

# DAY CAMP PODCAST

## SHOW NOTES!



May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021



My name is Chris Rehs-Dupin, I use the pronouns he/him/his and I am the co-Founder of an organization called “Trans\*plaining” which is working to create a safer world for trans\* and gender non-conforming kids through training, community conversations and as much empathy as we can safely exert. Much of my professional career was spent in camping- with 8 years in overnight programming and 9 years in day programming. At the beginning of my career was I was at the LG end of LGTBQ, and I got the vibe pretty early on that this part of my identity was not something that should be talked

about, OR something that I should ever answer questions about. So from the start I had a really hard time marrying my pride in who I was with my position as someone who wanted to help kids be the best version of themselves. I spent many years trying to figure out who I was, and who I *could be* and still be allowed to have a position in the camp industry. It took me way too long to get brave enough to share who I was with the world because I feared that I would be excommunicated from a job doing something that I truly loved- and believed in. But at 31, after having a kiddo of my own, I realized I could not hope that my child would end up being the most authentic version of themselves, if I couldn't be the most authentic version of myself. So I finally allowed myself the space to share and celebrate who I was. So now I am loving living my truth at the T for trans\*gender end of the acronym- and I am no longer working at camp, as I have set my sights on making a change industry wide. A shift in the conversations that helps camps reframe how we treat the subject of gender and sexuality.

I know that camp can change lives, and for some save lives. LGBTQ youth need to feel cared for and safe in camp communities- and that means all the parts of their identities, not just the convenient ones. The original mission of my work has focused on creating gender affirming spaces for trans\* kids- but really it is so much bigger than that. So, the first thing I often ask people is “think of a time when you were either implicitly or explicitly told that you could or could not do something because of your gender.” Most participants have very little problem thinking of a time of a time where they were limited by their sex assigned at birth- maybe it was an activity, a toy, an outfit, a type of car they wanted to drive, we spend a lot of time expecting folks of certain genders to act in certain ways. It is safe to say that there is not a person amongst us who has not been affected by the cultural concept of gender. As it turns out my work isn't just about trans\*gender kids- it is about making every kid who come through our

gates feel safe to express their gender, or lack of gender in whatever way empowers them and makes them feel good.

### Terms in Brief:

So a few brief terms- and I do mean brief- because there is no reason to get stuck in the terms if they are not going to be actionable or impactful.

### Sex Assigned at Birth

The first term we will be talking about is sex assigned at birth- which is the sex designation that you are given at birth based solely on your external genitals without regard to any other biological sex determinants including: internal genitals, genetic makeup, hormonal makeup, or expression of hormonal makeup. Let's just agree- this term we throw around "biological sex" is SIGNIFICANTLY more complicated than we want to believe AND significantly more complicated than we learned in high school science class. Sex assigned at birth is kind of given out Oprah style- meaning everyone gets one. EVEN if they should not.

### Intersex Condition

1.7% of the population have some type of physical, genetic, or hormonal characteristic that does not cleanly align with what is considered "biologically male" or "biologically" female. These folks have what is called an "intersex condition". For those whose genitals at birth do not cleanly align with expectations of male and female- the doctors and the parents simple decide which they think will "fit the best"- and then that baby usually immediately undergoes a surgery to make that baby fit even more "cleanly" to our ideas of male and female. So- we are literally putting our concepts of sex where it doesn't it naturally exist. This just shows how invested in this system we are.

PS- to do a little stats comparison the number percentage of folks who have an intersex condition 1.7%- is almost the same percentage of folks that have red hair OR green eyes. It's really not that uncommon!

### Pronouns

From your sex assigned at birth people will decide a LOT about you- what clothes to buy you, what toys to buy you (people really want to buy stuff for babies), what kind of sheets you should have in your crib, AND what pronouns that you will use. You get a set of pronouns based on your sex assigned at birth, which is based off what's going on in your diaper. And if you think that is weird when we talk about it that way- just know I did not make the rules I am just asking us to take a critical look at them. Okay- moving on.

### Transgender

Transgender comes from the Latin word "trans"- or "on the other side of"- and is used as an umbrella terms with lots of variations. For simplicity's sake, for this conversation- we will be using trans\* to discuss any person whose gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth. That could include nonbinary folks, people who are genderfluid, genderqueer, agender or any combination of these. So-we will proceed with the understanding that using trans\* for

all these identities is less than perfect, but will work for purposes of this introductory conversation.

### Cisgender

So- then the term that we use for someone whose gender *does* align with their sex assigned at birth is cisgender- amazingly also from a Latin root- cis- meaning “on THIS side”. From this we learn not only that academics truly love Latin- but also learn that the reason the word cis gender exists is so we don’t say transgender and then normal gender. Kind of like how everyone says “plain M&Ms” which makes it feel like it is the norm or the default. All the other M&Ms get all kinds of cool names, crispy, peanut, mocha, pretzel, mint, one time they did raspberry flavor but it is no longer available due to candy survival of the fittest. Anyways, we measure all those flavors in comparison to “plain”, or the “original”. One is the IDEAL and everything else is a variation. But the jigs up- Plain M&Ms are actually called milk chocolate. But we have decided that since they were the original- they get that designation of plain and everything else is measure against that. Which is okay- when you are talking about candy. It is a whole different thing when you are only measuring what a person IS or ISN’T based on their proximity to what our society has designated as the norm.

### Gender and Sexuality

Let’s put one other thing to bed. Gender and sexuality are too entirely separate concepts. Gender is about who you are and how you express yourself either in the confines of male and female, or outside of the male and female binary. Sexuality is who you want to get with in either a sexual or romantic type of getting with. Like I mentioned before they are two entirely separate concepts and only share a few things in common. The first being that almost all the leading health organization in the US agree (The Center for Disease Control, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Association of Pediatrics, and on and on and on)- neither your gender or sexuality can be changed by an outside party AND we are legally required to share Pride Parades. (One of those things is true- and I am going to let you decide which it is.)

### What should we know about gender equity at Day Camps?

We know that in Day Camp programming we are dealing with the youngest children. They are pre-dominantly pre-puberty, which affects our conversation a little bit, because it is likely that trans\* kids could come through our programs without us ever knowing. But that does not mean that we do not have to take care to make them feel safe, and welcome- whether they decide to disclose or not. So here are some concrete actions that will actively make your camp safe for kids of all genders, and gender expressions.

1. Only segregate genders when it is necessary (and challenge yourself to think critically when you are deciding when it is necessary).

Try to focus building groups based on interests. We cannot assume all the girls want to spend more time at the craft cabin and all the boys want to spend more time at the ball

field. If you create boy and girl groups, you are leaving out anyone who doesn't fit in either one of those groups and continue to perpetuate the idea that someone's gender is the easiest way to separate them from others. Someone's gender should not be the prime factor in determining their experiences and access.

## 2. Disrupt gender norms whenever you can!

There is no reason to assume that boys in the craft space do not want to use pink. If you do not offer them pink- you are sending the unintended message that they should not want pink (which PS- at the turn of the century was a color for boys- and blue was for girls... so obviously there is nothing essentially male or female about pink and blue. Our culture dictates these "preferences" 100% based on what people have accepted as gender "norms".) Equal access to program opportunities, activities, and resources is how we help kids arrive more naturally at their likes and dislikes. When done right we trade their actual preferences for those that they are told from birth that they should like or dislike based on their sex assigned at birth.

We spend way too much time accidentally telling kids how to perform their gender when we could just let them choose and everyone would know more about who they actually were from a young age. And I am not exception. Recently we shaved my son's head... because he HATES baths. Hates. Then my oldest child who was assigned female at birth said they wanted to shave their head. Immediately we tried to change their mind- were they sure? Had they thought it through? Did they know how people might treat them once their head was shaved? We had to talk our son INTO shaving HIS head- and now with our child who was assigned female at birth we were trying to talk them out of it. This was unintentional feedback that shaved heads should be reserved for boys- and is out of bounds for girls. Now I will always wonder if that short conversation will change the way our oldest relates to their hair and the way it should or shouldn't be cut.

## 3. Work on introductions with pronouns.

Create a space where kids can share their pronouns if they want to- and encourage your staff to model. They will be interested, explain it on their level and they will utterly amaze you. If a kid tells you they want to use a pronoun that doesn't match what you expect AWESOME! That also doesn't mean that this decision is final, and they will be trans\* from this day forward and you should actually do an all camp gender- re-reveal. No- this might just mean they might want to try something new. Maybe it fits, maybe it does not. And that is okay. But the important part about this decision is that it will be based on what that camper has chosen and not what they have been assigned.

## 4. Teach your staff inclusive language.

There are way cooler ways to address a group of kids than boys and girls. Like- scientists, athletes, campers, friends, peeps, pumpkins, party people, scholars, earthlings, and if you are from the south (like me) y'all. Boys and girls is really kind of boring when you think of

how much more creative it can get- *and* it continues to perpetuate the idea that these are the only two genders- boys and girls. This goes for any other way the gender binary shows up- “Do you have brothers and sisters?” “Don’t forget to ask your Mom and Dad.”, etc. It feels so sad when you are sitting in a room with all of your peers and your family make-up is ignored, or not represented. It is so important that when we are talking about campers, or their families that we are representing everyone’s experience and not just the majority.

#### 5. Know who to call when it gets dicey

You cannot be expected to know all the answers. This stuff is complicated, and messy. If it is not your lived experience- when making decisions, we can assume you will have blind spots. That is your not your fault, and you do not need to feel guilty about it. But what it means is that you have a responsibility to know who you are going to call when it gets too complicated for you to make a sound, well informed decision. Decisions about trans\* people, should not be made without trans\* people having a voice. So- connect with your local LGBTQ center, keep me in mind if you need in summer consulting, or find another person who is not only trans\*- but is well versed in the issues that are facing trans\* youth.

#### Conclusion

Ultimately the goal is that every single kid who comes through your program feels safe to express themselves in whatever ways empower them and makes them feel good, valued and safe. We cannot continue to leave trans\* kids out of the equation OR let them in conditionally and just hope no one notices. Hoping that no one notices is one of the best ways to make trans\* kids LESS safe. This assumes that they can stop people from asking questions, making assumptions, or that they are equipped to address all of these things while they are just trying to hit the bullseye at archery. Create a space where community is built through conversation that is open, honest and safe for all participants.

We must be prepared to love trans\* kids out loud, and not just in private. Share your love with the world- why wouldn’t you? I read once that the only basis for human choice is either love or fear. Are you making your choices based in the love for kids who need it- or out of fear for what you will lose? And I do not want to make it seem like that is just SO EASY. It’s not easy- but it will save lives. It is a tall order- and it stinks that being fully inclusive take bravery- but that is the reality. So love bravely, and love loudly because we are *all* better when everyone is treated with the respect that they deserve- regardless of what makes those in power the most comfortable.

[Learn More about our In-House Training](#)

[Book Chris as a Speaker](#)

[Email Chris about Summer Consulting](#)

[What Services Does Chris Offer Camps?](#)