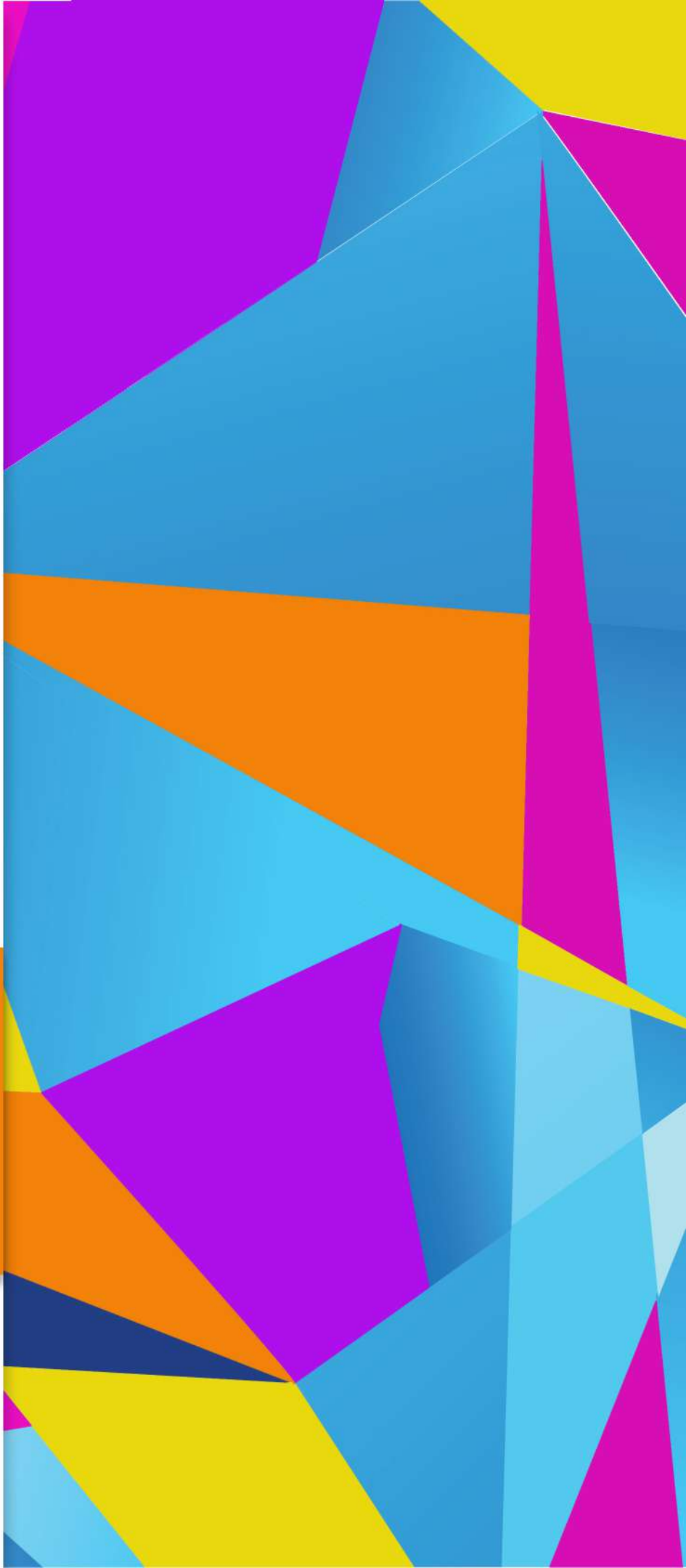


Youth Engagement:
**Opening the Door
to Difficult
Conversations**

Toolkit

Module 6:
Sex and Gender



Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations Toolkit© Module 6: Sex and Gender

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Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations Toolkit

Module 6: Sex and Gender

Please note, community standards should be set (see Module 1) before beginning this module.

Background

The terms “sex” and “gender” are often used interchangeably, leading to confusion, and misunderstanding about their distinct meanings. Assigned sex at birth generally refers to the classification of an individual as male or female based on biological characteristics after birth. On the other hand, gender is a social and cultural construct that determines how ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are represented. Gender is traditionally seen as binary (male or female), even though this is not the reality of how individuals often experience their gender identity. Society has historically reinforced gender norms, or the set of specific roles, expectations, and behaviours, for men and women based on an assumed gender identity.

It is important to create a safe space for individuals to feel comfortable expressing themselves. Equally, no one should ever be pressured into actively participating. While it can be liberating for some youth to disclose their gender identity, it is important to acknowledge that it might not be safe or feasible for everyone to do so. This will depend on each person’s unique circumstances. Therefore, it is essential not to pressure anyone into disclosing anything personal if they don’t feel safe doing so.

Understanding terminology and definitions about sex and gender will support an inclusive environment and avoid miscommunication. Ensure that you go over the terminology in Appendix B before facilitating this module. Refer to Appendix A for recommendations on Saskatchewan Prevention Institute resources that can be used to supplement this module.

Objectives

- Clarify the differences between sex and gender
- Develop a critical understanding of gender norms
- Foster an inclusive and accepting perspective on gender diversity
- Empower participants to create a safe and empathetic environment where everyone feels supported

Material

- Flipchart/whiteboard
- Markers/pens
- Sticky notes/index cards

Check In:

Two Indigenous people are sitting in a tipi. In the tipi they sit; a big one and a little one: both Indigenous. The little one is the big one’s son... but the big one is not the little ones’ father. How can this be?

Answer: The big one is the little ones’ mother.¹

Facilitator’s Tip: This check-in riddle sets the stage for the rest of this module by stimulating participants to challenge their assumptions. It supports the transition to a broader conversation about sex and gender.

Activity 1: Discovering the Differences

Begin this activity by explaining that the purpose is to collectively explore the difference between sex and gender. Remind participants that it is okay not to know the answer and that this will be an opportunity to learn together.

Draw a vertical line down the center of the flipchart/whiteboard into two columns labeled “Sex” and “Gender”.

Divide participants into small groups of 4 to 6 participants. Hand out sticky notes/ index cards and pens to each group. Instruct the groups to brainstorm and write down ideas and concepts related to sex and gender that help us understand how they are different.

Facilitator’s Tip: Encourage the groups to write down definitions, thoughts, and examples they can think of that can describe the differences between sex and gender.

After the groups are done, bring the participants together into the circle. Instruct each group to share what they wrote and place their sticky notes/ index cards in the corresponding column. As ideas are shared, guide participants to identify common themes and differences in their responses.

Facilitator’s Tip: To help facilitate the discussion, below are some key differences that should be discussed in this activity. These concepts may emerge on their own or require some probing and guiding questions.

SEX	GENDER	FACILITATOR QUESTIONS
Biological (reproductive organs, chromosomes)	Social/cultural construct Wide range of expressions and identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can society’s expectations and roles for males and females differ based on sex? • What aspects of gender are influenced by social/cultural factors?
Assigned at birth	Fluid/changes, is based on how individuals perceive and identify themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do people determine a baby’s sex? • How can this differ from gender identity?
Typically seen as binary	Includes a spectrum of gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We often hear about two sexes –

¹ Shared by Lyndon Linklater, Knowledge Keeper and storyteller.

SEX	GENDER	FACILITATOR QUESTIONS
(categorizes individuals as male - female) *Consider discussing intersex people who are born with biological characteristics that don't fit typical definitions of male or female.	identities	do you think there are only two genders? • Can you think of any examples that suggest gender might be more than two distinct categories?

Participants may further discuss specific social implications of sex and gender. If misconceptions or stereotypes about sex and gender arise, address them respectfully by providing accurate information.

Information on some common points of discussion:

- Gender identity and gender expression can be different. Someone may feel like one gender, but present like they are a different gender. They may do this for a variety of reasons, including to feel safe or accepted.
- Gender and sexual orientation are separate. Someone can be attracted to the same gender as they are, or more than one gender.

Activity 2: Breaking Stereotypes

Now that the group has explored gender as a social/cultural construct, this activity will focus on investigating and challenging some expectations and stereotypes surrounding sex and gender. Remind the group of the community standards that were collectively decided on during the first module and the importance of respecting them.

Part One: Individual Brainstorming

Begin by providing each participant with index papers and pens and ask them to write down some common stereotypes or expectations around sex and gender. A stereotype is a widely held idea about what someone or something is like. Often this idea is oversimplified or wrong. Provide participants with the chance to share as many stereotypes as they can.

If you feel that participants require probing to come up with answers, you can ask questions to help facilitate brainstorming. Here are some examples:

- When you think about males and females, what are some expectations of each that come to mind?
- Have you ever heard any comments about how males and females should behave?
- Are there any sayings that you've heard people say about males and females?
- What are some stereotypes you've noticed in the portrayal of males and females in TV shows, movies, and songs?

Facilitator's Tip: If there are not enough responses, you can add ones from the list at the end of the module.

Part Two: Beyond the Restrictions

Once everyone is done, collect the index cards and anonymously read them out for discussion. You could write down the ones you think might require prolonged discussion on the flipchart or whiteboard.

The following questions can help facilitate the discussion:

- What messages do these stereotypes or expectations convey?
- Why do you think these stereotypes exist?
- How can these expectations impact individuals on a personal and emotional level?
- How can these stereotypes influence someone's self-esteem and opportunities?
- What role does the media play in perpetuating or challenging these ideas?
- Are gender expectations the same across different cultures and societies?
- How can these expectations affect the way we interact with others?

Explain to the group that the stereotypes and expectations shared are called gender norms. These are unwritten rules or social scripts that sometimes vary across societies but are often restricted by a binary idea of "masculinity" and "femininity". These gender norms may perpetuate the idea that anything outside of the traditional gender categories is not normal and can limit us from being fully ourselves.

In reality, many people have a combination of characteristics typically labeled "feminine" and "masculine". For this section of the activity, challenge the group to think beyond these restrictions.

- What gender norms would you like to challenge?
- How can you challenge these norms? (These can be things we do ourselves or our actions when others challenge gender norms.)
- Think of people or events in the media that challenge gender norms. How do they do that?

Check Out: Thank everyone for participating in today's discussion. Encourage participants to reflect on what was discussed and identify how they can apply the insights gained in their daily lives to create a more inclusive and supportive community (this can just be a silent, personal reflection).

Activity 2: Common Stereotypes

Stereotypes About Women

- Women are emotional.
- Women are better suited for caregiver roles.
- Women are not capable of being in leadership positions.
- Women do not do well in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields.
- Women cannot drive well.
- Women should prioritize family over a career.

Common Social Sayings About Women

- “You throw like a girl.”
- “A woman’s place is in the kitchen.”

Stereotypes About Men

- Men should be the primary breadwinners of the family.
- Men are not interested in expressing their feelings.
- Men excel in sports and physical activity.
- Men are better at making decisions and taking charge.

Common Social Sayings About Men

- “Boys will be boys.”
- “Man up.”
- “Real men don’t show weakness.”