# Words we live by: A guide to LGBTQ+ Language

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## Glossary of terms

### Agender

Not identifying as any gender - whether female, male, or non-binary. Agender people are genderless.

### Ally

Being an ally means that you actively support LGBTQ+ people and challenge discrimination and inequality wherever you see it.

### Asexual (ace)

### an umbrella term to describe people who don’t experience sexual attraction. Some asexual people experience little or no romantic attraction (known as aromantic) and some may occasionally experience sexual attraction to someone they have a strong bond with (known as demisexual).

### Binders

An item of clothing to help flatten the chest safely. This can be very important for some LGBTQ+ people.

### Biphobia

Being prejudiced towards someone and/or discriminating against them based on the fact they identify as bisexual.

### Bisexual (bi)

Being attracted to more than just one gender. Some bisexual people might be more attracted to one particular gender than another.

### Cisgender (cis)

Short for ‘cisgender’, this is when your gender identity lines up with the sex you were assigned at birth.

### Coming out

Sharing your gender or sexual identity with other people. Some young people come out as *queer* or *questioning* rather than as anything more specific; it’s important not to rush them to “pick a label”.

### Deadname

Many trans people use this term to refer to their given name at birth, which they no longer use. It’s important to use the name(s) people are most comfortable with.

### Drag

Dressing up and performing as a different gender to the one you usually identify with.

### Family

LGBTQ+ families come in all shapes and sizes, and LGBTQ+ people can still have children if they want to (whether biologically or through adoption/fostering). Just because somebody’s LGBTQ+, you shouldn’t assume they necessarily do or don’t want a family.

### Flags

There are many different flags to represent different LGBTQ+ identities. Many LGBTQ+ people choose to display or wear them as a way of showing pride in their identity or to signal their identity to others.

### Fluidity

It’s common for people to move through different identities throughout their lives. Sexual and gender identities aren’t necessarily fixed forever once someone comes out. Equally, though, bi and pan people can still identify as such even if they settle down with one person; they don’t become straight or gay depending on the gender of their long-term partner.

### Gay

Traditionally, this is a sexual identity label used to mean ‘homosexual’. However, some young people now use ‘gay’ more as an umbrella term which points to the whole LGBTQ+ community, rather than as a specific label.

### Gender identity

How a person feels about their gender, for example that they’re non-binary or female. Gender doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with biology or the sex assigned to someone at birth.

### Gender expression

How someone expresses or presents their gender identity outwardly. This can include the clothes they wear and how they style their hair, for example, as well as things like their body language.

### Gender affirming treatment

Some trans people take hormones or have surgery which supports their gender identity. Not all trans people want to do this. In the UK, only those over 16 can take hormones and only those over 18 can have surgery, but some under 16s can take puberty blockers.

### Gender dysphoria

A feeling of distress or discomfort that some trans and non-binary people feel because their gender identity doesn’t line up with the sex they were assigned at birth. Not all trans and non-binary people experience gender dysphoria.

### Gender fluid

A form of non-binary gender. This is a flexible gender identity that shifts; sometimes you might feel more masculine, sometimes more feminine.

### Hate crime

Any crime (including verbal abuse) which targets the victim because of a particular characteristic, such as their gender or sexuality. It’s important to support LGBTQ+ people who wish to report hate crimes, but please don’t do it on their behalf without asking them as it may put them at risk.

### Homophobia

Being prejudiced towards people and/or discriminating against them because of their sexuality. Homophobic acts aren’t necessarily always violent and can also include language use such as slurs and offensive jokes.

### Inclusive language

Using language which doesn’t specify or assume that an experience is only shared by one gender, such as saying “people” rather than “women” in the context of pregnancy and menstruation.

### Intersex

When your biological sex characteristics don’t fit neatly into the boxes of ‘female’ or ‘male’. Some intersex people identify with a binary gender, others identify as non-binary. Importantly, not all intersex people feel part of the LGBTQ+ community, but some do.

### Labels

LGBTQ+ people often use labels (for example, ‘lesbian’) to describe their gender and/or sexual identity. Not everybody wants to use a label, though, and they can carry different meanings for different people. The important thing is to respect the way that someone describes their own identity, and to not question or deny the labels they use.

### Lesbian

Somebody who is attracted only to other women. Not all people who identify as lesbian necessarily also identify as women; some non-binary people use the label, too.

### LGBTQ+

An acronym to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning people. The plus symbol is inclusive of all other non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities, too. A longer version of the acronym is also often used, and includes intersex and asexual people: LGBTQIA+.

### Misgendering

Using pronouns or words which refer to someone as the wrong gender, whether deliberately or by mistake. This can be devastating for trans and non-binary people, so it’s best to use gender-neutral language and provide gender-neutral facilities (such as toilets, where young LGBTQ+ people can be at particular risk of misgendering) wherever possible.

### Mx

A title which, unlike Ms or Mr, is gender neutral rather than specifying a particular binary gender identity. Anybody can use Mx, no matter their gender identity, but providing this as an option (for example, on forms) is a good way of being inclusive of non-binary people.

### Neopronouns

Pronouns that have been created as alternatives to she/he/they, such as “ze” and “hir”. Some LGBTQ+ people use these pronouns to refer to themselves because they better fit how they feel about their gender identity.

### Non-binary

When your gender identity can’t be defined as either female or male (the gender binary).

### Outing

When your gender or sexual identity is shared with others without your permission, whether maliciously or not. If someone comes out to you, you should *always* ask if they’d like you to keep this information private.

### Pangender

A gender identity where you might feel feminine, masculine, and non-binary simultaneously.

### Pansexual (pan)

A sexual identity where you’re attracted to people based on them as individuals, regardless of their gender (also called being ‘gender blind’).

### Polyamorous

People who have more than one partner, where everybody involved is aware of and consents to the relationships.

### Pride

An event that happens in towns and cities around the world to draw the public’s attention to LGBTQ+ rights, and to celebrate being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

### Progress flag

An updated version of the rainbow flag which includes black and brown to represent LGBTQ+ people of colour, and the trans flag colours of blue, pink, and white. The flag symbolises an inclusive and diverse LGBTQ+ community.

### Pronouns

Parts of grammar like ‘she’, ‘his’, and ‘theirs’. Everyone uses pronouns, even if they’re not LGBTQ+. It’s really important to use the pronouns you’ve been asked to; this is a key way of respecting people’s gender identity. If you’re not sure what pronouns someone uses, it’s best to refer to them as “they” rather than assume you know their gender identity based on their appearance or name. Also, don’t assume someone’s gender identity from their pronouns; some non-binary people might still use ‘she’ or ‘he’, for example.

### Puberty blockers

Medication to temporarily stop the hormones associated with puberty. These can be life-saving for young people experiencing distress as their bodies change during adolescence, but are also reversible (if you stop taking them, puberty resumes).

### Queer

This can be used as an umbrella term for all LGBTQ+ people and a way of indicating your membership to the LGBTQ+ community. The word was mostly used as a slur in the past, which means not everyone’s comfortable using it, but for many younger people its use is now positive.

### Rainbow

The rainbow flag was developed in the 1970s and is symbolic of the LGBTQ+ community around the world. Its colours represent love, community and pride.

### Straight

A sexual identity label meaning ‘heterosexual’.

### They/them

Pronouns which are gender-neutral. They/them pronouns can be used in combination with gendered pronouns (for example, “my pronouns are she/they”) to indicate a gender fluid identity or to show that someone doesn’t identify as exclusively non-binary or gendered.

### Trans

Short for ‘transgender’, this is when your gender identity doesn’t line up with the sex you were assigned at birth. Some trans people identify with a binary gender (for example, a trans man) and some hold non-binary identities.

### Transfeminine

A trans person whose gender identity and presentation is primarily feminine. This can include both trans women and non-binary people.

### Transmasculine

A trans person whose gender identity and presentation is primarily masculine. This can include both trans men and non-binary people.

### Trans flag

A flag used to show trans pride, with the light blue and light pink symbolising traditional binary gender and the white representing non-binary and neutral gender identities.

### Transitioning

The process of changing your gender presentation, whether social (for example, taking a new name and wearing certain clothes), medical (for example, through hormone therapy), or legal (such as. on official documents like passports).

### Transphobia

Being prejudiced towards people and/or discriminating against them because they’re not cisgender. Transmisogyny is a particular form of transphobia against trans women and transfeminine people in particular.

### Transsexual

A term that’s been used historically in medical contexts to refer to a transgender person who has had, or who wishes to have, gender affirming treatment. The term is used less nowadays because there’s greater understanding that you can identify as trans without necessarily having gender dysphoria or wanting treatment.

## How should I ask someone about…

### How should I ask somebody about their sexuality?

First, ask yourself why you need to know. Is it so that you can give them the best support, or just because you’re curious? A person’s sexual identity is private: the most important thing is not to assume that everybody’s straight because then they can feel forced to come out when it’s not strictly necessary, and not to make someone feel like they have to tell you their identity.

### How should I ask somebody about their gender identity?

Again, first you should ask yourself why you need to know. Second, you should try not to assume based on someone’s appearance or name. If you want to refer to somebody (for example, as “she” or “they” and need to know how to do so respectfully, you can ask them what pronouns they use (see ‘pronouns’). You should also check if that person is happy for you to use their pronouns publicly, or if this might reveal their LGBTQ+ identity (see ‘outing’). If you accidentally misgender someone, just apologise and move on - it’s best not to make a big deal out of it as this can make people feel uncomfortable or even unsafe.