



BEING AN

LGBTQ Ally



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Introduction

As our world becomes more accepting of broader and more diverse identities, you may have questions about how you can better support the LGBTQ community, or what LGBTQ even stands for. Every person has their own journey in understanding what it means to support LGBTQ people, whether you're LGBTQ or not. We hope this resource can help you begin that journey.

You might be reading this resource because you want to provide guidance for LGBTQ people in your role as a teacher, counselor or religious leader. Maybe your child, best friend or parent just came out to you, and you have no idea what that means. Maybe you're already a member of the LGBTQ community, and you want to make sure you're supporting all of the parts of the community that you can. Or maybe you're reading this resource because you're just trying to be a better ally. No matter what brought you here, you have come to the right place.

This resource is designed to help build understanding and comfort. If you are new to LGBTQ issues, we will answer many of your questions. Or, if you have known LGBTQ people for years and are looking to find new ways to show your support, you can skim this resource and take the pieces that are relevant to you. It's ok to not know everything — we're here to help.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation hopes this resource can help you build understanding of LGBTQ identities and issues, and that you can use this newfound knowledge to be an ally to the LGBTQ community as a whole. Thank you for reading. We're glad you're here.

WHAT IS LGBTQ?



We'll start with the basics: what does LGBTQ stand for?



LGBTQ is a common acronym that attempts to capture the diversity of people whose sexual orientation and/or gender does not align with what is traditionally accepted in U.S. society. It is an imperfect acronym, as it only includes a few broad groups by name.

We Have Multiple Identities

Being lesbian, gay or bisexual refers to a person's sexual orientation, or who they are attracted to. Being transgender refers to a person's gender identity, or their internal sense of gender. People may refer to themselves as queer if their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is outside of the mainstream. That means, a person can be a transgender woman and a lesbian — a woman who was assigned male at birth and is attracted to other women. This person might also refer to themselves as queer because their sexual orientation and gender identity are counter to the mainstream.

Here is what the letters traditionally stand for:

L - 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.

G - 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.

B - 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. This is sometimes written as bisexual+ or bi+ to incorporate many non-monosexual identities, such as pansexual, fluid or queer. At least 62% of LGBTQ adults identify as bisexual, according to the HRC Foundation's analysis of General Social Survey [data](#).

T - 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 be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or another sexual orientation. Transgender is sometimes colloquially shortened to "trans." **The opposite of transgender is cisgender, meaning someone whose gender identity matches the one assigned to them at birth (i.e., most people).**

Q - 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 folks 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 movement. **Like all identities, you should only refer to someone as queer when they have let you know they identify that way.**

A BIT OF HISTORY



Being LGBTQ is nothing new. Documentation of LGBTQ people dates back to the start of written history, and we've existed across the globe. Here are a few examples:

- According to some records, same-sex relationships were “widely accepted in several regions of the country” among indigenous communities in North America.
- In South Asia, the term Hijra includes transgender, intersex and non-binary people. These individuals, who have been well-documented since antiquity, are officially recognized today by governments in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.
- In China, the Golden Orchid Society (Jinglanhui) was a women’s organization that celebrated “passionate friendships” and embraced same-sex relationships between women during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Additionally, many regard Guanyin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, to be a transgender deity.
- In Senegal, Gor-Digen were a group of individuals assigned male at birth who dressed as women and were viewed as a crucial part of the community.
- In Peru, archaeological discoveries of several erotic ceramics led scholars to study the role of same-sex relationships in the Moche community, a pre-Inca civilization.

In the United States, LGBTQ people have reached major milestones in the past 50 years, often credited to the work of transgender women of color in the Stonewall riots of 1969, coming on the heels of earlier LGBTQ uprisings including Compton's Cafeteria in 1966 and the Black Cat protests in 1967. You can learn more about Stonewall and the past 100 years of LGBTQ rights in the United States [here](#).

Much has changed for LGBTQ people in the U.S. since 1969. ‘Don't Ask, Don't Tell’ has been overturned — allowing gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals to serve openly in the military. Marriage equality is the law of the land. And employment discrimination against LGBTQ people has been recognized by the Supreme Court as illegal.

That being said, we still have a long way to go. LGBTQ people are still targets of violence, with Black transgender women losing their lives to fatal violence at alarming rates. LGBTQ people can be denied services in many states, ranging from homeless youth programs and veterans services to shopping centers and taxi cabs. And too many LGBTQ people are subject to so-called “reparative” or “conversion” therapy, a dangerous practice that targets LGBTQ youth and falsely seeks to change their sexual orientation or gender identity.

By pushing for LGBTQ acceptance and equality, we can make the world a better place for LGBTQ people. Through the very act of reading this resource, you are showing an interest and determination in making the world a better place for LGBTQ people. Thank you for joining us.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

There are 16 million LGBTQ people in the United States, of which at least 2 million are teenagers and at least 2 million are transgender or non-binary. No identity exists on its own, including LGBTQ identities. People aren't just gay or just transgender — they are a combination of many identities, such as a bisexual, Black, middle-class woman, or a young, white, poor transgender man.

Therefore, it is impossible to characterize the lives of any one category of LGBTQ people. We cannot say “all lesbians like x” or “all non-binary people hate y.” The only way that we can know anything for sure about individuals is by asking them. Let them tell you their own story instead of creating one for them.



WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU



For a lot of people, learning that someone they know and care about is LGBTQ can open a range of emotions, from confused to concerned, awkward to honored. It may be hard to know how to react, what to say, or how you can best be supportive. In this section, we will break down the idea and act of coming out in a way that can help you understand what to do next.

WHAT IS COMING OUT?

Coming out is understood by many to mean the act of disclosing one's non-straight sexuality or non-cisgender gender identity to others. It is a term that has only come to be commonly used in the past 100 years, originally referring to gay men "**coming out**" into gay society in the 1930s. Now, the tradition has evolved, and coming out refers to the process by which an individual tells people in their life about their gender and/or sexual orientation.

Coming out is often framed in media and culture as a necessary step to acceptance and well-being. But for some, coming out may be worse than holding that information in. It is important not to pressure anyone to come out, as the timing of that decision rests solely with the person coming out and what feels right to them.

Likewise, who a person comes out to is a decision to be made only by the person coming out. There are countless factors considered when deciding who to come out to, so it is important to not take it personally if someone does not come out to you.

Remember that it is not about you — it's about them — so respect their decision and know that they will share that information with you if and when the time is right.

You may be able to indicate that it is safe to come out to you by publicly showing your support for LGBTQ people and issues. See our 'Ways to Show Your Support' section on page **26** to learn more.

“Coming Out” vs “Inviting In”

“Coming out” has been the common term for someone who acknowledges being LGBTQ, and it is used throughout this resource. However, it is important to note that this language centers those that someone is coming out to, rather than the person coming out. It can give the impression that people who don’t identify as cisgender or heterosexual are hiding something from society, rather than acknowledging how homophobia, biphobia and transphobia create an unwelcoming environment. When publicly identifying as LGBTQ, someone is inviting people into a part of their life, which should be protected and celebrated. We ask you to think about the perspective of “inviting in,” and consider also using language about being invited in to learn about someone’s identity.



Having Conversations

Having conversations about life as an LGBTQ person may feel strange at first, especially if these aren't conversations you're used to. It is normal to feel a little awkward, or to be a little afraid of saying the "wrong thing" and making it "weird."

Here are some ways to help start an open dialogue:

Ask respectful questions to show you are interested:

- What was it like growing up?
- How did you know it was the right time to come out?
- What has the coming out process been like for you?
- How are you holding up?
- What can I do to support you?

Be honest:

- Tell them that this is new for you — and if you feel awkward, say so.
- Ask them to be honest with you about what you say or do that may make them uncomfortable.
- Tell them if they do or say something that makes you uncomfortable. But at the same time, examine why you feel uncomfortable and see if that's a feeling you can change.
- Be as open and honest as you would like them to be with you.
- Tell them if you need a little time to process the information.

Be reassuring:

- Explain to them that revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity has not changed how you feel about them, even if it takes a little while for you to digest what they have told you.
- Remind them that you still care for and respect them as much as you ever have or more.



A NOTE ON OUTING

Most LGBTQ people prefer to come out in their own ways and in their own time. Unfortunately, an LGBTQ person's sexual orientation or gender identity may be exposed without their knowledge or consent. "Outing" takes the decision-making out of the individual's hands, which can be painful, awkward and even harmful for everyone involved.

If someone has not come out to you, do not assume that they do not trust or care for you. The person may not be ready, may not feel safe, or may still be coming to terms with their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

Showing your support, acceptance and respect for an LGBTQ person who has been outed can help the healing process and may help both of you build a stronger, more genuine relationship.

DEALING WITH YOUR FEELINGS

Now you have some sense of what it feels like to come out to others, but what about how you feel?

Straight and/or cisgender people who have just had someone come out to them have reported feeling:

Honored that someone has chosen to entrust them with this revelation:

"It was a cool moment. I'll remember it for the rest of my life. You only share something like this with people who matter."

— Sharon, a sister, Wyoming

Accepting and dedicated:

"You shouldn't build a relationship on whether you are gay or straight. True friendship is not based on that."

— Chris, a college friend, Idaho

Curious about what life is like for LGBTQ people:

"Why? How? You ask those questions."

— Brandon, a dad, Oregon

Apprehensive or uncomfortable:

"The unknown causes you to pull back."

— Donna, a co-worker, Florida

Disapproving of the perceived "lifestyle":

"I never ask him about it — I don't accept it."

— Steve, an uncle, Maine

Anxious for the well-being of the LGBTQ person:

"What are you supposed to do? How are we supposed to act? I get angry at how the world will treat him."

— Amy, a mom, Texas

You may feel many of these seemingly contradictory emotions at once, leaving you feeling uncertain.

Feeling confused or uncomfortable doesn't make you a bad person. It doesn't mean you are homophobic, biphobic or transphobic. It does mean, however, that you should take the time to work through your feelings fully and honestly so that you can reach a place of support for your friend, loved one or acquaintance without reservation.

While you don't need to hide your emotions, it is important to remember that this individual who came out to you is searching for support and acceptance. Before you begin to ask questions to settle your own uncertainty about the situation, it is key that you make the other person feel that **they made the right decision to come out to you**. You might respond by saying, "Thank you for being honest" or "I appreciate your trust."

Then, use your emotions as the basis for an honest conversation. Ask the questions you need to ask. Have a real talk. And when it's over, you're likely to find that your relationship is stronger and richer than ever.

FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH

After a friend or loved one has come out to you, you might find yourself needing, and perhaps struggling, to come out as a person of faith who supports LGBTQ rights.

While an ethic of justice, inclusion and radical love is at the core of every religion, and many denominations and faith traditions are open and welcoming of LGBTQ people, there are many others that are not. If you come from a religious background that teaches that non-straight sexual orientations or gender variance are wrong or immoral, look back to your texts and history and take time to learn from people of faith who have become allies because of their faith, not despite it. Visit hrc.org/religion and straightforequality.org/faith to find resources to guide you.

If you come from a more affirming tradition, challenge yourself, your congregation and your community leaders to take the next steps in building an even more supportive spiritual home for LGBTQ people of faith. You might be surprised to find your own faith deepened and your community strengthened by your actions.

WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

There are many different ways that you can show your support for the LGBTQ people in your life. There is no one “right” way to do so.

Here are some easy ways to demonstrate support that fit naturally into most people’s lives:

- Create social settings that bring your straight, cisgender and LGBTQ friends and family together.
- Talk openly and honestly with your LGBTQ loved ones about their lives.
- Find opportunities to talk openly with your straight and/or cisgender friends about your LGBTQ friends and family and the issues they face.
- Make sure that you include the partners of your LGBTQ loved ones in events and activities, just as you would any other friend's spouse or significant other.
- If you hear an anti-LGBTQ comment or joke, speak up and explain why such comments or jokes are harmful and offensive.
- Integrate inclusive language into your regular conversations, professional interactions and/or spiritual life.

- Get involved with pro-LGBTQ groups and campaigns and contact your elected officials about LGBTQ rights.
- Join pro-LGBTQ causes or groups on Facebook and through other social networking opportunities.
- Attend pride celebrations and other LGBTQ community events.
- Visit the website for PFLAG (formerly known as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), a national organization that unites parents, families and allies with people who are LGBTQ. You can go to pflag.org for information on local meetings and PFLAG public education programs across the country.
- Casually mention a news item about an LGBTQ issue in a positive way.
- Mention other LGBTQ friends or family you might have in open conversations.
- Put a supportive symbol or sign in your office or home, or on your vehicle. (For example, you could wear an LGBTQ ally button, add a rainbow sticker on your name badge at work, or put the Human Rights Campaign equal sign sticker on your car.)
- Read an LGBTQ publication.
- Post a message in support of LGBTQ issues on social media.
- Suggest a get-together to watch a movie or show with LGBTQ topics or characters.
- Add your pronouns to your email signature or share your pronouns when introducing yourself to new friends or colleagues.
- Stand up for LGBTQ issues in every aspect of your life — even if there are no LGBTQ people there to watch.



Will people think I'm LGBTQ?

This is a question that many people have — and are often afraid to ask out loud. The simple answer is: yes, it is possible that some people may wonder if you are LGBTQ if you show your support for LGBTQ issues.

At the same time, many people understand that supporting fairness and equality for LGBTQ people does not mean that a person is LGBTQ — it means that a person values respect and acceptance for all people.

By being an advocate and supporter of LGBTQ people, you are leading by example. Odds are others will follow.

Many civil rights movements are successful because people from nearly every part of society stood shoulder to shoulder in fighting bias. The work to make the world safer and fairer for LGBTQ people will take the effort and understanding of all people from all walks of life, of all genders and sexual orientations. That is why it is so important that you are reading this resource and taking the next step toward supporting LGBTQ people.

SHOWING SUPPORT FOR DIFFERENT IDENTITIES



As no person is identical to any other, neither is any identity. While we have provided broad recommendations on ways to support LGBTQ people, we want to focus on a few of the often marginalized parts of our community and provide examples of how you can better support us.

LGBTQ People of Color

- 1. No experience or journey is the same.** Queer people often have experience as part of multiple marginalized communities. We may also be Black, indigenous or a person of color (BIPOC). We may be part of the disability community or face poverty or homelessness. The struggles of these groups often intersect with those of the queer community. To be an ally, take the time to listen to the experiences of marginalized people and help us to live openly and authentically. Take the time to learn about the unique experiences of **LGBTQ communities of color**.
- 2. Support and advocate for our most marginalized communities.** The LGBTQ community will not achieve full equality as long as LGBTQ people of color face oppression and marginalization on the basis of race. Transgender women of color continue to face blatant discrimination and an epidemic of violence simply for being who they are. The HIV epidemic disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx gay and bisexual men and transgender women. LGBTQ refugees and asylum-seekers experience discrimination as both immigrants and queer people. Be an active and fierce advocate while still providing space for LGBTQ people of color to be heard.
- 3. Embrace our leadership, share our stories and highlight our contributions.** To be an ally means listening to LGBTQ voices and respecting our understanding of our own identities. LGBTQ people have historically been ignored or subject to ridicule in popular culture, so recognize and call out media that portrays LGBTQ people negatively or not at all. Elevate LGBTQ voices by promoting our art, hiring us, voting for us and giving us spaces to speak with wider audiences. Continue to share the rich and diverse narratives that highlight our unique experiences. Most importantly, hire LGBTQ people of color, vote for them, buy their art and books, and continue to spotlight their voices.

Bisexual (or Bi+) People

- 1. See the individual in the bi+ person.** The bi+ umbrella encompasses a wide range of identities based on sexual orientation, including bisexual, pansexual, queer, fluid and all non-monosexual identities (see glossary of terms). Bi+ people can also have a variety of gender identities, including cisgender, transgender and non-binary. Every bi+ person may define bi+ identity differently. Remember that every bi+ person is an individual with their own unique experiences, and there is no one way to be a bi+ person.
- 2. Believe bi+ people when they tell you their sexuality.** When a bi+ person comes out to you, don't assume it's just a step on the way to another identity, like gay or lesbian. Being bi+ is a valid identity on its own — it's not a fad or a phase. No bi+ person needs to “prove” their sexuality to be bi+. When someone tells you that they are bi+, take them at face value, and work to overcome false assumptions and stereotypes you may have about bi+ people.
- 3. Don't erase the bi+ community and bi+ people's experiences.** Bi+ people face discrimination and biphobia, both from straight people, cisgender people and from gay and lesbian communities. This can be seen by the use of “gay and transgender” as an umbrella term for the entire LGBTQ community, assumptions that are made about bi+ people's sexuality in certain spaces or based on the gender of their partner(s), and the erasure of bi+ people from LGBTQ history. The ‘B’ in LGBTQ must not be erased.
- 4. Don't hypersexualize bi+ people.** Often, upon hearing that someone is bi+, people may ask questions about sex because they don't understand bi+ identity. Bi+ identity is about more than sex, just like gay, lesbian and straight identities. Learning someone's bi+ identity does not give you the license to ask about their sex or dating history. Don't reduce bi+ people to their sexuality and challenge others who do.

Transgender and Non-Binary People

- 1. Listen.** It is important to listen to transgender and non-binary people, especially when it comes to their own experiences. Even if you think you can't empathize, it is important to try your best to understand what your transgender and non-binary friends and loved ones are experiencing. We are looking for people who support us and trust us — the best way to start is by listening.
- 2. Respect boundaries.** Learn and respect the boundaries of your transgender and non-binary friends and loved ones. Some transgender and non-binary people love to share our stories, and others of us prefer that you first educate yourself. Certain topics, such as someone's plans for surgery or about the name they used prior to their transition (often referred to as someone's dead name), should not be raised without them first initiating that conversation. Respect is one of the first and most powerful steps toward allyship.
- 3. Be an active supporter.** Publicly support transgender and non-binary people, especially the ones you know personally. Be our advocates, especially when we're not around — that's usually when we need it the most. Advocate for more transgender and non-binary people in leadership positions and trust us to lead.
- 4. Normalize pronouns.** It is important to normalize the use of your pronouns when you introduce yourself to others, follow up by asking for others' pronouns, and correct people when they use incorrect pronouns for someone else — even if that person is not in the room. These simple actions will send a message that one cannot assume someone's gender or pronouns. We also recommend putting your pronouns in your email signature, on your nametag and other places where you introduce yourself in writing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- [Transgender and Non-binary Coming Out Resource](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual+ Coming Out Resource](#)
- [Black LGBTQ Coming Out Resource](#)
- [Asian and Pacific Islander Coming Out Resource](#)
- [Latinx Coming Out Resource](#)

National LGBTQ Organizations

American Veterans for Equal Rights	Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund
Bisexual Resource Center	Immigration Equality
Family Equality Council	Lambda Legal
Gay & Lesbian Medical Association	National Black Justice Coalition
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network	National Center for Lesbian Rights
Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation	National Center for Transgender Equality
	National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

National Minority AIDS Council	The Evangelical Network
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)	Gay Buddhist Fellowship
PFLAG National	Integrity USA (Episcopalian)
Straight For Equality	More Light Presbyterians
Still Bisexual	Muslims for Progressive Values
Straight Spouse Network	Rainbow Baptists
The Trevor Project	Reconciling Works (Lutheran)
	Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship International

Religiously-Affiliated LGBTQ Organizations

Affirmation: LGBTQ Mormons, Family and Friends	Unitarian Universalists Association Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Concerns
Affirmation (United Methodist)	United Church of Christ LGBT Ministries
Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists	Metropolitan Community Churches
DignityUSA (Catholic)	Unity Fellowship Church Movement
Emergence International (Christian Scientist)	The World Congress: Keshet Ga'avah (Jewish)

Hotlines

The Trevor Helpline

866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)

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National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

(800) 273-8255
(online chat available)

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The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline

(888) 843-4564

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The GLBT National Youth Talkline (youth serving youth through age 25)

(800) 246-7743

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Crisis Text Line

Text START to 741-741

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Trans Lifeline

(877) 565-8860

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State HIV & AIDS Hotlines

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



AFAB - Stands for “Assigned Female at Birth.” Used to describe someone whose sex was assigned as female when born, typically based on their external genitalia. While many transgender and non-binary people are comfortable identifying as AFAB, some prefer not to use this term to describe their experience or the experiences of others.

AMAB - Stands for “Assigned Male at Birth.” Used to describe someone whose sex was assigned as male when born, typically based on their external genitalia. While many transgender and non-binary people are comfortable identifying as AMAB, some prefer not to use this term to describe their experience or the experiences of others.

Ally - A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

Asexual - Describes a person who experiences little or no attraction to anyone, and/or does not experience desire for sexual contact.

Biphobia - The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

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. This is sometimes written as bisexual+ or bi+ to incorporate many non-monosexual identities, such as pansexual, fluid or queer. At least 62% of LGBTQ adults identify as bisexual, according to the HRC Foundation's analysis of General Social Survey data..

Cisgender - A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Fluid - A term people often use to describe their sexual orientation if their orientation changes with time, or if their orientation has the potential to change with time.

FTM - Stands for “female-to-male,” referring to someone who was assigned female at birth, but is transitioning or has transitioned to their true identity as a man. This term is relatively outdated and its use is not recommended, but it can still be seen in some medical and pop culture texts.

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-expansive - Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender identities.

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

Gender identity - One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. For more information on gender identity, visit our [Transgender and Non-Binary Coming Out Resource](#).

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.

Homophobia - The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Intersex - An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural biological variations that differ from those classically thought to be typical to either men or women. In some cases these traits are visible at birth, while in others they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.

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

LGBTQ - Stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.” Many people and organizations use “LGBTQ” as a catch-all term for the non-

cisgender and non-straight community, but the acronym varies depending on culture and style. For example, some groups may add “I” for intersex.

Monosexual - Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of only one gender.

MTF - Stands for “male-to-female,” referring to someone who was assigned male at birth, but is transitioning or has transitioned to their true identity as a woman. This term is relatively outdated and its use is not recommended, but it can still be seen in some medical and pop culture texts.

Non-binary - Describes a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. A non-binary person may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or completely outside these categories. While many non-binary people also identify as transgender, not all do.

Pansexual - Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Pronouns - Any word that can replace a noun or noun phrase and refer specifically to people who are being talked about. Examples of pronouns an individual may use include She/Her/Hers, He/Him/His or They/Them/Theirs. Some individuals use other less common gender-neutral pronouns, such as Xe/Hir/Hirs, or use no pronouns at all. The phrase “preferred pronouns” is being phased out by the community, as it denotes that gender is a choice.

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 folks 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 movement.

Same-gender loving - A term some prefer to use to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

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; transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc. Do not use the term “transgendered,” even as an adjective, as it is considered outdated and incorrect. Instead, consider using “transgender people,” “transgender person,” “trans people” or “trans person.”

Transition - A process that some transgender and non-binary people go through when they decide to live as their true gender, rather than the one assigned to them at birth.

Transphobia - The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.

Transsexual - An outdated term that we recommend avoiding.

Transvestite - An outdated term that we recommend avoiding. Often used as a slur.

About the Human Rights Campaign Foundation

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. We build support for LGBTQ people among families and friends, co-workers and employers, pastors and parishioners, doctors and teachers, neighbors, and the general public. Through our programs and projects, we are enhancing the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and their families, as we change hearts and minds across America and around the globe. The HRC Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

To access this resource online, please visit:

hrc.im/ComingOutAlly