



Facilitating Effective Communication with LGBTQI+ People



LGBTQI+ Terminology and Definitions

Understanding LGBTQI+ terminology is key to fostering respectful and successful interactions.

TERMINOLOGY	DEFINITION	
LGBTQI+	Acronym that collectively refers to people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex . The “+” refers to additional people who are diverse with regard to their gender identity and sexual orientation. <i>Note: Terminology is ever changing. You may see other variations of this acronym (i.e., containing other letters)</i>	
Lesbian	Women who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.	
Gay	Men who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men but can also be used for women who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.	
Bisexual	Women and men who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to both women and men.	
Transgender	People whose sex assigned at birth does not match their internal sense of gender. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transgender Woman (male to female): A person whose sex assigned at birth is male but understands herself to be, and desires to live her life as a woman. Transgender Man (female to male): A person whose sex assigned at birth is female but understands himself to be, and desires to live his life as a man. 	
Queer or Questioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Queer: An adjective used by people whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual. Once considered pejorative, the term has been reclaimed by some LGBTQI+ people to describe themselves. Questioning: A person who is in the process of discovering/exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity. 	
Intersex	A person born with sexual anatomy that does not fit typical definitions of male or female.	
Sex (assigned at birth)	A label (male or female) assigned at birth based on medical factors such as genitals, hormones, and chromosomes	
Gender Expression	The ways in which people display their gender identity to others.	
Gender Identity	A person’s internal sense of gender.	
Gender Non-Conforming	People who do not follow gender stereotypes or traditional societal gender expectations.	
Sexual Orientation	A person’s physical, emotional, and/or romantic attraction to another person.	
Transition	Refer to the process a person goes through to affirm their gender identity. Every transgender person’s transition needs, wants, and options are different. Transition can consist of:	
	Social	E.g.: Coming out to friends and family, designating a name, choosing different pronouns (e.g., he, she, they), displaying different clothing and expression (can include speaking, walking, and mannerisms), etc.
	Physical/ Medical	E.g.: Hormone therapy, surgery, hair removal, etc.
	Legal	E.g.: Official name or identity document changes, etc.



Tips for Effective Interactions with LGBTQI+ People:

LGBTQI+ people are a diverse population found worldwide.

LGBTQI+ people exist within every country, religion, race, and ethnic group. Any person can be LGBTQI+ regardless of appearance, behavior, age, socioeconomic status, religion, race, ethnicity, ability/disability, or culture.

- Use interpretation (oral) and translation (written) services when communicating with an LGBTQI+ person who is also limited English proficient.
- When using an over-the-phone interpreter, speak directly to and make eye contact with the LGBTQI+ person.

LGBTQI+ people are vulnerable to abuse worldwide.

LGBTQI+ people are often rejected by family or friends, susceptible to threats or physical attacks, and/or treated unfairly by employers and others. In some countries, mistreatment is carried out by law enforcement or the government. This may create a challenge in your communication with an LGBTQI+ person.

- Keep in mind that LGBTQI+ people may be distrustful of law enforcement and particularly reluctant to discuss their sexual orientation or gender identity. Allow the LGBTQI+ person to provide information on how they identify at their own pace. If needed, consider conducting a follow-up interview at a different time.
- An LGBTQI+ person should not be punished for not disclosing their identity or sexual orientation or for falsely reporting they are not gay or transgender.
- When interviewing an LGBTQI+ person, especially in relation to alleged physical or sexual assault, acknowledge when questions are personal and painful, and explain reason(s) for asking them.

Resist the urge to label LGBTQI+ people based on how they look or sound before you know how they identify.

Even if an LGBTQI+ person seems to fit within a particular definition, that person may not use/prefer that term. Keep in mind that gender identity (sense of self) and sexual orientation (romantic attraction) are separate and distinct aspects; hence, transgender people, for example, can identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

- Respect the label or classification the LGBTQI+ person chooses for themselves.
- DO NOT make assumptions based on stereotypes or biological anatomy.
- DO NOT presume all transgender people are gay or "flaunting their sexuality."

Respect LGBTQI+ people by using preferred pronouns and terminology.

The terms and definitions on this aid may be common, but they are not universal. Some LGBTQI+ people use terms differently and some terms change over time. Most transgender women (male to female) prefer you use "she" or "her." Transgender men (female to male) generally prefer "he" or "him." Some people who do not want to identify with a particular gender may use "they." Occasionally, LGBTQI+ people may even use derogatory terms to describe themselves, but it is inappropriate for you to use them. Don't be surprised if a mistake, even an honest one, in use of term or pronoun results in an emotional reaction from the LGBTQI+ person. Don't personalize the reaction; apologizing, even if what was said was well intentioned, can help defuse the situation.

- Allow LGBTQI+ persons to self-identify using terms they prefer but avoid known derogatory terminology even if the person uses it to refer to themselves.
- Address the transgender person by their chosen pronoun and name (if known), orally and in writing. Otherwise, simply use their last name if consistent with protocol.
- If not sure what pronoun or name to use, ask the person. For example, say "I would like be respectful—what name and pronoun would you like me to use?"
- DO NOT use unacceptable terms to describe an LGBTQI+ person or make "jokes" about their sexual orientation or gender identity with others. This behavior fosters an environment that tolerates mistreatment.

Keep LGBTQI+ status confidential and limit scope of questions.

Questions related to sexual orientation or gender identity should be restricted to those necessary, such as to complete intake, determine classification, make housing assignments, identify programming and hygiene options, and provide necessary health care. A good practice is to ask only when you *need* to know information, and not because you *want* to know. Generally, you should not communicate a person's LGBTQI+ identity to others without the person's consent.

- Don't be shy about asking necessary questions to ensure an LGBTQI+ person's safety and security; however, only question persons on their LGBTQI+ status on a "need-to-know" basis and not because you are curious.
- Always keep LGBTQI+ status confidential unless there is a need to disclose to others.
- Be discrete when asking an LGBTQI+ person about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and change locations if additional privacy is needed to thoroughly conduct the interview.
- Once the interview is complete, be sure to explain any outcomes and procedures to the LGBTQI+ person. Again, use interpretation and translation services when needed.