

Self-Identity and Development

Hilltop views each child as an individual with a unique personality, learning style and way of responding to the world. Given the diversity of the families and communities we serve, it is necessary for us to recognize and appreciate the characteristics and behaviors that each child brings to our programs.

Gender Identity and Transgender Children

Early childhood is a normal developmental period for children to explore concepts of gender.

Privacy and Confidentiality - All persons, including children, have a right to privacy, and this includes the right to keep one's transgender or gender nonconforming status private in the center. Information about a child's transgender status, legal name, or gender assigned at birth also may constitute confidential medical information. Hilltop faculty and staff shall not disclose information that may reveal a child's transgender status to others, including other families, faculty or staff, unless legally required to do so or unless the family has authorized such disclosure.

Transgender and gender nonconforming children and their families have the right to discuss and express their gender identity and expression openly and to decide when, with whom, and how much to share private information. The fact that a child or family chooses to disclose his or her transgender status to faculty or other children does not authorize the center to disclose other medical information about the student. When contacting the family of a transgender student, faculty should use the child's legal name and the pronoun corresponding to the child's gender assigned at birth unless the family has specified otherwise.

Official Records - The organization shall maintain a mandatory permanent child or faculty record that includes a person's legal name and legal gender. However, to the extent that the organization is not legally required to use a child's legal name and gender on other records or documents, the organization shall use the name and gender preferred by the faculty, child, and/or family.

Names and Pronouns - Every child, faculty, and family member have the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity by other children, faculty, and families. The intentional or persistent refusal by anyone to respect a child's gender identity (for example, intentionally referring to the student by a name or pronoun that does not correspond to the child's gender identity) is a violation of this policy.

Bathrooms - All of Hilltop's bathrooms are gender-neutral, in compliance with non-discrimination laws and in support of all children and adults, regardless of gender identity. The multi-stall bathrooms are for children's use only, while children are in the building. Adult bathrooms are gender-neutral and single stall and are located next to Raindrop Room and in the kitchen.

Child Transitions - Generally, it will be the family that informs the center of any impending gender transition. However, it is not unusual for a child's desire to transition to first surface at the program. If faculty believe that a gender identity or expression issue is presenting itself and/or creating difficulty for the child at the center, we will approach the family about the issue. Together, the family and center can then identify appropriate steps to support the child.

Here are some helpful definitions:

Gender identity: A person's deeply held sense or psychological knowledge of their own gender. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the gender assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity that matches their assigned gender at birth. For some, however, their gender identity is different from their assigned gender. All people have a gender identity, not just transgender people. Gender identity is an innate, largely inflexible characteristic of each individual's personality that is generally established by age four, although the age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial social development.

Gender expression: The manner in which a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, activities, voice or mannerisms.

Transgender: An adjective describing a person whose gender identity or expression is different from that traditionally associated with an assigned sex at birth. Other terms that can have similar meanings are transsexual and trans.

Transition: The process in which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another.

Gender nonconforming: A term for people whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations, such as "feminine" boys, "masculine" girls, and those who are perceived as androgynous. This includes people who identify outside traditional gender categories or identify as both genders. Other terms that can have similar meanings include gender diverse or gender expansive.

Sexual Development

Hilltop believes that sexual development occurs in the context of overall growth and development, along with physical, social/emotional and cognitive development. Like all areas of childhood growth, sexual development is highly individualized. Our experience is that an environment which fosters this growth in a positive light is essential. We recognize that families have differing values around sexual development and expression. It is our hope that families will feel free to communicate with faculty regarding their own individual family's beliefs and values.

We believe that a positive environment allows children to learn about and feel good about their bodies, develop a vocabulary which allows them to understand and talk about all of their body parts and functions and allows them freedom of self-expression in a wide variety of non-stereotypic roles. At the same time, we support children in learning the boundaries that help them respect their own body and the bodies of others. Children may undress to their underwear in order to try on drama clothing. While we do not allow nudity (although this is normal for children), there might be other times of day when you see children in their underwear. In addition, we do not allow the use of profanity, teasing and intimidation or sexual exploration that involves touching other's private parts. Our ultimate goal is to foster in children a high sense of self-esteem as their bodies grows and change.