



As You Are: Building Understanding of Gender and Family Diversity  
Indiana State Health Network Conference  
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### Who is the Joseph Maley Foundation?

The Joseph Maley Foundation is a non-profit organization with a mission to celebrate differences and cultivate an inclusive community through service and education of youth in Greater Indianapolis. Founded in 2008, the Joseph Maley Foundation offers powerful educational programs and service opportunities that teach young people to be accepting, empathetic, and respectful of all people. The Joseph Maley Foundation has served over 150,000 youth in the Greater Indianapolis area, including over 35,000 students in 2021.

### What is the As You Are program?

Joseph Maley Foundation's newest education program, As You Are, builds awareness and understanding of gender and family diversity. This program fosters respect, empathy, and a sense of belonging, emphasizing that we are all valued as we are. As You Are was developed in partnership with community stakeholders, including Indiana Youth Group, Trinity Haven, Lilly's PRIDE Employee Resource Group, GEKCO, and Shelly's Voice.

As You Are is a developmentally-appropriate, standards-based curriculum. Content grows with children, building year after year. Here are the themes for each grade level:

PreK: Everybody Can Play

Kindergarten: All Kinds of Families

Grade 1: Express Yourself

Grade 2: Uniquely Me

Grade 3: All are Welcome Here

Grade 4: Defying Stereotypes

Grade 5: Be The Change

Grade 6: Pride Milestones

Grade 7: The Power of Words

Grade 8: How to Be An Ally

High School: Coming Soon!

### What is the rationale behind the program?

Education about gender, sexual identity, and family diversity is overlooked or ignored in our schools. For many students, participating in As You Are will be their first formal learning experience regarding these topics. LGBTQ+ youth and families may feel represented and understood for the first time by their school.

Research also shows the critical importance of LGBTQ-affirming schools. According to the Trevor Project, LGBTQ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers. LGBTQ youth who reported having at least one LGBTQ-affirming space had 35% reduced odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year.

Finally, all students benefit when they see windows and mirrors of themselves at school. A mirror reflects and affirms a person's own experiences. When you look out a window, you can see new perspectives on the world, develop empathy, and overcome stereotypes.



## How can we make schools more affirming and inclusive for everyone?

### Use Inclusive Language

- Use non-gender specific descriptors that are inclusive of all people. For example, try saying “folks,” “students,” or “y’all” instead of “guys,” “boys and girls,” or “ladies and gentlemen.”
- Use the names and pronouns someone uses. When you meet someone, you can respectfully ask a person’s pronouns, share your own, or simply use gender-neutral language.
- Provide opportunities for people to share their preferred pronouns. Some students may share verbally, while others prefer a confidential questionnaire. Model sharing your own pronouns as a way to normalize this conversation.
- Interrupt name-calling and slurs such as “that’s so gay” and “no homo.” While students may say they are “just joking,” it is never acceptable or funny to make jokes about someone’s identity.
- Remember that language is constantly changing. We must keep learning!

### Feature Diverse Books and Resources

- Feature books and resources with diverse characters, stories, and histories in your classroom and library. Diverse books can provide “windows” and “mirrors” to students.
- Hang signs, flags, and posters with inclusive messages in your classroom. This small action can send a powerful message to students and families that your school loves and accepts all.

### Cultivate a Welcoming Community

- Set clear and inclusive norms and expectations for your school, such as: respect others, be open-minded, and respect confidentiality.
- Celebrate the diversity of your school and community. Diversity is an asset!

### Break Gender Stereotypes

- When you come across a gender stereotype, address it! Learning to ask questions and critically examine stereotypes is a valuable skill for all students.
- Rethink activities like “Muffins with Mom,” and “Father-Daughter Dance.” To be more inclusive of all kinds of families, host a “Family Day” instead.
- Avoid using gendered language to describe clothes, toys, colors, or activities.
- Use inclusive language to describe families. Ask students how they describe and refer to each of their caregivers and use this language. Address communication to parents/guardians or families, rather than mother/father. Ask students about their siblings, rather than specifying brothers and sisters.
- Assign classroom jobs and tasks to your students in an equitable manner.
- Debunk traditional stereotypes of all genders!

### Be An Ally

- Understand your own privilege. Privilege means that there are some things in life that you will not experience or ever have to think about personally. It does not mean that you never have to struggle or face challenges.
- Educate yourself. Don’t expect others to teach you.

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- Speak up, but not over! Amplify the voices of marginalized members of your community.
- Be willing to listen, even when it feels uncomfortable.
- Apologize when you make mistakes.

### Overcome Fears and Misconceptions

- Encourage adults not to project their own experiences, worries, or fears from growing up onto a younger generation. Instead, empower students to approach learning about this topic with an open mind.
- Teaching about the LGBTQ+ community is not pushing an agenda. In the As You Are program, students learn factual, accurate, and developmentally- appropriate information about gender and family diversity within the safe space of the classroom. An essential part of school is learning that we are all different.
- When gender is not addressed in schools, students will look to other sources for information, such as social media. These sources often spread misinformation and stereotypes, leading to shame and fear.
- Create a forum for parents and teachers to learn more about programming and ask questions.

### Be Patient and Positive

- All schools are unique and different.
- Change takes time.
- Small changes can make a big difference.

### Resources We Recommend

- GLSEN, <https://www.glsen.org/>
- Welcoming Schools, <https://welcomingschools.org/>
- Safe Zone Project, <https://thesafezoneproject.com/>
- The Trevor Project, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- Learning for Justice, <https://www.learningforjustice.org/>
- Facing History and Ourselves, <https://www.facinghistory.org/>
- Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/>
- It Gets Better Project, <https://itgetsbetter.org/>

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