



# Glossary of Terms

The definitions offered here can help when navigating LGBTQ identities and working with LGBTQ people. Please remember, however, not to impose these words as labels upon anyone who has not consented. Ask youth how they self-identify and ask about language that makes them feel safe. If they choose to avoid self-identifying terms, honor that – doing this will clearly indicate to children and youth their right to be themselves and to be safe.

**Affirm:** To acknowledge or assert as fact; here, to assert one's own sexual orientation or gender identity strongly and publicly or to openly acknowledge and publicly assert the rights and dignity of LGBTQ people.

**Agender:** An identity under the non-binary and transgender umbrella terms. Agender individuals find that they have no gender identity, although some define this more as having a gender identity that is neutral.

**Ally:** A person or organization that actively aligns and uses their resources to support individuals and communities with a specific issue. In this context, someone who is straight and/or cisgender, has a concern for the well-being of LGBTQ people, and is willing to take action to support them.

**Androgynous:** A gender expression that has both masculine and feminine elements.

**Anti-Gay Bias:** Hatred of, discrimination against or aversion to Lesbian Gay Bisexual people, people perceived to be LGB and/or those associated with persons who are LGB. Often referred to as homophobia.

**Anti-transgender Bias:** Hatred of, discrimination against or aversion to transgender or gender variant people, people perceived to be as such, and/or those associated with persons who are transgender or gender variant. Often referred to as transphobia.

**Asexual:** A person who experiences little to no sexual attraction.

**Bigender:** A gender identity in which an individual identifies as two genders. These can be any two genders and can be experienced in many different ways.

**Binarism:** Hatred of, aversion to and/or discrimination against people whose identities exist outside of the gender/sex binary.

**Binary:** Consist of, indicating, or involving two.

**Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to people of two or more genders, not necessarily their own.

**Cisgender:** An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity “matches” the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Cisgender Privilege:** The implicit and explicit privileges that cisgender people exercise. These privileges include the ability to use public restrooms without fear of verbal abuse, physical intimidation or arrest. The privileges also encompass freedom from questions about one's anatomy (often by strangers) and the freedom from frequent mis-gendering. Cisgender people



also enjoy a presumed “validity” as a man/woman/human and this validity is not based on surgical procedures or how well one “passes” as a man/woman/human, etc.

**Coming out:** The process through which a person acknowledges and explains their gender identity and/or sexual orientation to themselves and others. Often incorrectly thought of to be a one-time event, this is a lifelong and sometimes daily process.

**Conversion Therapy:** A range of dangerous and discredited practices that falsely claim to change a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. These practices are extremely harmful and have been rejected by every mainstream medical and mental health organization.

**Cross Dress:** To cross-dress is to wear clothing most often associated (in one’s culture and historical timeframe) with people of the other gender.

**Drag Queen/King:** Someone who dresses and acts like the opposite gender for entertainment purposes; usually does not self-identify as transgender.

**Female-to-male (FTM):** A person who transitions from female to male; a person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man. Similar self-identifications for this term may include: transgender man, transgender boy, transman.

**Feminine:** A term used to describe the socially constructed and culturally specific gender behaviors expected of females.

**Gay:** A term used to describe a man who is attracted to another man; this term may also be used by women attracted to other women.

**Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA):** Student organization/club of LGBTQ and straight allies in support of the dignity and rights of LGBTQ people, usually developed in the context of creating change in educational institutions and environments. The acronym “GSA” may also stand for other inclusive terminology determined by members of that specific club.

**Gender:** Attitudes, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors that a given culture or society associates with being man, woman, or other and that are often labeled as “masculine” or “feminine.”

**Gender Affirming Surgery:** The surgical procedure (or procedures) by which a transgender person's physical appearance and function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble that of their identified gender. Sometimes referred to as sex reassignment surgery or gender reassignment surgery.

**Gender Binary:** That idea that gender is strictly an either/or option of men who are masculine or women who are feminine based on sex assigned at birth, rather than a continuum or spectrum of identities and expressions. The gender binary creates expectations, or gender roles, for everyone about how they should behave, what to wear, who they should be attracted to, etc. Many people have a gender identity that is neither male nor female, but instead is neither, both, or other.



**Gender Conforming:** A person whose gender expression is perceived as being consistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. For example, according to these norms, boys/men are or should be masculine, and girls/women should be feminine.

**Gender Dysphoria:** The formal diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM 5), used by psychologists and physicians to indicate that a person meets the diagnostic criteria to engage in medical transition. In other words, the medical diagnosis for being transgender. Formerly known as Gender Identity Disorder (GID). The inclusion of Gender Dysphoria as a diagnosis in the DSM 5 is controversial in transgender communities because it implies that being transgender is a mental illness rather than a valid identity. On the other hand, since a formal diagnosis is generally required in order to receive or provide treatment in the US, it does provide access to medical care for some people who wouldn't ordinarily be eligible to receive it.

**Gender Expression:** A person's outward gender presentation, comprised of things such as personal style, clothing, hairstyle, makeup (or no makeup), jewelry, vocal inflection, and body language. A person's gender expression may not be an expression stereotypically associated with the person's assigned sex at birth. All people express gender(s) and it is not an indicator or sexual orientation.

**Gender Fluid:** An individual whose gender identity may continually change throughout their lifetime within different contexts and settings. These individuals may not feel confined within the socially and culturally expected gender roles and in fact may identify differently from situation to situation.

**Gender Identity:** One's internal sense of being man, woman, neither of these, both, or other gender(s). All people have a gender identity.

**Gender Neutral:** A term that describes something (i.e. a space, such as a bathroom, or an item, such as a piece of clothing) that is not segregated by sex or gender. Words can also be gender neutral instead of gender specific.

**Gender Nonconforming:** A person whose gender expression is perceived as being inconsistent with cultural norms for that gender. For example, boys/men who are considered to be not masculine enough, or girls/women who are not feminine enough.

**Gender Roles:** Culturally or socially determined sets of attitudes and behaviors that are expected of an individual based on their sex assigned at birth or gender identity, and/or perceived sex assigned at birth or gender identity.

**Genderqueer (also gender queer):** An umbrella term some people use to describe their gender identity when it falls out of the binary of man or woman.

**Gender Variant:** Expressing gender and/or having gender characteristics that do not conform to the expectations of society and culture. Also referred to as gender nonconformity or gender creative.

**Heterosexism:** A dominant notion that everyone is heterosexual (or should be) and that heterosexuality is superior, better, and preferred.



**Heterosexual:** Feeling romantic, emotional, and sexual attraction to a person(s) of the opposite gender with which one identifies; sometimes referred to as being “straight”.

**Heterosexual Privilege:** The privileges that heterosexual people have because of heterosexism. Being heterosexual carries with it privileges that may be explicit or implicit such as the right to marry, adopt children, be a foster parent, receive fair employment, etc.

**Homosexual:** Feeling romantic, emotional, and sexual attraction to a person(s) of the same gender with which one identifies. Although some individuals may identify with this term, it is now a dated term that has negative connotations, is often considered clinical, and/or derogatory.

**Identity:** What, how, and who one perceives oneself to be; a multi-faceted component of self-concept and can evolve throughout one’s life span.

**In the closet:** The intentional concealment of an individual's own gender identity and/or sexual orientation, usually due to fear of discrimination and/or violence; can cause isolation and psychological trauma.

**Oppression:** The situation that occurs in an oppressive system when a person or group oppressed supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power, often unintentionally or unbeknownst to the individuals.

**Intersectionality:** A theory that examines how our various identities including gender, race, class, ability and sexual orientation interact and contribute to multiple forms of discrimination and systematic social inequality.

**Intersex:** A term that describes an assortment of variations for a person that someone decided is not standard (or typical) to be defined as “male” or “female” due to physical, chromosomal, hormonal, and/or reproductive differences. People born with intersex genitalia or other intersex variations used to be called “hermaphrodite”; however, that term is considered to be dated and derogatory.

**Lesbian:** A term used to describe a woman who is attracted to another woman.

**LGBTQ:** An acronym commonly used to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning individuals and communities.

**Male-to-female (MTF):** A person who transitions from male to female; a person who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is woman. Additional self-identifications for this term may include: transgender woman, transgender girl, transwoman.

**Masculine:** A term used to describe the socially constructed and culturally specific gender behaviors expected of males.

**Misgender:** To refer to another person using the incorrect pronouns or name with which they do not identify. This could be done intentionally to cause emotional and psychological harm, unintentionally because of assumptions, or accidentally mis-stepping.

**Out:** Openly acknowledging one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity; may be partial (that is, out to some people and not to others). Sometimes referred to as being “out of the closet.”



**Outing:** When someone else accidentally or deliberately reveals another's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, usually without consent.

**Pansexual:** A sexual orientation characterized by a potential aesthetic attraction, romantic love and/or sexual desire for a person regardless of gender identity or sex assigned at birth.

**Permanency:** Physical, legal, mental, and emotional safety and stability for youth. This includes but is not limited to lifelong connections with supportive adults, a sense of community, connection with peers, and access to resources one needs not only to survive but thrive.

**Pride:** National, citywide, and neighborhood local events and programs in celebration of the ongoing fight for recognition and visibility of LGBTQ people.

**Pronouns:** A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun, in this case someone's name. Common pronouns include she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs. Pronouns are not specific to someone's gender identity or expression. Someone's pronouns may change, they may use multiple sets of pronouns, or they may simply use their name.

**Queer:** A self-identification, sometimes used as an umbrella term, that indicates not fitting cultural norms around sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Historically, this was a derogatory slang term used to identify LGBTQ people. It is now a term that some LGBTQ people are reclaiming and embracing as a symbol of pride.

**Questioning:** A person who is exploring or questioning their gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation.

**Safe space:** A place where anyone can relax and fully express themselves, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of different identities including but not limited to: sex assigned at birth, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, cultural background, age, and/or physical or mental ability; a place where the rules guard each person's self-respect and dignity, and where all are accountable to one another.

**Sex (also referred to Sex Assigned at Birth):** In the United States, individuals are assigned "female" or "male" sex at birth, based on a physician or other medical professional's perception of external anatomy. For some people, the sex they are assigned at birth is the same as their gender identity. For other people, the sex they are assigned at birth is different from their gender identity.

**Sex Binary:** The classification of sex into two distinct, opposite and rigidly fixed anatomical options: male or female, both grounded in a person's physical anatomy including genitals and internal reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones.

**SOGIE:** An acronym that stands for sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

**Sexism:** Discrimination and unfair treatment based on sex or gender in which privileges are afforded to cisgender men and not women.

**Sexual Behavior:** The physical, intimate acts one may do with another person(s). This is distinct from sexual orientation.



**Sexual Orientation:** Describes the emotional, romantic, and physical feelings of attraction—usually—over a period of time; it is distinct from sexual behavior. A person may be attracted to people of the same gender, to those of a different gender, people of same and different genders, or to people regardless of their gender. Some people do not experience primary attraction to anyone. There are many different terms used to describe one’s sexual orientation including but not limited to: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, questioning. All people have a sexual orientation.

**Stealth:** This term refers to when a transgender person chooses to not be out in the public sphere about their identity, either after transitioning or while socially transitioning. Also referred to as ‘going stealth’ or ‘living in stealth mode’.

**Third Gender:** Is the concept that individuals are categorized, either by themselves or by society, as neither man nor woman. It also describes a social category present in those societies that recognize three or more genders.

**Trans\*:** An umbrella term that refers to all non-cisgender identities within the gender identity spectrum.

**Transgender:** An adjective used to describe a person whose sex assigned at birth is different from who they know they are on the inside.

**Transition:** A transgender person’s process of developing and assuming a gender expression to affirm their gender identity. This gender identity can be man, woman, neither, both, or other. This process can include: coming out to one’s family, friends, and/or co-workers; use of a different name and/or pronouns; legally changing one’s name and/or gender marker. Some transgender people may also undergo a process which includes hormones and/or surgery, in order to change their body; however, not all transgender people can or do undergo medical transition.

**Transsexual:** A medicalized term historically used to identify a person who has undergone hormone and surgical treatments to attain the physical characteristics that affirms their gender identity. Although some individuals may identify as transsexual, this term is now generally considered a clinical and/or derogatory term.

**Two-Spirit:** A term traditionally used by some Indigenous tribes to recognize individuals who possess qualities or fulfill roles of multiple genders. Two Spirits can cross social gender roles, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

**Adapted from the following sources:**

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