

Autism and Gender

Understanding the Connection

Sexuality and gender identity is often fluid, and not set in stone. Many autistic persons express themselves atypically in terms of gender and sexuality and tend to be more flexible in the ways in which they express their identity. Gender can be quite complex and people are defining themselves in new and different ways as we gain a deeper understanding of identities.

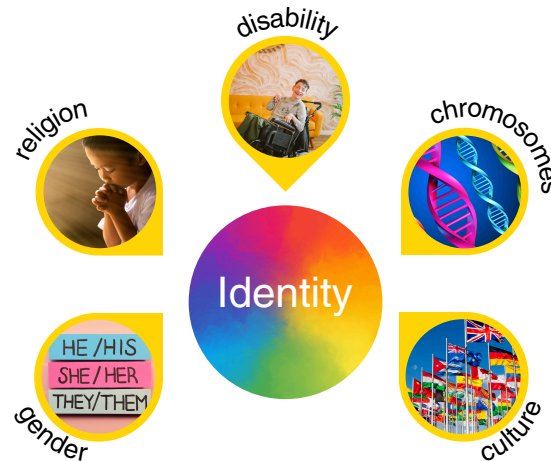
Research on gender and sexual orientation of autistic person's shows that, compared to non-autistic persons they are:

- ◆ more likely to not conform to the gender roles that society expects
- ◆ more gender diverse
- ◆ more likely to experience higher rates of gender dysphoria
- ◆ more flexible in their sexual orientation

Autistic youth may be navigating this journey in a number of ways:

They may identify in the 2SLGBTQ+ spectrum or gender identity does not exist for them. They are just "them". They may feel discomfort or disconnect to their assigned sex or they are still unsure of their gender identity, and they require more time exploring to make sense of their feelings inside.

Some of the features of Autism may intersect with the journey for gender identity. A person's identity is a combination of many factors such as our chromosomes and our cultures and are often difficult to pull apart.



Recognizing diversity is a positive step when creating space for differences within gender, attraction, connection, and self-expression. The current 2SLGBTQ+ labels for gender and sexual identity may still ineffectively represent how a person's autistic identity uniquely contributes to their experience and expression of gender. A great starting place for caregivers to open these discussions with your youth would be to let them know they are safe to discuss how they are feeling and that they can ask any questions about gender and sexuality. Communicate openly and honestly, and without judgment.

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- Warrior, V., Greenberg, D.M., Weir, E. et al., (2020). Elevated rates of autism, other neurodevelopmental and psychiatric diagnoses, and autistic traits in transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Nat Commun 11, (3959). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-17794-1>

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