

# A Guide to the LGBTQ Community

The letters LGBTQIA+ stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, and asexual (or an ally), and more.



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Understanding the concepts behind gender identity and expression—and sexual and romantic orientation—is key to understanding your child or loved one. Being comfortable with the language of LGBTQ culture can help you have conversations with your child and express that you accept them as they are.

Gender refers to the social construct of what it means to be “male” or “female.” When we talk about gender, we are referring to both society’s view of gender and an individual’s view of gender. Without looking at both aspects of gender, understanding the difference between sex, gender, and the variety of ways it can be expressed is impossible.

Every society has certain traits, looks, or values that they may assign to be male, female, or neither. As an individual, a person may associate more with one gender than another. Or they may choose to identify with no specific gender. Or they may move back and forth between different gender identities.

Gender identity refers to how an individual sees where they fit on the spectrum of male, female, and neither male nor female. Gender identity is internal.

Gender expression is the way a person *presents* themselves to the outside world. This expression may include the way they dress, their hairstyle, their chosen name, their chosen pronouns, their voice, and more.

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## LGBTQIA+... What Do All the Letters Mean?

LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that broadly refers to the gay and trans community at large. Not every gender identity, expression, and sexual and romantic orientation are represented in the acronym—hence, the plus sign at the end. The letters LGBTQIA+ stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, and asexual (or an ally), and more.

**Lesbian:** a woman who is attracted to other females.

**Gay:** generally, a person who is attracted to someone of the same gender. Usually used to refer to men who are sexually attracted to men, but can also be used in reference to women who are attracted to women. The “gay community” can be used to refer to the LGBTQIA+ community at large as well.

**Bisexual:** a person who is attracted to two or more genders. (Males and females, or females and genderqueer, etc.)

**Bi-curious:** a person who is generally attracted to those of the opposite gender but may be curious about having sex with someone of the same gender.

**Bi-romantic:** a person who may have a romantic orientation towards two or more genders.

**Coming out:** the act of telling a particular individual or a group of people that you identify with the LGBTQIA+ community. Coming out of often thought of as a “one-time” event, but actually is an ongoing process over a queer person’s lifetime.

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**Pansexual:** a person who is sexually attracted to all or any genders. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual, but pansexual indicates an attraction to *all* genders—male, female, and non-binary—while bisexual can indicate an attraction to “only two” gender identities but not necessarily all.

**Pangendered:** a form of non-binary gender identity, refers to someone who identifies with all genders.

**Straight:** a person who is heterosexual, or attracted to those of the opposite gender and sex.

**Trans:** a word that can be used to reference the entire transgender community.

**Transman:** a word that may be used by a person who was assigned female at birth but whose gender identity is male. While some may prefer to be called “male,” calling themselves transmale is a way to pay tribute to their previous sex assignment of female.

**FTM, F2M:** another term that can be used to indicate someone who was assigned female at birth but is a transgender male.

**Transwoman:** a word that may be used by a person who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female.

**MTF, or M2F:** another word that may be used by a person who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female.

**Queer:** formally used in a derogatory sense, queer has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community to be used in a positive way.

Queer can be used to refer to being any part of the gay community. It can also be used as a way to not specify one particular “box” within the LGBTQIA+ rainbow of identities.

In other words, an individual may not want to say what their sexual orientation is, but by calling themselves queer, they are indicating they are not exclusively straight (or heterosexual).

**Questioning:** a term used for someone who isn’t sure what their sexual orientation or gender identity is.

**Asexual:** an individual who has no sexual attraction to others. They'll likely still develop relationships or even romantic relationships, but they do not have feelings of sexual attraction. This is not a medical condition.

**Aromantic:** an individual who doesn’t form romantic attachments with other genders.

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**Ally:** someone who advocates for or supports the LGBTQIA+ community, but doesn't consider themselves to be queer or trans.

## Using Proper Pronouns

Using the pronouns preferred by an individual is an important part of showing that person respect and support.

If you're unsure of what pronouns a person prefers, ask them. If you're unsure which pronouns to use, use the plural gender-neutral pronouns (they/theirs/them), even if you're referring to a singular person.

Some possibilities include:

- He/his/him
- He/their/them
- She/her/hers
- She/theirs/them
- They/theirs/them
- Zie/Zir/Zirs/Zirself

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Zie, zir, zirs, and zirsself are gender-neutral singular pronouns that some prefer in the trans community. Zie is pronounced /zee/, and zir is pronounced /z-ir/, like sir but with a z.

If your child has asked you to use pronouns that differ from the ones typically associated with their sex assigned at birth, let them know you will do your best to use them as requested.

Of course, you will sometimes make a mistake and use the wrong pronouns. Changing the way you've referred to a person for many years isn't easy. But making an effort to use the pronouns they request is an important part of [supporting your child](#).