

# Showing Kindness & Support to Transgender and Nonbinary People

*A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum*

*Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.*

## **NSES ALIGNMENT:**

**GI.12.INF.1** - Explain how support from peers, families, schools, and communities can improve a person's health and well-being as it relates to gender identity and gender expression

**GI.10.INF.1** - Analyze how media, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about gender, gender identity, gender roles, and gender expression

**TARGET GRADE:** High School

**TIME:** 50 Minutes

## **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Computer with internet, screen and speakers (and LCD projector if using PowerPoint)
- Ask the IT person at your school to make sure you can access YouTube to show the following video clip:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKE8olBeYzw> - "Why Hollywood Needs To Get Trans Representation Right"
  - It is 8 minutes 28 seconds and is a brief discussion with Kuchenga, a black transgender writer and journalist, sharing her experience of watching the Disclosure documentary. (Note: the Disclosure documentary is a Netflix documentary with leading transgender actors, writers, and thinkers sharing their personal experiences and analysis about Hollywood's impact on the transgender community. (It is not necessary to have seen the documentary to use this video clip.)
- Copies of worksheets, enough for each student to have 1 sheet of the activity of their choice
- Texts of Support and Kindness
- Letters of Support and Kindness
- Pens/pencils as needed
- [Optional PowerPoint slides provided](#)

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Examine representations of transgender people and how they can influence attitudes, beliefs and expectations about gender identity and expression. [Knowledge]
2. Report at least two ways that support from peers, families, schools, and communities can improve a transgender or nonbinary person's health and well-being. [Knowledge]
3. Describe at least two ways a person can show support to people who are transgender and nonbinary. [Knowledge]

## **LESSON RATIONALE:**

There is overwhelming research and data showing that support for transgender and nonbinary youth can help to dramatically increase protective health behaviors, help build resilience, and support positive mental health behaviors. Understanding what support looks and feels like and how it relates to health and well-being will serve as a foundation to describe specific ways that support from peers, families, schools, and communities positively impacts transgender and nonbinary youth. In this lesson we will examine ways that gender identity and expression are represented through media and how that can influence individual attitudes, beliefs and expectations. Additionally, students will identify specific ways to demonstrate support for transgender and nonbinary friends, family, and community members.

## **ADVANCED PREPARATION:**

Being prepared to talk about and facilitate lessons on gender identity and expression may be new skills for some teachers. Preparation can include checking out some of the links below, talking with colleagues who have taught these topics before, and taking a minute to practice new phrases or use of pronouns. You have transgender young people in your classes, you always have! Your preparation to actively acknowledge and include them can be lifesaving!

- [I Think I Might Be Transgender. Advocates for Youth](#) – Written by transgender youth, this pamphlet provides answers for young people who find that the gender to which they were born, or assigned at birth, does not fit them.

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- [Developing LGBTQ-Inclusive Classroom Resources, GLSEN](#) – Educator guide on creating an inclusive curriculum, responding to anti-LGBTQ behavior and implementing social emotional learning in the classroom.
- [Framework for Gender-Inclusive Schools, Gender Spectrum](#) – Background on the four entry points for the intentional development of gender-inclusive school settings and resources to approach each.
- [Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools, ACLU](#) – Handbook on providing safe environments for transgender high school students that is targeted toward administrators, teachers and parents.
- [Pronoun Guide, GLSEN](#) – Guide for members of the school community to learn how to use people’s correct pronouns.
- [Gender Support Checklist for Transgender and Non-Binary Students, Welcoming Schools](#) – Set of questions for educators to confirm they have the answers and resources necessary to best support gender-nonconforming students.

***Note to the Teacher:** Teaching about transgender and nonbinary people from the expectation that you have transgender and nonbinary students in your class, and people with transgender and nonbinary friends and family members, is critical. This means using phrases like “this lesson is important because we have transgender and nonbinary students at our school that can really benefit from our support and kindness.” These small and simple affirmations of the existence and presence of transgender people can have a positive impact on your students and your school climate.*

*We have actively chosen not to focus on sharing an exhaustive and detailed list of risks and poor mental and physical health outcomes experienced by transgender youth as a result of stigma and discrimination. We believe that transgender youth themselves are extremely aware of the challenges they see and experience, and their cisgender peers benefit more from very brief information about the challenges and risks, and, instead, dedicating classroom time to a clear focus on the protective and helpful actions and behaviors they can practice.*

### **A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:**

Language is extremely important. It is one way you can be explicitly inclusive around often underrepresented and not as commonly acknowledged sexual orientations and gender identities. We’ve intentionally been very thoughtful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language that seems less familiar, for example, using the pronoun “they” instead of “her” or “him”, and simply referring to the body parts and processes we are teaching about rather than unnecessarily gendering them. We have also explicitly included scenarios and role plays that use a variety of names typically coded to certain

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genders, as well as ones that are not as readily coded to assumptions about gender. We have also used a variety of gendered and gender-neutral pronouns and names to be sure we are actively including various gender identities, sexual orientations, and relationships in our activities and discussions. This commitment to inclusiveness across our lessons is aimed at building new habits within our classrooms related to actively and more seamlessly representing a broader range of genders, orientations, and lived experiences.

### PROCEDURE:

#### STEP 1:

Introduce the lesson by explaining that we'll be talking about ways that showing support and kindness to our transgender and nonbinary friends, peers, and family members can make a really big positive impact. Explain that we'll begin by learning about media representation of transgender people and how that can influence attitudes, beliefs and expectations about gender identity and expression.

Explain that one of the things that can impact transgender and nonbinary people – and the support and kindness they get from friends, families and their community – is the way they are represented in traditional and social media. These messages often include a lot of myths, misinformation, and prejudice that can have a significant negative impact on how people think about and treat transgender people. According to a study from GLAAD, more than 80 percent of Americans do not personally know someone who's transgender. That means most people learn about transgender people from the ways they're shown in movies and on TV. This has been the case related to limited and stereotypic representation of many groups throughout history. From representation of young parents to the lives of immigrants and Black and brown people, all of these stereotypes hurt people and limit the understanding of the diversity of lived-experiences.

Explain that we will watch a short video called “Why Hollywood Needs To Get Trans Representation Right.” It is less than 10 minutes and is a brief discussion and personal reflection by Kuchenga, a Black transgender writer and journalist, sharing her experience of watching the Disclosure documentary.

Ask students if they have heard of the Disclosure documentary? If yes, have students share briefly what the documentary is about. In addition to any student descriptions, share that the [Disclosure documentary](#) is a Netflix documentary with leading transgender actors, writers, and thinkers sharing their personal experiences and analysis about Hollywood's impact on the transgender community. (It is not necessary to have seen the documentary to use this video clip.)

Play video clip found [HERE](#).

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Invite students to share their thoughts and reflections on the video clip. You can use any of the following questions to encourage discussion:

- Did anything stand out to you in this video?
- Was there something new you heard that you had not thought of before?
- What do you think Kuchenga might have meant by describing her experience as shifting from an “approach of emotional depletion to one of healthy ambition” related to seeing more transgender representation in the media?
- What do you think Laverne Cox means by “possibility models” when she talks about the importance of transgender representation in the media?

Close the group conversation by emphasizing that learning about transgender people from movies and TV can leave a lot of gaps in understanding and expose people to a lot of biased and prejudiced stories and images. Knowing that the real and diverse lived experiences of transgender and nonbinary people is bigger than the stories on TV and in movies is important.

*(15 minutes)*

### STEP 2:

Explain that now, we’ll move on to an activity to help us think about how we can personally share support and kindness to transgender and nonbinary people in our lives.

Briefly explain that many transgender young people often face stigma and discrimination in school, from classmates and teachers, and from their family. Be sure to explicitly state that being transgender isn’t the problem at all! It is the behaviors, words, and attitudes of people who are unkind, unfair, and uninformed that negatively impact transgender youth and can lead to things like feeling depressed, alone and even suicidal.

Explain that we can all do things – whether we are cisgender or transgender – to help make a positive difference for transgender and nonbinary people by actively showing our support and kindness. We know that transgender youth are amazing and resilient and that kind actions and support from friends, at school and at home, can make a big positive difference and quite literally, save lives.

Make sure to highlight that similar acts of kindness and support can have a positive impact on so many people! Whether that includes interrupting biased and racist statements, or challenging ableism or ageism, or stepping up against fatphobia, when you can use your voice to interrupt bias and share kindness and support, it can make a positive difference.

Be sure to share that correct and consistent use of chosen pronouns and names is an important way to show kindness and respect. Misgendering is commonly reported by trans and nonbinary people and can have large negative impacts on mental health and safety. When names and pronouns are used correctly they have a protective impact on mental health! It’s an important and intentional way we can all show up for trans and nonbinary people?

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Say, “**think about a time when someone has shown you support or kindness. Think about a time when you have shown someone else support and kindness,**” and ask, “**what are some specific examples of how you can share support and kindness with someone?**” Facilitate group discussion about what support and kindness can look like and feel like, and be sure to emphasize the following:

*Note to the Teacher: Optional slides provided for the following two sections.*

- **Making time** – making time to talk or text can show someone you really mean it when you say you support them and are there for them
- **Being listened to** – listening can make a huge difference to how someone feels. If they’re finding it difficult to talk, let them know you’re there when they’re ready
- **Ask them what would help** – it could just be being there for them, or they might want help talking to another person or looking for support options
- **Encourage them to find more support** – sometimes you need help to properly support a friend, that can mean talking about other people who could help too. You could offer to go with them to talk to another person
- **Keep in contact** – ask them how they’re doing, send occasional messages just to check in and say hello
- **Take care of yourself!** – Being in a support role for a friend can be intense for the person giving support! Take the time you need to take care of yourself too

*Ask students if they have any specific ways that they check in with friends? Share these short helpful ways to check in as additional examples:*

- “Hey, I’m here for you if you want to talk.”
- “You’ve seemed \_\_\_\_\_ (stressed, sad, withdrawn, quiet). How are you?”
- “I missed you at school today. Is everything okay?”
- “I’m worried about you. Is there anything you want to talk about?”
- “We haven’t talked in a while. What’s been happening?”

*(10 minutes)*

### STEP 3:

Explain that now we’re going to do an activity that lets us practice ways to share support and kindness with a transgender or nonbinary friend or family member in a few different scenarios. Explain that students will work on their own for a few minutes, then in small groups, and students can choose if they will practice by writing text messages or sample letters to support and show kindness to someone.

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Distribute the worksheets and invite each student to choose which format they want to work on – texts or letters. Make sure each student has one worksheet and a pen/pencil. Let students know they have 5 minutes to work independently; after 5 minutes, have students pair up – it is OK to mix up students that have completed the text and letter worksheets – the goal is to have ample opportunity to practice and hear ideas and approaches of other people in either format.

Pairs will have 7 minutes to talk through their scenarios and share some of their texts or parts of their letters. Encourage discussion and updating individual worksheets if they hear a new phrase or approach they might consider using. Circulate around the classroom during the pairs activity to see if any pairs need help or encouragement. After 7 minutes, reconvene the large group.

Ask students what it was like doing this activity? Ask students to share examples of what they could text or write to show support and kindness to their friends or family members. Facilitate discussion and encourage new ideas that come up to be shared and built upon. Some questions you can ask to encourage sharing:

- Were there any specific phrases you think show support really well?
- What things did you text or write to show kindness?
- Were there any specific actions you offered to take to show support?
- Are there other follow-up things you could do to keep showing support and kindness?

*(20 minutes)*

### **STEP 4:**

Wrap up discussion and thank students for their participation. Remind students that their actions can make a big positive difference for transgender friends when they find ways to share support and kindness.

*(5 minutes)*

### **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:**

Step 1 is designed to address the first learning objective; Step 2 addresses the second learning objective; and Step 3 addresses the third learning objective.

### **HOMEWORK:**

**WRITE A REVIEW!**

Download one of these guides and write a review! What did you like? What was helpful? What would you add or change if you were writing it?

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- [I Think I Might Be Transgender, Advocates for Youth](#) – Written by transgender youth, this pamphlet provides answers for young people who find that the gender to which they were born, or assigned at birth, does not fit them.
- [A Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth, The Trevor Project](#) – this guide is an introductory educational resource that covers a wide range of topics and best practices on how to support transgender and nonbinary people.

Watch the Disclosure documentary on Netflix and write a journal entry reflecting on how it made you feel and what it made you think about.

Watch other interviews and reflections by transgender actors about their experience of watching the documentary and write your own journal entry about what you think and learned.

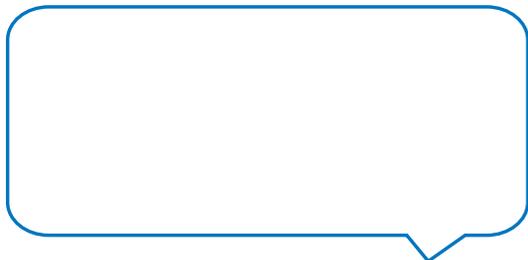
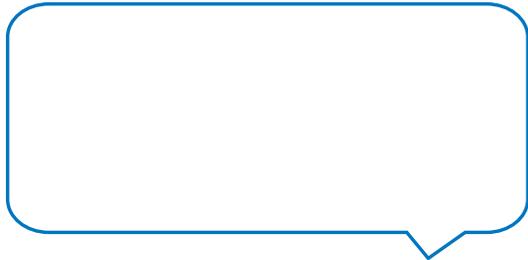
- Watch: The Trans Gaze – Tiq Milan & Alexandra Grey
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXxuAm6Bn2I>
- 17 minutes

Visit any of the following websites and reflect on their importance and value in working to create better representation of transgender people in the media.

- [Translash](#)
- [Black Trans Femmes In the Arts](#)
- [Black Trans TV](#)
- [Femmeprimacy](#)
- [By Us For Us](#)
- [Transgender Media Portal](#)

# Worksheet: Texts of Support & Kindness

**YOUR COUSIN**...privately pulled you aside and came out to you as trans at your Auntie's birthday BBQ. She said she's been thinking about it for a long time and is planning to tell her mom this week and ask her to start using her new name (Josie) and to use she/her pronouns. She thinks it will probably be OK (her mom has a trans friend at work she sticks up for a lot) but she's really nervous anyway. She hasn't told anyone else yet. What are FOUR texts you could send after you get home to show support and kindness?



**A GOOD FRIEND**...you have known since second grade has been having a hard time at school. They are nonbinary and they get misgendered (people use the wrong pronouns) all the time by teachers and other people at school. You can see how much it hurts them and how they just don't have the energy to always correct people. What are FOUR texts you could send to them to show support and kindness?



# Worksheet: Letters of Support & Kindness

**YOUR SIBLING**...has been really withdrawn and depressed and you're worried. You used to be really close, but now it seems harder to hang out. You find a letter written to you explaining what's been going on. He comes out to you as a trans man and asks you to use his new name (Luke) and asks you if you'd go with him to tell your mom. What could you write back to show him support and kindness?



**WHAT COULD YOU DO TO SHOW SUPPORT AND KINDNESS?** A new friend from your summer recreation program has become a really good friend. You text, call, and write to each other a lot. You notice that they have become suddenly withdrawn from you and you're worried. You had such an easy connection and it seems harder now. You get a letter explaining what's been going on. They come out to you as transgender and want you to start using their new name (Luke). What could you write him back to show him support and kindness?

