

Dear Families,

TNCS fosters an environment of inclusivity and acceptance of all walks of life, cultures, languages, and philosophies. TNCS students embrace this inclusivity, especially around the evolving topic of gender identity.

Our children are growing up in a world where trans and non-binary celebrities, public figures, politicians, as well as people they interact with each day, are increasingly visible. Our students are asking questions about gender identity; some TNCS students are exploring their own gender identity. Some may be gender non-conforming or gender dysphoric. As a community, we need to be supportive adults in our children's lives so that all individuals feel welcome and affirmed at TNCS.

Gender identity and inclusion is not a new topic for TNCS. However, we realize it is time to engage in broader conversations with our community. During the October professional development day, TNCS had it's first all-staff meeting on the topic of gender identity. It was a great initial discussion led by Dr. Caitlin McFarland, a psychiatrist with deep interests in mental health education specifically amongst transgender and LGBTQIA+ populations. Staff are eager for more conversations. Simultaneously, this communication marks the beginning of a more active engagement with our parents and caregivers. This is being driven by the needs of our students.

The topic of gender identity might feel complicated for some of us or divisive for others, however it is crucial for everyone to understand. Our students are becoming increasingly aware of this evolving subject. In coming weeks and months, TNCS will be sharing some of the ways we are supporting all of our students and what we are using to guide conversations on gender identity. In accordance with the current TNCS Gender Identity Policy, teachers do not ask students which pronouns they prefer, however staff do honor and use preferred pronouns when requested by students. Staff members are expected to address students using non-gender specific language such as "class", "students", or "friends."

As with anything in child development, children need their parents and caregivers to listen to them and support them. We have put together a FAQ below and encourage you to become familiar with this important topic. Questions or concerns should be directed to the TNCS School Counselor, Daphnee Hope.

FAQ's

It's too complicated.

True but many things take practice. When we fail to make an effort with someone's name or pronoun, it can be hurtful. Using a trans or non-binary person's chosen name and identified pronoun can improve their mental health and significantly reduce overall negative health outcomes. This also helps boost a child's self-confidence and promotes safer communities for all gender-nonconforming youth.

Isn't it just the latest trend?

It is easy for some adults to dismiss youth who come out as trans or non-binary as simply following the latest trend or just going through a phase. Those adults may then use this rationale as an excuse to ignore those young people's new pronouns or chosen names. Whether children's current pronouns remain with them for life isn't really the point. If a young person is asking us to use a certain pronoun, pushing back against their request on the basis that it is just youthful whimsy is misguided and dangerous.

It's confusing?

Consider the fact that a 2018 study from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) found that close to 40 percent of transgender and non-binary youth had attempted suicide at some point. Then consider the findings of [a 2016 study](#) by the same organization that found that transgender children who are supported in their gender identity have developmentally normative levels of depression in relation to cisgender children, while transgender children who are not supported in their identities have higher rates.

They/them pronouns aren't grammatically correct

Language is always evolving. So, it should come as little surprise to know that even though most of us learned to exclusively use singular "he" or "she" pronouns, there have been times when ["they" was widely used as a singular gender-neutral pronoun](#). But despite what we may have learned, the "they" pronoun is already regularly used colloquially. Using "they" as a pronoun is not just a colloquialism, Merriam-Webster officially added the non-binary pronoun ["they" as an entry in its dictionary](#).

Won't it confuse my child?

Often adults are uncomfortable or confused. Much of today's young people are perfectly at ease with identities their parents may not understand.

What about the idea that if children learn that gender identity is not tied to biology, they will somehow be influenced to transition when they otherwise would not have?

It's true that a more open world might allow more kids to explore their gender identities. It is also clear that exposure to gender-nonconforming folks won't make a child trans. What it will do is support those kids who are trans, and remind all children of the vast diversity around us.

What does transitioning look like for young trans kids?

It's typically a social transition. This might involve changing one's name to better align with their gender identity and asking people to use different pronouns. That's really it for kids. It revolves around how people reflect back that gender to the child and going with what the child is asking at the time.