

# LGBTQIA+ Terminology and Definitions

## Sex Assigned at Birth

The designation of “male,” “female,” or “intersex” given to a newborn based on the appearance of their external genitalia.

## Biological Sex

A set of biological attributes typically associated with physical and physiological characteristics such as chromosomes, hormone levels, reproductive/sexual anatomy.

## Gender Identity

One’s inner concept of how they identify themselves as a boy/man, girl/woman, both, neither or somewhere along the gender spectrum. Gender identity is independent of sex assigned at birth.

## Gender Expression

Gender expression is how a person shows their gender identity to others through their behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, name, personal pronouns, and other forms of self-presentation. It can change over time and doesn’t have to follow traditional or stereotypical gender norms.

## Sexual Orientation

Describes a person’s sexual attraction to others. “Heterosexual” (or “straight”) refers to someone attracted to people of a different sex. “Lesbian” describes a woman attracted to other women, while “gay” typically refers to a man attracted to other men, though it can also be used as a general term for both lesbians and gay men. “Bisexual” refers to someone attracted to more than one gender, typically male and female. “Pansexual” describes someone whose attraction is not limited by sex or gender identity, and they may be attracted to people of any sex or gender. “Asexual” refers to individuals who experience little or no sexual attraction to others.

## Transgender

“Transgender” is an adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. It is important to use this term as an adjective (e.g., “transgender person”) rather than as a noun (e.g., “a transgender”).

## Cisgender

An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. The term is often shortened to “cis.”

## Transitioning

The process in which a transgender person aligns their life with their gender identity. This may involve changing legal documents, using a new name or pronouns, adjusting behavior, or changing their appearance through clothing or hairstyles. Some transgender people may also choose medical interventions like hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries, but not all transgender people complete a medical transition.

## LGBTQ+

Shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people. The “Q” can also include those who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, and the “+” represents identities beyond the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

## Intersex/DSD

A broad term for conditions where a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosomes that don’t fit typical definitions of male or female. For example, someone assigned female at birth might have internal male-typical anatomy or chromosomes, or someone might be born with genitals that don’t clearly match male or female types. Intersex is also known as Differences of Sexual Development (DSD). Many intersex people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth and may not discover their DSD until a medical examination.

## Non-Binary

A person whose gender identity is not strictly male or female. A non-binary person might identify as both genders, somewhere in between, none at all, or with an entirely different gender. Similar terms include genderqueer, gender expansive, and gender nonconforming. It is important to note that referring to someone as ‘male’ or ‘female’ focuses on biological sex, which might not align with their gender identity. Instead, using terms like ‘man’ or ‘woman’ respects a person’s right to self-identify according to how they experience their gender.

## Gender Fluid

A person whose gender identity and expression can change over time. It is one type of non-binary identity but does not represent all non-binary experiences.

## Transphobia/Homophobia

Describes a range of negative feelings toward transgender or gender nonconforming people, either as individuals or as a group. Transphobia is manifested in hostile or derisive language or actions toward transgender or gender nonconforming people. Homophobia describes a range of negative feelings toward lesbian, gay, or bisexual people, either as individuals or as a group. Homophobia is manifested in hostile or derisive language or actions toward lesbian, gay, or bisexual people.

## Heterosexual/Cisgender Ally

A heterosexual or cisgender person who takes actions to support LGBTQ+ people and works to address prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ+. Allies can help by advocating for equal rights, challenging discrimination, and offering support to LGBTQ+ individuals.

## Intersectionality

The way different social categories like race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are connected to shape a person’s experiences and opportunities.

## Queer

Historically used as a slur against lesbian and gay people, “queer” has been reclaimed by many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, especially younger people, as a way to challenge traditional expectations around sex and gender. It serves as a positive self-description and an umbrella term that includes a wide range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions that don’t conform to societal norms.

