

## equality literacy 101

*Feeling a little nervous about what words you should use when expressing your support or learning more about LGBTQ issues? Fear not – this short list of terms will help you get started in becoming equality-fluent. When you're ready to learn more, be sure to visit us at [www.straightforequality.org](http://www.straightforequality.org).*

**Affirmed gender:** The gender to which someone has transitioned. This term is often used to replace terms like “new gender” or “chosen gender,” which imply that the current gender was not always a person’s gender or that their gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

**Agender:** A person who does not conform to any gender.

**Ally:** A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBTQ but who is supportive of LGBTQ equality in its many forms and through a wide variety of different expressions, both personal and private.

**Androgynous:** A non-binary gender identity, having both male and female characteristics. Can be used to describe people’s appearances or clothing.

**Asexual:** A person who does not experience sexual attraction. This term is a self-identity.

**Assigned sex:** The sex (male, female intersex) that is assigned to an infant at birth.

**Bisexual:** An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to men and women. This is sometimes stated as “bi.” People who are bisexual need not have had equal sexual experience with both men and women and need not have had any sexual experience at all; it is attraction that determines orientation.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. This is a term that is preferable to “non-trans,” “biological,” or “natal” man or woman.

**Closeted:** Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation, or an ally who is not open about their support for people who are LGBTQ.

**Coming out:** For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life. People often establish a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity to themselves first and then may decide to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and allies of people who are LGBT. There are many different degrees of being out: some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It’s important to remember that not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

**Disclosure:** The act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender nonconforming identity to another person in a specific instance. Related to, but not the same as, coming out.

**Gay:** The adjective used to describe people whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, “lesbian” is often a preferred term for women. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Gender:** A set of social, psychological, or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as either feminine or masculine.

**Gender-affirming surgery:** Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches or desired gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term “sex change.”

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other.

**Gender expression:** The manner in which a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through external means such as clothing and/or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people’s understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to remember and respect is that every gender expression is valid.

**Gender identity:** One's deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One's gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex (i.e., a person assigned female at birth identifies as male or a person assigned male at birth identifies as female). Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced in infancy and reinforced in adolescence.

**Gender neutral:** Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being gender-queer, for example).

**Gender nonconforming:** A person who views their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male. This is an umbrella term that can encompass other terms such as "gender creative," "gender expansive," "gender variant," "genderqueer," "gender fluid," "gender neutral," "bigender," "androgynous," or "gender diverse." Such people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the male and female binary paradigm.

**Gender variant:** A term, often used to describe children and youth, that describes those who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not confirm with dominant gender norms. Some people do not use this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal. (See gender nonconforming.)

**Homosexual:** An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, "gay" and "lesbian."

**Lesbian:** A woman whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**LGBT/LGBTQA/LGBTQ:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender which refers to these individuals collectively. It is sometimes stated as "GLBT" (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as "LGBTQA" to include allies, "LGBTQ," with "Q" representing queer or questioning.

**Lifestyle:** A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ is a choice. Try using LGBTQ lives instead.

**Out:** Describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ in their public and/or professional lives.

**Queer:** A term currently used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and others find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, "queer" is disliked by some within the LGBT community, who find it offensive. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. "My cousin self-identifies as queer.")

**Questioning:** A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**Sex:** Refers to biological, genetic, or physical characteristics that define males and females. These can include genitalia, hormone levels, genes, or secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often compared or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

**Sexual orientation:** Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who are bisexual experience these feelings for people of both sexes. And people who are asexual experience no sexual attraction at all. Other terms describing sexual orientation include (but are not limited to) pansexual and polysexual. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, while sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation. One's sexual activity does not define who one is with regard to one's sexual orientation; it is the attraction that determines their orientation.

**Stealth:** A term used to describe transgender individuals who do not disclose their trans status in their public lives.

**Transgender:** A term that may be used to describe people whose gender expression does not conform to the cultural norms and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is also considered by some to be an "umbrella term" that encompasses a number of identities which transcend the conventional expectations of gender identity and expression, including FTM, MTF, genderqueer, and gender expansive. People who identify as transgender may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity (see transsexual.)

**Transition:** The process one goes through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. This can, but does not always, include taking hormones, having surgeries, or going through therapy.

**Transsexual:** A term used to describe those who have undergone some form of gender-related surgery. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

**TGNC:** Acronym which stands for trans and gender nonconforming. Often used when talking about groups of people with diverse gender identities.