

PARENT-TO-PARENT TIP SHEET ON DIVERSITY & CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The challenges of parenting teenagers can be a handful, and given our school's diverse student body, it can be especially tricky at times to navigate. Our community not only encompasses differences of race, cultural background, and religion, but differences in learning and physical abilities, socio-economic situations, the gender spectrum, and more. Though we might encounter many an awkward moment -- a mix of confusion and embarrassment, maybe a bit of frustration -- we must lean into this by embracing one of the [core values](#) of BHS: "Understanding and respect for human differences." In fact, the school's mission statement is "to develop capable, confident life-long learners who contribute to their community, participate thoughtfully in democracy, and succeed in a ***diverse and evolving global society.***"

Maybe you've heard your kids make comments such as:

- "Mom, today we got asked our pronouns and some of my friends declared themselves Gender Neutral. Cool, right" (Huh?)
- "Today is a no homework day because it is Eid-al-Adha." (Huh?)
- "Dad, what race am I? I am Latino, but I look white, and my friend from India, is she considered to be black? She does not look black. And what about some of my friends who say they are black, but they look brown to me? This is confusing!!"

Yes, all this *is* confusing! There are so many aspects to diversity, and many of us might lack the correct information to address our kids' – and our own -- concerns. So here, parent-to-parent, is some very basic information on three categories to help us all navigate BHS's diverse community.

Diversity in Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

The World Health Organization defines **gender** as "the socially constructed characteristics of women and men." **Gender Identity** is **one's personal experience** of one's own gender. It is about **who you feel you are** and it goes beyond the male or female genitalia you were born with. Some of the terms one might hear around this are gender neutral, transgender or transitioning, and the question, "What is your pronoun?"

Sexual orientation is an enduring **pattern of romantic or sexual attraction** to persons of the opposite sex or gender, same sex or gender, or both sexes or more than one gender. Some terms here are heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. As it's frequently explained, "Gender identity is who you go to bed **as**. Sexual orientation is who you go to bed **with**. LGBTQ (which generally stands for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning) is a widely used acronym that involves both gender identity and sexual orientation.

Many teenagers already know their sexual orientation and their gender identity, others are still figuring it out. As parents, we can help by educating ourselves in the terms used, acknowledging our own gender identity and sexual orientation, and our personal values around all this.

More information explained simply:

- <http://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_identity
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_orientation
- <http://www.b-pen.org/lgbtq.html>

Diversity in Religion

The student body of BHS is composed of members and followers of many religions and faiths, and all contribute to the richness of our culture. Our school embraces followers of Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and many others. Some students might not follow a religion at all. Parents need to be informed and respectful of these differences. Small steps, such as finding out about the main holidays of these religions, how they are celebrated, and/or what is acceptable to eat and when, can go a long way. We encourage you to not just to **respect these differences**, but **tap into the common values** that we share: love, respect, gratitude, and paying it forward. Another way of strengthening our diverse community is to be aware and sensitive to religions coming under particular scrutiny these days. Be mindful of your children's friends who follow that religion, and be there for them.

For more about values shared by many religions, go to:

<https://integralchurch.wordpress.com/2012/07/10/15-great-principles-shared-by-all-religions/>

Diversity in Race and Heritage

When you walk into almost any BHS space or event, you can see a wide range of skin color, hair texture, accents and languages spoken. Yet this diversity that we value brings some parental and community challenges. **Race, ethnicity and heritage can be intertwined, but sometimes they are not.** We should remember not to assume background based on the color of skin. For example, Latino is a heritage, not a race. Let us see the person, not the stereotype.

Here is a link that explains in lay terms some of these words:

<https://www.dauntlessjaunter.com/2012/03/26/ethnicity-nationality-race-heritage-culture/>

Communicate

Something each parent can do is find out what race you are, what your heritage is, and share that with your children. Be proud of where you come from, yet very respectful of other people's races and heritages. Continue to stress with your children that no one is better than the other. We are just different and can choose to acknowledge those differences, celebrate them, and find our commonality. Inform yourself about the diversity terminology that your kids are using, and connect with them and their friends, working to always keep the lines of communication open. Continue to be...

informed * involved * connected