

What the Words Mean – A Basic List of LGBTQ Words

As an advocate it is important to get familiar with words used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) communities. This list was written in plain language. We want you to know:

- There are many ways to describe these words. Some people may use a different definition.
- There are many words not on this list. We wanted to focus on the basic words.
- Words and what they mean change all the time. We will try to keep this list up to date. Let us know if you have any suggestions.

Ally - Here are two types of allies:



- A person who does not have a disability and they support the self-advocacy movement.
- Another kind of ally is a person who is not LGBTQ and they support people who are LGBTQ.

All allies push for respect and equal treatment of all people.

Asexual – Someone who feels little or no romantic or sexual feelings.



Bisexual - A person is attracted to both men and women.

Cisgender - When your gender matches your sex at birth. For example:

- A man who was born male
- A woman who was born female

Closeted – A person who chooses not to tell others that they are LGBTQ.

Coming out – This is a saying that means telling others that you are LGBTQ. It is the process of discovering you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and then telling others.



Gay - Men who are romantically or sexually attracted to men.

Gender expression – Have you thought about getting a new hairstyle? Do you like to go shopping for clothes? People express themselves in different ways. There is a saying, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Try not to guess a person gender or pronouns from the way they look.

Gender identity - How you feel and see yourself. What you call yourself.

- male
- female
- a blend of both
- or neither



Your gender identity can be the same or different from the sex you were given at birth. We all have a gender identity.

Homophobia – To fear or hate people who are attracted to people of the same sex.





Lesbian - A woman who is romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

LGBTQ – These letters stand for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning.”

Outing – Saying someone is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to others without their permission. Choosing to tell someone about your sexual orientation is a personal choice. Some people may feel comfortable coming out in certain situations (at a party) and not in others (at work). That is their choice.

Preferred Pronouns – Pronouns are words like she, her, him, his, they and them. Each person decides which pronouns they use for themselves. If you make a mistake and say the wrong pronoun apologize. Say, “Sorry, I meant to say (then use the correct pronoun).”

Queer – It means LGBTQ. Not everyone in the LGBTQ community likes the word queer. When used in a mean way this word can hurt a person’s feelings. Some gay rights advocates call themselves queer. They say it is a “badge of courage.”



Questioning - If you are not sure of your sexual orientation or gender identity. Trying to figure out if you are straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual or any other gender identity.

Sex assigned at birth – A doctor or midwife will look at a child’s body parts when they are born and say if it is a boy or girl.



Sexual orientation – A person may have sexual feelings for someone of the same sex or opposite sex.

- Heterosexual – attracted to the opposite sex
- Homosexual – attracted to the same sex
- Bisexual – attracted to both



You can decide not to act on your sexual feelings. Being homosexual or heterosexual is not something you can change.

Transgender - A person whose gender identity (how they feel) is different from the sex they were given at birth.

- A person feels they are a man even though they were born female
- A person feels they are a woman even though they were male at birth.



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