#). The question of gender is complex and difficult; and because of the way it's connected to identity, conversations about it often run high with emotion. But God is the cornerstone of all creation. If we are rooted in Him, we do not ever need to be afraid.

Gender identity is a term used to discuss the way modern people think of and express their gender. Note that this term [separates the concept of gender from the context of sex](#), the former being a personal experience and the latter being purely connected

WHAT IS “GENDER IDENTITY”?

to biology. The term itself functions as an argument that the body a person is born into does not have any say over who it is. We disagree with this idea in its entirety: Sex and gender are one and the same because God designed us as male and female with no schism between our bodies, minds, hearts and souls. However, because society insists upon this schism, we need to know this term and understand its meaning and impact.

The biblical understanding of gender has been accepted and supported for most of history. Even in cultures with other religions, the standard for human existence has been binary almost without exception. The concept that humans are born either male or female, that one male and one female pair are necessary for the conception of new humans, and that those humans will also be born either male or female, is not groundbreaking.

What was revolutionary, however, is that in Genesis God declared He has created humans first in His image, what we call the *imago Dei*. Our maleness or femaleness, while specific, essential and necessary, is not the very heart of who we are as human beings. We are *imago Dei* — created in God’s image — full stop; *then* we are male and female.

What culture has done is not just deny humans are male or female. It has removed the image of God from the center of our beings and replaced it with our gender, and then dissolved the ideas of “male” and “female” themselves. We are left then with a concept of self, defined in its entirety by what gender we believe ourselves to be. It becomes the way we see ourselves, the way others see us, and the first and foremost link we have with the world, communicating what kind of person we are.

So why are so many in Gen Z concerned with gender identity? We see four primary reasons:

1. They believe meaning and morality are no longer derived from a higher power.
2. Self-expression has become individualized, not derived from participation in community.
3. Gender is now seen as the final destination for an understanding of the self.
4. And, Gen Z’s primary question is, “Who am I?”

In the next sections, we’ll examine each of these reasons individually.

Reflection Questions: *How was gender talked about when you were growing up? How do you see today’s culture talking about gender in movies or on TV?*

THEY BELIEVE MEANING AND MORALITY ARE NO LONGER DERIVED FROM A HIGHER POWER.

As we mentioned earlier in this guide, the question of self-identified gender would not only be irrelevant to a person living 100 years ago, but would be nonsensical. Although, of course, not every person had a personal relationship with Christ, Christianity was still the broadly applied structure of society in the West. The Bible said male and female, the church said male and female, and anything else was unimaginable.

In the modern era, we have lost not only the Christian framework that governed society and culture but any sort of framework at all. There is no completely accepted and universally agreed-upon standard of behavior. Even within this assertion of total subjectivity, however, we still cling to the idea of morality as we struggle to mark down which people are good and bad according to how our own feelings guide us. If it feels bad, it must be wrong, yes? But not everyone feels bad under the same circumstances.

The argument comes to a dead end. Without an objective meaning of life and morality derived from a source with the authority to decide these things, there is no certain way to lay claim to truth. Therefore, a self-determined identity that makes you feel confident, powerful, and in control of your life and your body is the closest thing you can get to the good life.

Reflection Questions: *Where do you see the effects of subjectivity in society? In what ways do you turn to yourself, rather than to the Bible, for a sense of meaning?*



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SELF-EXPRESSION HAS BECOME INDIVIDUALIZED, NOT DERIVED FROM PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY.

A good example of this shift in our understanding is the way our culture has moved from the biological family being a good and important thing to the “found family” being central to a person’s social identity.

In the past, people identified themselves by their genealogy, their hometown and the trade their family participated in. The “O” in Irish last names such as O’Sullivan or O’Doyle literally translates to “grandson of,” and it’s not hard to guess the lineage of someone named, for example, John Shoemaker. But in today’s individualistic culture, we are encouraged to separate ourselves from our biological family as quickly and completely as possible.

According to [Newsweek](#), 1 in 4 Americans are estranged from their families. Some of the reasons for this include needing to draw boundaries because of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, but more and more young Americans are citing “difference of opinion” as the reason why they don’t want to be associated with their families at all. There is also the ever-present, ever-vague issue of “toxic behavior,” which [WebMD](#) defines as “behavior [that] adds negativity and upset to your life.”

The dissolution of the very first embodied experience we have as human beings — the connection to the humans whose DNA is combined within us, and without whose physical union we would not exist — is emblematic of the ways our physical existence is now seen as nothing more than a starting point for the choices we need to make in order to arrive at our “authentic selves.” Rather than accepting, working with and learning from the community and family that made them, young people are encouraged to shed that cocoon and select people who agree with, affirm and support them in whatever their desires for their life may be. To quote Twitter user [@GrammarWarlock](#): “We are the main character in each of our lives.”

Reflection Questions: *How are you a product of your family and community? Do you ever feel a desire to distance yourself from them? When and why?*

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GENDER IS NOW SEEN AS THE FINAL DESTINATION FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SELF.

Planned Parenthood defines gender as “a social and legal status, and set of expectations from society, about behaviors, characteristics, and thoughts. . . . Gender identity is how you feel inside and how you express your gender through clothing, behavior, and personal appearance. It’s a feeling that begins very early in life.” This definition casts gender in an incredibly central place in the human experience. It defines your place in society, how laws affect you, how you are to act, what your personality is supposed to be like and even how you think. At the same time, though, it’s also “how you feel inside.” In short, gender is every single thing about you, inside and out.

Of course, there are things we do and say and wear that communicate how we would like to be perceived by society. For example, if someone would like to be perceived as a heterosexual man, the best way to achieve that goal would likely *not* be to wear six-inch heels and a full face of makeup, or to decorate his room with posters of Canadian actor [Ryan Reynolds](#). Even though the things we think define one gender or another now have not always been in place — high heels were originally designed to [help Persian cavalymen keep their feet in their stirrups](#), and both men and women in ancient Egypt sported dramatic winged black eye makeup [to protect themselves against the sun](#) — they are useful for explaining some parts of ourselves to others and the role we would like to play in community.

This kind of behavior, curating our outward expression to represent inward desires, goals or interests, is very normal and human, and is exactly what helps us build community. But gender, which may have previously been considered similar to hometown or skin color as an immutable attribute, has now come to constitute the heart of selfhood. If gender then defines every part of our lives, every moment we inhabit, both in interaction with the world and our whole experience of our humanity, how could it be anything less than of ultimate importance?

Reflection Questions: *How much does your gender affect the way you live? Do you ever feel pressure to let your gender define who you are?*

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GEN Z'S PRIMARY QUESTION IS, "WHO AM I?"

In the 2003 film *Anger Management*, Adam Sandler's character, Dave, attends a support group led by Jack Nicholson's Dr. Rydell. Dr. Rydell asks Dave to introduce himself, saying, "Tell us who you are." Dave answers by talking about what he does for a living, but Dr. Rydell cuts him off: "I'm not asking what you do, Dave; I want to know who you are." Dave flounders, describing his hobbies, his family and his personality. Each time Dr. Rydell shuts him down and identifies the ways Dave is failing to really answer him, again saying, "All I'm asking is who you are." Finally Dave snaps, saying he doesn't know what Dr. Rydell wants him to say.

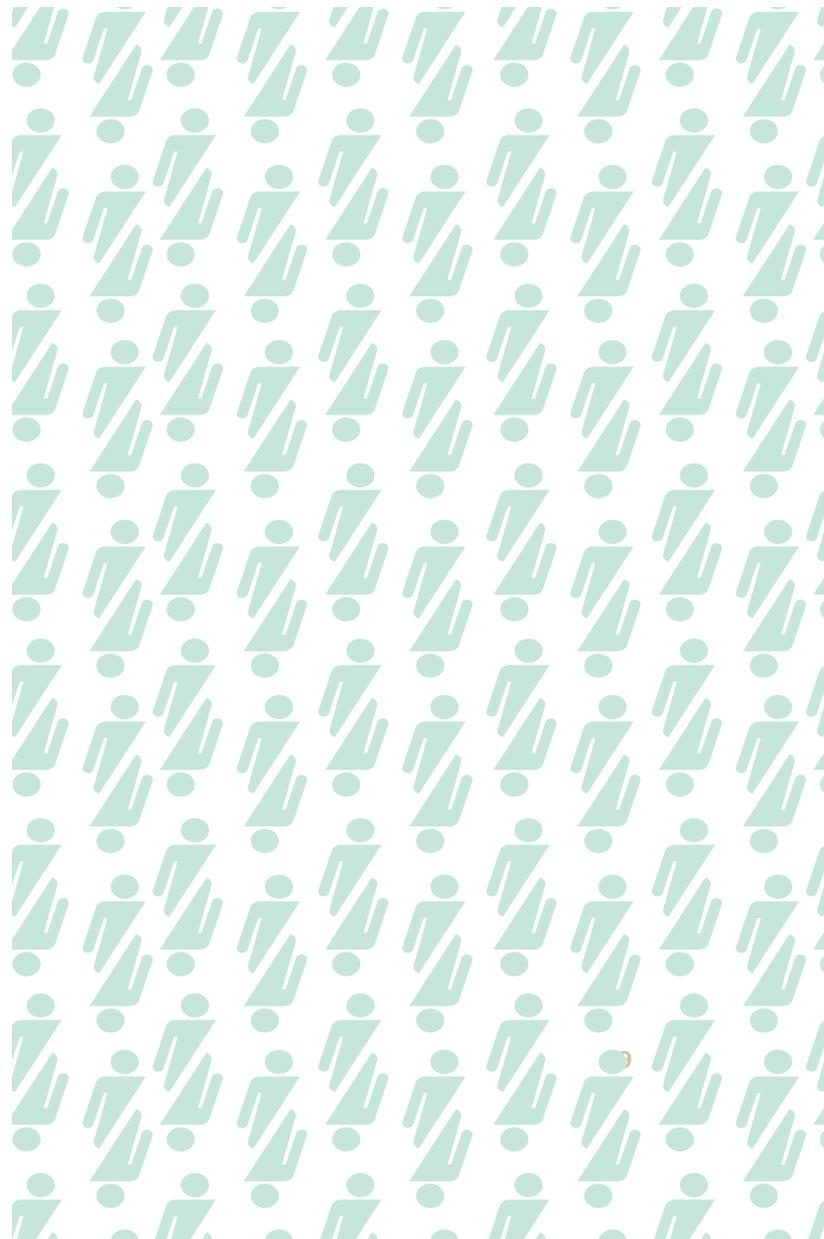
The scene is played for laughs, but it strikes a chord today in a way that it likely didn't 20 years ago. As Christians, our answer is we are followers of Christ, made in the image of God, inhabited by the Holy Spirit. But it's easy to imagine Dr. Rydell brushing that away, too. *Not your religion, Dave. Tell me who you are.*

Gen Z finds that to be a difficult question to answer. In a culture in which selfhood is discovered and created rather than innate, where there cannot be a divine definition of who we all are for fear of limiting our infinite freedom, there is a void at the center of our selves, and we are desperately trying to fill it.

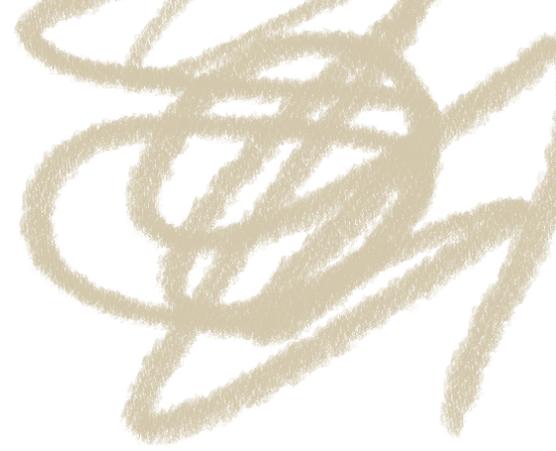
So to the original question, "Why are so many in Gen Z so concerned with gender identity?" the preceding sentence offers an explanation. The four answers found in the previous paragraph help explain why Gen Z is asking questions about gender identity and coming to the conclusions they are. Of course, not every teen is struggling with or even questioning their gender identity. Despite the narratives we find in media, most teens actually are comfortable identifying with the gender that aligns with their biological sex. However, even teens who identify as "cisgender" (a word used to describe those whose gender identity and biological sex are aligned) are being asked the same questions and are

encouraged to pursue the same trains of thought as those who do not. Understanding the shape of our society helps us understand why the conversation about gender identity needs to happen at all.

Reflection Questions: *Do you ever treat your faith in Christ as something you do, rather than who you are? How have you seen your students grapple with who they are?*



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT GENDER?



As we said above, all humankind is made in the image of God — equal reflections of His being and bearers of His design, regardless of anything else about us. It is essential that we understand the relationship between our imago Dei identity and our gender because our culture has so sufficiently stripped us of the first and replaced it with the second. Even we as Christians are prone to do the same, often without realizing it. Although the thought of changing, shifting or in some way mutating our gender is less common in churches, especially those which hold to traditional definitions of gender, even the most well-meaning believer is not totally immune to the internalization of their gender as a replacement for the imago Dei.

When Christian women begin to build their identity around being a mother, or when Christian men begin to parse Scripture into what verses teach them to live into conventional definitions of masculinity, we may also be making gender identity the most important thing about us. When we prioritize our experience of gender over our experience as children of God, made in His image, we participate in idolatry, placing our beliefs about ourselves above what God tells us is true. Our gender and the way it affects us is important; our bodies are naturally gendered and are created that way on purpose. Therefore we must be careful to filter our gender through the lens of the imago Dei rather than filter the imago Dei through the lens of our gender.

From the outset of Scripture, we can tell gender is important to God. He created male and female, each in His image. Yet he did so in different ways, at different times, with different characteristics. He created two genders, and those genders were not separated from biological sex. Maleness is determined in the body of the man, femaleness in the body of the woman; masculinity is therefore derived exclusively from maleness and femininity from femaleness. God created us as humans completely whole. There is no division between our bodies, our feelings or our souls.

Many Christians refer to the body as “housing” the soul, [but this is dangerous language](#). As true as it is that the human soul is not physically perceptible, our use and treatment of our bodies express our innate knowledge that they are one with our souls. It is why we do everything from raise hands in worship to assert the humanity of unborn children. If we believe our bodies and souls are one and indivisible, we must then believe the physical nature of our selves is as essential to our being as our inner lives. We are not, as Twitter user [@KylePlantEmoji](#) puts it, “meat with electricity inside.” Our body dictates the way we experience the world, which is both purposeful and good.

The Bible is not shy about addressing women and men as distinct from one another. In most cases, these passages relate to men and women in the context of marriage and parenthood. But in Jesus’ cultural context, women were barely considered humans, which makes the Bible’s consideration of women pretty radical. From the assertion that they bear the image of God to the fact that Jesus’ [first revelation of himself](#) post-resurrection is to Mary Magdalene, who had been a follower of His during His ministry, these passages, which address women as equal in value and dignity to men, tell us something about how God views gender.

Our gender has a role to play in how we relate to one another, and how we behave in community with each other and with God. Neither gender is superior nor inferior in any way. (The woman spoken of in [Proverbs 31](#) is clearly exemplary for both men and other women.) But because there are places in Scripture where we are addressed as different and contrasting to one another, we can be assured there is a distinction that is important and meaningful. We are, after all, “[suitable](#)” for one another.

Reflection Questions: *How do you see God’s purpose for your gender reflected in Scripture? What are ways you substitute your experience of gender for the knowledge that you are made in the image of God?*

HOW DOES CULTURE COMMUNICATE ITS VIEW OF GENDER IDENTITY TO YOUNG PEOPLE?

We know at this point that gender identity is central to culture and why. The next question we have to ask then is, “How is this narrative disseminated?” As Carl Trueman notes, the sociological theory of gender and identity politics is really a very academic issue, birthed from a long line of philosophers and writers who shifted accepted standards bit by bit through their work. But the average person isn’t reading Rousseau and Nietzsche, so the acceptance of the notion of fluid gender identity comes from something different. Trueman writes:

The fact that ‘I am a woman trapped in a man’s body’ makes more sense to Joe Smith probably has far less to do with him being committed to an elaborate understanding of the nature of gender and its relationship to biological sex than to the fact that it seems intuitively correct to affirm someone in his or her chosen identity and hurtful not to do so, however strange the particulars of that self-identification might have seemed to previous generations.

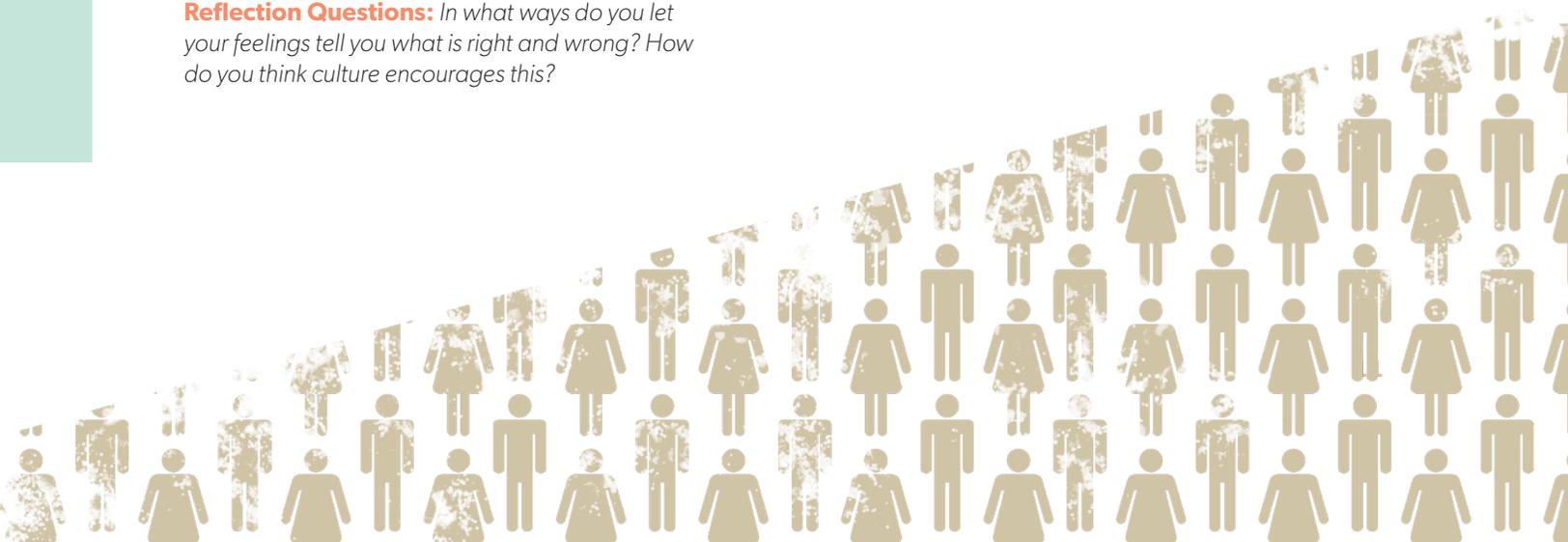
In other words, we are taught by our culture in subtle ways that what is right and wrong is dependent on our feelings, and our feelings are manipulated and influenced from every direction throughout our lives. Three of the primary ways this manipulation happens are through education, politics and social media. We’ll look at these avenues in the next three sections.

Reflection Questions: *In what ways do you let your feelings tell you what is right and wrong? How do you think culture encourages this?*

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WHEN WE PRIORITIZE OUR EXPERIENCE OF GENDER OVER OUR EXPERIENCE AS CHILDREN OF GOD, MADE IN HIS IMAGE, WE PARTICIPATE IN IDOLATRY, PLACING OUR BELIEFS ABOUT OURSELVES ABOVE WHAT GOD TELLS US IS TRUE.

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GENDER IN EDUCATION

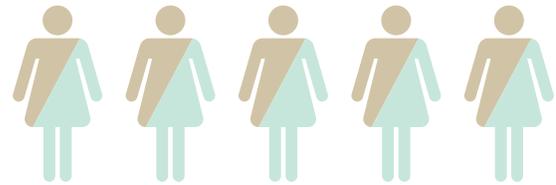
There is a great deal of fear-mongering media regarding the progressive teaching of gender in public school systems, but most schools in America are not handing out free testosterone injections to kindergarten students. ([Most school nurses can't even give kids Tylenol®.](#)) But the question of when it's appropriate to start teaching children about gender is still up for debate, even in the most progressive circles.

However, there is a vocal contingency advocating for the idea that toddlers can identify as transgender, nonbinary or otherwise gender nonconforming. [California's Department of Education declares](#), "Some children in kindergarten or even younger have identified as transgender." [Planned Parenthood asserts](#) children as young as 3 can self-identify outside of the gender binary. [The American Psychological Association has offered advice](#) for teachers not to "categorize students by binary gender (e.g., line up by boys/girls)," and, "[In a virtual learning environment], use your pronouns in your email signature and on your video screen. This communicates to students that you don't make assumptions about pronouns and gender identity based on appearance alone, and that they can report the pronouns that they use."

By introducing even the idea of gender fluidity and choice to very young children, whether it is in a pressuring or overt way, schools incorporate a foundation of thought that can lead to children questioning and wrestling with their gender going forward. It also suggests to a child that they need to make determinations about who they are before they're old enough to really understand what that means. A 3-year-old means about as much when she says "I'm a boy" as she does when she says "I'm a dragon." Young children don't have a solid conception of reality in the same way as adults do, so asking them to form a definitive statement of self and then accommodating it by calling them by a different name or pronoun is both harmful and

confusing. And yet, because our culture views gender as such a central concept and wants to develop a new generation that affirms it, education is exactly the arena where these ideas are often first introduced.

Reflection Questions: *What are some things your younger kids have said to you that alarmed you, and how did you react? How do you tell the difference between an appropriate reaction, an overreaction and an underreaction?*



BY INTRODUCING EVEN THE IDEA OF GENDER FLUIDITY AND CHOICE TO VERY YOUNG CHILDREN, WHETHER IT IS IN A PRESSURING OR OVERT WAY, SCHOOLS INCORPORATE A FOUNDATION OF THOUGHT THAT CAN LEAD TO CHILDREN QUESTIONING AND WRESTLING WITH THEIR GENDER GOING FORWARD.



GENDER IN POLITICS

American journalist H. L. Mencken said, “The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.” In short, making an issue political is a very good way to make it immensely more large and terrifying than it actually is.

Making gender identity a political issue both oversimplifies it and turns it into a bogeyman. The issue of gender identity involves real, often very young, people and their real feelings. But when the conversation is framed as a political one, it’s easy to believe if we can just get policies in place that enforce the lifestyles we believe are correct, it will silence our opponents and make the problem go away.

When this happens, people are either cast as “supporters” or “bigots,” “allies” or “transphobic.” It’s easy to lose the ability to have nuanced conversations with real people about their real lives. As our society has discovered, this kind of polarization can often keep us from being able to really connect with the ones we love most.

Reflection Questions: *What are some political phrases you’ve heard that seem to be most polarizing? How can you have conversations that are emotional and personal without overpoliticizing them?*



MAKING GENDER IDENTITY A POLITICAL ISSUE BOTH OVERSIMPLIFIES IT AND TURNS IT INTO A BOGEYMAN. THE ISSUE OF GENDER IDENTITY INVOLVES REAL, OFTEN VERY YOUNG, PEOPLE AND THEIR REAL FEELINGS.





GENDER ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The impact social media has on the way young people think cannot be overstated. Where a teacher cannot point at a third grader and say “You’re not a girl” without repercussions, a random TikTok user can. Where a politician would face backlash from their constituents posting, “I just think that if someone is a trans woman that means she’s better than everyone else,” Twitter user [@bonkey_bong](#) and many others do every day.

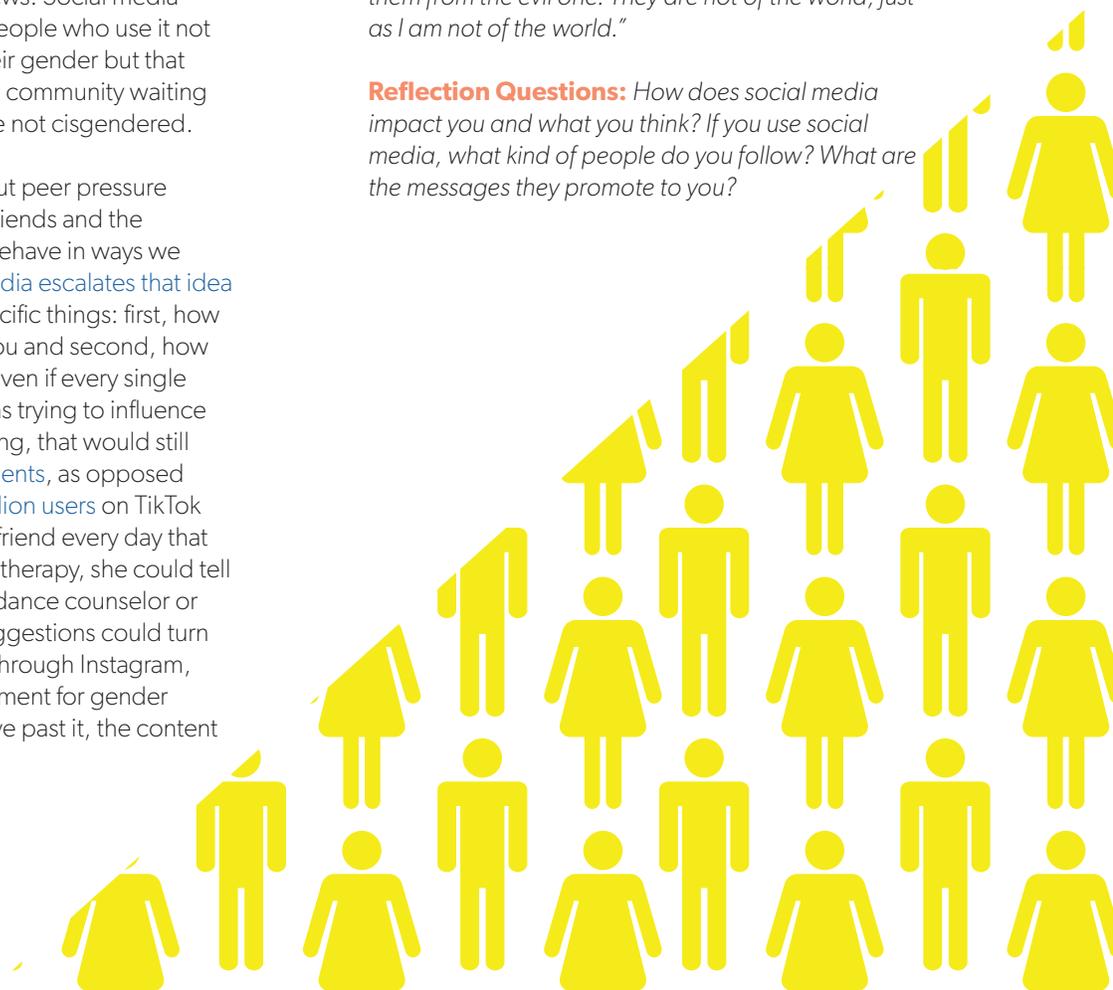
Many major social media platforms let users add pronouns to their bio, suggesting that changing genders is as simple as clicking a button. Tags also provide a subtle, easy way to begin identifying oneself with nontraditional gender identities. The hashtag [#trans](#) has 50.6 billion views on TikTok, [#nonbinary](#) has 17.2 billion, and [#genderdysphoria](#) (the feeling that your gender doesn’t match your biology) comes in at a comparatively low but still telling 209.1 million views. Social media communicates to the young people who use it not only that they can question their gender but that they should, and that there is a community waiting for them if they decide they are not cisgendered.

As children we are taught about peer pressure and how the influence of our friends and the desire to “fit in” can make us behave in ways we otherwise wouldn’t. [Social media escalates that idea](#) immensely by altering two specific things: first, how many people are pressuring you and second, how accessible those people are. Even if every single student in their high school was trying to influence a young person to do something, that would still only be an average of [514 students](#), as opposed to any number of the over [1 billion users](#) on TikTok alone. If a classmate told their friend every day that she should look into hormone therapy, she could tell her parents, a teacher, the guidance counselor or even other friends, and the suggestions could turn into a conversation. Scrolling through Instagram, a teen will hear a positive argument for gender reassignment surgery and move past it, the content

gone in an instant; but the idea is still implanted in the user’s mind. The people presenting ideas on social media often cannot really be challenged, questioned or asked to provide nuance in a way that resembles real conversation. Users can post comments or send direct messages, but that is no guarantee of further understanding. A young person on social media can be easily isolated from the community that knows and loves them, and instead be fed information by voices attuned to the cultural narrative, who do not even know they exist.

As tempting as it may be to try and shut out the world in an attempt to cling to the truth, we must believe Christ, the author of truth, also clings tightly to us, and the waves of culture cannot wash us away from Him. Jesus’ prayer in [John 17:15-16](#) gives us the balance we must strike in this world: *“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”*

Reflection Questions: *How does social media impact you and what you think? If you use social media, what kind of people do you follow? What are the messages they promote to you?*



HOW DO I HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH MY CHILD ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY?

We hope that at this point you understand why it's so important to have conversations about gender identity with the young people in your life. Now we want to give you some practical ways to approach what is undoubtedly a daunting discussion. Though it can be difficult to have these conversations, and though we may wish we didn't have to have them with kids who are at such young ages, they can also be a wonderful opportunity to learn about your child's heart and get a glimpse into their experience of the world.

If the cultural trend is moving towards introducing children to the current social narrative of gender when they are young, you as a parent need to start having these conversations with your children earlier than ever. That doesn't mean you need to try and get your preschooler to understand the nuances of gender theory, but it does mean you need to be aware of the kinds of concepts they might run into at school or around friends, and plant seeds of truth that will intercept those concepts and stop them from taking root in your child's developing mind.

It's easy to think talking to your child about gender issues will expose them to the topic earlier than necessary. But refraining to do so is having too much faith that the world won't tell them exactly what you don't want them to hear. We must assume the worst and prepare accordingly. The world wants our children to learn specific things about gender, so we have to give them the truth of God's design to lean on before they even know they need it.

There are several ways to do this; keep in mind the conversation will need to change as they grow older. For a preschool-aged child, it might be as simple as affirming their biology and encouraging them in their role as a son or daughter, sister or brother. Try not to base conversations around gender stereotypes. Instead, tell your children they are made by God, that He made them exactly as He meant to, and that they are loved and unique in

their bodies exactly the way they were born. This gives them a foundation to stand on regardless of what they enjoy doing, and will help them maintain a healthy understanding of gender even as culture's expressions and representations of it change.

As your children get older, be aware of and open to any and all questions they have about the things they hear. Never shame your child for asking questions and try not to be dismissive of their concerns or shocked by their ideas. Kids often try different ideas on for size; they are naturally curious and inquisitive, and these are attributes that should be fostered. Creating a space where your child can express all these attributes and still receive scriptural teaching and grounding in the truth of God's design will allow them to use their natural instincts in tandem with the foundation you provide them as a parent to develop a robust and healthy biblical worldview that adapts to adversity as they grow older.

If you don't know the answer to something, offer to do research alongside your child. If they don't know the meaning of a term they heard from a friend or are confused about something they overheard on the internet, look it up and share it with them. Be encouraged that there are many people in this world doing the work of the kingdom, trying to bring truth to families with the same questions as you. And, if you really just need to get to the heart of things, go to the Word with your children. Studying Scripture together allows them to bring up anything they're confused about right in the moment so you can dig into it and grow deeper in the Spirit together.

In addition to becoming informed yourself and helping inform your child, make sure you keep a pulse on how they're feeling about the things they're hearing and maybe even experiencing related to gender identity. Although a narrative exists that there are millions and millions of people whose gender identity doesn't conform to traditional understandings of male and female, **only 2%** of

CONT.

Americans over the age of 13 actually identify as transgender. That means the vast majority of young people are at least relatively comfortable identifying their gender with their biological sex.

That said, even kids who don't experience issues with the gender of their body are still going to be encouraged to ask questions about whether they feel a desire to change. Don't assume your child is immune to these suggestions. Create a relationship with them in which you can comfortably ask how they feel about these pressures and how they feel about their gender, without coming across as accusatory. Some good questions you can ask are:

- » When do you feel most comfortable in your body?
- » What are things you like about being a boy/girl? Is there anything you dislike? Why do you think that is?
- » Do you ever feel like there's pressure on you to look/act differently than you do?
- » What do you think TV and movies tell people your age about what a boy/girl should look like?
- » How do you think the Bible's definition of identity compares to the definition of identity you hear from culture?
- » Do you feel like God has a purpose for your gender? What do you think it might be?

There aren't "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions; they invite your child to be open with you. As you listen to and respect your child, they will more likely remain open to your input. There is nothing more important in conversations around gender than keeping lines of communication as clear as possible.



IN OTHER WORDS, WE ARE TAUGHT BY OUR CULTURE IN SUBTLE WAYS THAT WHAT IS RIGHT AND WRONG IS DEPENDENT ON OUR FEELINGS, AND OUR FEELINGS ARE MANIPULATED AND INFLUENCED FROM EVERY DIRECTION THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES.



Based on your family's personal decisions regarding the use of social media and the internet, you may want to consider asking your child these more straightforward questions. The answers to these questions could help you learn how your child presents on the internet to their friends when you're not around.

- » Do you have pronouns in your bio? If you do, which ones?
- » Can I watch your For You Page (TikTok)/scroll through your (Instagram/Facebook/Twitter) feed with you? I'm interested in what you like.
- » What kind of things do your friends post on social media?
- » How do your friends talk about gender?
- » How do people at school talk about gender?
- » Do you know anyone who has different ideas about gender than you do? What is this person like and what kind of things do they believe?

CONT.

At all times, think of and present conversations with your child as invitations to share time and ideas rather than interrogations. Kids are quick to shut down and hide when they feel accused or ashamed. Engage with your kids when tempers aren't running high, and try not to let what could be a conversation turn into a lecture. Keep your love for your child and your desire to see them grow at the center of every interaction.

Above all, try not to be shocked or scared by the things your kids share with you. Remember, the more alarming the information they give you, the more they trust you and are trying to be vulnerable with you. Be grateful for and respect that vulnerability; let it encourage you that they see you as a safe person to be honest with. The more conversations you have, the less scary and taboo these topics will become. Become someone your children feel comfortable coming to first before they turn to other sources, such as friends or social media, that won't speak the truth to them.

Finally, don't be worried if your teen feels uncomfortable with their body. If your 13-year-old daughter says something like "I hate being a girl," don't assume she is considering transitioning. But do dig deeper into that statement. Ask her, "What about being a girl makes you feel this way? Do you think things would be better if you weren't a girl? Why?" Most likely it's a matter of normal teen discomfort that can be quickly and healthily discussed.

Ideally, gendered experiences should only start becoming apparent when young people begin to experience puberty. When certain hormones and different physical characteristics become apparent, it can be an incredibly anxiety-inducing time for them. It can feel like their bodies are rebelling against them. Worst of all, puberty affects everyone differently, and it's impossible to gauge your "normal" by other people's "normal." Encourage your teen that while they may feel their body is the

enemy and they'd rather crawl out of their skin than have to experience what they're going through, that it's an extremely common experience and doesn't indicate who they are. Bodies change and grow and shift rapidly in adolescence, and trying to survive the intense emotions that brings is enough of a challenge; hating their gendered experience doesn't necessarily mean anything deeper than the normal discomfort that comes with that challenge. Encourage your teen to hang in there and even appreciate the ways God is shaping their body to reflect His glory of creation. Puberty, by the enduring grace of God, doesn't last forever.

Reflection Questions: *How did you feel about your gender when you were a teenager? When were times you had a good conversation with your teen and when have things gone poorly? What was the difference?*

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HOPE IN THE CHAOS

Hebrews 13:14-16 says: For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

It can be uncomfortable and even frightening to realize evil is at work around us, and that we are not immune to all of its effects. God never promised we would not walk through darkness, but He does promise to guide us with His light.

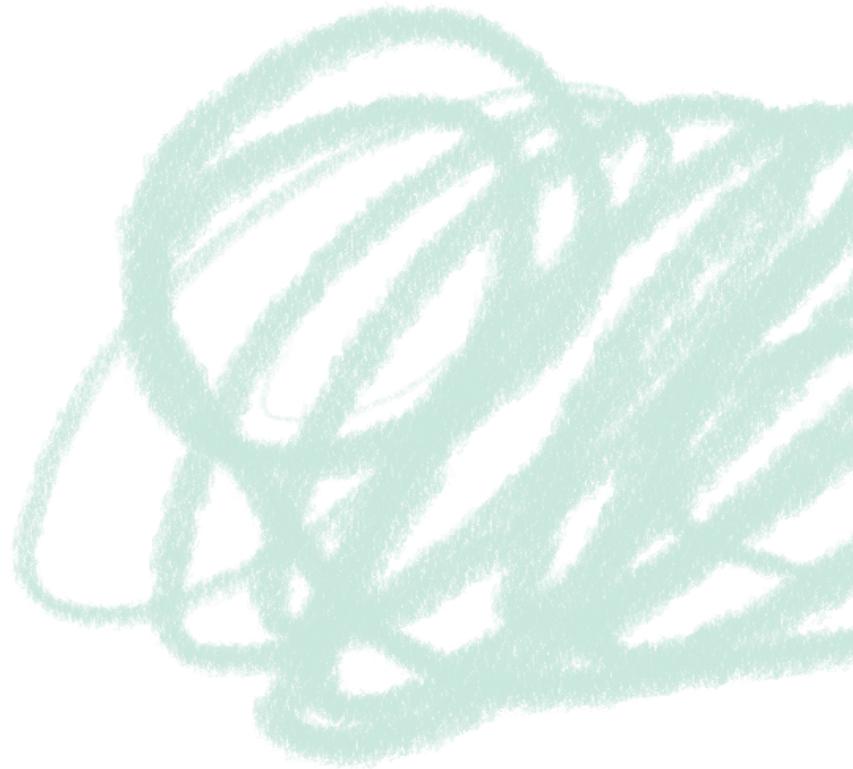
Our culture's view of gender identity is antithetical to God's design, but it poses no challenge to Him. He isn't panicking, hastily trying to come up with ideas about what to do next. God reigns in supreme order, and the ways of the world that seem so strange and overwhelming are no mystery to Him. That is why the most important thing we can do as Christians in response to our society's narrative about gender identity is pray. We can pray for our children, who desperately need strength and fortitude as they pursue truth in a world that will fight against it, and who need the clarity and peace that only the Holy Spirit can bring as they work to understand and live out their true identity.

We can pray for ourselves as we try to parent and guide our children with wisdom, compassion and grace, striking a balance of protecting, preparing them and — above all — teaching them to walk in the ways of light. As difficult as it can be, we can also pray for our culture, which, as angry, vitriolic and impenetrably lost as it may seem, is full of hurting and suffering people in desperate need of the saving hope of the Gospel.

God draws near to us with clarity in our confusion and with peace in our fear, and welcomes everything we bring to Him. There is no problem too complex, frustrating or fraught for Him. We may rest in the knowledge that He was sovereign in the

beginning when He made humankind in His image, and His sovereignty remains in all its fullness now. With this in mind, we can obey the urging of [1 Peter 5:7](#): *[Cast] all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.*

Reflection Questions: *What are specific things about your conversations with your teens that you want to bring to God in prayer? How can you practice a continuous choice to trust God when you are afraid?*



INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

If you like what you learned in this *Gender Identity Parent Guide* and want to help us continue to make great resources to serve parents like you, consider making a gift at awana.org/donate or axis.org.

Axis builds lifelong faith by helping parents and caring adults talk with their kids about what they otherwise wouldn't, one conversation at a time.

Awana is a nonprofit organization and has been a global leader in child and youth discipleship for more than 70 years. Each week, Awana reaches more than 5 million kids with the Gospel across partnerships with more than 69,000 local churches in 133 countries.

ChildDiscipleship.com is a project of Awana and its mission is to equip you to disciple the kids and teens in your life to help them foster a vibrant relationship with Jesus. For more discipleship resources like this, check out ChildDiscipleship.com and create your free account today! Thank you!

SOURCES USED IN THIS GENDER IDENTITY PARENT GUIDE

- » The Paradox of Choice
- » Comparitech
- » Tido
- » *Huffpost*
- » *Medical News Today*
- » *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*
- » Bible Hub, Genesis 1:27
- » Bible Gateway, 1 Corinthians 14:33
- » Bible Gateway, 1 John 3:3
- » Bible Gateway, Romans 15:13
- » Bible Gateway, Hebrews 6:18
- » Office for National Statistics
- » *NewsWeek*
- » WebMd
- » Twitter
- » Planned Parenthood
- » Instagram
- » *Teen Vogue*
- » Ask Aladdin
- » YouTube
- » Lynne Rudder Baker, Asbury Seminary
- » Twitter
- » Bible Gateway, Mark 16:9
- » Bible Gateway, Proverbs 31
- » Bible Gateway, Genesis 2:18
- » *Consumer Reports*
- » *The Atlantic*
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- » American Psychological Association
- » Twitter
- » Tik Tok, Trans
- » Tik Tok, Nonbinary
- » Tik Tok, Gender Dysphoria
- » *Youth Medical Journal*
- » Public School Review
- » *Wallaroo Media*
- » *News Gallup*
- » Bible Gateway John 17:15-16
- » Bible Gateway, Hebrews 13:14
- » Bible Gateway, 1 Peter 5:7

- » [Awana.org/donate](https://awana.org/donate)
- » [Axis.org](https://axis.org)
- » [Awana.org](https://awana.org)
- » ChildDiscipleship.com

RELATED AXIS RESOURCES

- » Parent Guide to LGBTQ+ and Your Teen
- » Parent Guide to Difficult Conversations
- » Conversation Kit on Gender
- » Conversation Kit on Identity