

## Sexual Orientation

- Using the word “partner” to define a relationship is just as valid as “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”
- A person’s orientation is not defined by who they are dating—for example, if a bisexual man is dating a woman, it doesn’t make him any less bisexual
- Use LGBTQ+ terms correctly, and don’t be afraid of using them—it helps make LGBTQ+ people more visible
- Don’t say “that’s so gay” to describe something you think is bad. You can say “That’s ridiculous” or “wild” or “horrible” or “awful” — just say what you mean

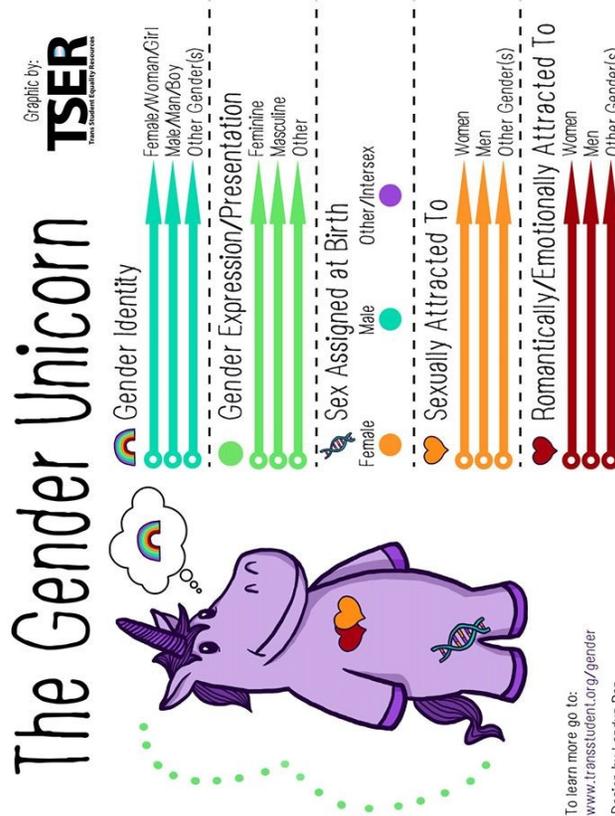
## Gender

- Respect pronouns - he/him, she/her, they/them, or otherwise. If you make a mistake: apologize, move on, and remember for next time
- Don’t assume you know someone’s pronouns just by looking at them: introduce yourself with your pronouns, then ask for theirs
- Saying a person has “preferred pronouns” suggests that their gender is a preference instead of a part of who they are; forget the “preferred,” just say “pronouns”
- It is never okay to use the wrong pronouns (misgender) or the wrong name (deadname) for a trans person on purpose
- Say “cisgender” if you are talking about a person who isn’t transgender

There are more identities than are listed in the brochure, and each definition is only a snapshot of what a person might experience or how they might identify — Labels can mean different things to different people.

Being an ally is a process of learning and unlearning, not just our language, but *how* we speak, and *who* speaks. Being an LGBTQ+ ally means stepping back and making space for LGBTQ+ voices.

\*Note on the limitations of the diagram: People aren’t typically assigned intersex at birth, but for visibility purposes, it is important to include. Learn more inside!



Via Trans Student Educational Resources. See more at [transstudent.org](http://transstudent.org)

### Things to remember:

- All the parts of a person’s identity illustrated above are distinct and separate from one another
- They are also fluid, which means they can flex and change over time
- A person might have multiple gender identities and/or sexual orientations—we are complex people who weren’t meant to fit into neat little boxes
- Mirror the language a person uses for themselves — they know themselves best.

# Learning to be an LGBTQ+ Ally



## Terms & Definitions to Help You Get Started



Funding for this brochure was provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

This brochure is part of a series that will look at how we can work toward being LGBTQ+ allies. "Ally" isn't a name we can call ourselves; it's about our actions and how we show up. We can work toward allyship by learning LGBTQ+ terms. Terms or labels are important because they can offer a sense of personal identity, or a sense of community and belonging. They also offer visibility and a way to talk about shared experiences and language to address oppression.

### Intro Terms

**Binary:** a system created to divide things into only two options, erasing complex and beautiful spectrums of possibility

**Fluidity:** gender identity and sexual orientation can change or remain the same over the course of a person's life; this does not make a person's identity or experience any less legitimate

**Intersex:** a person with reproductive or genital anatomy, hormones, or chromosomes that don't fit society's binary definition of male or female. Intersex people are as common as redheads, and many people are intersex without ever knowing

**LGBTQ+:** acronym for (some) queer, trans, and queer-identified two-spirit identities

**LGBTQ+ Ally:** a person who is not LGBTQ+ but who values and supports LGBTQ+ people, educates themselves and others about LGBTQ+ issues, challenges queerphobia and transphobia in their own lives, and centers LGBTQ+ voices

**Queer:** an umbrella term for people who identify as LGBTQ+, including queer-identified intersex, trans, and two-spirit people. A reclaimed slur, "queer" is an in-group term, so allies should say LGBTQ+ instead

**Questioning:** when a person is unsure of or exploring their sexual orientation or gender

### Gender Terms

**Agender:** a person who does not identify with a gender

**Androgynous:** a gender expression that combines elements of femininity and masculinity

**Assigned gender:** the assumptions around gender identity, gender roles, and norms of behaviour and appearance that follow from someone being assigned a sex at birth

**Assigned sex:** the classification of a person at birth usually based on genitals *Not the same as gender*

**Bio-essentialism:** the belief that we are who we are because of our genetic makeup, instead of accounting for social determinants and cultural influences. Gender essentialism builds on this, insisting that "men and women are just *different*." This creates problematic stereotypes ("Women are just more nurturing") and excuses for bad behaviour ("Boys will be boys!")

**Cisgender (cis):** a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth  
*A person who is not transgender*

**Cissexism/cisnormative:** the assumption that a person's assigned sex aligns with their gender identity (ex. penis = man, vagina = woman) which positions trans people as "abnormal"

**Gender:** a person's understanding and experience of themselves in relation to their gender

**Gender binary:** a system rooted in Western colonialism that only allows for two genders (man and woman). Other cultures, past and present, have had more flexible models of gender that allowed and celebrated a variety of genders including non-binary identities

**Gender expression:** how a person shows their gender identity (to themselves and others) through clothing, accessories, hairstyle, behaviour, etc.

**Gender roles:** social and cultural expectations of how people "should" express themselves, reinforced by the gender binary. Everyone can question, challenge, and unlearn gender roles

**Gender nonconforming:** a person whose gender expression does not match their society's gender roles or norms for their gender identity.  
*Can include transgender as well as cisgender people*

**Genderqueer:** an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is outside of, not included within, or beyond the binary of male and female

**Gender variant:** an umbrella term for gender identities and gender expressions that do not align with social or cultural expectations of gender

**Non-binary:** a person who identifies outside the binary of "male" or "female" some or all of the time. Despite the lack of recognition within the Western gender binary, non-binary genders are still valid identities

**Transgender (trans):** a person who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth  
*A person who is not cisgender*

**Transition:** the ways a trans person might change socially (introducing a new name, pronouns, clothing) or medically (hormones, surgery). There are as many different ways to transition as there are trans people; not all trans people have the same wants and needs

**Transphobia:** systemic violence against trans and gender variant people, associated with fear, discomfort, distrust, and disdain

**Two-spirit:** a term used in some First Nations communities for a person who embodies masculine and feminine spirits *May or may not identify with LGBTQ+*

### Attraction Terms

**Aromantic:** a person who does not experience romantic attraction. They may still experience sexual attraction.

*Note: romantic attraction is not the only form of "love"*

**Asexual (ace):** a person who experiences little to no sexual attraction (they may still experience romantic attraction) or experiences sexual attraction in a different way

**Biromantic:** a person who is emotionally/romantically attracted to genders that are the same as theirs and genders that are different from theirs

**Bisexual:** a person who is physically attracted to genders that are the same as theirs and genders that are different from theirs

**Demisexual:** a person who can experience sexual attraction only after forming an emotional bond

**Gay:** often describes men attracted to men or women attracted to women

**Heteroromantic:** men who are emotionally attracted to women; women who are emotionally attracted to men

**Heterosexism/heteronormative:** the assumption that being heterosexual/straight is the norm or default, which positions queer people as "others"

**Heterosexual/straight:** men who are primarily attracted to women; women who are primarily attracted to men

**Homophobia:** systemic violence against LGBTQ+ people, associated with fear, discomfort, distrust, disdain

**Homoromantic:** a person who is emotionally/romantically attracted to people of the same gender

**Lesbian:** often describes a woman attracted to women

**Panromantic:** a person who is emotionally attracted to people of any gender

**Pansexual:** a person who is physically attracted to people of any gender. Their attraction might fluctuate, but this does not invalidate their identity

**Romantic attraction:** wanting emotional connection or intimacy

**Sexual attraction:** wanting sexual connection or intimacy