

SOURCE: DURON, LORI. RAISING MY RAINBOW!
ADVENTURES IN RAISING A FABULOUS,
GENDER CREATIVE SON

Twelve Things Every Gender-Nonconforming Child Wants You to Know

1. When most people are born, their sex (male or female based on their genitalia) and their gender (male or female based on their brain) are usually in total alignment. Mine aren't. Get over it. I was born this way.
2. If you are confused and can't quite tell if I'm a boy or a girl, just know that I am a person. Please treat me that way.
3. Sometimes I notice that my gender nonconformity makes you uncomfortable. I'm not trying to make you uncomfortable; I'm trying to make myself comfortable.
4. My gender nonconformity is a way of expressing myself, a way of being true to myself, true to the way my heart beats and my blood flows. I allow you to express your gender your way without being bothered; I hope that you will allow me to do the same.
5. It's silly when you think, say, or feel that colors, clothes, and/or toys are "only for girls" or "only for boys." Colors, toys, and clothes are for

- everybody—even though one particular item may be marketed only to one sex or gender. Antiquated notions like "dolls are only for girls" have no reason to exist, and I see them as pure nonsense.
6. Just because I'm gender nonconforming doesn't mean that I'll grow up to be LGBTQ. It's a strong predictor, but I'd rather you see me as a child and not an underage punch line to some homophobic joke.
 7. It hurts my feelings when people point and laugh at me because of my gender nonconformity. I'm not weird; I'm just different. I don't need people pointing out my differences—especially people who are old enough to know better.
 8. I don't ask that you teach everyone around me about sex, gender, and sexuality, but if you could teach them about empathy, kindness, and acceptance, I would greatly appreciate it. Treat others how you want to be treated—it's that simple.
 9. I don't fit into a category or a box. I may not be easy to explain or understand, but if you approach me with an open heart and an open mind, I can guarantee that I will change your way of thinking. It makes me sad when I learn that your mind and heart are closed.
 10. Kids like me are the most likely to suffer from depression, addiction, and bullying; practice unsafe sex; and injure ourselves or die by self-harm. Please refrain from making me hate myself because I am different. My gender nonconformity should not be a thing of shame.
 11. Bullies aren't just at school; sometimes they are at

home too. Home should be the place where I feel the most safe and the most loved. If that is not the case, something is wrong and I need help.

12. If you see me doing something that defies "traditional gender norms," don't place blame on my parents or family. Give them praise! It means that they are awesome enough to understand that I need their love and support more than anything. Them forcing me to express a gender that I don't exactly associate with or trying to "fix" me would do dangerous things to me. I don't need them to tell me to "act like a lady" or "man up." I need them to tell me that I was perfectly created. If everybody in the world were the same or "expected" to be the same, this would be a very boring world. People like me give the world color.

Tips for Educators

No matter the age or grade level, if you have a career in education, you will teach lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) and gender-nonconforming children.

More than 3 percent of the population identifies as LGBTQ. That means that if there are thirty students in a class, at least one of them is LGBTQ. And, gender variance or a transgender identity occurs in as many as one of every five hundred births—making it more common than childhood diabetes.

Educators have the unique opportunity to change stereotypes, address social injustices, decrease bullying, and increase empathy and acceptance. Please plan your curriculum and classroom accordingly. Consider implementing these tips in an age-appropriate manner:

1. Emphasize that the members of the class are a community and every child is needed, special, unique, valued, and has something different to offer the community. If everybody were exactly the same, the community would be boring.

2. Ensure that every child in the classroom feels safe and included. Let children know that they should be working to make others feel safe and included, as well. It's not just the teacher's job; it's everybody's job.
3. Teach children about empathy. Educators don't have to provide in-depth lessons on gender, sex, and sexuality, but they do have a responsibility to teach children about empathy, kindness, and acceptance. Children need to be taught how to work, play, and get along with all kinds of people.
4. Create an inclusive and accepting environment that teaches children to recognize and resist stereotypes. Introduce them to books that show children and adults in atypical gender roles and use gender neutral terms when discussing careers and members of the community (i.e., police officer instead of policeman).
5. Explain to children that everyone has their own style and that people are allowed to dress and wear their hair any way they want. Everyone gets to pick their own style. If you like someone's style, tell them. Compliments should be shared, criticisms should not.
6. Make your classroom a place where all children are free to learn and play without the strict confines of stereotypes. All colors, games, activities, and toys can be enjoyed by everyone. Nothing is "just for boys" or "just for girls."
7. Resist the urge to use gender to divide students into lines, groups, or teams. That makes some students feel uncomfortable and distracts them. It's

- hard to teach a child when she or he is distracted or uncomfortable. Try something new.
8. Eliminate gender when addressing pupils. Instead, address them using gender-neutral terms, like students, friends, scholars, class, children, people, human beings, etc.
 9. Know the nation's and your state's anti-bullying and anti-discrimination laws. Teach students about the laws and how to stand up for themselves and others, to resist bullying, and to work together. Empower children to be allies.
 10. View parents of LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming children as resources and teammates, not high-maintenance liabilities. It's not two teams against each other; it's one team in favor of the child. Also realize that sometimes bullies aren't just at school; sometimes they are at home. If you see a child in distress, help him or her.