

## Best Practices for Religious, Faith and Spiritual Leaders

This guideline aims to create a starting place for religious, faith and spiritual community leaders to deepen their own understanding of gender, gender inclusion and gender sensitivity when it comes to the incredibly important role they play in their congregates' lives.

- Do your own work first. Map your own gender journey by reflecting on the following questions:
    1. Can you remember a time when you were reprimanded for behavior that was perceived as “gender inappropriate?” What did the experience feel like? What was your response? Were there other factors that impacted your experience? Explain.
    2. Do you see/express male and female traits or both or neither in yourself? Explain.
    3. Have you become more open to traits of the “opposite” sex in yourself as you have become older? Or were you more open at earlier stages of your life?
    4. How open have you become over time understanding someone else’s gender? Explain.
    5. What role has your religion, faith or spirituality played in your understanding of gender? Explain.
  
  - Take time to know and understand what gender expansive means. Learn the many ways gender expansive young people define their gender experience.
  
  - Learn how young people define their gender in concert with the other identities they carry – family, race, class, and religion for example.
  
  - Listen to the story of your practitioner and their family. Use the template above as a guide to uncover their story.
  
  - Ask open-ended questions without passing judgment yet raising interest and demonstrating support. Affirm not shame. Listen not dismiss. Suggest not demand. Ask not assume.
  
  - In your own ministry, become aware of how gendered language could be a deterrent for gender expansive young people. Open your congregation to normalizing gender diversity through your teaching and practice.
  
  - Provide gender-inclusive training for all of your staff, including youth ministerial staff, deacons, and ushers, etc.
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