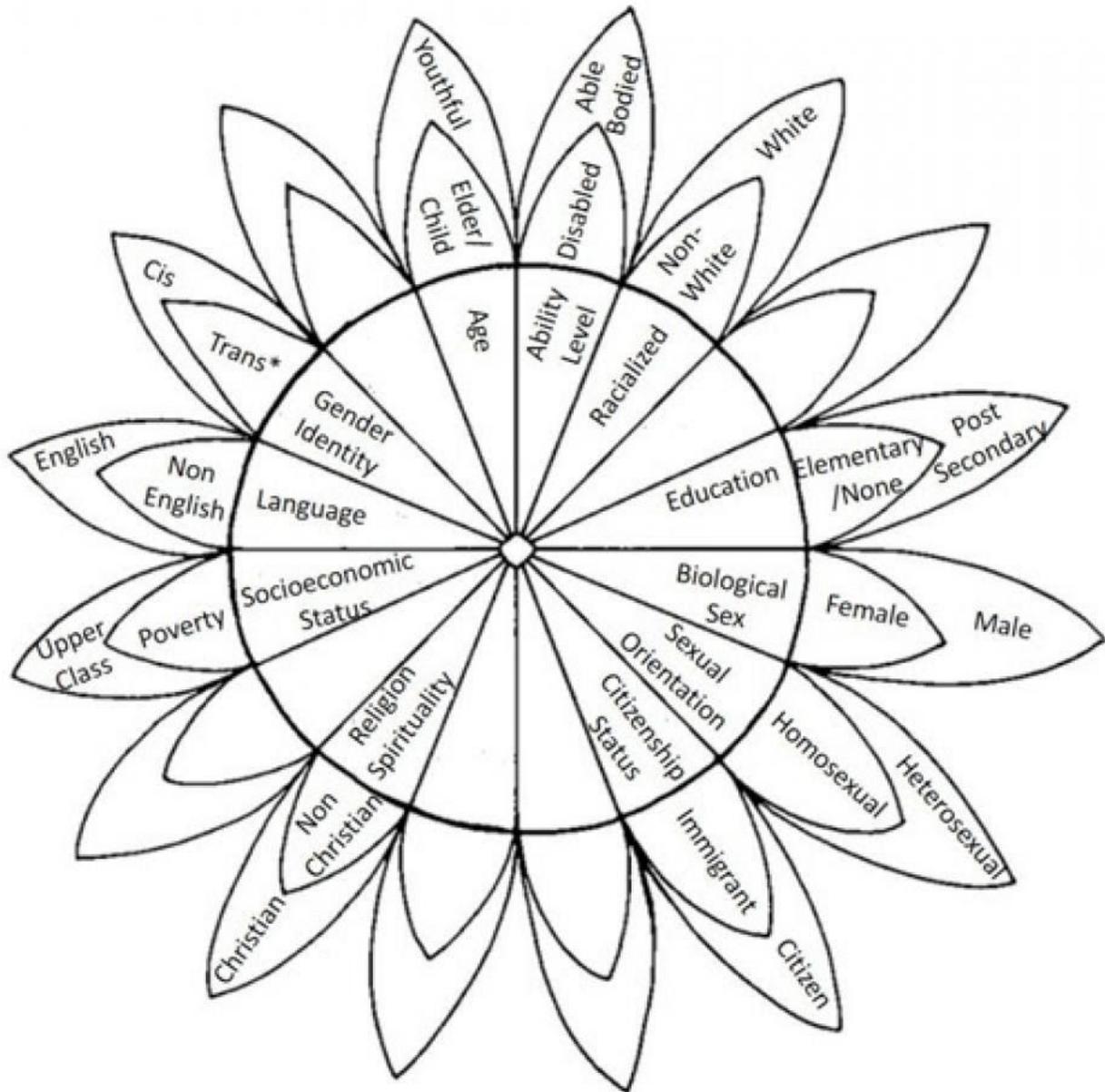


Three Quick Questions for *Lizzy Appleby*

A brief Q&A with a luminary in the field of diversity, equity, and belonging. We are calling this new feature, **Three Quick Questions**. In February 2021, DEB Communications Committee Member Marjorie Bransfield interviewed Lizzy Appleby. Lizzy, a licensed social worker and Pride/Share Director of the Glenview-based nonprofit Youth Services, helps local communities examine questions of identity. She led two virtual parent programs for The Joseph Sears School in February and will be working with school staff this spring.



The Power Flower Identity Chart

How do we support our children as they embrace their growing identities? What are the how-to's?

First and foremost, we as the adults must embrace their growing identities, and if this is your kid and if they are reflecting their own identity and autonomy and it's different from who we are—or who we wanted them to be—we can become really reactive. So step one is that we as parents come from a place of embracing their authentic identities and valuing their identity exploration. On the flip side of that is the need for us to embrace our own identities and model what it feels like to live our own truths. For example, if we use body image, kids pick up so much about body image by listening to how adults talk about their own bodies. So, if we're making derogatory comments about our own bodies they're learning what they're supposed to think and feel about their bodies. The same with our identities, if we are making derogatory comments about our interests, passions, or cultures, our kids pick up on it and they might think that their interests, passions, cultures are not good enough or even that it is something they should hide. So, how to's? We show up for our kids, we embrace them where they are, but we also do the work to embrace where we are. I also always encourage parents to avoid any language that embodies 'either/or' thinking like 'always/never.' Nonbinary language sounds like, 'some people do it this way, others do it that way.' Finally, it's a process. When kids tell us who they are, we believe them. But we don't hold them to it if it changes next week. And that's ok, they're growing, they're changing, they're figuring it all out. We are along for the ride. We can see the big picture even when they can't.

How has the pandemic impacted our kids in their identity journeys? Has it contracted or expanded those journeys?

I think it's a both/and. For some young people, the pandemic has actually expanded the possibilities that might not have been there otherwise. Particularly with LGBTQ young people, we've seen a tremendous increase in young folk who have expressed or explored trans femme identities. And that's largely because it feels easier to do that when you don't have to go to school every day. It can feel easier to do that when you're not spending as much time around other people, you're protected and insulated from people who might pass judgment or say unkind things. In some ways, the pandemic has given kids—who feel like home is a supportive space for them—license to explore their identities with almost more opportunities to do that because they have less fear of judgment from peers from whom they are remote. On the flip side, being isolated and missing out on afterschool activities like athletics, hobbies, and clubs has restricted journeys too because it is from these activities that a lot of kids derive their identities. Not having access to those spaces can be incredibly painful. So much of our identity is our own personal search, but we also find so much of our identity in our community with other people. Identity words are important because they help explain ourselves to ourselves but they also help us find other people who are like us and the pandemic has made it more difficult to find and gain comfort from like-minded communities.

What are the greatest obstacles to identity work with North Shore parents who may feel no reason to examine their own identity?

I think one of the most challenging things about doing identity work on the North Shore is that it requires vulnerability. And vulnerability is hard for all people, but (speaking as a person who grew up in the culture of the North Shore) there is a very strong social norm here about not sharing too much.

So what's hard about doing identity work in our communities is that in order to do identity work well, we have to be willing to risk being wrong, we have to be willing to risk sharing something about our authentic selves with people—which could potentially be received poorly and I think that's what's really hard.

