

LGBTQIA+ Dictionary

A plain-English guide to the words our community uses

Language is one of the ways we show care. The words below are a plain-English starting point — not a rulebook. Language evolves, and the words people use for themselves are always the ones that count. When you're unsure, listen first, then ask kindly.

UMBRELLA & EVERYDAY TERMS

LGBTQIA+ — An umbrella for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual or aromantic people. The “+” holds space for every identity the letters don't name.

Queer — A broad, reclaimed word for anyone who isn't straight and/or isn't cisgender. Many embrace it with pride; because it was once used as a slur, some still find it painful — so use it for others only if they use it for themselves.

Questioning — Exploring your own orientation or gender. A valid place to be, for as long as you need.

Coming out — Sharing your orientation or gender with others. Not a single event but an ongoing choice, made on each person's own terms.

Outing — Revealing someone's LGBTQIA+ identity without their consent. Never okay.

Ally — Someone who isn't LGBTQIA+ themselves but actively supports the community. Allyship is something you do, not a badge you give yourself.

Pride — Both a celebration and a protest — a public stand for LGBTQIA+ visibility, rights and joy.

SEXUAL & ROMANTIC ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation — Who a person is drawn to romantically and/or sexually.

Lesbian — A woman (including trans women) who is attracted to women. Some non-binary people use it too.

Gay — Attracted to people of the same gender — often used by men, and by anyone who finds it fits.

Bisexual (bi) — Attracted to more than one gender.

Pansexual — Attracted to people regardless of gender.

Asexual (ace) — Experiencing little or no sexual attraction. Ace people may still have romantic relationships; asexuality is a spectrum.

Demisexual — Feeling sexual attraction only after a strong emotional bond has formed.

Aromantic (aro) — Experiencing little or no romantic attraction. Romantic and sexual attraction don't always line up.

Straight (heterosexual) — Attracted to a different gender from your own.

GENDER

Sex assigned at birth — The label (usually male or female) given at birth based on physical characteristics. It doesn't always match a person's gender.

Gender identity — Your own internal sense of your gender — woman, man, both, neither, or somewhere else.

Cisgender (cis) — When your gender matches the sex you were assigned at birth.

Transgender (trans) — When your gender differs from the sex you were assigned at birth. An umbrella covering many identities.

Non-binary — A gender that isn't simply "man" or "woman". Some non-binary people also identify as trans; some don't.

Genderfluid — A gender that shifts over time or by situation.

Agender — Having no gender, or not identifying with any gender.

Intersex — Born with sex characteristics (anatomy, hormones or chromosomes) that don't fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex is about biology and is separate from gender identity and orientation.

EXPRESSION, TRANSITION & RESPECT

Gender expression — How you present your gender outwardly — clothes, hair, voice, name. It doesn't always signal someone's identity.

Pronouns — The words we use for someone instead of their name (she/her, he/him, they/them and others). Sharing yours helps everyone feel safe to share theirs.

Transition — The personal process of living as your gender. It can be social, medical and/or legal — and not everyone wants every step.

Gender dysphoria — Distress caused by a mismatch between your gender and your assigned sex.

Gender euphoria — The joy and relief of being seen and living as your true self.

Misgender — Using words (like the wrong pronoun) that don't match someone's gender. If you slip, correct yourself, apologise briefly and move on.

Deadname — A name a trans person used before and no longer uses. Use a person's current name only.

Drag — A celebratory art form of performing gender, often with bold, exaggerated style. Drag is performance, and is separate from being trans.

Two-Spirit — A term used by some Indigenous North American peoples for a range of gender and sexual identities within their own cultures. It carries specific cultural meaning and isn't a label for people outside those communities.

WORDS TO USE WITH CARE

- Say "**trans people**" or "**a trans person**" — not "transgenders" or "a transgender".
- Say "**sexual orientation**", not "sexual preference" — it isn't a preference.
- Avoid "**lifestyle choice**" — being LGBTQIA+ isn't a choice or a lifestyle.
- Use "**intersex**", never the outdated "hermaphrodite".
- Say "**assigned male/female at birth**" rather than "born a man/woman".

A NOTE ON RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

Lead with respect: use the name and pronouns someone gives you; if you're unsure, ask gently and privately; don't ask about anyone's body or former name; and if you slip up, correct it, say a quick sorry, and carry on. When people define themselves differently, follow their lead.