

It is important to understand and use appropriate, affirming language to create inclusive environments for LGBTQ children and families. Below you'll find definitions for several key terms related to the LGBTQ community.

For a more comprehensive list please visit: [HRC.org/Resources/Glossary-of-Terms](https://www.hrc.org/Resources/Glossary-of-Terms).



**ASEXUAL** The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people.

**BISEXUAL** A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity—though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

**CISGENDER** A person whose gender identity aligns with cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

**GAY** A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

**GENDER EXPRESSION** External appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice. This may or may not conform to socially-defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

**GENDER NON-CONFORMING** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

**INTERSEX** People who are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response and/or secondary sex traits.

**LESBIAN** A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

**LGBTQ** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

**NON-BINARY** An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

**QUEER** A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or those who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ community.

**QUESTIONING** A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION** An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual’s sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

**TRANSGENDER** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

For more information and great tips, check out our *Notes from the Backpack* podcast episode “[How to Help LGBTQ Youth Thrive](#)” featuring HRC Senior Director, Ellen Kahn and Board Chair, Jodie Patterson.



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