Let’s Talk About Gender and Gender Identity
Advice for Leaders

Introduction
As Girlguiding is an organisation for all girls and young women, gender is a very relevant topic for us. We hope that young members will feel safe and comfortable within our girl-only space to discuss issues that are important to them. This may include a wider discussion about gender identity and what makes them girls and young women. Discussion of this kind may follow on from conversations within a school environment or questions raised if they know someone who is transgender (someone who feels that the sex they were assigned at birth does not match or sit easily with their sense of their own gender). Or this may be a very personal issue to them as individuals.

This resource contains information to support all Leaders with both planned and unplanned conversations about gender, gender identity and transgender (trans) inclusion within a regular unit meeting. It is accompanied by age-appropriate guidance and activities for each section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Topics covered</th>
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| Rainbows | ● Being a girl and what they think this means.  
          ● Knowing that their gender shouldn’t limit what they like or do.  
          ● Feeling good about being themselves.  
          ● Respecting themselves and others.  
          ● Respecting individual differences.  
          ● Developing positive and supportive relationships. |
| Brownies | ● Gender, what this means to them and what it means in the wider community.  
        ● How they might feel limited by their gender within society, and that this should not change what they like or do.  
        ● Thinking about other people’s feelings and trying to see things from the point of view of others, including people with different values and customs, or families that look different to theirs.  
        ● Developing self-respect and empathy.  
        ● The value of respect, love and care, regardless of gender or gender identity.  
        ● How to ask for help and where to get more support if needed.  
        ● Healthy lifestyles, what affects mental health and how to make informed choices.  
        ● Bullying behaviour and the effect that this can have on other people.  
        ● What to do in situations where they see someone being bullied, are being bullied or are the bully. |
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Guides

• Healthy lifestyles, what affects mental health and self-esteem, and how to make informed choices.
• How society can define people by gender, and the limiting effect that this can have on people.
• Gender identity, including gender as a spectrum and transgender people.
• The value of respect, for others and yourself.
• How to ask for help and ensure you are receiving the support you need.
• The effects of bullying, including homophobic and transphobic bullying. How to recognise this and what to do.
• Where and how to get further advice and guidance about gender and gender identity.

The Senior Section

• The differences between gender, sex and sexual orientation.
• Trans identities.
• Gender as a spectrum rather than a binary of male/female.
• How society discusses gender and how this can seem limiting to all genders.
• Transphobia, how to recognise this and where to get support.
• Where to find more information and support.

Aims of these guidelines

This document aims to provide Leaders with:

• clarity about Girlguiding’s membership policy and the girl-only space, and how these relate to gender and gender identity
• advice, guidance and support, so that Leaders have the confidence to respond to questions and concerns in various circumstances and are able to have open and honest conversations about gender.

These guidelines are supported by information sheets and activity ideas for each section. These will help Leaders to give girls opportunities to explore these issues in ways which are appropriate to the individual and the Leader.

At the core of guiding we aim to provide a place where girls can build up their confidence and where all activities are voluntary. We believe that, as a charity that supports girls and young women, it is important that our members are able to investigate and discuss gender identity, gender restrictions and what these issues mean to them.

Your role as a Leader

As a Leader your role is to facilitate the conversation about gender, but you can take your lead from the young members in the unit meeting.

If you do not feel comfortable facilitating discussions about gender and gender identity you can ask another Leader to run the session. Or you can ask your Commissioner to put you in touch with another Leader who can run the session.

Confidentiality and safeguarding

A member does not have to tell you if they are trans. If a person has disclosed this information, you must not tell other people unless they have given you permission to do so.

It is not a requirement, or best practice, to tell parents/carers that a trans person is a member of a unit.

If you have a trans member in your unit, remember that they may not wish for other members of the unit to know. Discuss with the young member, discreetly and in advance, how she would like any potentially difficult situations to be managed. It is important that she feels safe in the knowledge that she will be supported.
A child, or adult volunteer, disclosing to you that they are trans is not a safeguarding concern. You should ensure that the information given is kept confidential and the member is protected from transphobic language and behaviour.

**Parental consent**
You do not need parental consent to talk to young members about gender and gender identity. However, this is a sensitive subject area and parents of members under 16 should be made aware if you are planning to run a session about gender and gender identity. Send a letter home to parents outlining the session, areas that are going to be covered and where they can find more information if needed (see Further information and support, page 7).

This will allow parents to:
- ask questions about the session
- be prepared for their child to ask questions about gender and gender identity
- access any additional information and resources that they feel they may need to support their child
- make a decision about their child attending the session.

**Respecting others**
For any girl in your unit, conversations about gender may be sensitive. A girl may be trans or may be currently asking questions about her gender identity.

Set ground rules with the girls before the conversation starts and ensure they understand the need to respect the opinions of others.

**Talking about gender**

**Inclusive language**
You must ensure that girls do not bully or use transphobic or homophobic language, as this can create a hostile environment for other young members. Guidance on inclusive language can be found on Girlguiding’s website.

- Treat all people according to how they define their gender.
- When referring to a person, describe them using the gender that they self-identify as.
- If you make a mistake, apologise; don’t dwell on it.
- Use the appropriate gender pronouns (he/she, him/her etc). If you are unsure, ask ‘Which pronouns do you prefer?’.
- Be discreet and respect that all young members are individuals with their own opinions and unique experiences.

**Definitions**
Although sex and gender are often used as interchangeable terms, there are differences in how we define them. ‘Sex’ tends to refer to biological characteristics, while ‘gender’ tends to refer to cultural or social ones.

For a lot of people their assigned sex (male or female) at birth matches their self-identified gender - this is called cisgender. However, it is believed that about 1 per cent of people are transgender or trans. A trans person is someone who feels that the sex they were assigned at birth does not match or sit easily with their sense of their own gender. Trans people include:

- those who were assigned male at birth whose gender is female (trans women)
- those who were assigned female at birth whose gender is male (trans men)
- those who do not identify as ‘male’ or ‘female’ (non-binary people).

Gender reassignment is when a person takes steps to alter the outward expression of their gender so that it better aligns with their sense of who they are or, in other words, their identity.
Although society refers to gender in terms of male and female (binary terms), it is now becoming more common to think of gender as a spectrum moving between male and female. Where individuals identify along this spectrum will affect how they outwardly express their gender, for example through hairstyles and clothing choices.

Gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation and should be treated differently in conversation. For more information on discussing sex and relationships with girls and young women, see Let’s Talk About Sex and Relationships.

The Trans Media Watch style guide gives a clear and useful summary of accurate and acceptable terms to use.

**Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes are when certain characteristics, such as preferring a colour or an activity, are applied to an entire gender. For example, ‘all girls like pink’ is a very common stereotype.

Stereotypes like this can often be limiting to young people. They can split the population into male and female and can make people feel uncomfortable about enjoying things that are not perceived as being ‘normal’ for their gender. This can influence choices of toys, colours, hobbies, subjects studied and even career paths.

It is important, when discussing gender with girls and young women in your unit, that you feel able to examine these stereotypes and discuss them. Use the age-specific activity sheets that accompany these Leaders’ notes to help you investigate gender stereotypes and further explore these limitations.

Please note: if a child is enjoying activities or expressing themselves in a way that is stereotypically associated with a gender different to their assigned gender, for example a girl liking rugby, this does not necessarily mean that they are identifying as a different gender or that they are trans.

Girlguiding’s girl-led programme gives girls and young women the opportunity to push against or challenge gender boundaries and stereotypes. This enables them to gain skills and experience that will help them to achieve their personal aims and goals in life without the limitations of gender.

**Membership of Girlguiding**

Membership of Girlguiding is decided based on gender identity. This is understood in terms of the way a person self-identifies their gender identity - a person’s inner sense of self. If a young person identifies as female then they are able to join any of our youth sections appropriate to their age.

We understand that if a young member is transitioning from female to another gender identity, they will be experiencing a great amount of change and uncertainty. It may be that they would be better supported in an organisation that is available to all genders. However, flexibility and the Leaders’ discretion, in conversation with the parents, can be used to determine how long the child stays within the unit.

If an adult self-identifies as female they are able to undertake all adult roles in guiding and may, if they wish, make their Promise.

If an adult self-identifies as not being female then they are able to take volunteer roles that do not require them to complete a Leadership Qualification or to make their Promise. This includes the role of Unit Helper and support roles such as Adviser or Coordinator.

If an adult member self-identifies as non-binary they are still a valued and appreciated member of Girlguiding. They are able to take any role that does not require them to make the Promise.

For more information, see Girlguiding’s Equality and Diversity Policy.
Our girl-only space
We give girls a space where they can really be themselves with other girls and share the experience of growing up as a girl in today’s world.

We know from our research that being girl-only is one of the things our young members value most about guiding.

‘Girl’ is defined based on gender identity. This means that any child who self-identifies as a girl should feel safe and welcome in our girl-only space regardless of the sex that they were assigned at birth.

Supporting trans members
What should I do if a young member tells me she is a trans girl or young woman?
Be aware that the young member may not have told many people or anyone at all, and that it is a sign she trusts you as a Leader.

Reassure her that her gender identity is not a problem in guiding and you will continue to support her as you do all girls. Make sure she knows that she can tell you if anyone is not supportive. The conversation should be treated in confidence and you should:

- offer reassurance
- tell the young member her confidentiality will be respected
- listen and be supportive
- ask the young member how she would like to be supported or if there is any information she wants or needs
- let her know she can come and talk to you again, or recommend someone else whom she can speak to.

What should I do if a young member tells me they do not identify as a girl?
Be aware that the young member may not have told many people or anyone at all, and that it is a sign that they trust you as a Leader. Reassure them that their gender identity is not a problem and that guiding will continue to support them throughout this time of exploration and, potentially, of change. Make sure they know that they can tell you if anyone is not supportive. The young member may prefer a different pronoun such as ‘he’ or ‘they’; this can be respected if and when the young member wishes while they remain part of the organisation. This conversation should be treated in confidence and you should:

- offer reassurance
- tell the young member that their confidentiality will be respected
- listen and be supportive
- ask the young member what their preferred pronoun might be and then use it
- ask the young member how they would like to be supported or if there is any information they want or need
- let them know that they can come and talk to you again, or recommend someone else whom they can speak to
- at the right time, you may wish to begin to work with the young member to find another organisation that may better support their needs, for example an organisation open to all genders.

What should I do if a young member identifies as non-binary?
Be aware that the young member may not have told many people or anyone at all, and that it is a sign that they trust you as a Leader. Reassure them that their gender identity is not a problem and that guiding will continue to support them throughout this time of exploration and, potentially, of change. Make sure they know that they can tell you if anyone is not supportive. The young member may prefer a different pronoun such as ‘he’ or ‘they’; this can be respected if and when the young member wishes while they remain part of the organisation. This conversation should be treated in confidence and you should:
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What should I do if a young member tells me that they are being targeted by transphobic bullying outside guiding?

A young member may be targeted by transphobic bullying for a number of reasons, including:

- they are trans
- they do not fit with traditional gender stereotypes
- people think that they are trans
- they have trans friends or family.

They have come to you as a trusted adult and it is important that you take any reports of bullying seriously.

- Listen carefully and trust that what is being said is correct.
- Offer immediate support, understanding and reassurance.
- Let the young member know that what they have told you is in confidence, but you may need to pass on some information to keep them safe.
- Ask the young member what support they would like from you, and if they would like you to find them any additional information or put them in touch with another organisation. If they wish, agree an action plan with them and give timescales for steps to be taken.

Questions that may arise

There have been a lot of questions from girls in my unit about gender and gender identity recently. I am uncomfortable answering them and feel that I do not have the right information, so what could I do?

Why not ask another Leader in your unit or area who feels more confident to run a session? Ask your County or Country/Region office for contact details. You could also consider asking someone from an expert charity or organisation to hold a session at one of your meetings. Organisations such as Gendered Intelligence offer training opportunities to give people more information and confidence to support young trans people (see Further information and support, page 7).

My girls are asking a lot of questions about gender and gender identity, and want to look at these issues more deeply. Are there resources or activities on offer that we can build into our programme?

Please see Girlguiding’s section-specific guidance on gender identity (see Further information and support, page 7), which signposts age-appropriate section programme resources and activities you might like to run with your unit.

I have a girl in my unit who does not recognise trans people based on her religious views. What should I do?

If you plan to run a session on gender and gender identity, inform all parents first, so they can remove their daughter from that session if they wish.
Agree ground rules with all girls before discussing gender identity. Ensure that all the girls understand that they must respect each other’s opinions. This includes all girls respecting people’s religious beliefs, as well as trans people’s right to be protected from discrimination.

While some religions do not recognise trans people, trans people are recognised by law in the United Kingdom.

Please note that while some people have a view about trans people based on their religious beliefs, not all people of the same religion may hold the same view and a child may not share the views or beliefs held by their parents.

Be prepared to confront transphobic language and behaviour. For further guidance, see the inclusive language information on Girlguiding’s website.

Girls, and some Leaders, have been using unacceptable language to discuss gender and gender identity. It may not be intentionally offensive but is old-fashioned. What should I do?

Calmly explain to them why the language might offend people and that this language is not acceptable. You may wish to use phrases such as: ‘We don’t use words like that at Guides because it can be upsetting to people.’ You might like to talk to the entire group about the language and use this to facilitate a wider discussion.

Do not make an example of the member who has used the language. Once you have addressed and explained the use of language, move on.

If the term was aimed at an individual or a group, do not bring attention to them. This may make them more uncomfortable.

For further guidance, see the inclusive language information on Girlguiding’s website.

There have been a lot of high-profile articles about trans people in the media this week. Is it appropriate to use these as examples?

Absolutely, but be aware that the media does not always use best practice when discussing trans issues. Make sure that you use correct gender pronouns and the person’s chosen name when discussing any high-profile articles, regardless of what the media reports.

Further information and support

Guiding resources
Section-specific sheets containing supporting guidelines, information and activity ideas are available as downloads on the website.

- Let’s Talk About Gender with Rainbows
- Let’s Talk About Gender with Brownies
- Let’s Talk About Gender with Guides
- Let’s Talk About Gender with The Senior Section

Girlguiding’s Equality and Diversity Policy.

Guidance for residential events - Information for supporting young trans members on residential events

Information on inclusive language and steps to take when unacceptable language is used.

Support within guiding
If you have been approached by a member of the press in relation to any of the issues in these guidelines, please contact the Girlguiding Press Office on 020 7592 1733 or 07990 553940 (out of hours).

If you receive a complaint from a parent or carer about anything connected with this subject, pass it on to your Commissioner.

Participation in discussions or sessions about gender and gender identity is voluntary for everyone.
There may be another Leader in your unit or local area who will cover the subject with your group if you feel unable to - ask your Commissioner to put you in touch with someone.

**WAGGGS publications**

*Taking Action on Gender*: a toolkit to support young people’s participation and empowerment, developed by WAGGGS Europe Region with support of the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe.

**Outside guiding**

Sometimes a girl, young woman or even another adult may come to you with a question about gender and gender identity which you need external information to answer. In this case you should be able to point her to reliable sources of information including health centres, websites, up-to-date leaflets or reputable organisations such as Gendered Intelligence. Ensure you signpost a young woman to age-appropriate resources.

See also the Confidentiality and safeguarding section on page 2 for more guidance.

This information was correct at publication.

**Online resources**

[genderedintelligence.co.uk](http://genderedintelligence.co.uk)

Gendered Intelligence is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that works to increase understanding of gender diversity. It works with the trans community and those who impact on trans lives. The organisation specialises in supporting young trans people aged 11 to 25.

[mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://mermaidsuk.org.uk)

Mermaids supports individual young trans people with or without support from their families. Their website contains useful first-hand accounts from young people and their parents.

[gires.org.uk](http://gires.org.uk)

Gires (Gender Identity Research and Education Society) provides information for trans people, their families and the professionals who care for them.

[itpronouncedmetrosexual.com](http://itpronouncedmetrosexual.com)

It’s Pronounced Metrosexual is a comedy show and online resource with articles, graphics and other resources which explain gender in a clear and easy-to-access way.

[gendertrust.org.uk](http://gendertrust.org.uk)

The Gender Trust helps trans people and those affected by gender identity issues.

[nonbinary.org](http://nonbinary.org)

Nonbinary.org is a non-binary gender visibility advocacy network. The website contains information and resources around non-binary gender.

[transmediawatch.org](http://transmediawatch.org)

Trans Media Watch is a charity that aims to improve media coverage around trans and intersex issues. The website contains a useful style guide which can be used as a framework for discussing trans people in the media.

[pfc.org.uk](http://pfc.org.uk)

Press for Change is a UK-based campaign group and the UK’s leading authority on transgender law.

**Books**

*I am Jazz*, Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jenning (Dial Books, 2015)