



You, Me and Identity: Understanding Identity (Grades 4-7)

We all have an identity: it makes us who we are and involves so many parts of ourselves. But what is identity, really? What effect does identity have on the way we live our lives and on the way others see us? What about the way we see ourselves? In this resource, you will find a breakdown of the various parts of identity. Through this breakdown, you will be able to see just how many parts of us make up who we are. Once you see just how many parts make up our identities, you can better understand how to build empathy for those around you who might not look, act, talk or think in the same way you do.

The Big 8

This theory of identity says that there are eight major categories. While smaller categories exist too, these ones are the easiest to see and are known as “social identities.”

1. **Racial identity** - a group that has similar physical characteristics, including skin color and facial features. Racial identity is defined by people in society and has no scientific basis.
2. **Ethnicity identity** - defined in terms of culture, language, and country of origin. This relates to a person or a large group of people who share a national, cultural, and/or language heritage, whether or not they live in the countries where they are from. Examples of ethnicities include Irish, Japanese, Greek, Caribbean, etc.
3. **Sexual orientation identity** - an emotional, romantic, sexual, affectional attraction to another person or people. Self-labels might include gay, lesbian, heterosexual, same-gender loving, bisexual, pansexual, queer, straight, etc.



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4. **Gender identity** - a person's individual experience of gender, for instance, as a woman, as a man, as a transgender/gender queer person, as a combination, or as none of these categories.

5. **Ability identity** - the physical or mental ability to do something or perform successfully. Someone could be able-bodied or disabled. Sometimes, we use the term "diverse-ability" instead of disabled.

6. **Religion/Spirituality identity** - either a group someone belongs to or personal set of beliefs and practices relating to the divine. Examples include Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.

7. **Nationality identity** - connected to the country you were born in, come from, or live in.

8. **Socioeconomic status identity** - the social group based on income (money) and/or someone's position in society based on money (i.e. working poor, working class, middle class and upper class).

All of these parts of identity make up who we are and can shape how people view us and how we view ourselves. Stigma around these parts of our identities can lead to harmful behaviour and beliefs about groups. In order to eliminate stigma, it is important to understand identity and that we all have it.

If you have any questions about any of these parts of identity, it is great to ask questions to your teachers, parents and other adults in your life to get a better understanding of what they mean. You can also find other learning around identity on the Student Mental Health Toolkit.