



## SECTION #8

# LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

- CANAPI Presentation: LGBTQ Youth Homeless in Context: Understanding LGBTQ Communities as Service Providers and Advocates
- LGBTQ Resources List
- The Gender Unicorn
- National LGBT Health Education Center: Glossary of LGBT Terms for Health Care Teams
- GLSEN: LGBT Students of Color
- Glaad: An Ally's Guide to Terminology
- PFLAG: Guide to being a straight ally
- PFLAG: Guide to being a trans ally



# LGBTQ Youth Homeless In Context

Understanding LGBTQ Communities as Service Providers and Advocates

Slides at [canapi.org/slides](https://canapi.org/slides)



# Objectives





# Disclaimer: What This Presentation Isn't



---

# Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative (CANAPI)

---



About Our  
Organization

It is our vision to empower an inclusive community through education, outreach, and awareness while eliminating stigma and HIV transmission

# Community AIDS Network Programming



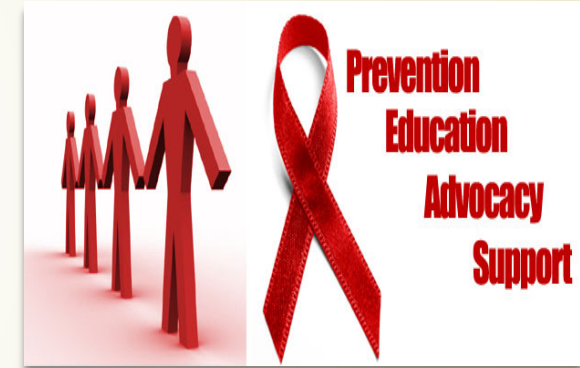
## Housing Programs

- Permanent Supportive
- Rapid Re-Housing
- Homeless Prevention
- Tenant Based Rental Assistance



## Nutrition Program

- Food Pantry
- Nutrition Education



## Prevention Program

- Free HIV/Hep C Testing
- Education
- Outreach
- Social Skills Training

# Akron Pride Initiative Programming



## Teen Pride Network

Prosocial Activities

Education

Northeast Ohio's Third Annual



## Education

Annual Education Conference

Professional Development



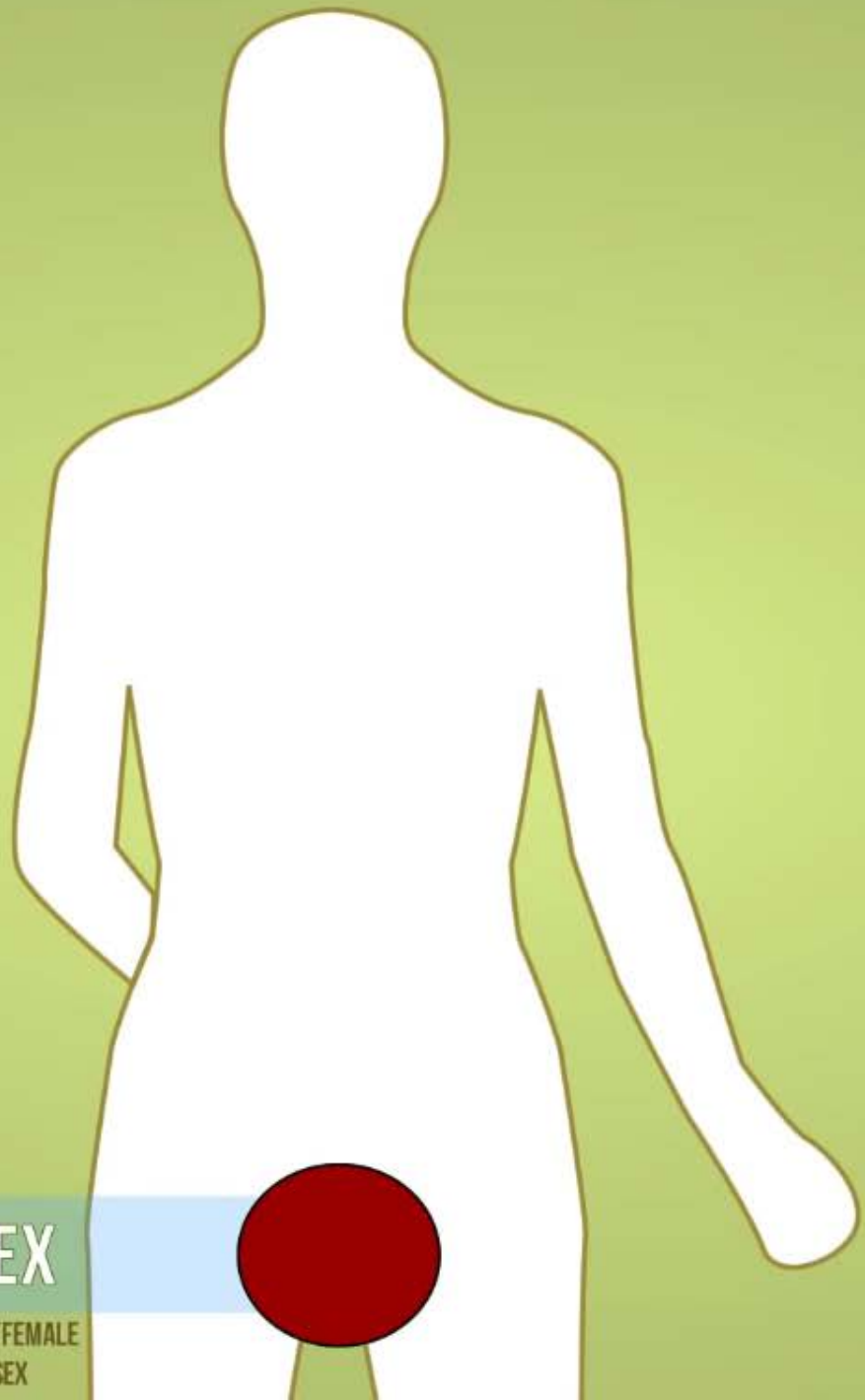
## Advocacy & Support

LGBTQ Youth Housing Assistance

New Pride Support Group

Advocacy Initiatives

# THE COMPLEX HUMAN



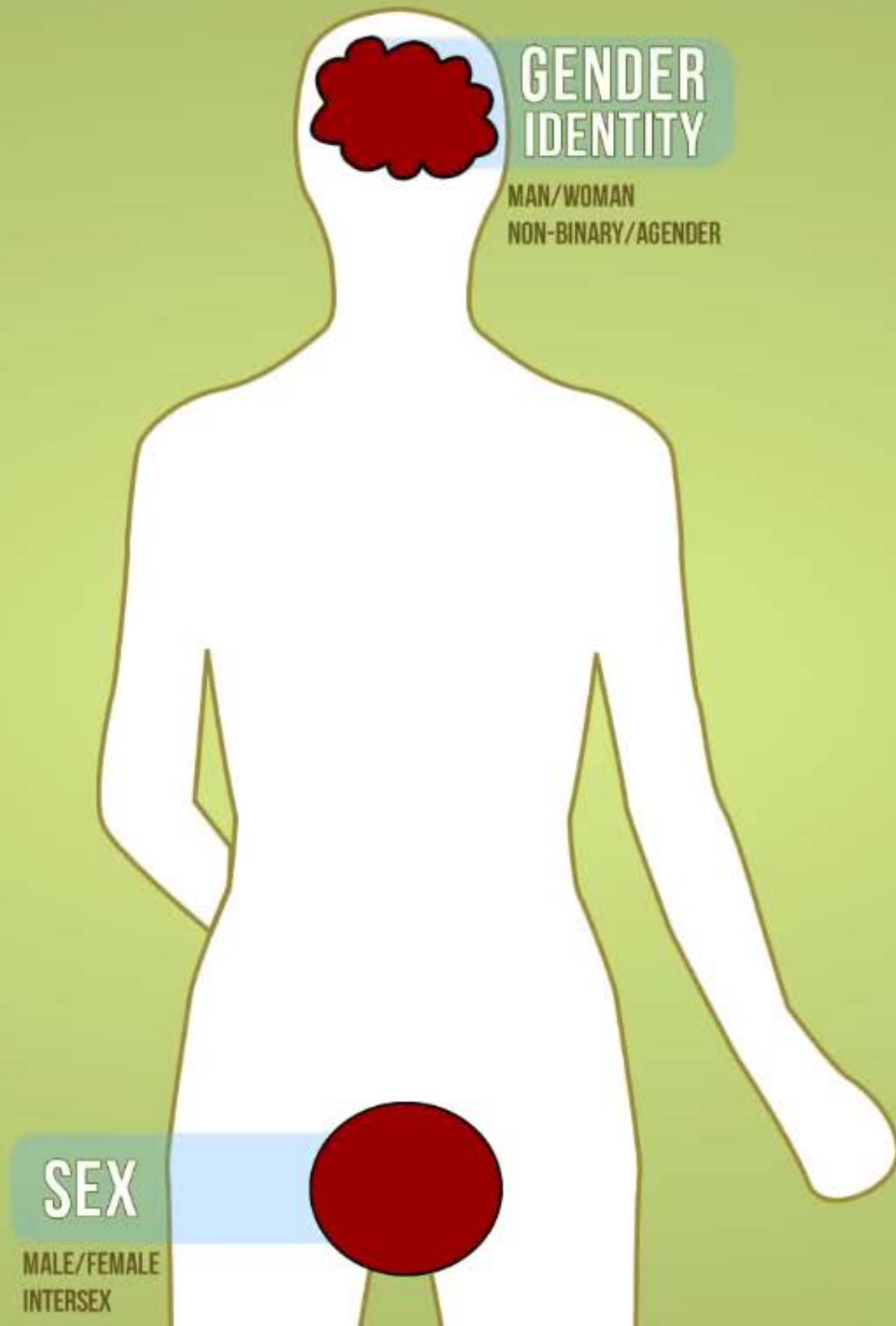
SEX

MALE/FEMALE  
INTERSEX

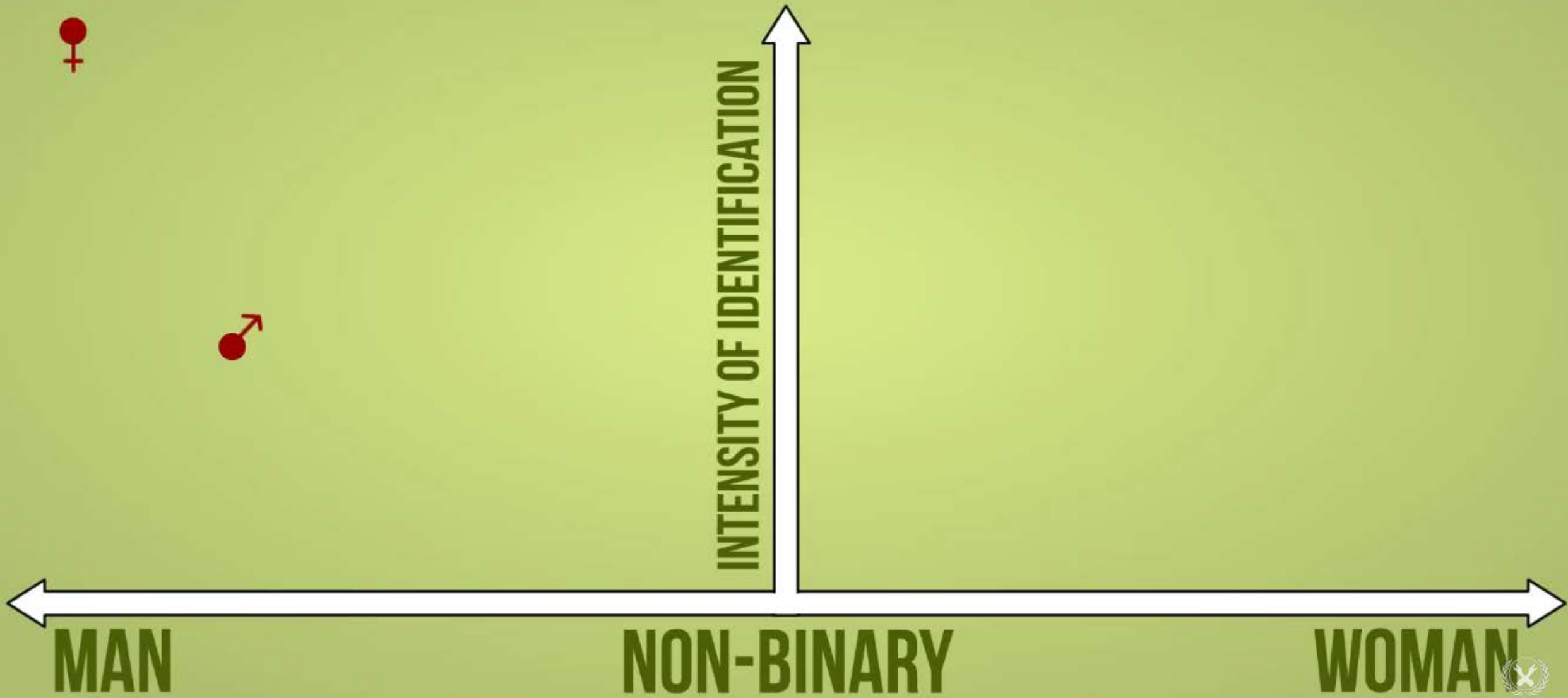




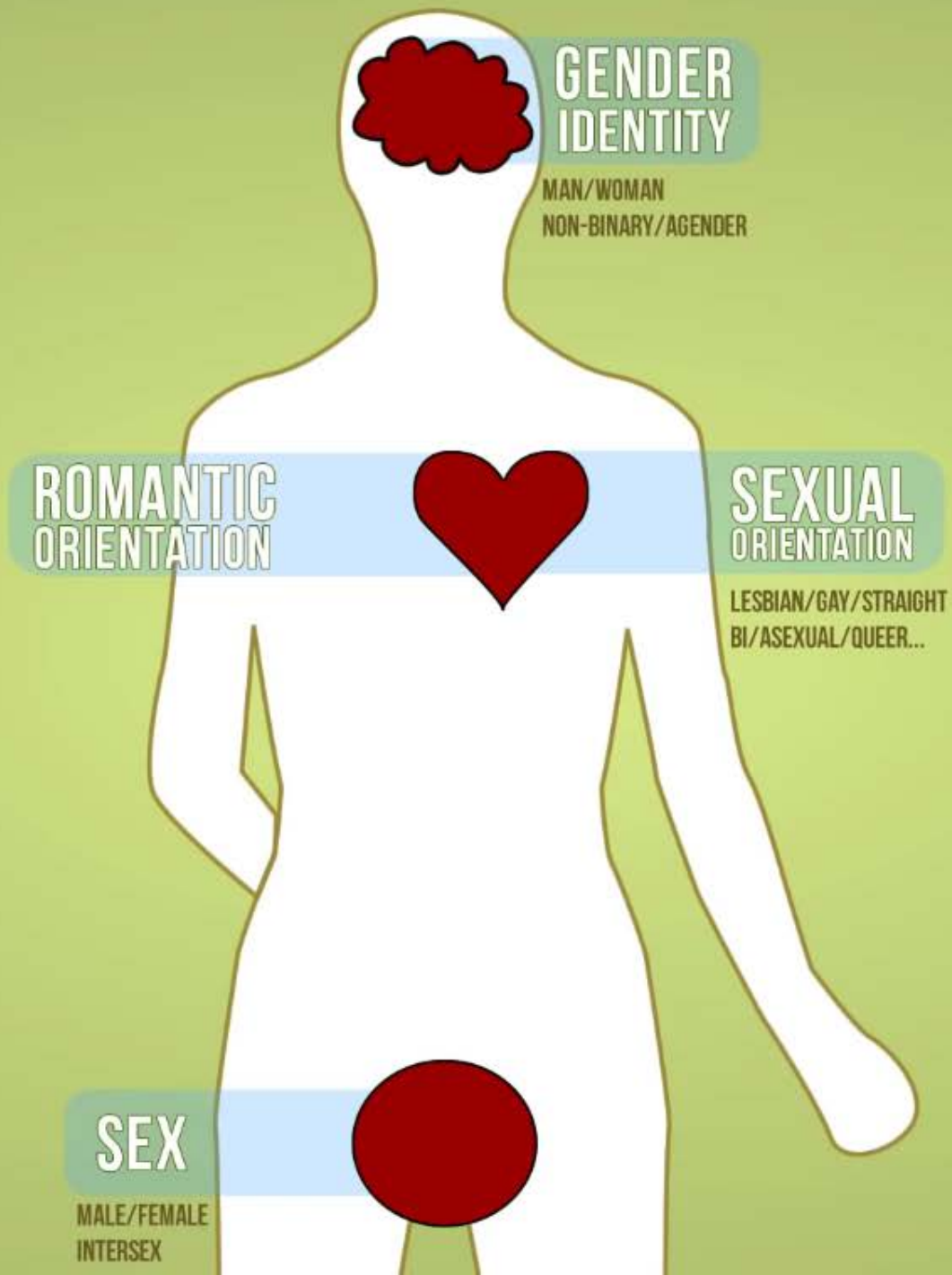
# THE COMPLEX HUMAN



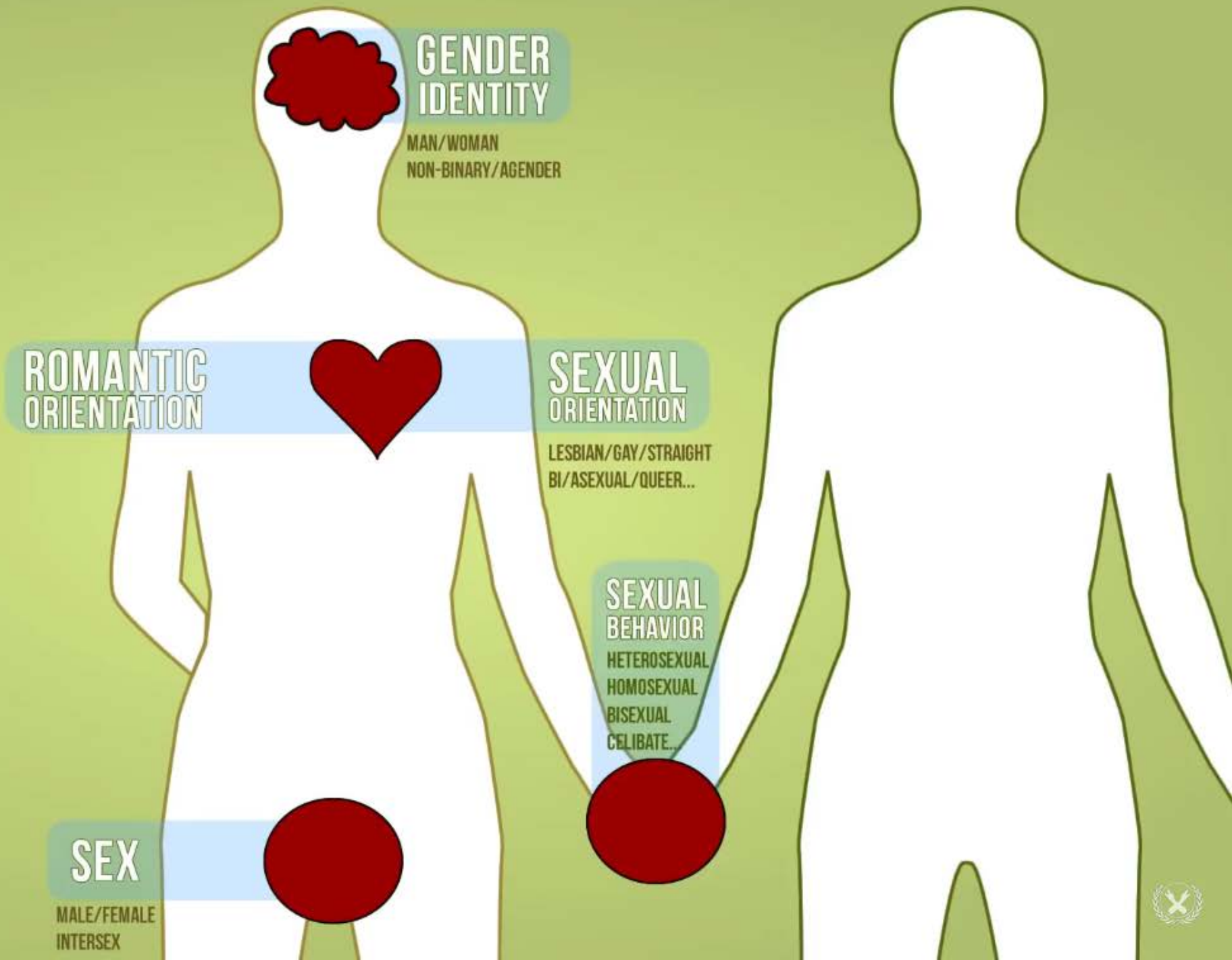
# GENDER IDENTITY



# THE COMPLEX HUMAN



# THE COMPLEX HUMAN



# THE COMPLEX HUMAN

**GENDER  
EXPRESSION**

**GENDER  
IDENTITY**

MAN/WOMAN  
NON-BINARY/AGENDER

**ROMANTIC  
ORIENTATION**



**SEXUAL  
ORIENTATION**

LESBIAN/GAY/STRAIGHT  
BI/ASEXUAL/QUEER...

**SEXUAL  
BEHAVIOR**

HETEROSEXUAL  
HOMOSEXUAL  
BISEXUAL  
CELIBATE...


**SEX**

MALE/FEMALE  
INTERSEX





# What is LGBTQ?

- ▶ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (Sexual/Romantic Orientation)
  - ▶ Transgender (Gender Identity)
  - ▶ Queer/Questioning (Could refer to sexual/romantic orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or any combination thereof)
  - ▶ Does not encompass all possible combinations of The Complex Human
  - ▶ No such thing as an “LGBTQ individual” – term refers to multiple communities
- 



# Community Recognition Vs. Resistance to Labeling

- ▶ Older generations tend to prefer using LGBTQ labels
  - ▶ These generations tends to consider “Queer” an offensive term, uses “Questioning”
- ▶ Consider this generation’s long-standing battle to gain visibility via terminology (and thereby, a sense of identity)
- ▶ Younger generations tend to resist labeling
  - ▶ These generations are more likely to identify as bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer, questioning, if any labels are preferred at all
- ▶ Better approach to view individuals as individuals, allow them to label themselves if they choose to do so



# Pronouns

- ▶ Pronouns generally defined by gender identity, not by biological sex
  - ▶ Should always use pronouns preferred by individual, regardless
- ▶ She/her/hers – feminine
- ▶ He/him/his – masculine
- ▶ Ze/Hir – Gender neutral (many different gender-neutral pronouns, incl. “they”)
- ▶ Some individuals prefer no pronouns at all
  - ▶ “Matt went to Matt’s car to get Matt’s presentation slides because Matt is a space cadet.”
- ▶ “What are your pronouns?”
  - ▶ Young individuals may not know what you mean/may not have thought about it before
  - ▶ Don’t use as a blanket question for all people, strangers and friends alike

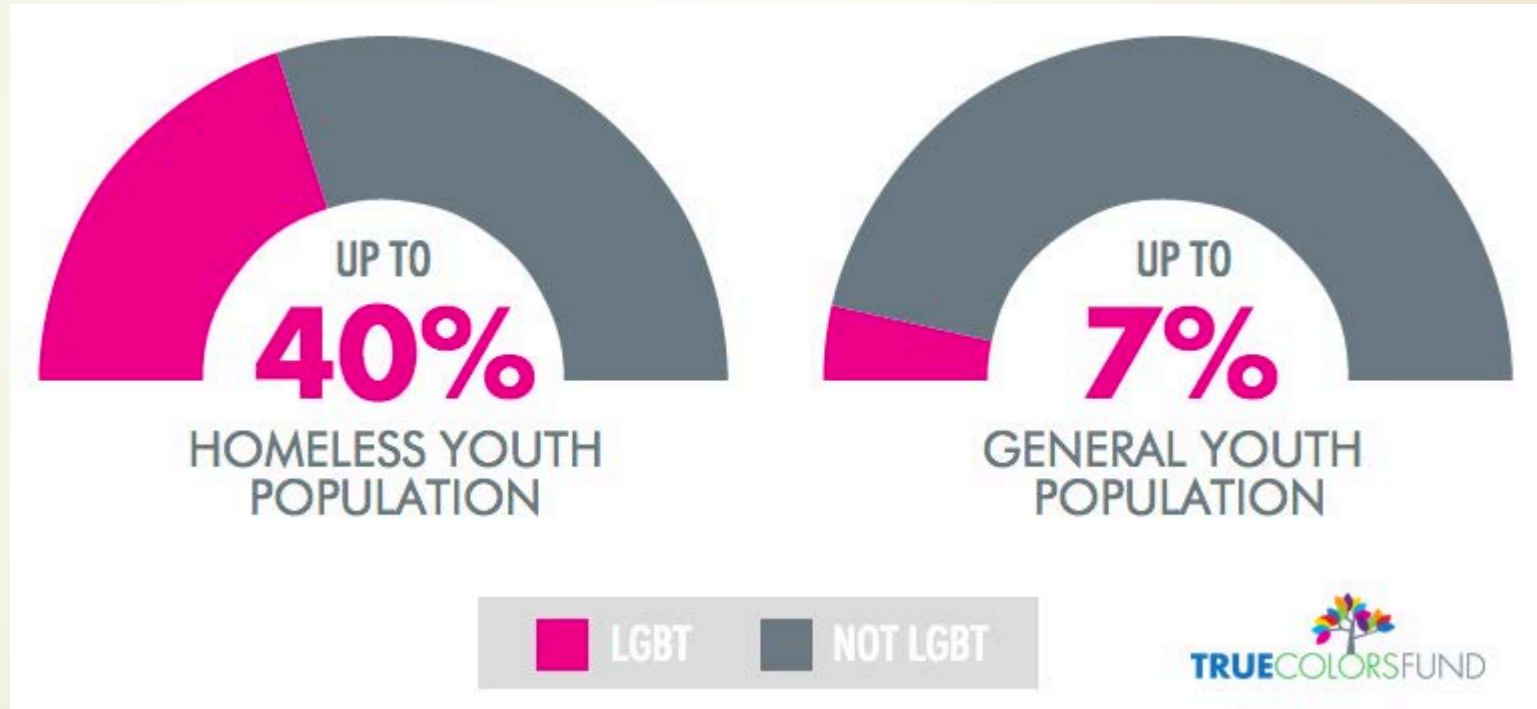




# Questions about LGBTQ Basics?



# LGBTQ Youth Homeless Statistics National

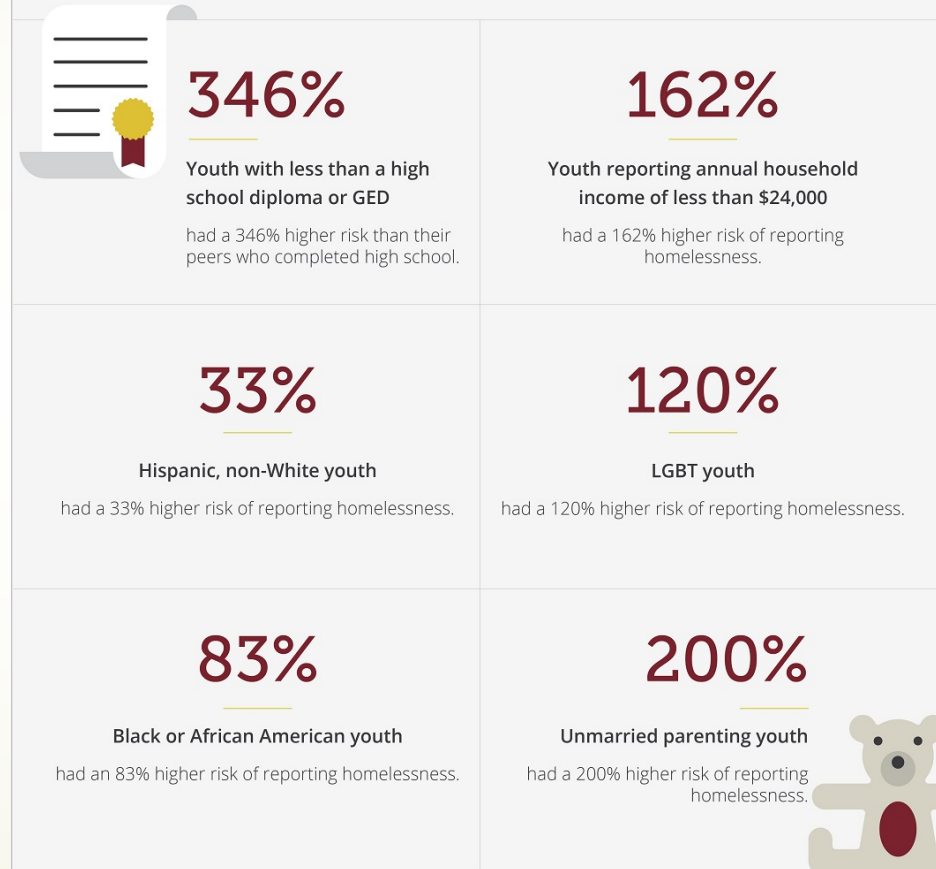


# LGBTQ Youth Homeless Statistics National

- ▶ November 2017
- ▶ University of Chicago's Youth Count Initiative

**Figure 5.** Youth at Greater Risk of Experiencing Homelessness

Statistics describe the relative risk of certain groups of young adults, 18-25, having reported "explicit homelessness" in the last 12 months.




According to the Director of Street Outreach Services in Akron, approximately half of homeless youth served identify as LGBTQ

2017 CMOR survey in Summit County showed 6.9% (N=780) of residents identify as LGBTQ

2016 5-year national Gallup survey showed 4.1% (N=1.6 million) U.S. residents identify as LGBTQ

No formal local study conducted specifically related to youth homelessness



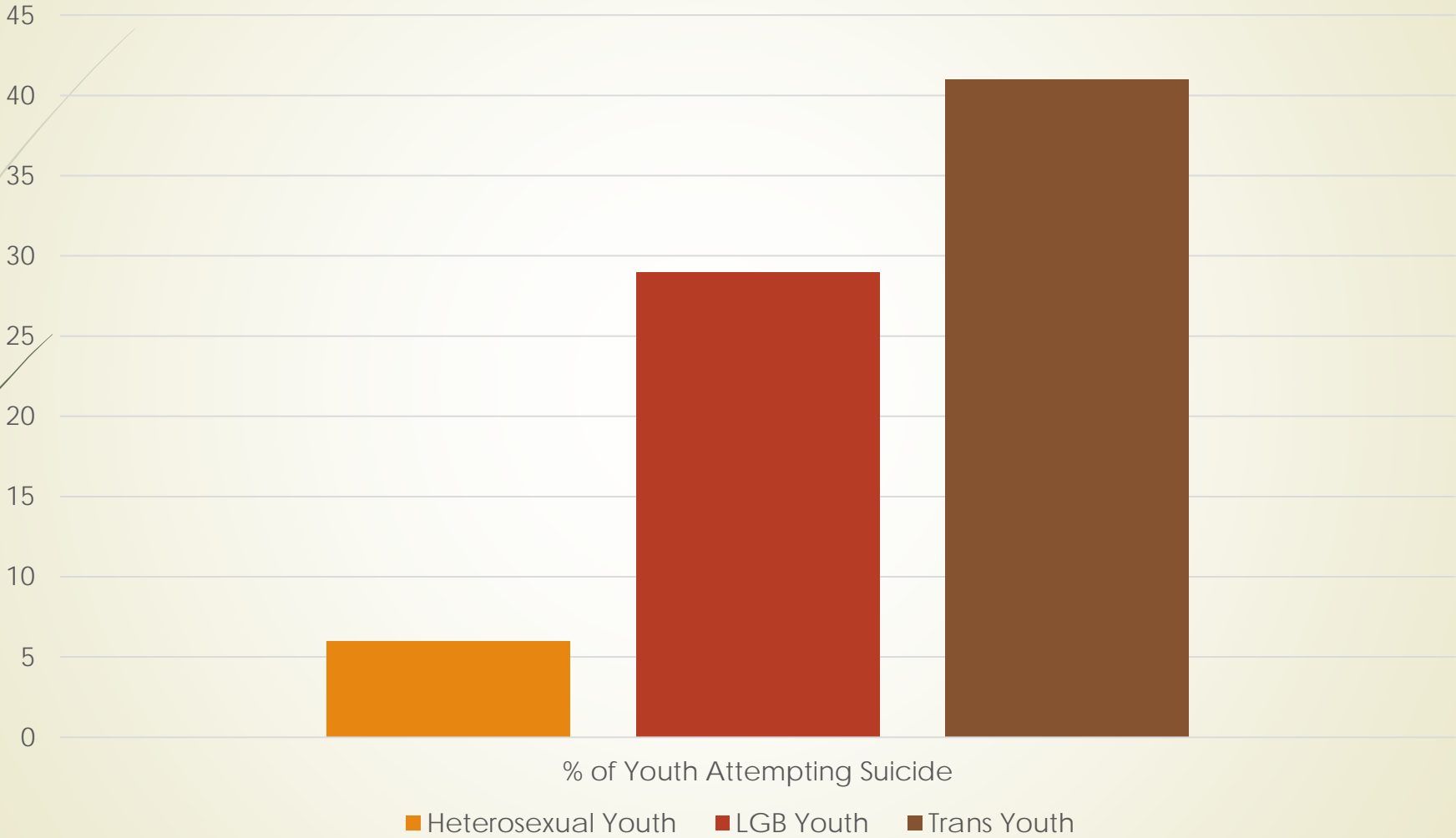
LGBTQ  
Youth  
Homeless  
Statistics  
Local

# Differences in Youth Populations Acceptance, Fear, Bullying

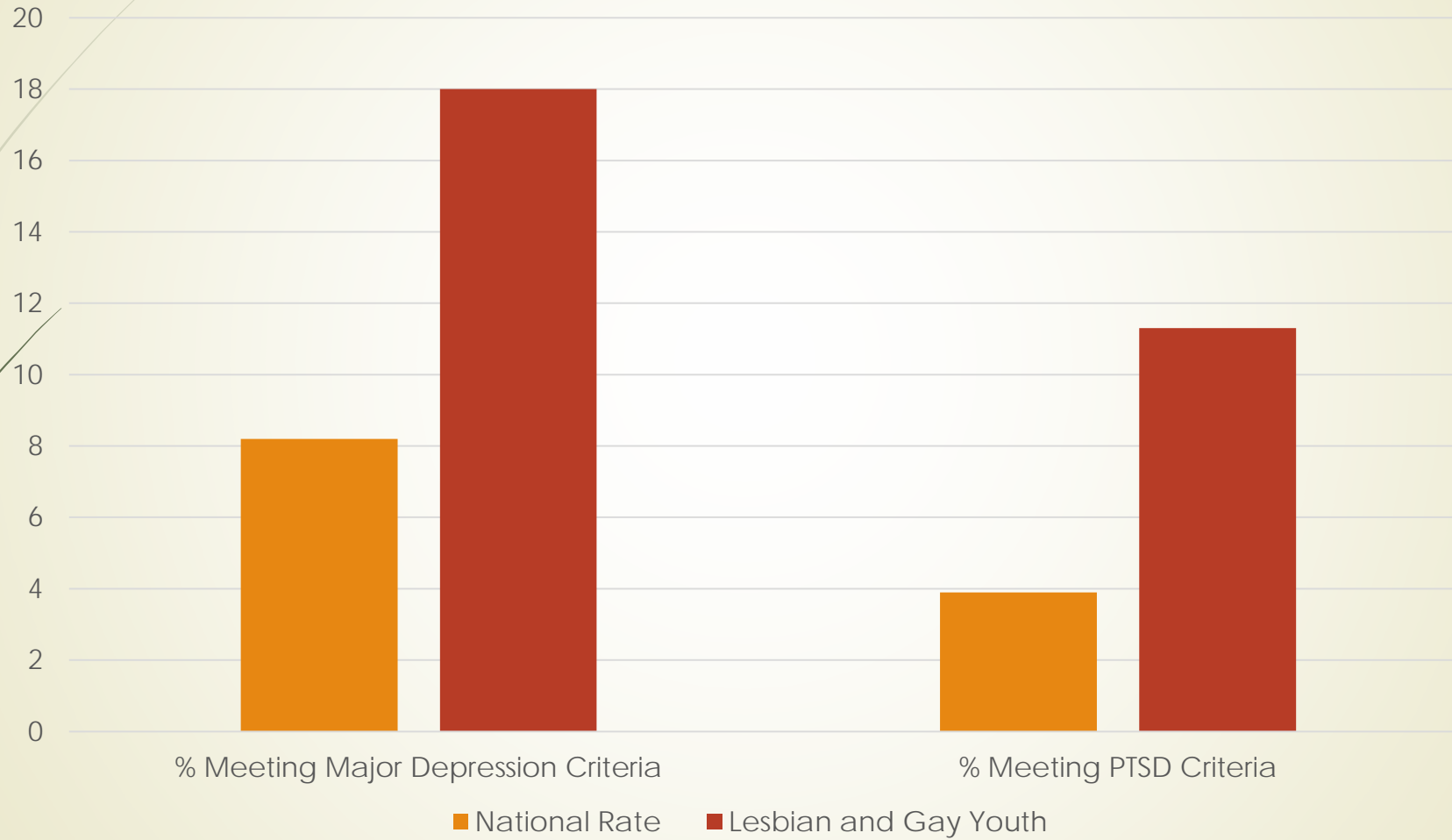


LGB students 140% more likely to skip school due to safety concerns compared with heterosexual students

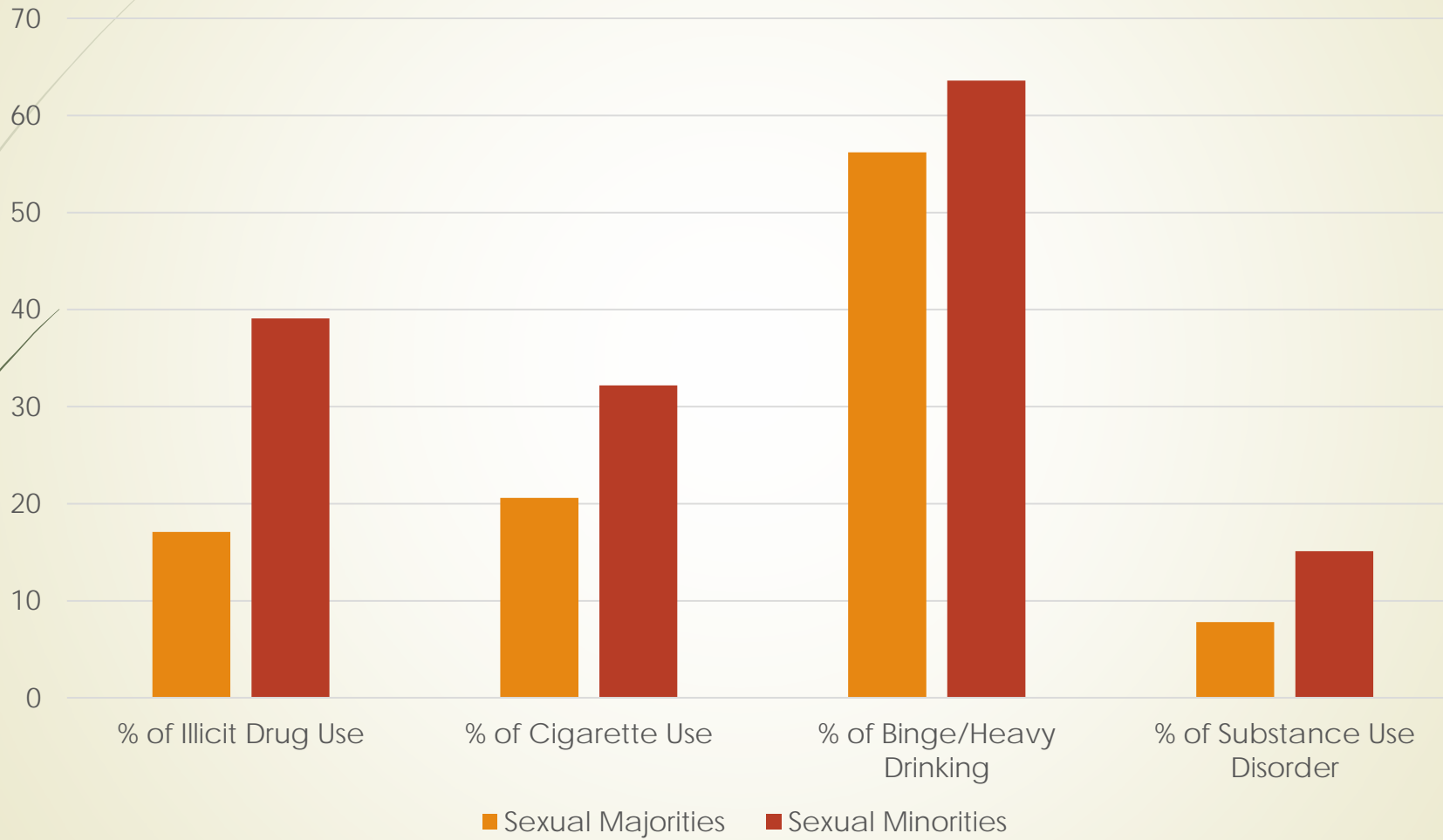
# Suicide Disparities Among Youth Populations (By Percentage)




## Mental Health Disparities Among Youth Populations (By Percentage)



## Substance Misuse Disparities Among Populations (By Percentage)









# Differences in Youth Populations Domestic Violence

- ▶ According to the CDC's 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey
- ▶ 44% of lesbians and 61% of bisexual women experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner vs. 35% heterosexual women
- ▶ Among men who cohabitated with same-sex partners, 23.1% had experienced rape, physical assault or stalking by an intimate partner vs. 7.4% of men who cohabitated with women only
- ▶ 40% of gay men and 47% of bisexual men have experienced sexual violence other than rape, compared to 21% of heterosexual men



# The Cycle of Homelessness

- ▶ Once a household becomes homeless, they are more likely to have homelessness episodes in the future and/or become chronically homeless
  - ▶ Mental health diagnoses, substance misuse, and domestic violence increase rate of homelessness
  - ▶ Homelessness increase rate of mental health diagnoses, substance misuse, and domestic violence
  - ▶ Consider lack of support system as individuals contradict societal norms, cannot self-resolve via parents or other family
- 



# Existing Resources for Homeless Youth (and lack thereof)

- ▶ Critical lack of youth shelters in the Northeast Ohio area
- ▶ Local Children Services Organization
- ▶ Street Outreach Services, Akron
  - ▶ Drop-in only (no overnight stays)
  - ▶ Not LGBTQ-specific
- ▶ Westhaven Youth Shelter, Cleveland
  - ▶ Up to 10 kids for up to 15 days each
  - ▶ Not LGBTQ-specific
- ▶ Summit County Continuum of Care is applying for a federal grant to fund youth homeless initiatives



# Survival Tactics

- ▶ Survival Sex
  - ▶ Prostitution engaged in by a person because of their extreme need (trading sex for food, a place to sleep, other basic needs, or drugs)
- ▶ 2015 Urban Institute Study of 283 LGBTQ Youth engaging in survival sex
  - ▶ 5% identified as white vs 90% identifying as persons of color
  - ▶ 20% were trans or gender-expansive



# Story Time





# A Culturally-Competent Approach

- ▶ Understand and respect LGBTQ communities
- ▶ Don't challenge a client's identity
  - ▶ Your client's circumstances didn't "make them this way"
- ▶ Create a safe and non-judgmental space
- ▶ Leave out personal bias
- ▶ Don't make assumptions about cause/effect
- ▶ Don't assume all clients want/need the same things
- ▶ Promote self-efficacy and client-centric goal setting
- ▶ Affirm the client's inherent value



# Thank you!

- ▶ Slides: [www.canapi.org/slides](http://www.canapi.org/slides)
  - ▶ Cannot be found through regular navigation menu
- ▶ Additional Questions: [info@canapi.org](mailto:info@canapi.org)
- ▶ Social Media
  - ▶ [Facebook.com/mycanapi](https://www.facebook.com/mycanapi)

**Cultural Influences and Health Care Series:  
LGBTQ Youth Homelessness**

*March 15, 2018*

*Stark County Cultural Competence Learning Community & Committee (SC3C)*

**WEBSITES & DATA RESOURCES**

***General Resources***

Domestic Violence Project, Inc. Canton/Massillon

[dvpi.squawqr.com/](http://dvpi.squawqr.com/)

Compass Sexual Assault

[compassrapecrisis.org/](http://compassrapecrisis.org/)

Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative – Youth Homelessness Support

[canapi.org/](http://canapi.org/)

Teen Pride Network

[canapi.org/teen-pride-network/](http://canapi.org/teen-pride-network/)

Equality Ohio

[equalityohio.org/](http://equalityohio.org/)

META Center Inc.

[facebook.com/Metacenterinc/](https://facebook.com/Metacenterinc/)

Battered Women’s Shelter and Rape Crisis Center- Summit and Medina Counties

<http://hopeandhealingresources.org/>

One Eighty -Wayne County

[one-eighty.org](http://one-eighty.org)

LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland- Youth homelessness support

[lgbtcleveland.org/index.html](http://lgbtcleveland.org/index.html)

SAGE Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders - Cleveland

[sageusa.org/advocacy/sagenet-affiliate.cfm?ID=28](http://sageusa.org/advocacy/sagenet-affiliate.cfm?ID=28)



RAINN: Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network Guide to Local Crisis Centers  
[centers.rainn.org/](http://centers.rainn.org/)

### **Education Resources**

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, Inc., GLSEN Northeast Ohio:  
[glsen.org/chapters/neo](http://glsen.org/chapters/neo)

Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO)  
[bravo-ohio.org/](http://bravo-ohio.org/)

Safe Zone  
[bravo-ohio.worldsecursystems.com/szhome](http://bravo-ohio.worldsecursystems.com/szhome)

Kaleidoscope Youth Center  
[kycoho.org/](http://kycoho.org/)

Trans Ohio  
[transohio.org/](http://transohio.org/)

Star House Columbus- Youth Homelessness Support  
<http://starhousecolumbus.org/>

Light House Youth & Family Services Cincinnati – Youth Homelessness Support  
[lys.org](http://lys.org)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health: National Resources  
[cdc.gov/lgbthealth/](http://cdc.gov/lgbthealth/)

### **Support Group Resources**

TRANS Family Equality Respect Canton:  
[facebook.com/transgequilityrespectfamily/?ref=br\\_rs](https://facebook.com/transgequilityrespectfamily/?ref=br_rs)

PFLAG Akron Chapter  
[pflag.org/chapter/pflag-akron](http://pflag.org/chapter/pflag-akron)

Trans Alive Akron  
[sites.google.com/a/transfamily.org/transfamily/events/akron-meetings](https://sites.google.com/a/transfamily.org/transfamily/events/akron-meetings)

OutSupport Medina

[outsupport.org/](https://outsupport.org/)

PRISM – Wayne County

[facebook.com/prismofwaynecounty/](https://facebook.com/prismofwaynecounty/)

### ***Physical and Sexual Health Resources***

Canton City Health Department HIV Counseling, Testing and Referral; STD Testing

[cantonhealth.org/](https://cantonhealth.org/)

Equitas Health - Canton

[equitashealth.com/locations/canton/](https://equitashealth.com/locations/canton/)

Planned Parenthood - Canton

[plannedparenthood.org/health-center/ohio/canton/44709/canton-health-center-2464-91230/lgbt](https://plannedparenthood.org/health-center/ohio/canton/44709/canton-health-center-2464-91230/lgbt)

Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative

[canapi.org/](https://canapi.org/)

### ***Mental Health & Substance Abuse Resources***

Gay & Sober

[gayandsober.org/meeting-finder-ohio](https://gayandsober.org/meeting-finder-ohio)

The Crisis Intervention and Recovery Center

[circstark.org/](https://circstark.org/)

NAMI – LGBTQ

[nami.org/Find-Support/LGBTQ](https://nami.org/Find-Support/LGBTQ)

Phoenix Rising Behavioral Healthcare and Recovery, Inc.

[phoenixrisingbhr.org/](https://phoenixrisingbhr.org/)

The Trevor Project Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention

[thetrevorproject.org](https://thetrevorproject.org)

SAMHSA – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT):

[samhsa.gov/behavioral-health-equity/lgbt](https://samhsa.gov/behavioral-health-equity/lgbt)

**LGBTQ EVENTS**

Cleveland Pride (June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018)

[lgbtcleveland.org/pride-in-the-cle.html](http://lgbtcleveland.org/pride-in-the-cle.html)

Columbus Pride (June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

[columbuspride.org/](http://columbuspride.org/)

Sandusky Pride (June 21-24)

[facebook.com/events/403110870102861/](https://facebook.com/events/403110870102861/)

Youngstown Pride (July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018)

[facebook.com/Youngstown-Pride-Festival-248169855356329/](https://facebook.com/Youngstown-Pride-Festival-248169855356329/)

Cincinnati Pride (June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)

[cincinnatipride.org/](http://cincinnatipride.org/)

Toledo Pride (August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

[toledopride.com/](http://toledopride.com/)

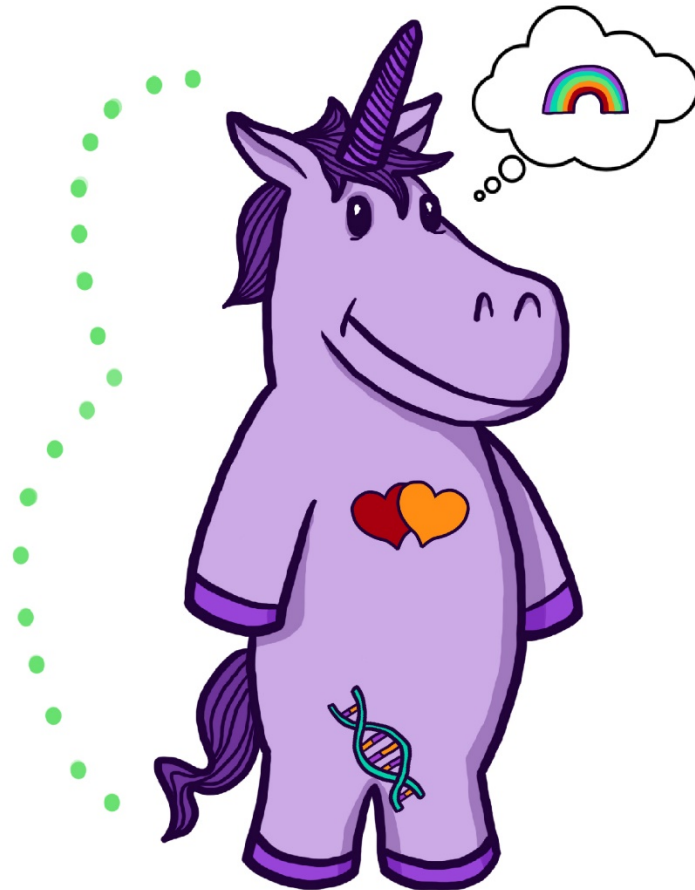
Akron Pride Festival (August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

[akronpridefestival.org/](http://akronpridefestival.org/)

FUNDED BY

# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



## Gender Identity

-  Female/Woman/Girl
-  Male/Man/Boy
-  Other Gender(s)

## Gender Expression

-  Feminine
-  Masculine
-  Other

## Sex Assigned at Birth

-  Female
-  Male
-  Other/Intersex

## Physically Attracted to

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

## Emotionally Attracted to

-  Women
-  Men
-  Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore



## Glossary of LGBT Terms for Health Care Teams

---

As a provider in a health center or other health care organization, becoming familiar with terms used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) communities can help you provide these patients with the highest quality care. In this glossary, you will find some of the terms most relevant to the health care of LGBT people. When reading this glossary, here are a few things to keep in mind: 1) Definitions vary across communities; not all of your LGBT patients will agree with all of these definitions; 2) There are many terms not included on this list; we tried to keep the list as concise and relevant to health care providers as possible; 3) Terms and definitions change frequently; we will try to update this list to keep up with changing language. If you have a suggestion, please email us at [lgbthealtheducation@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:lgbthealtheducation@fenwayhealth.org).

**Agender** (adj.) – Describes a person who identifies as having no gender.

**Ally** (noun) – A person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBT people.

**Aromantic** (adj.) – An orientation that describes a person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in forming romantic relationships.

**Asexual** (adj.) – Describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others. Asexuality is not the same as celibacy.

**Assigned sex at birth** (noun) – The sex (male or female) assigned to a child at birth, most often based on the child's external anatomy. Also referred to as birth sex, natal sex, biological sex, or sex.

**Bigender** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity is a combination of two genders.

**Binding** (verb) – The process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts. This is achieved through use of constrictive materials such as cloth strips, elastic or non-elastic bandages, or specially designed undergarments.

**Biphobia** (noun) – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of bisexual people or those who are perceived as such.

**Bisexual** (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender and people of other genders.

**Bottom surgery** (noun) – Colloquial way of describing gender affirming genital surgery.

**Cisgender** (adj.) – A person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth correspond (i.e., a person who is not transgender).

**Coming out** (verb) – The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexual orientation or gender identity (to come out to oneself). Also the process by which one shares one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others (to come out to friends, etc.).

**Cross-sex hormone therapy** (noun) – The administration of hormones for those who wish to match their physical secondary sex characteristics to their gender identity.

**Disorders of Sex Development** (DSD) (noun) – Group of rare conditions where the reproductive organs and genitals do not develop as expected. Some DSDs include Klinefelter Syndrome and Androgen Sensitivity Syndrome. Sometimes called differences of sex development. Some people prefer to use the term intersex.

**Drag** (verb) – The performance of one or multiple genders theatrically. Those who perform are called Drag Kings and Drag Queens.

**Gay** (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender. It can be used regardless of gender identity, but is more commonly used to describe men.

**Gender affirming surgery** (GAS) (noun) – Surgeries used to modify one's body to be more congruent with one's gender identity. Also referred to as sex reassignment surgery (SRS) or gender confirming surgery (GCS).

**Gender binary** (noun) – The idea that there are only two genders, male and female, and that a person must strictly fit into one category or the other.

**Gender dysphoria** (noun) – Distress experienced by some individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their assigned sex at birth. Manifests itself as clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) includes gender dysphoria as a diagnosis.

**Gender expression** (noun) – The way a person acts, dresses, speaks, and behaves (i.e., feminine, masculine, androgynous). Gender expression does not necessarily correspond to assigned sex at birth or gender identity.

**Gender fluid** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more one gender some days, and another gender other days.

**Gender identity** (noun) – A person’s internal sense of being a man/male, woman/female, both, neither, or another gender.

**Gender non-conforming** (adj.) – Describes a gender expression that differs from a given society’s norms for males and females.

**Gender role** (noun) – A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived sex.

**Genderqueer** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary. Other terms for people whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary include gender variant, gender expansive, etc. Sometimes written as two words (gender queer).

**Heteronormativity** (noun) – The assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

**Heterosexual** (straight) (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes women who are emotionally and sexually attracted to men, and men who are emotionally and sexually attracted to women.

**Homophobia** (noun) – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of lesbian or gay people or those who are perceived as such.

**Intersectionality** (noun) – The idea that identities are influenced and shaped by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality/sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, physical disability, national origin, etc., as well as by the interconnection of all of those characteristics.

**Intersex** (noun) – Group of rare conditions where the reproductive organs and genitals do not develop as expected. Some prefer to use the term disorders (or differences) of sex development. Intersex is also used as an identity term by some community members and advocacy groups.

**Lesbian** (adj., noun) – A sexual orientation that describes a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women.

**Men who have sex with men/Women who have sex with women (MSM/WSW)** (noun) – Categories that are often used in research and public health settings to collectively describe those who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, regardless of their sexual orientation. However, people rarely use the terms MSM or WSW to describe themselves.

**Minority stress** (noun) – Chronic stress faced by members of stigmatized minority groups. Minority stress is caused by external, objective events and conditions, expectations of such events, the internalization of societal attitudes, and/or concealment of one's sexual orientation.

**Outing** (verb) – Involuntary or unwanted disclosure of another person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Pangender** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity is comprised of many genders.

**Pansexual** (adj.) – A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people regardless of gender.

**Polyamorous** (adj.) – Describes a person who has or is open to having more than one romantic or sexual relationship at a time, with the knowledge and consent of all their partners. Sometimes abbreviated as poly.

**QPOC** (noun) – An acronym that stands for Queer Person of Color or Queer People of Color.

**Queer** (adj.) – An umbrella term used by some to describe people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms. Some people view the term queer as more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. Due to its history as a derogatory term, the term queer is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBT community.

**Questioning** (adj.) – Describes an individual who is unsure about or is exploring their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Same gender loving (SGL)** (adj.) – A term used as an alternative to the terms gay and lesbian. SGL is more commonly but not exclusively used by members of the African American/Black community.



**Same-sex attraction (SSA)** (noun) – A term that is used to describe the experience of a person who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Individuals using this term may not feel comfortable using the language of sexual orientation (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual) for personal reasons. Use of this term is not indicative of a person’s sexual behavior. It is used most commonly in religious communities.

**Sexual orientation** (noun) – How a person characterizes their emotional and sexual attraction to others.

**Social stigma** (noun) – Negative stereotypes and social status of a person or group based on perceived characteristics that separate that person or group from other members of a society.

**Structural stigma** (noun) – Societal conditions, policies, and institutional practices that restrict the opportunities, resources, and well-being of certain groups of people.

**Top surgery** (noun) – Colloquial way of describing gender affirming surgery on the chest.

**Trans man/transgender man/female-to-male (FTM)** (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is male may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will just use the term man.

**Trans woman/transgender woman/male-to-female (MTF)** (noun) – A transgender person whose gender identity is female may use these terms to describe themselves. Some will just use the term woman.

**Transfeminine** (adj.) – Describes people who were assigned male at birth, but identify with femininity to a greater extent than with masculinity.

**Transgender** (adj.) – Describes a person whose gender identity and assigned sex at birth do not correspond. Also used as an umbrella term to include gender identities outside of male and female. Sometimes abbreviated as trans.

**Transition** (noun) – For transgender people, this refers to the process of coming to recognize, accept, and express one’s gender identity. Most often, this refers to the period when a person makes social, legal, and/or medical changes, such as changing their clothing, name, sex designation, and using medical interventions. Sometimes referred to as gender affirmation process.

**Transmasculine** (adj.) – Describes people who were assigned female at birth, but identify with masculinity to a greater extent than with femininity.

**Transphobia** (noun) – The fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of transgender or gender non-conforming people or those who are perceived as such.

**Transsexual** (adj.) – Sometimes used in medical literature or by some transgender people to describe those who have transitioned through medical interventions.

**Tucking** (verb) – The process of hiding one’s penis and testes with tape, tight shorts, or specially designed undergarments.

**Two-Spirit** (adj.) – A contemporary term that connects today's experiences of LGBT Native American and American Indian people with the traditions from their cultures.

## Outdated Terms to Avoid

The following terms may have been used in the past, but are now considered outdated and sometimes offensive. We recommend replacing these words with the suggested terms provided.

Berdache	See <b>two-spirit</b> .
Hermaphrodite	See <b>intersex/disorders of sex development</b> .
Homosexual	See <b>gay</b> or <b>lesbian</b> .
Sexual preference	See <b>sexual orientation</b> .
Transgendered/A transgender/Tranny	See <b>transgender</b> .
Sex change	See <b>gender affirmation surgery</b> .

## A Note about Acronyms

There are many acronyms that are used in the LGBT community. The National LGBT Education Center uses LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. When discussing adolescents or youth we use LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. Other acronyms may use any combination of the following: LGBTQIAAP2S: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, Pansexual, Two-Spirit.

## Sources

Definitions for this glossary were developed and reviewed by the National LGBT Health Education Center and other experts in the field of LGBT health, as well as adapted from glossaries published by the Safe Zone Project and the UCLA LGBT Resource Center.



NATIONAL LGBT HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

TEL 617.927.6354 WEB [lgbthealtheducation.org](http://lgbthealtheducation.org) EMAIL [lgbthealtheducation@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:lgbthealtheducation@fenwayhealth.org)

THE FENWAY INSTITUTE 1340 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02215

This project was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under cooperative agreement number U30CS22742, Training and Technical Assistance National Cooperative Agreements (NCAs) for \$449,985.00 with 0% of the total NCA project financed with non-federal sources. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.

# Some Considerations When Working with LGBT Students of Color

All students deserve a safe and affirming school environment. More than 20 years of GLSEN work and research proves that 1) supportive school staff, 2) inclusive curriculum, 3) GSAs (and other student-led clubs) and 4) comprehensive and enumerated policies help to improve school climate, academic achievement and student well-being.

When working with LGBT students of color<sup>1</sup>, there are a number of additional concerns that should be taken into consideration. It is crucial to see students through a holistic lens, one that recognizes and tries to understand the complex identities and experiences that shape each individual.

The following considerations are meant to help you think more deeply about the experiences of LGBT students of color and their needs. It is not an exhaustive list, but one that was created in hopes of inspiring additional thoughts and questions amongst school staff.

We encourage you to read, consider and try out some of the suggestions on the following pages.



**HETRICK-MARTIN INSTITUTE**  
EMPOWERMENT, EDUCATION & ADVOCACY FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

**GLSEN**<sup>®</sup>

## TALK ABOUT IT

### The Need:

LGBT students of color face multiple forms of oppression in their lives and may feel isolated and/or invisible at school. Challenging all forms of oppression and empowering students and staff begins with recognizing existing issues of bias and facilitating open dialogue about how these biases affect others. Bringing these topics out into the open allows for healthy and productive opportunities for students and colleagues to ask questions, share their own personal feelings and experiences, and learn from each other.

### The Challenge:

In a school setting, discussing issues of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression can be intimidating. You may have concerns that by bringing these topics up, especially as they relate to your students, you do more harm than good. It may seem like you are opening a can of worms or that you might lose control, with challenging student responses, potentially angry parents and unsupportive school leadership.

### Try This:

- Reflect on your school climate and culture with colleagues, paying close attention to the experience of LGBT students of color at your school and how institutional oppression and individual acts of bias and prejudice may impact them.
- Talk about anti-LGBT bias, racism and other forms of oppression with students in your school. Ask open ended questions in the classroom, allowing students to share their thoughts and personalize their feelings and experiences.
- Develop discussion groups with other staff in your school where you can talk about and work through questions of diversity, challenges regarding bias, and strategies for engagement.

<sup>1</sup>LGBT students of color are defined as those students who identify as both having an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning) and person of color identity. The term "person of color" is; 1) regarded as acceptable when groups or individuals use it to name themselves; 2) often refers to African-American/black, Latino/Hispanic, Native American/First Nation, Asian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and people of mixed ancestry as people of color; 3) an expression in English usage for any nonwhite category.

## AFFIRM COMPLEX IDENTITIES

### The Need:

All students benefit from learning environments in which they are seen as a whole person, and where their various identities, experiences, abilities and needs are taken into account.

LGBT students of color, like all students, are not a monolithic group; they represent a diverse range of race, ethnicity, religion, community and culture. Even within a particular ethnic group, student experiences may vary widely. Also, LGBT students of color may feel conflicted about acknowledging all parts of themselves and struggle in their efforts to combine their racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, sexual and gender identities.

### The Challenge:

The identities and needs of LGBT students of color vary widely depending on their environmental context (access to resources, experiences affirmation/discrimination, sources of support, etc.). You may be unfamiliar with the nuances of your students' racial, ethnic, religious, cultural sexual and gender identities. Additionally, you may feel that you lack the resources to meet the needs of such a diverse population.

### Try This:

- Step out of the “box” and search out opportunities to experience cultures, traditions, and communities different than your own. Take on the task of becoming culturally aware. Work to recognize and challenge your own personal biases and misconceptions.
- Learn from your students and their families. Ask questions about their cultures, traditions, communities, experiences, and feelings to ensure that your behavior is respectful and inclusive. At the same time, ensure that these conversations do not tokenize or place the full burden of explanation on students and their families.
- Acknowledge the fact that each student comes with a unique personal story and set of experiences. Seek to affirm each aspect of their identity and model a way in which they can do the same for themselves.

## SUPPORT STUDENT RESILIENCE

### The Need:

LGBT students of color face multiple forms of oppression in their daily lives, based on their real or perceived racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, sexual and gender identities. Because of these experiences and learned coping skills from family and community, one study finds that LGB students are often more resilient when faced with adversity than their white LGB counterparts. LGBT students of color need educators who recognize and affirm all parts of their identity and the internal resilience and resources they possess.

### The Challenge:

Despite common misconceptions, LGBT students of color, as with LGBT students in general, do not necessarily need counseling or therapy, but instead opportunities and encouragement to build upon their existing internal resilience factors, coping strategies and leadership skills. Supports that are developed should be strengths-based and informed by Positive Youth Development<sup>3</sup> approaches.

While LGBT students of color are often targeted for their real or perceived identities, many are capable of being quite strong in the face of adversity. As an educator, it can be difficult to find a balance between intervention (protecting/saving) and empowerment (affirming/encouraging).<sup>2</sup>

### Try This:

- Assess the extent to which LGBT students of color engage in extra-curricular activities. Encourage your LGBT students of color to take on leadership roles within the school, including student government, sports, and other extra-curricular activities.
- Expose your students to the lives and stories of LGBT people of color who may serve as role models by including them in curriculum, school presentations and displays.
- Be a faculty sponsor for your school's GSA, diversity club and/or other student-led groups.
- When a student confides in you about their identity, thank them, listen to their story and ask if/how you can help. When a student comes forward to report bullying, intervene immediately.

<sup>2</sup>Meyer, I.H. (2010). Identity, Stress, and Resilience in Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals of Color. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 38 (3), 442-454.

<sup>3</sup>Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an area of research, a modality of practice and a framework of perspective which posits that when youth are engaged from their strengths they build the necessary skill for a healthy transition into adulthood. For more information, visit: [http://www.actforyouth.net/youth\\_development/development/](http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/development/)

## INTERVENE AND PREVENT

### The Need:

LGBT students of color, and all students, deserve learning environments that are safe and affirming. They may face bullying and harassment at school based on a number of factors relating to their multiple identities. It is not unusual for LGBT students of color to be the targets of racist and homophobic/transphobic acts. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that LGBT and non-LGBT students of color are disproportionately impacted by criminalization and harmful policing practices.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Only safe and supportive environments provide opportunities for students to achieve at their highest potential. You must be prepared to intervene appropriately when bias-based incidents occur and take proactive steps to create and sustain a healthy and respectful school environment.

### The Challenge:

If you are like most school staff, you have many responsibilities and never enough time to focus solely on any single one. Test scores, standards, IEPs and other systemic factors can make it hard enough to focus on academic learning, let alone school climate. Adding the need for culturally responsive intervention and prevention strategies can seem like an additional and impossible challenge.

### Try This:

- When you witness bias-based behavior of any kind, stop it and name it.
- Consider the ways your school's intervention policies and practices impact LGBT students of color.
- Work to support efforts to replace Zero-Tolerance policies with those that allow for nuance, education and growth, such as restorative practices or positive behavioral interventions and supports.<sup>7</sup> Apply these practices to your interaction with students.

## PARTNER WITH EXTERNAL RESOURCES

### The Need:

While your school has the obligation to serve each student as comprehensively as possible, it may not be possible to provide the entire social-emotional supports to LGBT students of color within the school environment. You should know which outside agencies to refer LGBT students of color to for support that cannot be offered within your school and you should know when it is appropriate.

### The Challenge:

Referring students to an outside agency for support can be a challenge, especially if you are unfamiliar with the services offered within your community, or their culture and/or language. You may also face resistance from school leadership.

### Try This:

- If a student expresses the need for support within a racial/ethnic/religious community that you may not share, reach out to colleagues and/or community leaders of a similar identity. Invite them to be a source of affirmation and support to the student.
- Reach out to the school counselor, school social worker and other school staff who are familiar with youth service agencies and can assist you in making a referral.
- Contact your local LGBT center and ask for specific programs aimed at reaching the community your student belongs to.

<sup>4</sup>Stoudt, Brett G., Michelle Fine, and Madeline Fox. "Growing Up Policed in the Age of Aggressive Policing Policies." *New York Law School Law Review* 56 (2011): 1331-370. Print.

<sup>5</sup>Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011.

<sup>6</sup>Rios, Victor M. "The Hyper-Criminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth in the Era of Mass Incarceration." *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 8, no. 2 (2006): 40-54.

<sup>7</sup>For more information, please view: [http://www.dignityinschools.org/sites/default/files/Creating\\_Positive\\_Discipline\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.dignityinschools.org/sites/default/files/Creating_Positive_Discipline_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

AN ALLY'S GUIDE TO

# TERMINOLOGY



Talking About LGBT People & Equality



## INTRODUCTION

The words we use to talk about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people and issues can have a powerful impact on our conversations. The right words can help open people’s hearts and minds, while others can create distance or confusion. For example, the abbreviation “LGBT” is commonly used within the movement for lesbian, gay, bi and transgender equality, but it can be confusing and alienating to people who don’t understand what it means (for many media and mainstream audiences, the term *gay and transgender* is more accessible without being overwhelming).

Designed for new allies who want to support LGBT Americans but often face an array of confusing terminology and language, this short guide offers an overview of essential vocabulary, terms to avoid, and a few key messages for talking about various issues. The **Talking About LGBT Issues** series, available online at [www.lgbtmap.org/talking-about-lgbt-issues-series](http://www.lgbtmap.org/talking-about-lgbt-issues-series) and [www.glaad.org/talkingabout](http://www.glaad.org/talkingabout), provides additional recommendations and resources.

## GAY, LESBIAN & BI

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>gay</b> (adj.)</li> <li>• <b>lesbian</b> (n. or adj.)</li> <li>• <b>bi</b> (adj.)</li> <li>• <b>bisexual</b> (adj., if needed on first reference for clarity)</li> </ul>	<p>“gay people”</p> <p>“gay man/men”</p> <p>“lesbian couple”</p> <p>“bi men and women”</p> <p>“He is gay.” / “She is a lesbian.” / “He is bi.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “homosexual”</li> <li>• “gay” (n.) (as in, “He is a gay.”)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Gay</i> is an adjective, not a noun; it is sometimes used as a shorthand term encompassing gay, lesbian and bisexual orientations (though not transgender people or gender identity). Also, while many lesbians may identify as <i>gay</i>, the term <i>lesbian(s)</i> is clearer when talking only about a woman or women.</p> <p>Anti-gay activists often use words like “homosexual” to stigmatize gay people by reducing their lives to purely sexual terms.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>being gay</b></li> </ul>	<p>“She talked about being gay.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “homosexuality”</li> <li>• “lesbianism”</li> <li>• “That’s so gay.” (a hurtful slur)</li> </ul>	<p>Talking about a person’s “homosexuality” can, in some cases, reduce the life of that person to purely sexual terms. Talk about <i>being gay</i> instead.</p> <p>The term “lesbianism” is considered pejorative.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>orientation</b></li> <li>• <b>sexual orientation</b> (on first reference, if needed for clarity)</li> </ul>	<p>“a person’s orientation”</p> <p>“Sexual orientation can be a complex topic. A person’s orientation is...”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “sexual preference”</li> <li>• “gay lifestyle”</li> <li>• “homosexual lifestyle”</li> <li>• “same-sex attractions”</li> <li>• “sexual identity”</li> </ul>	<p>The term “sexual preference” is used by anti-gay activists to suggest that being gay is a choice, and therefore can be changed or “cured.” Similarly, the term “gay lifestyle” is used to stigmatize gay people and suggest that their lives should be viewed only through a sexual lens. Just as one would not talk about a “straight lifestyle,” don’t talk about a “gay lifestyle.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>gay and transgender</b></li> <li>• <b>lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender</b> (if needed for clarity)</li> </ul>	<p>“laws that protect gay and transgender people”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “LGBT” (when talking with those who are unfamiliar with the issues or not yet supportive)</li> </ul>	<p>Reference sexual orientation <u>and</u> gender identity when talking about issues pertaining to both. (See <b>Transgender</b> on the next page for more information.)</p> <p>The abbreviation “LGBT” can be confusing and alienating for those who are unfamiliar with the issues or not yet supportive—though it is essential when talking to LGBT and strongly supportive audiences. Use the term that allows your audience to stay focused on the message without creating confusion about your intended meaning.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>openly gay</b></li> </ul>	<p>“She is openly lesbian.” / “He is openly bi.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “admitted he was gay”</li> </ul>	<p>The term “admitted” suggests prior deception or that being gay is shameful.</p>



## TRANSGENDER

The term *transgender* refers to people whose gender identity (the sense of gender that every person feels inside) or gender expression is different from the sex that was assigned to them at birth. At some point in their lives, transgender people decide they must live their lives as the gender they have always known themselves to be, and often transition to living as that gender.

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>transgender (adj.)</li> </ul>	<p>"transgender person"</p> <p>"transgender advocate"</p> <p>"transgender inclusion"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"transgendered"</li> <li>"a transgender" (n.)</li> <li>"transgenders" (n.)</li> <li>"transvestite"</li> <li>"tranny"</li> </ul>	<p><i>Transgender</i> is an adjective, not a noun. Be careful not to call someone "a transgender." Do not add an unnecessary "-ed" to the term ("transgendered"), which connotes a condition of some kind. Never use the term "transvestite" to describe a transgender person.</p> <p>The shorthand <i>trans</i> is often used within the LGBT community, but may not be understood by general audiences.</p> <p>Always use a transgender person's chosen name. Also, a person who identifies as a certain gender should be referred to using pronouns consistent with that gender. When it isn't possible to ask what pronoun a person would prefer, use the pronoun that is consistent with the person's appearance and gender expression.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gender identity</li> <li>gender expression</li> </ul>	<p>"Everyone should be treated fairly, regardless of gender identity or expression."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"sexual identity" (the correct term is <i>gender identity</i>)</li> <li>"transgender identity" (use <i>gender identity</i> to refer to a person's internal sense of gender)</li> </ul>	<p>Not everyone who is transgender identifies that way; many transgender people simply identify as male or female. Also, note that <i>gender identity</i> (one's internal sense of gender) and <i>gender expression</i> (how a person outwardly expresses their gender) are not interchangeable terms.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>transition</li> </ul>	<p>"She began transitioning last year."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"sex change"</li> <li>"sex-change operation"</li> <li>"pre-operative" / "post-operative"</li> <li>"pre-op" / "post-op"</li> </ul>	<p><i>Transition</i> is the accurate term that does not fixate on surgeries, which many transgender people do not or cannot undergo. Terms like "pre-op" or "post-op" unnecessarily fixate on a person's anatomy and should be avoided.</p>

## OVERVIEW: TALKING ABOUT EQUALITY FOR LGBT PEOPLE

Effective conversations about LGBT issues frame those issues in authentic, emotionally compelling ways that resonate with people's values.

When conversations about equality are rooted in the common ground we share, it's difficult to cast LGBT people as being "other," "different" or "not like me." It also makes it more difficult for Americans to ignore or dismiss the harms and injustices that LGBT people face.

When talking about equality for LGBT people:

- Use the language of common values, beliefs, hopes and dreams.
- Make it about people and their stories, not policies.
- Remind people that LGBT people are everyday Americans who live ordinary lives. Gay and transgender people are neighbors, coworkers and friends who also walk the dog, mow the lawn, shop for groceries, etc.

For example: *"This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to pursue health and happiness, earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love."*

For more information, see [Talking About LGBT Issues: Overall Approaches](#), available at [www.lgbtmap.org](http://www.lgbtmap.org) and [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org).

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fairly and equally</li> <li>• fairness and equality</li> </ul>	<p>"Everyone should be treated fairly and equally."</p> <p>"She supports fairness and equality."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "rights"</li> <li>• "civil rights"</li> <li>• "gay rights"</li> </ul>	<p>"Rights" language is generally unpersuasive with most audiences, and civil rights comparisons can be especially alienating to African Americans.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intolerance</li> <li>• rejection</li> <li>• exclusion</li> <li>• unfairness</li> <li>• hurtfulness</li> </ul>	<p>"This is the kind of exclusion and intolerance that divides our community."</p> <p>"Rejection by one's family can be the most hurtful of all."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "hate" / "haters" / "hatred"</li> <li>• "bigot" / "bigots" / "bigotry"</li> <li>• "prejudice"</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid highly charged, argumentative terms like "hate" and "bigotry," which are likely to alienate people. Instead, use language that is measured and relatable to create empathy and a sense of how rejecting attitudes and actions hurt LGBT people.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anti-gay activists</li> <li>• far-right activists</li> </ul>	<p>"the hurtful rhetoric of anti-gay activists"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "religious extremists/ extremism"</li> <li>• "anti-gay Christians"</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid language that unfairly paints an entire religious tradition or denomination as being anti-gay or extremist.</p>

## TALKING ABOUT MARRIAGE FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES

In conversations about marriage for same-sex couples, it is important to:

- Focus on the values of marriage and what marriage is about: loving, committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other, for better and for worse.
- Help people understand and grapple with how same-sex couples are hurt when they are shut out of marriage—and help people think about how they would feel if someone told them that they couldn't marry the person they love.
- Remind people of how our shared beliefs—particularly in the Golden Rule, freedom, and not sitting in judgment of others—are at the heart of people's journeys toward supporting marriage.
- Don't be drawn into debating opponents' fear-based strategies. Instead, keep the conversation focused on why marriage matters—to you, and to the people you know and love.

For more information, see [An Ally's Guide to Talking About Marriage for Same-Sex Couples](#), available at [www.lgbtmap.org](http://www.lgbtmap.org), [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org) and [www.freedomtomarry.org](http://www.freedomtomarry.org).

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• marriage</li> <li>• exclusion from marriage</li> <li>• denial of marriage</li> </ul>	<p>"Denying someone the chance at happiness that comes with being married—just because they're gay—seems hurtful to me."</p> <p>"I believe in treating others the way I want to be treated. I wouldn't want anyone to tell me that I couldn't marry the person I love—and I don't want to do that to anyone else."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "gay marriage"</li> <li>• "same-sex marriage"</li> </ul>	<p>Gay couples and straight couples want to marry for similar reasons, and they seek to join the institution of marriage as it currently exists. Just as it would be inappropriate to call the marriage of two older adults "elder marriage," it is inappropriate to call the marriage of a same-sex couple "gay marriage" or "same-sex marriage." If additional clarity is needed, use <i>marriage for same-sex</i> (or <i>gay/gay and lesbian couples</i>).</p> <p>Also, while the term "marriage equality" can be helpful when talking with those who are supportive of marriage for same-sex couples, it can create confusion and barriers to understanding for other audiences. When possible, simply talk about <i>marriage</i>, without modifiers.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• love, commitment, responsibility, promise</li> <li>• taking care of the one you love</li> </ul>	<p>"Marriage is about loving, committed couples who want to make a lifelong promise to take care of and be responsible for each other, in good times and bad."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "marriage rights"</li> <li>• "marriage benefits"</li> </ul>	<p>There is sometimes a misperception that gay couples only marry for "rights" and "benefits." To avoid this, focus on the values of love, commitment and responsibility that gay couples bring to marriage, and the importance of a couple being able to take care of and be there for each other.</p> <p>Also, focus on how gay and straight couples alike share similar hopes and dreams for marriage. But instead of taking shortcuts by using phrases like "exactly the same" or "just the same," spend time exploring the common ground and values (like commitment, responsibility and love) that we share.</p>

**Note:** These approaches for talking about marriage can also be helpful in talking about other forms of relationship recognition, such as domestic partnerships or civil unions. However, note that in many states that allow domestic partnerships, same-sex couples have been barred from a dying partner's bedside and denied the ability to say goodbye to the person they love. That just doesn't happen when a couple is married, and it's one of the reasons why marriage matters to gay and straight couples alike.

## TALKING ABOUT NON-DISCRIMINATION LAWS

When talking about non-discrimination laws that protect LGBT people from being unjustly fired from their jobs, remind people of our common, shared values:

- **Fair and equal treatment, for everyone** (“All residents should be treated fairly and equally by the laws of our city/state.”)
- **The importance of hard work and the chance to earn a living** (“All hardworking people in our city/state, including gay and transgender people, should have the chance to earn a living and provide for themselves and their families. Nobody should have to live in fear that they can be legally fired for reasons that have nothing to do with their job performance.”)

For more information, see [Talking About Inclusive Employment Protections](#) and [Talking About Transgender-Inclusive Non-Discrimination Laws](#), available at [www.lgbtmap.org](http://www.lgbtmap.org) and [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org).

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>employment/workplace/housing protections</b></li> </ul>	<p>“This law protects high-performing workers from being unfairly fired just because they’re gay or transgender.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “rights”</li> <li>• “employment/housing rights”</li> </ul>	<p>Talking about “rights” in this context can make people think about opponents’ false claims about “special rights.” It can also make people resistant to the idea of non-discrimination protections.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>treating people fairly and equally</b></li> </ul>	<p>“All residents of our state should be treated fairly and equally.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “fighting discrimination”</li> </ul>	<p>There is a difference between referring to <i>non-discrimination laws</i> (a term that accurately describes these kinds of laws) and talking about “fighting discrimination,” which is generally unpersuasive and can lead to polarized, partisan reactions.</p>

## TALKING ABOUT OPEN MILITARY SERVICE

When talking about open military service:

- **Focus on how open military service—and ending the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell ban—supports a strong national defense.**
- **Talk about the shared values that open military service—and military service itself—embodies.**

For the latest updates on the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, visit Servicemembers Legal Defense Network ([www.sldn.org](http://www.sldn.org)).

For more information, see [Talking About Ending Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell](#), available at [www.lgbtmap.org](http://www.lgbtmap.org) and [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org).

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>open military service (or open service)</b></li> <li>• <b>gay (or gay and lesbian) service members/troops/personnel</b></li> </ul>	<p>“Strong majorities of Americans support open military service for gay and lesbian personnel.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “gays in the military”</li> <li>• “soldiers” (when broadly referring to the troops)</li> </ul>	<p>The term “soldiers” applies only to personnel serving in the U.S. Army. Use <i>service members</i>, <i>troops</i>, <i>personnel</i> or <i>military personnel</i> to describe those serving throughout our nation’s armed forces.</p> <p>Also, note that Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and its repeal do not apply to transgender people, who remain barred from service by other regulations.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>service, duty, courage, sacrifice, patriotism, honor, integrity</b></li> </ul>	<p>“Open military service is about serving one’s country with honor and integrity.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “rights”</li> <li>• “equality”</li> </ul>	<p>In conversations about military service, talk about the ideas and ideals that Americans associate with our nation’s armed forces. Don’t talk about “rights” in conversations about open military service, which is really about service, duty, courage, sacrifice, patriotism, honor and integrity.</p>

## TALKING ABOUT PARENTING & ADOPTION

When engaging in conversations about adoption and parenting:

- **Focus on the best interests of children, using the language of everyday family life.** Emphasize how caring LGBT parents can provide children with the love, stability, protection, security and guidance they need to succeed.
- **If talking about a proposed ban on adoption by gay parents, focus on three key points:**
  1. Adoption decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis based on what is in the best interests of the child.
  2. Experienced child health and social service authorities should make adoption decisions.
  3. All mainstream child authorities and peer-reviewed research on parenting support adoption by gay parents.
- **Remember that research shows that children of gay parents do just fine.** There's a large and growing body of peer-reviewed research that examines outcomes for children raised by gay parents. This research consistently concludes that being raised by gay or lesbian parents has no adverse effects on children, and that kids of gay parents are just as healthy and well-adjusted as other children. Also, nearly every credible authority on child health and social services (including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Child Welfare League of America) has determined that a person's orientation has nothing to do with the ability to be a good parent.

For more information, see [Talking About Adoption & Gay Parents](#), available at [www.lgbtmap.org](http://www.lgbtmap.org) and [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org).

✓ Terms to Use	Usage Examples	✗ Terms to Avoid	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adoption by loving, caring parents</li> <li>• adoption by gay (or lesbian and gay) parents</li> <li>• two moms, two dads</li> </ul>	<p>"We shouldn't prevent kids in need of forever homes from being adopted by loving, caring parents who happen to be gay."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "gay adoption"</li> <li>• "adoption by gay/ same-sex couples"</li> </ul>	<p>Always keep the focus on loving, caring parents. Talking about <i>parents</i> rather than "couples" helps emphasize what adoption means to kids—the chance to find a forever home with loving parents.</p>
<p><b>This is about:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the best interests of children</li> <li>• taking care of and providing for children</li> <li>• providing children with love, security, stability, and loving, forever homes</li> <li>• making adoption decisions on a case-by-case basis based on the best interests of the child</li> </ul>	<p>"This is about creating safe, stable homes for children. It's about making sure that they have the loving, nurturing environment that allows them to thrive and succeed."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "rights"</li> <li>• "adoption rights"</li> </ul>	<p>Parenting and adoption are about providing security, love and protection for kids. Discussions about parenting and adoption should not focus on "rights"—but rather on how loving, caring LGBT parents can provide children with the love, stability, protection, security and guidance they need to thrive and succeed.</p>



movement advancement project ▶

2215 Market St. • Denver, CO 80205  
720-274-3263  
[www.lgbtmap.org](http://www.lgbtmap.org)



104 West 29th Street, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212-629-3322  
[www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org)

THIRD EDITION

the incredibly detailed honest forthright  
fully comprehensive completely blunt  
shockingly simple wonderfully helpful  
and witty exposition on a topic that  
sometimes makes people blanch but  
really shouldn't because this compelling  
open and straight to the point no pun  
intended little publication will demystify  
the secret world of gay people and be  
your tried and trusted

# guide to being a straight ally\*





# welcome to the third edition!

What a difference three revisions can make.

When the first edition of the *guide to being a straight ally* was released in 2007, the number of people who said that they knew someone who was lesbian, gay, or bisexual was a mere 4 in 10. In the workplace, many organizations were just starting to have conversations about the role of allies to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. And the thought of marriage equality was still aspirational.

Eight years later, the world is a different place. Now, 8 in 10 people say they know someone who is lesbian, gay, or bisexual—and connections to people who are trans are constantly growing. The engagement of straight allies at work has become the rule for organizations, not the exception. And in the United States, marriage equality is the law of the land. Notably, the win was marked by the support of allies who raised their voices alongside their gay and lesbian friends and family.

For **PFLAG National's Straight for Equality® project**, the response from allies (and the LGBT people who love them) has been overwhelming. As of this writing, more than 150,000 copies of this book in its first two editions have been distributed in print, with thousands more downloaded. The series now includes three other books, including the *guide to being a trans ally*, which pushes those numbers above 200,000 copies. Over 13,000 people have participated in Straight for Equality learning sessions (of which there are now 16). And PFLAG chapters are engaging allies in their communities from coast to coast.

The third edition reflects much of the progress that has been made, and the evolving barriers that remain on the path to active allyship. We've learned a lot along the way from the allies who have welcomed us into their lives, and it is our great hope that the new content honors what they've shared and helps to engage more allies.

We continue to say that achieving equality and full inclusion will never be done alone. So, as always, we're thrilled that you're here.

“

I remember being in school and learning about the civil rights and other social movements for equality and thinking to myself, 'Well, if I had been old enough then, I would have stood up and done the right thing.'

And now I am. In spite of great progress like gay and lesbian people being able to marry, I still see inequality, and I know that I should do something. But it just isn't that easy. I have so many questions. I don't know everything. I've got some fears. And I'm just not sure where—if anywhere—I belong in the LGBT equality movement.

”

Katie, 29

## Sound familiar? Feeling the same way?

You've come to the right place.

### Welcome to Straight for Equality.

While some incredible progress has been made towards equality and fairness for people who are LGBT, we're not there yet. Full equality can't happen without support from smart, energetic, compassionate, and dedicated straight allies. Basically, people just like you. (See? We just met and already have complete confidence in your abilities.)

Straight for Equality is a project developed by PFLAG National specifically created for people who want to stand up for LGBT equality but may not be sure how or even where they fit in. Straight for Equality invites, educates, and engages people who are not LGBT in supporting and advocating for LGBT equality in their homes, workplaces, and all of the communities where they live and belong.

**Straight for Equality isn't about politics or politicians, Republicans or Democrats, radical activists or peacekeeping pacifists. While that may seem a little impossible, stick with us for a bit and see what it's about.**

This project is about creating a place where all people who care about fairness can honestly and openly discuss and remove the barriers they face to becoming allies, get specific recommendations for action, and learn how to assist others—whether friends, family members, coworkers, or community members—in becoming agents of change.

For people who identify as LGBT, the project provides a different way to think about connecting with allies, and offers resources that you can share to help them learn what allyship means. It also provides guidance on how you can support their ally journey. This book specifically

addresses issues related to sexual orientation, while the *guide to being a trans ally* focuses on gender identity and expression. Allyship can take different paths, so look for ways that you can support allies as well as how you might become a stronger ally to other people within the LGBT community.

### **Got questions?**

We've got some answers. Through publications like this one, our website, social media, in-person learning sessions, or with suggested resources, we can help you find what you need.

### **Got concerns?**

That's natural—and healthy! We'll do what we can to resolve your concerns and introduce you to people who had similar experiences and are willing to share their ally stories. Being an ally is not without its challenges. There are lots of issues and barriers that may keep people from getting involved, and that's why we're here. This book is just the first step.

### **Don't know how to get involved?**

Keep reading. We're getting there. Pinky promise. Look for the invitations to action throughout this book for a few great ideas.

### **Already see yourself as a straight ally?**

There's plenty of stuff inside for you, too. Look for ways to become more active and ideas for how you can engage and support new people on their ally journeys.

### **Straight allies (and potential allies), your time has come.**

# Equality guideposts

This book features a few nifty little icons to help you during your straight ally journey. Here's what they mean:



## Stumbling Blocks

Caution with a twist. Read real-life stories from people about how they struggled to understand a situation, confronted a fear, or tried something new. These narratives are good reminders that you're not alone in your ally coming out process or in becoming a more active straight ally.



## Phone-a-Friend

Get quick access to great resources that can help you get past your stumbling blocks and on the road, straight to equality. (Bad pun intended.)



## Your Invitation

Learning more about how to be a powerful straight ally opens up a whole new set of opportunities for you to change your world. Take advantage of these invitations to try something new and help move equality forward.

## Equality Literacy

While you're reading this book, it's possible that you'll find some words with which you're not familiar. Don't panic. Check out the *equality literacy* glossary starting on page 43 for help.

**ally**

noun | al · ly

# Who are allies, anyway?

We've already mentioned them more than a dozen times, and the word seems simple to understand, right? Maybe. But chances are that if you ask a group of 10 people what "ally" means, you'll get 10 different answers. That's actually a good thing.

So before we get into what allies can do to create meaningful change for their LGBT friends, classmates, and colleagues, let's talk about what the word really entails.

## **In the beginning, there were lists.**

As PFLAG National developed the Straight for Equality project in the time leading up to its 2007 launch, we started by researching how the word "ally" was being used within the LGBT equality movement. Certainly allies have always been here and doing important work, but we needed to explain who an ally is and the expectations around creating change. After all, what is the chance that someone would say they'd like to be an ally if they don't know what it is, or what's expected of them?

We went to work. We searched high and low for definitions of what allies are within the LGBT movement and what we found were *lists*.

There was the list of five things you must believe to be a good ally. The list of 25 things you must be doing to be a good ally. Even the list of 150 things that you need to believe and do before you earn the right to call yourself an ally. Even the explanations that were not list-based had some big requirements for people who wanted to adopt the term. Allies had to challenge homophobia and transphobia *every single time* they encountered it. Allies had to vote in a very specific way. Allies need to acknowledge and work to subvert their heterosexual privilege. Allies had to give money to LGBT organizations. Allies needed to only belong to faith communities that are openly supportive of people who are LGBT.

These are some legitimately worthy goals, and are good options for *some* allies. But in the end, the same question kept coming up: aren't people worth so much more than being reduced to a list or a set of rigid demands—some of which would probably exclude many people from the effort?

## **We think so.**

We went back to the drawing board and thought about what the path to being an ally really looks like. We thought how we might be able to expand it to bring more people on the journey. And leveraging the more than 40 years of experience that PFLAG has in helping people become accepting—and sometimes even advocates—we found ourselves looking at things differently. Our first step was to do a definition purge, and the second entailed drawing a picture.

Rather than developing a stiff set of requirements for someone to be an ally, we thought about the qualities people—regardless of where they are on their ally journey—possess:

- **Allies want to learn.** Allies are people who recognize they don't know all that can be known on LGBT issues or about all the experiences of people who are LGBT, but they want to understand more.
- **Allies address their barriers.** They may have to grapple with some roadblocks to being openly and actively supportive of people who are LGBT, and they're willing to take on the challenge.
- **Allies are people who know that support comes in many forms.** It can mean something super-public (think covering yourself in rainbow glitter and heading to a Pride celebration with a sign reading, "PROUD ALLY"). But it can also mean expressing support in more personal ways through the language we use, conversations we choose to have, and signals that we send. True allies know that all aspects of allyship are important, effective, and should be valued equally.
- **Allies are diverse.** Allies are people who know that there's no one way to be an ally, and that everyone gets to adopt the term in a different way...and that's ok.

*\*An admirable move. Great for Pride. But chances are it isn't practical for everyday kinds of stuff.*



As we started to think about the qualities of allies, the terms “journey” and “spectrum” kept coming up. The process of going from “not my issue” to “someone take me to my legislator to fix some laws!” rarely happens overnight. It usually entails a process of learning more, becoming comfortable enough to talk about the issue openly, knowing how to take on pushback, and eventually being able to help others in their ally journeys.

And that ally journey, as we looked at it, felt like its own coming out process of sorts. So we grabbed our sketchpads and went to work.

### Behold, the Straight for Equality Ally Spectrum®:



## Why is the ally spectrum useful?

First, it acknowledges that allies can be found across the spectrum of support, from the people who say, “Not my issue...but I’ll listen to you,” to those who feel comfortable finally saying “LGBT” and talking about issues out loud, to those who get the LGB part, but want to understand the T, right through our super allies, who are off and trying to make lasting change.

Second, it is a reminder that no matter where people are on the spectrum, they are allies. No need to become an advanced ally before you claim the title. There are things to learn and things to do at every single point.

Finally, it gets rid of that icky feeling that we all get when we’re forced to ignore all of the characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences that make people who they are and try to squeeze them into a box to fit our own ideas about who they ought to be. Shake free the chains of being just a list or one definition, people! Now is your time to embrace your ally diversity. (Interested in more about the Ally Spectrum and things to do at different points on the journey? Keep reading, but also visit us online at [straightforequality.org/allyspectrum](http://straightforequality.org/allyspectrum).)

## So why is this term so important? Why the “label”?

Even super-brainy people have taken on this issue. Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (ally status unknown) once wrote that, “Once you label me, you negate me,” suggesting that labeling any individual compromises their individuality.

We actually agree. Labels really aren’t for people at all.

But to us, identifying as an ally isn’t a label—it is a term of empowerment. It is a state of being, an explanation of who someone is, and where their values lie. It communicates key things that matter to them—LGBT equality, care for their LGBT friends, family, and colleagues—in a powerful way. It is a vocal and positive stand that clarifies an important point: While I may not be LGBT, LGBT issues are my issues, too.

“You’re messing with my head!” you say. “Straight allies and allies with no specifics...why?”

There's a lot of conversation about it, and it tends to sound something like this: if the point is that your sexual orientation or gender identity/expression shouldn't matter, then why make such a point of mentioning it when we talk about being allies?

### **The short answer? Because it does matter.**

Don't get us wrong—the goal is that one day none of this will be relevant. (At PFLAG, we joke that our job is to do such a good job at achieving equality and inclusion that we'll be able to put ourselves out of business.) But for now, it is relevant.

Consider this: As of this writing, roughly 50% of people who are LGBT are not out in their workplaces. About 63% of LGBT Americans say that they've experienced discrimination in their personal lives, in places like the workplace, housing, and education. Among LGBT youth in schools, nearly 65% say that they feel unsafe in their schools simply because of their sexual orientation, while almost 38% say they feel unsafe because of their gender expression.

In order to change these jarring statistics, we need to have a spectrum of diverse voices expressing their support for equality and inclusion—and that includes people who are *not* members of the LGBT community. They have a unique power to send the message that inclusion and equality aren't just things that people in the group affected want (in other words, LGBTs), but something that everyone wants. And in order to make that unique, "It's not about me, but it really is about me" statement, talking about our background as someone who isn't LGBT, but owns this issue is often necessary.

### **Where do we go from here?**

By now, you've hopefully started taking a bit of an ally journey of your own. Maybe you're rethinking how you personally understand the term "ally." There's a chance that you considered where you might be on your ally spectrum right now and what it will take to move forward. Maybe you've even started thinking about what some of your barriers might be to becoming an out and proud straight ally.

If you've thought about these things—or thinking about them now—we're on the right track.

## SIDENOTE

Ever wonder if your support as an ally matters to people who are LGBT? We can tell you it does, but some of these narratives from LGBT people really help illustrate the tremendous power that your contributions have, even if you don't see them.

*"My office had a Pride event last June, and the focus was on straight allies. Seeing so many people stepping up and saying that they are allies made me feel more secure and inspired me to come out. The best part? My boss was one of those proud straight allies! I never really thought I'd be out at work, but that was the signal that it could happen." —Roberto*

*"One of my favorite teachers at school has a safe space sticker at their desk and really tries to use inclusive language all the time. They even talked about gender-neutral pronouns in one class. Seeing the sticker and hearing those words made me comfortable talking about gender identity and even asking some questions of the teacher that I've never asked anyone before. I'm not sure how I identify quite yet, but having someone so open about how they're trying to understand what I'm going through really mattered to me." —Satabdi*

*"I'm very, very out. But even as a person who is incredibly open about talking about her sexual orientation, I still sometimes worry how someone might react when I come out to them. Recently, I was on a trip when the person next to me on a flight struck up a conversation. When he turned around to ask me about my background, he noticed my wedding ring, paused in a question that was going to be about what my husband does, and then asked me what my partner does. He said that he tries to assume nothing. That one word change made all of the difference for me. I knew I could be open, and the conversation was going to be comfortable. I really appreciated that." —Jane*

*"The support of allies has been crucial to my family. Just last week, my son was repeatedly teased about being a girl because of how he looks, and how other kids perceive him. He hates that. But this time, several girls in his class stood up for him and his right to wear what he wants. They know that boys can like pink. I think that these kids—these allies—are vital to making my son feel safe at school." —Marissa*



“

I was telling a friend of mine about how my sister is getting married. She was excited and asked, 'Her fiancé...what does he do?'

I didn't want to make her feel put on the spot, so I smiled and said, 'Not he —she's marrying a chick!'

We've been friends for years, and I knew that making her laugh a little would be the right approach. I saw the look on her face as she processed what I said and realized that she'd just assumed my sister is straight.

She laughed and said, 'So what does this chick do?' Because I spoke up, she knew about my family, no one was uncomfortable, and I felt good about being honest and choosing to have the conversation with her. But it took me a while to get to the point of doing it. Being open took work to overcome some of my fears.

”  
Stephanie, 34

## About those barriers...

As Bob Dylan wrote, the times, they are a-changin'. Just a look around our everyday lives and you can see more visibility, and, in many ways, acceptance, for people who are LGBT. Count the number of shows that you watch that have LGBT characters or storylines. Watch the news and people are talking about the fact that people who are gay, lesbian, and bisexual now have the right to marry their same-sex partners. In schools, gay-straight alliances (or GSAs) are common, while workplaces feature employee groups for people who are LGBT and their allies.

### **So it should be easier than ever to be an ally, right?**

Not always. In fact, sometimes the progress going on around us makes the stakes feel even higher for straight allies to speak up and become active. Progress around us doesn't always translate into feeling the confidence to initiate new conversations, deal with conflict, or even be an out ally. And sometimes even progress can feel like it makes people's deeply-held ideas become even stronger as they feel that their way of seeing things as being challenged. This sense of challenge often seems to make a big disagreement seem more likely, and the prospect of even starting a conversation tougher.

But remember where we talked about who allies are just a little while ago? (Like in that last chapter?) One of those big characteristics of allies is to identify *barriers* to being an ally and work through them. So let's talk a little bit about some of the most common barriers that allies often run into, shall we?



### “You know...not that there’s anything wrong with that”

“I sometimes feel a little like a cliché these days. I’m one of those people who will tell you that I’ve got several gay friends, and even recently became friends with a man who is trans. And I take my responsibility to be an active ally who speaks up seriously. This sounds silly, but sometimes I get worried that when I do, people will think that I’m gay, too...you know, like that *Seinfeld* episode said, not that there’s anything wrong with that. I’m single, and I can see them jump to conclusions, and it isn’t comfortable for me because I’m an ally. But I don’t know how to address it, and it gets awkward, and I find that sometimes I end up not speaking at all.”

— Mark, 42

There’s a reason that more than 20 years after a *Seinfeld* episode in which the line, “I’m not gay...not that there’s anything wrong with that” was used it, is still relevant (and funny). The truth is that straight allies are rarely given instruction on how they “come out” as allies.

For some people, recognizing some of the negative treatment that people who are LGBT receive will make them nervous about speaking up. Discrimination is still real at work, in our communities and all around us. The need to minimize this fear by being able to self-identify as someone who is not LGBT may help them navigate this fear and be more outspoken.

For others, there’s a realization that their status as a person who is not LGBT is important because it sends a unique message about LGBT equality from someone who is not directly affected by progress made. The thought of not using that status as part of your super-change-making abilities can feel defeating. But still, people often don’t know how to state their ally status effectively.

And then, there are some that may be concerned about how speaking up may impact their dating prospects. (Just joking. Or not. Maybe sometimes?)

This isn’t a thing that is insurmountable—nor is it a barrier that makes someone a bad ally. Finding a comfort zone from which you can express your allyship is critical to being able to travel your ally journey. There’s no shame here.





## **Straight ally, meet PFLAG.**

Straight for Equality is a project of PFLAG National. PFLAG, our “parent” organization (in more than one way) was founded in 1973 by Jeanne Manford in New York City. She and other parents—at a time when publicly supportive families of people who are gay and lesbian were rare—started a group which has come to be known as the country’s original family and ally organization.

Comprised of family members, friends, allies, and people who are LGBTQ, PFLAG has a three-part mission of support, education, and advocacy that is carried out by its more than 350 chapters across the United States, in a network of more than 200,000 members and supporters.

PFLAG chapters continue to support families through the coming out process through peer support groups, but their work is much bigger than that. They offer unique community-based opportunities for allies to become more educated about equality-focused issues as well as ways to get engaged where they live. They’re a great way to get support in your ally journey as well as connect with other allies. Learn about PFLAG and find your local chapter by visiting [pflag.org](https://pflag.org).



**“I didn’t want to make her—or me—feel uncomfortable or start an argument...”**

“I was talking to a friend who lives in the same assisted living center that I do. She was telling me about attending her granddaughter’s wedding, and asked how my grandson is doing. I said he’s well, but because I didn’t want to offend her, I neglected to mention that he and his partner of 10 years just had a beautiful wedding, which I proudly attended. I love my grandson and his husband, but sometimes I just don’t want to risk making other people uncomfortable by mentioning that he is gay. Worse, the thought of having to argue about it with someone just makes me back away.”

— Evelyn, 74

Of all the challenges that straight allies talk about, the fear of getting into an argument or making people uncomfortable always tops the list. We’re a culture where the idea of everyone being able to have their own opinion prevails, but when those opinions clash, well, awkwardness (or worse) ensues.

Am I going to lose a friend? Am I going to create a bad relationship with a neighbor? Might I hurt my personal brand at work because someone disagrees...strongly? Will what I say lead to some really awkward and uncomfortable silence? Will I end up getting excluded?

These are just a few of the questions asked by straight allies in moments of possible conflict. They also happen to be the same kinds of questions that many people who are LGBT are asking when they hit conflict, too. We tend to be the same like that.

It would be easy to say that you’ve just got to be brave and speak up, but that also would be silly and unreasonable. There are consequences to our actions, and understanding them needs to be a real calculation. But there are consequences to inaction, too. Big ones.

For straight allies (no matter where they are on their ally journey) understanding that there’s no one way to respond when potential conflict arises is important. It isn’t always about grabbing your soapbox and yelling. And that alone may make this fear seem just a bit more manageable.

## SIDENOTE

If there's one thing that makes people panic, it's the thought of getting into an argument. Add the fear of consequences of arguments, and it creates a special recipe for shutting down. But conflict isn't always a bad thing. Often, it is the beginning of an important conversation, but only if you take on the discussion in a constructive way. Changing the way you approach disagreement can transform a moment of ally panic into a moment of ally win. Here are a few steps to try out when you feel yourself backing down, or not speaking up.

**Take a deep breath:** If you're extremely upset, the way that you approach the conversation will reflect it. Step back and let your temperature come down. Retract those claws.

**Assume nothing:** You don't always know what drives someone's opinion. Sure, it may be really gross bias. But it also might be because they didn't think or know what they said or did was hurtful, or because they thought people would see it as a joke. Give people room to explain.

**Pick the right time and place:** While there may be a momentary rush of self-satisfaction in making a scene as you point your finger, don't. Instead, approach the person and ask if you can have a quick private conversation.

**Address the behavior:** Be sure to explain what you're referring to—and then keep the conversation about that specific behavior. In other words, "I felt like the joke you made about gay people was really messed up," works because it makes the topic of conversation the joke. Whereas, "I am here to tell you that I think that you're a great big homophobic jerk" doesn't address the behavior, but attacks the person's character.

**Explain why you're speaking up:** Let people know why you felt that something is wrong and the impact that it had. Try something like this: "As someone who is a straight ally, I'm making an effort to talk to people when they say something that doesn't seem right. And I feel like the joke you made is insulting to people who are gay."

**Listen and offer support:** Listen to the other person to hear what they've got to say. Maybe they'll apologize or tell you they didn't think it would hurt anyone. Maybe they'll say something that helps you see where they're coming from. You won't know unless you're really listening. Let them know that you're a resource if they ever want to talk.

**Say thank you:** This is important. You've just done something big, and engaged someone else in the process. No matter how it goes, thank people for their time.



### “What exactly am I supposed to do now?”

“I’m a straight ally. Well, maybe I’d call myself an ally in training. I want to do the right thing, and I know that the next part of my work is finding ways to be out there about my beliefs. But it leaves me wondering how I’m supposed to get conversations going. I mean, ‘I have a gay friend’ just sounds weird and not useful. But when I talk politics, people tend to back off. I’m at a loss here.”

— Arthur, 23

Right now, more people than ever know someone who is LGBT, and with each day, it seems like more are identifying as allies. And while this momentum can be super-empowering, it doesn’t really provide much guidance for being allies outside of more “political” conversations.

Let’s face it. It can be pretty easy for straight allies to demonstrate their support at a Pride festival or even a political rally.

But in the absence of one of these opportunities, finding ways to still be out about your allyship isn’t always simple. How do allies keep the conversation about equality going—or, even more importantly, find ways to integrate it into everyday life? How can allies become people who can initiate conversations about equality in a wide variety of ways...you know, beyond, “I’ve got a lesbian friend”?

In the upcoming pages, you’ll find some basic, everyday changes you can make that will help you do it, so stay tuned.



## Put your assumptions in check.

We're constantly making assumptions about people. Seriously, all of us do it. Because of where someone is from, the kind of work they do, their family background, their religious beliefs (or lack thereof), their appearance, the way they speak—and much more—we make snap judgements about what kinds of people they are and where their values lie.

But that's just what we're doing: *making snap judgements*. And they're based on the little info that we have, and, importantly, our own biases, conscious or unconscious.

So here's your first invitation to action as an ally: put your assumptions in check about who is (and is not) supportive of LGBT equality, or even about their willingness to engage in a conversation about LGBT inclusion.

How many people have you not spoken to about LGBT topics because, for whatever reason (let's say where they're from) you've assumed that they won't be supportive? And since your decision was based on an assumption about "people who are \_\_\_\_\_" and not necessarily fact, you may have missed a huge opportunity to talk.

As you put those assumptions in check, you'll start to see that people will often surprise you. They may not always be where you want them to be on their ally journey, but you'll never know—or know how you can support them—until you give them a chance. So try to be willing to have that conversation rather than hoping someone else will.

“

A friend at work who is involved with our company's LGBT network group invited me an upcoming event. I accepted, thanked him and said 'I really want you to feel comfortable being out about your lifestyle.'

He looked a little shocked. I wasn't sure what had gone wrong, because I felt like I was being supportive.

My friend finally said, 'I'm glad that you are supportive, and I want you to be there, but just know that when you say lifestyle, it is offensive to me and a lot of people. I just want to be honest with you.' Then he explained why he said it in greater detail.

I had no idea about how the word can make some people feel. I was kind of embarrassed and find myself worried about what to say and what not to say.

”

John, 57

# Get educated.

Don't know what's going on with "LGBT issues"?

Confused about terminology?

Not sure what all of those rainbows mean?

Unsure if you're about to say something that's going to offend someone?

**It's ok. We've all been there...and there's a way to feel better. To put it really simply, it's time to learn some stuff. (Professional, right?)**

One of the best ways to demonstrate your interest in moving equality forward and in being an ally is to get—and keep getting—educated. But this is more than just saying, "Ok, I will. Later."

Make the commitment right now to finding the answer when you don't understand something. The leap between being someone who's kind of interested in the issue and being someone who is an active ally is an enthusiasm to learn. (Remember all that stuff about allies at the start of the book?) That leap actually entails not letting questions wait for an answer at some unexpected time in the future, but getting answers when you need them.

Go online. Ask questions. Do some research. Reach out to other allies who might have grappled with the same challenge.

Have LGBT friends? You can also ask for their help. Just be aware that not everyone is comfortable speaking about some issues, their personal experiences, or being your go-to resource. So be willing to accept "no" as an answer, and have a backup plan for finding what you need. (You know, a trusted resource. Like [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org).)



### “I was just embarrassed because of what I didn’t know.”

“My city was voting on a nondiscrimination bill, but I didn’t even know what it was! I knew it involved LGBT people, but I was too embarrassed to ask anything beyond that. What if someone thought I didn’t know because I didn’t care?

So I went online and Googled ‘Springfield and gay’ and learned there is no law in my town or my state that protects LGBT people from discrimination at work or from being evicted from their homes! Who knew? Not me, actually. But once I had a better idea of what was happening, I was able to start talking to people about it. I felt comfortable to become part of the conversation and shared what I learned with some friends.”

— Denise, 35

When you hear about an issue on the news that you don’t understand, look it up, or ask a friend. When a LGBT coworker uses a term that you don’t know — like “queer” — ask what it means. Why exactly are there rainbow flags all over the pride parade each year? What’s with the pink triangles? Chances are that people will be pretty impressed that you took an interest in wanting to say the right thing or to understand what’s going on.



### Get some good advice.

One of the places that millions of people have gone for individual advice is to one of the highest-profile straight allies in the world. **Dear Abby** has been dispensing wise words for people since 1956. Many times, she’s offered guidance on how to talk about issues whether you’re an ally, family member, or LGBT yourself. Her columns appear in more newspapers each week than any other column in the world, so find her in your local newspaper or go online to [dearabby.com](http://dearabby.com).

But Dear Abby isn’t alone in dispensing great advice for allies. If you’re looking for advice on modern manners when it comes to LGBT and ally etiquette? Check out **Steven Petrow’s “Civilities”** column in the *The Washington Post* or his book, *Steven Petrow’s Complete Gay & Lesbian Manners: The Definitive Guide to LGBT Life*. Learn more at [stevenpetrow.com](http://stevenpetrow.com).



**And remember: Rome wasn't built in a day. Similarly, becoming an ally is rarely an overnight transformation.**

You don't need to learn everything before you can participate as an ally. Hard as it is to accept, you're probably going to make a mistake somewhere along the line. We all do. But when that fateful day comes and someone provides feedback, apologize for the error, ask for guidance (for example, "Can you explain more to me about the word 'queer' so I understand it better moving forward?"), say thank you, and move on.

This does bring up a really big point.

Allies know about the importance of listening. And by "importance" we mean "you need to really, really, really take your responsibility to keep listening to people's stories and feedback super-seriously, no matter how much you know."

As a person gets more confident in their abilities to demonstrate support, there's a natural tendency to think that they're an expert and have little more to learn. It's true of nearly anything people are passionate about, from one's vast knowledge of, let's say the Star Wars canon, to baseball, to being a great ally.

The problem is that once you slip into that "I've got this" place, you may not be listening to the incredibly diverse stories and needs of your LGBT friends and colleagues.

So constantly keep your ears, mind, and heart open to learning more and knowing that just when you think you've learned it all, the conversation changes.\* There's a lot more out there to understand. The ally journey doesn't end when you feel like you're at Super-Ally status. It actually goes on forever.

*\*Obergefell v. Hodges, anyone? Not sure of the reference? How about Googling it now? Remember that stuff about committing to finding the info you need to be a strong ally? Yep. That.*



## Take advantage of the power of language

One of the starting points for many allies—and, honestly, a point to which many allies and LGBT people return—is language. The terms associated with the LGBT community are vast, important, and evolve rapidly. Notably, they are a great way to keep educated and offer lots of ways to start moving what you learn into action.

To get started on your linguistic journey, check out the *equality literacy* section starting on page 43. It will give you a few starting points on what many of the key terms that you'll need to know mean. When you're ready for even more, check out the more expanded *equality literacy* cheat sheet by visiting [straightforequality.org/glossary](http://straightforequality.org/glossary).

Once you know the terms, put them to work. For some people, just saying words like “gay” or “bisexual” out loud and comfortably is a big step. For others, the gay-b-c’s are a breeze, even with new letters being added so frequently. Regardless of where you are, being the person who can say, “I can explain that one!” gives you the chance to put yourself out there as an ally and become a great source for information to someone.

And once you're feeling on top of definitions, expand your language skills. Practice using inclusive terms like “partner” or “spouse” (in place of “boyfriend/husband” and “girlfriend/wife”) when you meet people for the first time to demonstrate that you're not making any assumptions about them. Once you know someone's preferred terms, use and respect them. But until that time, demonstrate that you're not assuming anything based on your perception of their gender.

It may even turn into a learning moment, too—if someone asks why you're using those terms, be ready to tell them, and let them know you're an ally!

PSSST!

Still got that scenario on page 22 on your mind? Let's break it down.

For a long time, the term "lifestyle"—as in "gay lifestyle"—was considered to be an acceptable way to talk about the lives about people who are gay or lesbian. But language and how we understand each other changes. Now the term is widely considered to be offensive.

Why?

Think about it. When you mention a *lifestyle*, it generally suggests something someone prefers to live, like the choice to have a vegan lifestyle, for example. But we're not talking about a *preference*, but rather an individual's *orientation*. Ask the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, or the Surgeon General. People are who they are. So the sound of "gay lifestyle" sounds like the underlying suggestion is choice, and something that can be "cured". It also minimizes the tremendous diversity that exists within the LGBT community, suggesting that there's only one way of being a member of the group's "lifestyle"—which is far from reality.

Looking for an alternate way to communicate the point? Consider using "the lives of people who are gay and lesbian" instead. In John's case, he could have said, "being out at work" instead of "being out about your lifestyle."

See? We promised that we'd be here to teach you stuff. Mission accomplished.

“

So I was at work and someone told this joke:

'A male-friendly lesbian, a man-hating dyke, Santa Claus, and the Easter bunny are in a race for a \$100 bill. Which one wins?

The man-hating dyke because the other three are figments of your imagination.'

Most people around me were laughing. To this day I really regret not saying, 'Dude, that's really offensive. Stop.' But I was focused on people thinking that I don't have a sense of humor or maybe even that *I'm* gay. Those concerns just shut me down.

”

Rishi, 25

# Speak up.

Everyone's been there. Whether it is a racist joke, sexist joke, or a gay joke, we've all heard humor that we knew was offensive, but, for one of many reasons, haven't said anything to object. Whether we didn't want to be the PC police, felt frozen because we didn't know the words, or we just didn't want to sound like a buzzkill, we knew something should be said... but we just didn't say it.

While some kinds of jokes and comments are clearly taboo (most people wouldn't make a racist joke at a staff party), jokes about people who are LGBT tend to continue to slide by without much pushback. In fact, about 62% of people who are LGBT say that they've heard gay and lesbian jokes in their workplaces.

And it isn't always the jokes: often comments are made about people who are LGBT that, regardless of their intent, are hurtful. For many people who are LGBT, having a person describe a Pride parade as people "flaunting their lifestyles" can be devastating. And yet, often no one will intervene when these kinds of things are said.

## **So think about this:**

Imagine that there's a closeted person on your team at work who heard the comment and felt shame because they couldn't respond without outing themselves. Or think about the man who has a lesbian daughter and hears friends at work frequently make derogatory comments about lesbians. It's personal for him, even if he isn't LGBT. Sadly, he may also be worried about the consequences of speaking up and objecting to his friends' remarks.

**When you speak up as an ally, your courage speaks to them.**

Allies often have an opportunity to address situations that others feel they cannot. When you intervene, you're educating people around you, and demonstrate that you are supportive of equality and inclusion for all. Your voice sends a powerful message that you're advocating for your LGBT friends, family, classmates, and colleagues because you care about how these jokes and comments make people feel, regardless of intent.

The challenge is, however, that while most people know that they should intervene, they're not sure how to do it effectively and in a way that is respectful for everyone involved.

Don't worry. We've got your back.



### **“I didn’t want to make her look bad...”**

“The people I work with love talking about celebrity gossip and all of the pop culture news out there. On Monday morning, I heard Mary, one of my co-workers, talking about how unfair it was that one comedian got so much heat for calling a photographer a ‘faggot’ and that he shouldn’t have felt like he had to apologize for his comments.

I really like Mary. She’s my friend and I didn’t want to embarrass her or make her look bad in front of others. But I really felt like I needed to say something, so I commented, ‘But what if he had used the n-word? Would you think he should apologize then? Or what if you had a gay son or daughter who heard that? Would you have defended him?’ At first she seemed annoyed, but later we had a great conversation and she conceded that she never thought about it that way.”

— *Charlotte, age 44*

A couple of things happened here. First, Charlotte knew that the situation was tough. She didn’t want to call her friend out, but she didn’t want to be quiet, which would have sent a message that she was in agreement. So she used two great ally strategies. First, she found a softer way to bring attention to the situation without attacking her friend. But then she did something just as important—she followed up with a personal conversation where she really had the time, space, and privacy to talk to her coworker. It wasn’t easy, but it had a big positive impact both on her group and on her friendship with Mary.



## How to say, “I object!” without sounding bossy.

Figuring out ways to intervene when a negative comment is made isn’t easy since you’re balancing relationships and working to have respect for differences. Based on countless conversations with allies about what works, the Straight for Equality team at PFLAG National offers these suggestions:

### **Use appropriate humor to avoid seeming confrontational from the start.**

Phrases like, “Not to be the buzzkill, but...” often give you an opening to start the conversation without people getting a sense that you’re about to climb on your soapbox. Exclusionary comments are serious, and should be taken seriously, but find a way to keep the conversation lighter so people don’t shut down in anticipation of a lecture.

### **Use facts.**

Many times, people don’t realize that their jokes are often making light of serious situations. So having some information in your head (remember that part about becoming an educated ally?) is helpful. Then you can create learning moments, launching with phrases like, “A lot of people don’t know that...” to help you focus on the un-funny aspects of the remark made.

### **Make your comment relatable.**

People often forget to think about how they’d feel in a similar situation should the tables have turned. Perhaps you can ask them, “How would you feel if someone had poked fun at your...” or “How would you feel if everyone was laughing at the expense of someone you love?” Helping people understand the impact of a comment without insulting or minimizing their background helps refocus things.

### **Explain why you’re having the conversation—and say you’re an ally!**

Your ally conversations shouldn’t be random. Mention that you’re an ally and why: “I consider myself to be a straight ally who wants everyone to feel included, and I don’t like to let things like this slide because exclusionary behavior hurts everyone, not just the group directly being excluded.”

Also, remember that speaking up it isn't just about jokes and overtly exclusionary comments. People make huge generalizations and assumptions about people who are LGBT frequently based on stereotypes and misconceptions. And just as frequently, those assumptions are also wrong.

How many times have you heard, "He dresses well, he must be gay"? Or "She won't go out with me, so she must be a lesbian"? (Ever think that she doesn't like you because of the joke you just told?) What about, "People aren't bisexual! They just haven't met the right person"? Or even, "Oh, the LGBT community is so wealthy"?

Misinformation and stereotypes can be just as harmful and damaging as jokes especially when they go unchallenged and eventually get accepted as "fact." While there's been lots of progress in some ways for people who are LGBT, there are huge challenges that remain across a variety of issues. Did you know that in many states, qualified people who are LGBT can't foster or adopt children? Or that people who are LGBT don't just live in big cities like New York and San Francisco, but actually live in every single state? Or that in the transgender community, poverty and unemployment rates significantly outpace those of the population as a whole?\*

The point is this: As an ally, being able to call some of these generalizations into question and create learning moments is a huge project and opportunity. As a real, fact-based understanding of the lives of people who are LGBT expands, the chance that others will base their opinions on fact (and not misleading assumptions) increases.

*\*Also, some gay men are not well-dressed. Some lesbians love unreasonably high heels. And bisexuality is a real identity for people. True story.*





## Take your conversations online

Often, we think about demonstrating allyship when we're in the middle of a conversation or an argument. But there's another great way for you to identify as an ally and educate people around you: Why not use social media? (Come on. You're probably Tweeting right now. Tweet us at [@S4Equality](https://twitter.com/S4Equality), please.)

More and more, allies are saying that they've used the simplicity of sharing information on social networks like Facebook and Twitter as their way of educating and engaging people. Think about the impact that being an online advocate can have. News outlets actually covered the fact that in 2015, following the Supreme Court decision on marriage, more than 26 million people turned their Facebook profile pictures rainbow to show their support for equality, and many of those people were allies. That news certainly started more than a few discussions online.

Why not make your online efforts happen year round? Straight for Equality has feeds on both Twitter and Facebook ([facebook.com/S4Equality](https://facebook.com/S4Equality)), so getting content to share is simple. Just like or follow us.

But don't stop there—lots of conversations happen after people post articles or images. Engage in online conversations with people in your networks, and the same rules apply as in-person conversations. When someone says something exclusionary, don't let it slide. Take a deep breath if you're aggravated, and be willing to share information to clear up misunderstandings or big assumptions.

It's just one more way to get yourself out there as an active ally.

“

I've been an ally for as long as I can remember. In all honesty, I didn't have a choice in the matter. My parents actively boycotted Cracker Barrel when I was a kid, scolded my siblings and me if we used the word 'gay' as an insult, and included openly LGBT people in our lives from day one.

Even so, I know there are times when I struggle to be an out and active ally. Some days I'm just not in the mood to be the one who speaks up, or I find myself making assumptions about who I can talk to about LGBT issues. I have to remember that while ally is a usually a noun, it is verb, too. My voice matters in both big and small ways—and I need to keep using it.

”

Janie, 30

## Come out as an active ally.

This is the point at which the Straight for Equality team starts crossing their fingers and hoping that you're feeling the ally love. We've covered a lot of ground together in these pages, and, unfortunately, we're almost at the end of this book.

But the end of this book is actually the beginning for you, no matter where you are on your ally journey, and here's why: this is the place where you're going to need to start coming out as an ally and getting more active.

Reaching a point where you believe that straight allies are important—and wanting to be one—is a huge deal, and we'd never minimize that accomplishment. However, while feeling like an ally and even identifying as one is good, starting to find ways (at your own pace) to express your allyship takes you from good to *brilliant*.

Recently, some polling was released that revealed an interesting trend. When men and women across the United States were asked if they consider themselves to be workplace allies to people who are LGBT, the numbers were awesome: 70% and 83%, respectively.

But then those pollsters asked an interesting little follow-up question: Do you consider yourself to be an active ally? They gave a wide berth for what was considered to be active—speaking up at a meeting, talking about LGBT inclusion with a colleague or client, or even just supporting an LGBT coworker. And something kind of scary happened. Those great numbers then dropped to 8% and 19%.

Kind of a downer, right?

To many people, it spoke to the challenge of ensuring that allies know that their support can't be just something they *feel*. In other words, to make real and lasting culture change, straight allies are going to have to find ways to actively demonstrate support. They need to become great models for helping others see what allyship looks like and what it can accomplish.

The number of places where an ally can express their support is limitless. Your workplace (maybe by joining your LGBT and ally employee network group), house of worship, school, civic organizations, with your family...all of these spaces offer opportunities to get a conversation started, or, for some, transform the way that those conversations—and the actions that come after—play out.



#### **“I thought it would be too political...”**

“I’m a teacher at a small school. One of the guidance counselors expressed a lot of frustration and even anger over a new policy that requires counselors to receive special training to help them work with LGBT youth. She was clearly agitated and didn’t see why she should have to do it and mentioned that it was unnecessary because (in her opinion) none of the students at our school are gay. She said it personally offended her.

My first inclination was to let it go and keep what felt like politics out of work, but I thought about how her attitude could affect the kids. What would happen to a student who goes to her for help? So I told her about all the newspaper articles I’ve read about how LGBT youth get bullied, how their fear and shame impacts their grades, and even how attempted suicide rates were way higher in this group. I just wanted to point out that many of these kids desperately need support, and frankly, being able to provide this support is part of our job responsibilities.

It may not have changed everything, but it started to reframe the discussion, and I realized that even though I was just sharing what I learned, it was a big help in changing the climate of my school, and that it wasn’t about politics at all.”

— Joe, 61

As the old adage goes, change starts at home...and at work...and at school. We could go on, but the point is that small changes (like not letting something that sounds wrong go unchecked) matter. Sure, there's a chance that someone will push back, but sometimes, if allies don't speak up, the conversation will never happen in the first place.

If a concern about getting into a political debate is your barrier, try finding different ways to address an issue. In the story, Joe opted to make it about the kids that school counselors serve and their real needs, rather than go to a conversation about the politics of changing school or district policy. It was a way to still speak up, but in a space that was comfortable for him. Change doesn't have to be about politics and policies, but about people.



### Getting to the issues

Are you ready to learn more about key advocacy issues that affect the LGBT community? Have an idea as to what issues you're interested in, but not sure where you can start getting more actively engaged? There are incredible global, national, state, and local organizations addressing these topics. Certainly PFLAG and Straight for Equality are a great place to start. Here are just a few more suggestions for places to check out to learn how you can boost your ally voice:

**Advocacy:** Human Rights Campaign | [hrc.org](http://hrc.org)

**Faith:** Institute for Welcoming Resources | [welcomingresources.org](http://welcomingresources.org)

**Global:** International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association | [ilga.org](http://ilga.org)

**Health:** GLMA | [glma.org](http://glma.org)

**LGBT Parents:** Family Equality Council | [familyequality.org](http://familyequality.org)

**Transgender:** National Center for Transgender Equality | [transequality.org](http://transequality.org)

**Schools:** Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network | [glsen.org](http://glsen.org)

**Workplace:** Out & Equal Workplace Advocates | [outandequal.org](http://outandequal.org)

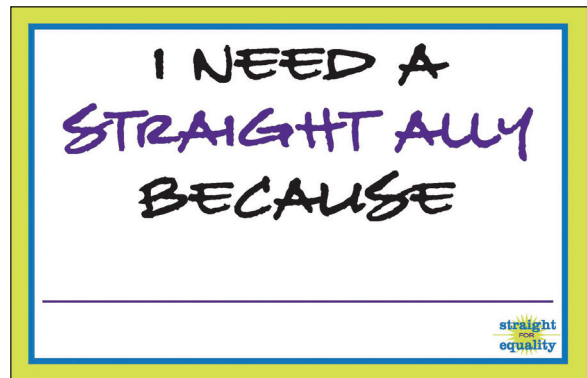
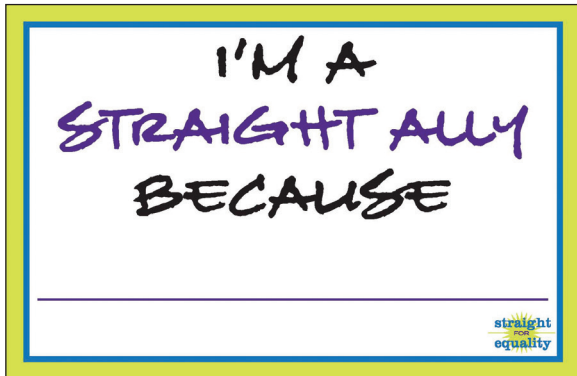
**At-Risk LGBT Youth:** The Trevor Project | [thetrevorproject.org](http://thetrevorproject.org)

## There is one last thing we need to talk about before things wrap up here: being more visible.

Let's be clear—the ally journey rule still applies. Not everyone is going to be ready to start declaring their ally pride right away. It may take some learning and time. That's still true. But for many people who have identified as allies for a while, it is time to do even more by moving from private support to out allyship.

Admittedly, finding ways to make sure people see that you're an ally isn't without its challenges. There's no obvious characteristic that people can immediately see. (We were going to suggest stitching the letter A on all of your clothes, that option was taken and didn't work out well in the first place.) And while wearing some kind of ally t-shirt may be a good option at times, it's probably not going to fit in during formal events. And even beyond that, just saying that you're an ally doesn't always get things rolling as much as needed.

Of course, we've put some thought into this, too. Here's what we've got:



See how that works? Not only is displaying this card somewhere—your dorm room, your workspace at the office, your refrigerator, etc.—a way to send a message, but you’re making it unique and personal when you fill in that line about why you’re an ally. We give you the start, then you put your own brilliant ally brand on it.

There are two cards that we offer. One of them isn’t for allies at all—in fact, they were designed for people who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual to express why straight allies are needed in their lives. This has always been a two-way conversation, and here’s the place for our LGB friends to help explain their side of things.\*



### **Express yourself!**

Ready to get your ally message out there? You can download this card from the Straight for Equality website ([straightforequality.org/allycampaign](http://straightforequality.org/allycampaign)). If you are interested in purchasing the card for a group activity, you’ll find information there about how to do it. You can also reach out to the Straight for Equality team for more information.

You’re not done yet, though. Here’s the extra credit invite for the super-ambitious:

After you’ve filled out your card, take a photo with your ally statement and Tweet it to us [@S4Equality](https://twitter.com/S4Equality), hashtag [#straightally](https://twitter.com/straightally) or tag us in your Facebook post ([@Straight for Equality](https://www.facebook.com/StraightforEquality)). You can also e-mail us your photos at [info@straightforequality.org](mailto:info@straightforequality.org), and we’ll be happy to share the pics of your gorgeous faces and awesome statements on the Straight for Equality website and on our social media feeds. It helps more people see the incredible diversity and power of allies and is just one more way for you to come out as an ally.

*\*Remember that if you’re looking for ways to learn more and express your trans allyship, visit [straightforequality.org/trans](http://straightforequality.org/trans).*

**bye**

for now.



# This is, sadly, where we leave you.

## But not for long.

This guide is hopefully only the start of your lifelong ally journey. The ball is rolling, and now it is time to see where you're going to take it. So here are just a few immediate next steps for you after you put down the (wonderful, intellectually stimulating) book you've just read.

### 1. Go to [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org) and find out what's new.

While you're there, you'll be able to access the latest news and resources from the Straight for Equality project, including materials and publications on faith, healthcare, and transgender inclusion. You'll also be able to access all of the other Straight for Equality materials. (May we suggest the *guide to being a trans ally* as a next step?) All resources can be downloaded for free, or you can purchase copies of print editions. Remember to follow us on Twitter ([@S4Equality](https://twitter.com/S4Equality)) and Like us on Facebook ([facebook.com/S4Equality](https://facebook.com/S4Equality)) to keep getting updates, too.

### 2. Check out the PFLAG National website.

As the nation's original family and ally organization, PFLAG continues to provide support, education, and advocacy to people who are LGBTQ, their families, friends, and allies. Know someone who needs help with coming out? PFLAG's got your back. Want to learn more about equality issues in your community and how you can get involved? There's a chapter waiting for you to join in. Interested in issue advocacy at the local, state, and federal level? We promise to help get you engaged. Visit [pflag.org](http://pflag.org) to learn more. If you want to find your local chapter right away, go to [pflag.org/find](http://pflag.org/find) and you can enter your state or zip code.

### **3. Pass this book along to someone else and then talk about it.**

We understand. You may be pretty attached to this wonderful book by now. (At least we hope that you are.) But now it's time to use this guide to get one of those important ally conversations going. Pick someone around you—maybe a friend or a sibling—and give it to them. Tell them why you'd like them to read it. ("Those Straight for Equality people told me to do it" is *not* an acceptable reason.) Then circle back in a few days and ask them what they thought. Changing the world really does start with something that simple.

That's it for now, though. Thanks for sticking around until the end. The work you've done—and the work you're about to do—is important and it is valued, sometimes by people you'll never even meet. Exercise that ally power, and help move equality forward.

**We still can't do it without you.**

# equality literacy

## Ready to have your straight ally conversations?

Here's a list of terms that will help make your efforts even more effective. Remember that terminology is constantly evolving. It may change over time, so if you're unsure about a word, check online by visiting one of the many resource sites we list in this book and on our website, [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org).

**Affirmed gender:** The gender to which someone who is transgender has transitioned. This term is often used to replace terms like "new gender" or "chosen gender," which imply that the current gender was not always a person's gender or that their gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

**Agender:** A person who does not conform to any gender.

**Ally:** A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBT but who is supportive of LGBT equality in its many forms and through a wide variety of different expressions, both personal and private.

**Asexual:** A person who does not experience sexual attraction.

**Assigned gender:** The gender that is given to an infant at birth based on the infant's external genitals. This may or may not match the person's gender identity in adulthood.

**Assigned sex:** The sex (male, female, intersex) that is assigned to an infant at birth.

**Biological sex:** Sex determined by the physical characteristics of the body at birth, such as genetic markers and internal/external genitalia. Biological sex may differ from identity.

**Bisexual:** An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to men and women. This is sometimes stated as “bi.” People who are bisexual need not have had equal sexual experience with both men and women and need not have had any sexual experience at all; it is attraction that determines orientation.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. This is a term that is preferable to “non-trans,” “biological,” or “natal” man or woman.

**Coming out:** For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life. People often establish an LGBT identity to themselves first and then may decide to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and allies of people who are LGBT. There are many different degrees of being out: some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It’s important to remember that not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

**Disclosure:** The act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender nonconforming identity to another person in a specific instance. Some people who are trans-identified dislike the term and prefer “coming out” so it is a best practice to ask which term an individual uses in their personal lexicon.

**Gay:** The adjective used to describe people whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, “lesbian” is often a preferred term for women. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Gender:** A set of social, psychological, or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as either feminine or masculine.

**Gender-affirming surgery:** Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches or desired gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term “sex change.”

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other.

**Gender expression:** The manner in which a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through external means such as clothing and/or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people’s understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to remember and respect is that every gender expression is valid.

**Gender identity:** One’s deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One’s gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex (i.e., a person assigned female at birth identifies as male or a person assigned male at birth identifies as female). Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced in infancy and reinforced in adolescence.

**Gender neutral:** Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

**Gender nonconforming:** A person who views their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male. This is an umbrella term that can encompass other terms such as “gender creative,” “gender expansive,” “gender variant,” “genderqueer,” “gender fluid,” “gender neutral,” “bigender,” “androgynous,” or “gender diverse.” Such people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the male and female binary paradigm.

**Homosexual:** An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, “gay” and “lesbian.”

**Lesbian:** A woman whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is attraction that helps determine orientation.

**LGBT:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender which refers to these individuals collectively. It is sometimes stated as “GLBT” (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as “LGBTA” to include allies, as well as “LGBTQ,” with “Q” representing queer or questioning.

**Queer:** A term currently used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and others find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, “queer” is disliked by some within the LGBT community, who find it offensive. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e., “My cousin self-identifies as queer.”)

**Questioning:** A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**Sex:** Refers to biological, genetic, or physical characteristics that define males and females. These can include genitalia, hormone levels, genes, or secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often compared or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

**Sexual orientation:** Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who

are bisexual experience these feelings for people of both sexes. And people who are asexual experience no sexual attraction at all. Other terms describing sexual orientation include (but are not limited to) pansexual and polysexual. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition—while sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one’s sexual orientation. One’s sexual activity does not define who one is with regard to one’s sexual orientation; it is attraction determines their orientation.

**Transgender:** A term that may be used to describe people whose gender expression does not conform to the cultural norms and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is also considered by some to be an “umbrella term” that encompasses a number of identities which transcend the conventional expectations of gender identity and expression, including trans man, trans woman, genderqueer, and gender expansive. People who identify as transgender may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. For more information on people who are trans and how you can be a trans ally, check out the *guide to being a trans ally* on the Straight for Equality website.

**Transition:** The process one goes through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. This can, but does not always, include taking hormones, having surgeries, or going through therapy.

*the incredibly detailed honest forthright fully comprehensive completely blunt shockingly simple wonderfully helpful and witty exposition on a topic that sometimes makes people blanch but really shouldn't because this compelling open and straight to the point no pun intended little publication will demystify the secret world of gay people and be your tried and trusted **guide to being a straight ally***

Author: Jean-Marie Navetta | Editorial review: Jamie Henkel

Copyright ©2007, 2011, 2015 PFLAG National.

All rights reserved. We encourage you to share and use this information, but please be sure to credit Straight for Equality® as your source for the content.

This and other publications from [PFLAG National's Straight for Equality project](#), including:

- *read this before you put your metatarsals between your mandible and maxillae: straight for equality in healthcare*
- *be not afraid—help is on the way! straight for equality in faith communities*
- *guide to being a trans ally*

are available for download or purchase at [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org). We've got other ally-friendly goodies there, along with details on how you can bring a Straight for Equality in the Workplace learning session to where you work. Seriously, we're smart and funny in person.

**We're happy to remind you how to find us online:**



Connect on Facebook: [facebook.com/S4Equality](https://facebook.com/S4Equality)



Follow us on Twitter: [@S4Equality](https://twitter.com/S4Equality)



Visit our website: [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org)



E-mail us: [info@straightforequality.org](mailto:info@straightforequality.org)



# About PFLAG National:

Straight for Equality is a project of PFLAG National.

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the original family and ally organization. Made up of parents, families, friends, and allies uniting with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ), PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has more than 350 chapters and 200,000 supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states.

This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and supported by the PFLAG National office (located in Washington, D.C.), the National Board of Directors, and the Regional Directors Council. PFLAG is a nonprofit organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

## **PFLAG National**

1828 L Street NW, Suite 660

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 467-8180

info@pflag.org

pflag.org



/pflag



@pflag



/pflag



/pflagnational



/pflagnational



*\*Made you look.*

*Straight for Equality® is project of PFLAG National.*

the incredibly detailed honest forthright  
fully comprehensive completely blunt  
wonderfully helpful and witty exposition  
on a topic that makes some people stress  
because they doubt they understand it or  
know enough about it but they'll soon be  
ready to talk because this compelling and  
transformative (no pun intended) little  
publication will answer lots of questions  
and start to demystify the not-at-all secret  
world of people who are transgender and  
become your tried and trusted

# guide to being a trans ally\*

# CONTENTS

- 2** Introduction
- 5** Equality Guideposts
- 6** Chapter 1: *Words. A lot of words.*
- 20** Chapter 2: *Who are allies, anyway?*
- 28** Chapter 3: *Working through the barriers*
- 46** Chapter 4: *Going further on the journey*
- 57** Chapter 5: *Come out, come out, wherever you are*
- 63** Equality Literacy
- 70** Connect with Straight for Equality
- 72** About PFLAG National

# introduction

*Allies have been indispensable in the journey of transgender people. Without them, this would be a very lonely road.*

Alyssa

## **If there's one thing that we can say about being an ally, it's this: It is all about the journey.**

When PFLAG National launched the Straight for Equality project in 2007, the mission was—if you'll excuse our nearly inexcusable pun—pretty straightforward. We wanted to create a resource and community for people who are not lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) to understand why their voices are critical to achieving equality for all, and provide them with the information and tools to effectively raise their voices.

To lead people on the path from “Soooo not my issue...” to one of support (or even Super Ally status), we'd have to start at the very beginning. It would entail creating a set of resources that would take people through different aspects of the journey: learning what allies are, developing competency around understanding what “LGBTQ” means, finding out about the experiences of LGBTQ people, and genuinely knowing what ally behaviors to deploy in every situation.

So far, the trip has been pretty awesome.

We started with the basics—what does it mean to be a straight ally to people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and why is self-identification so important? We went into some very specific

topics—things like being an ally as a person of faith (**be not afraid—help is on the way!**), or an ally working in healthcare (**read this before you put your metatarsals between your maxillae and mandible**).<sup>\*</sup> And we got some important conversations and learning opportunities going about what being an ally looks like in different settings, like the workplace or with our friends.

At every point on the journey, we were doing what anyone on a road trip does: we were looking down the road at what comes next. Which, of course, brings us to our next stop.

## Welcome to learning how to be a trans ally.

We kind of know what you might be thinking. Why wait? And how does this fit into your whole “straight ally” thing?

Glad that you asked.

From the start, the goal of the Straight for Equality project was to engage all of those people out there who never really saw “LGBTQ stuff” as their issue. And to do this, it means a lot of focused education. Learning about what every part of “LGBTQ” actually means, for example, and how things like sexual orientation and gender identity—while often thrown into the same sentence—are very different things. And to demonstrate respect for people who embrace these identities, we’d need to create specific spaces where people can learn about each element.

So here you are, holding this book. A book focused on transgender inclusion, and the role that allies play in making it a reality.

There is that other question, about how the whole “straight ally” thing fits in here. Now that we’re talking about gender identity and expression, this might mean that more than straight-identified people can be part of the ally group, and...your head is near exploding, right?

We’ve got you covered on that one, too.

You’ll find a lot more conversation about the word “ally”, why it is important to use, why modifiers matter, and how to pull it all off later on in chapter two. But for now, let’s just say this: the name

---

<sup>\*</sup> If you’re interested in either of these books, you can download them for free at [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org).

of the project—Straight for Equality—always worked as a very nice nod to people who identify as non-LGB allies because of the lovely double entendre. (Yes, we remember high school English classes all too well.)

But the title of the program always carried a primary message: this is about how we're all working to achieve equality together, not taking detours around issues that stress us out, or avoiding conversations with people we didn't think would agree. It was always about heading straight to that end goal of equality, and bringing as many people along with us on this very direct journey.

And here we are, together again. So whether you come to this new part of our journey as a straight ally, or you come to it as a member of the LGB community looking to be part of the force for trans inclusion, welcome. As always, we're honored and thrilled you're here.

**Let's go.**

# Equality guideposts

Here are some nifty icons to help quickly identify things you might face on your journey to becoming a trans ally.



## Stumbling Blocks

Caution with a twist. Read real-life stories from people about how they struggled to understand a situation, confront a fear, or try something new. These narratives are good reminders that you're never alone in your journey to becoming a more active ally.



## Phone-a-Friend

Get quick access to great resources that can help you get past your stumbling blocks and on the path, straight to equality.



## Your Invitation

Learning more about how to be a powerful trans ally opens up a whole new set of opportunities for you to change the world. Take advantages of these invitations to try something new and help move equality forward.

## Equality Literacy

While you're reading this book, it is possible that you'll encounter terms with which you're not familiar. We've made an effort to provide explanations along the way, but if there's a word that is unclear, check out our Equality Literacy section starting on page 63.



*I didn't know much about transgender people or what a lot of the words around the term meant. And I had never considered what it felt like on a day-to-day basis as to what it would mean to be trans. But when I found myself closely working on an event with a transgender person, it allowed me to see into her world, and see the obstacles that she faced every day. It was a shock to think outside of my little box, but talking and interacting with an out and proud transgender woman helped me become a better ally in general, and a much better ally for people who are transgender.*

Jane

## chapter one:

### Words. A lot of words.

There's been a lot written about why people sometimes struggle with understanding the T in the LGBTQ acronym, and one of the key indicators that seems to be consistent in any discussion is this: many of us are just kind of hazy on what everything means in the first place.

If we call becoming an ally a journey (and we do), it would seem that the best place to start the trip is by doing some preparation to start our adventure. So let's begin by talking about a few words.

Ok, more than a few. But we promise to be brief. Or brief-ish.

One quick and very important note from the outset: the conversation about gender identity, expression, and identification is constantly evolving, and there are lots of ways to understand some of the terminology associated with the transgender community and being a trans ally. The explanations and definitions in this publication are just one of many ways to understand the landscape. It is likely that you will meet people who interpret some of these terms differently, or that some of these terms will change—even in the time between when this book is published and when you read it.

That's ok. In fact, it's great.

Why? It demonstrates the tremendous diversity in this conversation, and reminds us that there is no one definitive way to understand who we are. We're offering some starting points to help get the trip going.

## Sex

Hooray! We have everyone's attention!

Simply put, sex refers to the biological, genetic, or physical characteristics that define males and females. These can include genitalia, hormone levels, and secondary sex characteristics (the things we often "read" as male or female, like body hair or body shape).

Nearly everyone is assigned a sex at birth, and it tends to be one of two choices: Male or female.\*

But it doesn't have to be that way.

Did you catch the word "assigned"? That was a pretty big one. When we think about the sex of an individual, it typically corresponds with what the doctor said the moment that individual was born—"It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!". Keep that in mind, because we're coming back to it soon.

**Here's the big takeaway: Everyone has a sex.**

## Gender

If we're going by the book, gender most often refers to a set of social, psychological, and emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as "feminine" or "masculine".

We hear about gender all the time—traditional stereotypes about gender (e.g., women are nurturing while men are protective) and how they've traditionally influenced life choices (the nurturing woman goes into teaching, while the protective man garners a high-powered job to care for his family).

---

\*Some individuals may be assigned the term "intersex" which refers to a variety of biological conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy or hormone levels that do not fit the typical definitions of male or female. It is important to know that intersex and transgender are **not** interchangeable terms. For more information on this term, please see the Equality Literacy section starting on page 63.

Often, when someone steps outside the way that gender is understood by their group, it causes some people to get a little rattled. For example, the girl who didn't want to play with dolls, grew up playing rough sports like football, and, as a woman, chose to become a firefighter will have a number of conclusions drawn about her—and perhaps her sexual orientation, or even gender identity—because she's stepped out of the typical space for girls and women.

When things like this happen, it is a reminder to all of us about the power that our society confers about how gender “ought to be”...and the possible consequences that happen when an individual (whether as a child or adult) steps outside those boundaries.

**And the takeaway for this one? Everyone has a gender, too.**

## Sexual Orientation

This term tends to be a pretty familiar one for most people because of the growing familiarity with people who have a sexual orientation that is not straight.

In talking about sexual orientation, we're getting into an individual's emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay and lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who are bisexual experience feelings for people of both sexes. And people who are asexual experience no or very little attraction to either sex.

**Just like sex and gender, everyone has a sexual orientation.**

## Gender Identity

This tends to be a bit of a newer term for a lot of people—but the fact that we're hearing it more often is a good sign that this conversation is receiving greater attention.

Gender identity is the term that is used to describe a person's deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or maybe even neither.

**Here's the important part: A person's gender identity may not always correspond to their assigned biological sex.**

So remember where we talked about assigned sex typically being male or female? This is where gender identity comes in. While an individual, at birth, may be assigned the term “male” based on biological characteristics, that person might not necessarily feel as though they are male, or were intended to be male. For them, there’s a disconnect that happens between what they may see on the outside (a male body, leading to the assumption that the person will identify as male) and how the individual sees themselves (a person who identifies as female but who is living inside a body that was assigned male).

We’re learning more about where gender identity comes from. A lot of experts in the field believe that awareness of gender identity is experienced in infancy, solidifies around age three, and then gets reinforced in adolescence through how we teach youth about who boys and girls are expected to be. But no matter where our understanding of our gender identity comes from, or when we become aware of it, it’s an incredibly strong force in determining how we understand ourselves.

### **The takeaway for this term? Everyone has a gender identity.**

This of course brings us to terms that help describe various gender identities.

#### **Cisgender**

As a refresher to those of us who struggled through Latin in school, and a quick tutorial for those of us who (one might argue, luckily) averted the struggle, the prefix “cis” is Latin for “on the same side of.” When we add the word “gender” to the prefix, we end up with a word that roughly translated, means “on the same side of gender.”

Still fuzzy?

Try looking at the term this way. Cisgender people identify with (or are on the same side of) the gender assigned to them at birth. So when we mention a cisgender man, the focus is on an individual who was assigned male at birth, and whose internal sense of his gender has been the same as that identification: male. Similarly, a cisgender woman is an individual who was assigned female at birth, and also identifies as female.

Yep. It's true: When you break it down like that, the term is pretty useful. And cisgender sounds a whole lot better than "non-transgender" or—even worse—the dreaded, "I'm not transgender, not that there's anything wrong with that."

## Transgender

Here's the most basic explanation: transgender is a term often used to describe an individual whose gender identity does not necessarily match the sex assigned to them at birth.

So we have transgender women (individuals who were assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female) and we have transgender men (individuals who were assigned female at birth, but whose internal sense of their gender identity is male).

But we did mention that this is the basic explanation. As in any group, there is tremendous diversity within the transgender (which can sometimes be referred to as "trans") community. Transgender people are just part of the incredible spectrum of identities in this space, and the space is constantly evolving and changing.



## Your Invitation...

### Everything under the umbrella

*"I thought I had this down, and then there were more words. Now I'm really worried that I'm not getting this whole thing as much as I thought I was. Gender-creative? Help."*

**Michael**

Genderqueer. Gender nonconforming. Trans\*. Transsexual. Bigender. Third sex. Female-to-male (FTM). Male-to-female (MTF). Gender-creative. Gender-colorful. Gender-expansive.

The diverse collection of ways that people who identify under what is sometimes called "the transgender umbrella" is vast, and is always evolving. Some terms that you may hear are alternate ways of talking about being trans, while others might refer to specific identities that expand our understanding of what gender nonconformity (in other words, viewing one's gender as something beyond the understanding that people must be male or female) means.

*(continued on page 13)*

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRANSITION?

*“My journey as an ally began when my fraternal twin started his gender transition. Being a twin means you always have a witness to your life, someone to help you see yourself more clearly. During my twin’s transition, many people asked if I was upset or sad to lose my sister. I always told them that I did not lose anything. My twin is still my twin, I just see him more clearly now. Our transgender friends and family give us the gift of being their best selves. My wish is that one day people like my twin receive only gratitude, not pain and discrimination, in exchange for their courage.” —Katherine*

When talking about people who are trans-identified, one of the most commonly used terms is “transitioning.” Simply put, it refers to the process one goes through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. The process not an overnight event, but a long-term journey that may take years.

There tend to be two aspects to transitioning for many people:

- **Social and legal transition: Change of name, pronoun selection, cosmetic modifications to appearance, dress, changes to an individual’s vocal tone, etc.** For many people, this will also entail legal changes to their name and gender marker on identification documents like driver’s licenses and passports.
- **Medical transition: The introduction of hormones (testosterone for trans men, estrogen and testosterone blockers for trans women) into the body.** For some people, it will also involve surgical procedures that align the physical body with one’s gender identification. These may include “top” surgery, “bottom” surgery, and, for trans women, facial feminization.

For many teens and adults who are transgender, their transition experience will be guided by the Standards of Care (SOC) developed by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). The SOC serves as clinical guidance for health professionals to assist trans-identified people with safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort in order to maximize their overall health, psychological well-being, and self-fulfillment. This assistance may include primary care, gynecologic and urologic care, reproductive options, voice and communication therapy, mental health services (e.g., assessment, counseling, psychotherapy), and hormonal and surgical treatments.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRANSITION? (CONTINUED)

For children who identify differently from their assigned sex, and are “persistent, consistent and insistent” in that identification, parents might decide to support their child’s social transition. They may call the child by their preferred name and pronoun, allow the child to grow or cut their hair, and dress in the clothing and colors of the gender the child feels most comfortable. These changes are completely reversible should the child want to. Often, parents find these changes bring their child great comfort and alleviate the child’s anxiety and depression. What is most important for success in these cases (as in all cases) is the parents’ unconditional love and support of the child for who they are, whether trans or cis, lesbian, gay, bi, or straight.

However, not all trans people will follow the Standards of Care, nor will they go through medical procedures or treatments as part of their transition. Some individuals’ experiences—whether dictated by personal selection, where they live, access to healthcare services, or by limited resources—necessitate a slightly different path. However, this does not mean that an individual is “less” transgender than someone who has received extensive medical and surgical procedures any more than someone is “less” gay because they haven’t yet been in a relationship. It is just one more way of being trans-identified.



### Phone-a-Friend

#### Looking for more information on the transitioning process?

Check out the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) by visiting [wpath.org](http://wpath.org). And if you’d like to learn even more about the many aspects of trans-related health, pick up a copy of **Trans Bodies, Trans Selves** (available at [transbodies.com](http://transbodies.com)).

For more details on transition processes among children and youth, check out **Gender Born, Gender Made: Raising Gender-Nonconforming Children** by Diane Ehrensaft or **The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals** by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper.

### Not sure what to use?

In general, *trans*, or *transgender* tend to be safe places to start, but the best way to find out what to use is simply to ask a person. (More on how to do this in chapter 3.) If you're looking for additional definitions for words associated with gender identity, check out the Equality Literacy section on page 63.

## Gender Expression

So far we've talked a lot about terms that are assigned to people, and terms that people may use to identify themselves, so much of the conversation has been internal. But gender expression is where everything goes public.

Gender expression is something you can see. It includes the way in which a person communicates their gender identity to others through external means such as clothing, mannerisms, speech patterns, and social interactions that are traditionally linked to how we read masculinity or femininity.

We say "traditionally" for a very specific reason: some individuals may embrace a gender expression that is outside of these two opposite points, or *binaries*. Many individuals may have a more androgynous—or gender-neutral—expression. Some individuals may embrace a more fluid expression, at times presenting as female, at others presenting as male. When we talk about countless expressions, we're being completely literal. You may hear people refer to being non-binary, which generally means that they do not see themselves on any of the more traditional understandings of gender as rigid and inflexible.

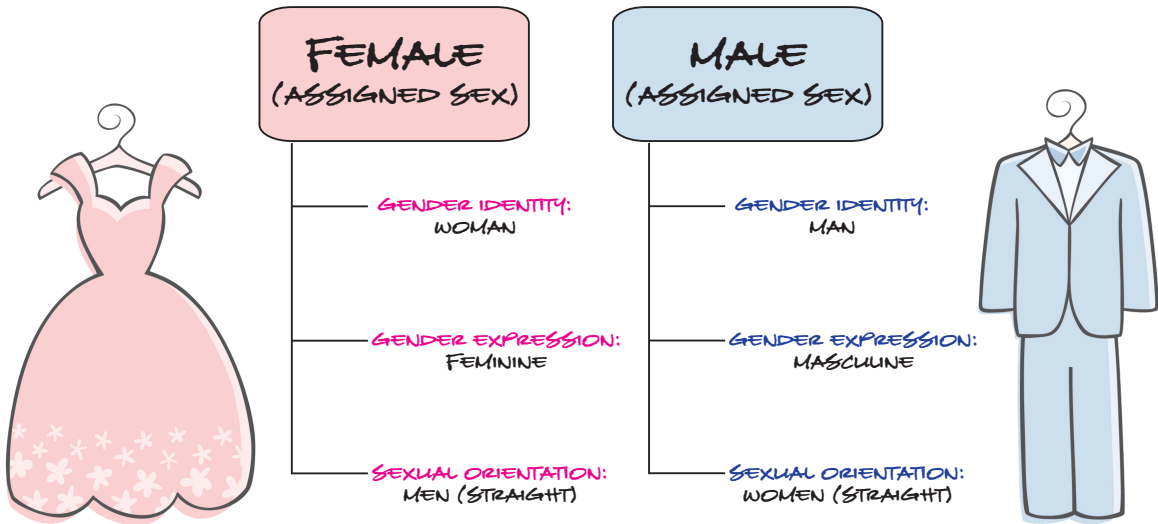
**And just like all of those terms that we've mentioned already, remember this: Everyone has a gender expression.**

**That really was a lot of words.**

Yes it was. And we're just starting the conversation. But just like any vocabulary list, this isn't just about memorizing what things mean. The real goal is to understand how it all fits together. Occasionally, there's no better way to do that than to just draw some pictures.



For some people who may say that they've never met someone who is transgender, or even lesbian, gay, or bisexual, this is often what the world may look like:



This perspective isn't a good or bad thing—it is just about the experience that they have had so far. And while it may seem kind of rigid or inaccurate for many, acknowledging that this remains the place from which some people approach this topic is important to being an effective trans ally who can talk about the issue.

Even for people who may understand sexual orientation and acknowledge that they are one of the 8 in 10 people in the U.S. who say that they personally know someone who is not straight, adding in the element of gender identity and expression might be outside of their experience.

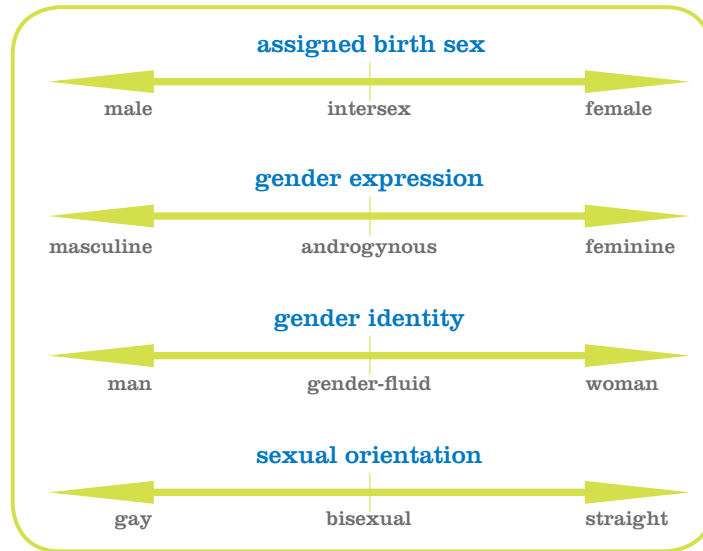
So how can we help communicate a more accurate version of how people identify? Think of it this way—every person has a path in life. Sometimes it's just recognizing that we each get to the same destination a little differently. But we can always learn from each other on that journey.

**“If I dare to hear you  
I will feel you like the sun  
And grow in your direction.”**

Mark Nepo



So let's look at things differently:



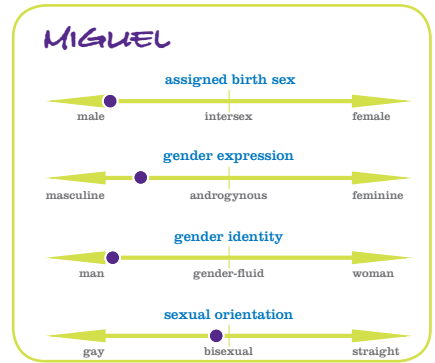
Admittedly, this version lacks cute pictures, but here's why we think it is the way to go: it is a whole lot closer to reality in reflecting the diversity of who we are, regardless of where we identify. In other words, anyone can "map" themselves on this model if they wanted to.

Remember how we kept reminding you that, "Everyone has a..." and then added terms like sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression? That's because it is true. We all have these elements, and we all fall on different places of the spectrum within these elements.

So let's look at a couple of examples to see how this works...

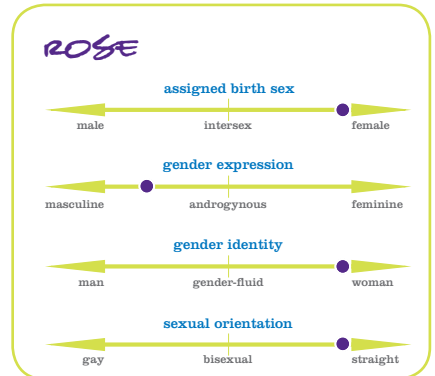
## Miguel

When Miguel thought about where he was in terms of these spectrums, we were able to get an idea of how he identifies. His assigned sex is male, and he's always identified as male. His gender expression has been pretty typically masculine, and his sexual orientation is towards both sexes, although slightly leaning towards other men. So when we're talking about Miguel, he's a cisgender bisexual man.



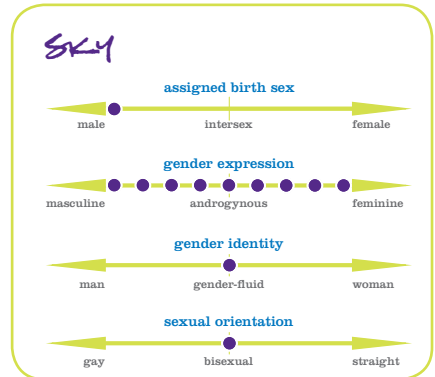
## Rose

Rose gives us another chance to look at how someone might identify. She mapped herself out as being assigned female, and said that her sexual orientation is towards men. Yet when it came to her gender expression, she picked something that was leaning towards masculine. So while some elements of who Rose is and how she presents to people may be expected, her expression—she doesn't do dresses, prefers work boots to heels, and doesn't use much makeup—is a little less traditional. She identifies as a cisgender straight woman.



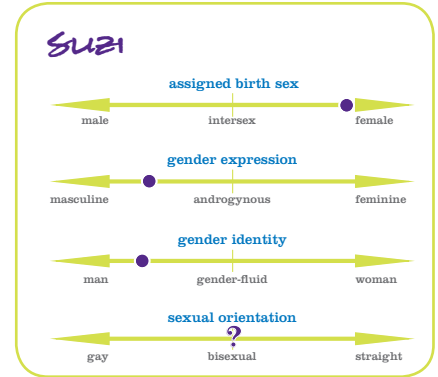
## Sky

And Sky provides us with one more possible example of how someone might see themselves. Sky was assigned male at birth, although Sky's never truly identified as "completely" male. Sky's gender expression has reflected that. Some days, Sky will show up for classes in feminine clothes, other days it is all about donning a bow tie and a suit, and on others, Sky's clothes will be pretty gender-neutral, like jeans and a sweater. When it comes to attraction, Sky identifies as bisexual, because Sky is attracted to both women and men. If you asked Sky for a term of self-identification, it would be queer.



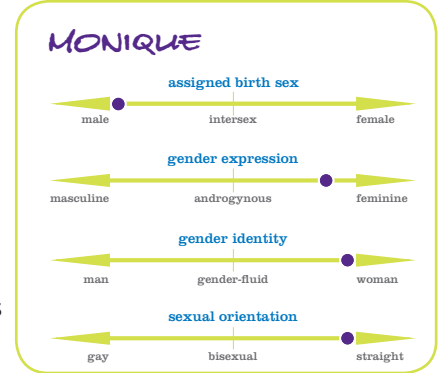
## Suzi

Suzi is now three years old and was assigned female at birth. Yet when Suzi was a toddler, her parents noticed she only played with boy's toys and, in pretend play, she was always the daddy. Suzi's parents allowed Suzi to continue to express herself, even in traditionally masculine ways, without criticism or censure. While Suzi probably wouldn't be identified as transgender at this point, she gives us a perfect example of how youth begin to express their gender identity—which may be seen as nonconforming—and claim their gender expression at very young ages.



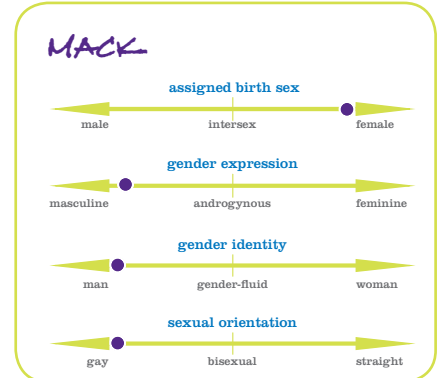
## Monique

Monique gives us yet another example of how a person might identify when we put all of these elements together. Monique's assigned sex at birth was male, but she never identified as such. For as long as she can remember, she identified as female. Her gender expression is very feminine and when most people see her, they identify her as a woman. Finally, Monique identifies as heterosexual and says that her attraction is exclusively towards men. So Monique's self-identification is as a straight, transgender woman.



## Mack

Finally, Mack offers yet another way to understand how people identify. Mack's assigned sex at birth was female, but when he was a child, Mack started identifying as a boy. As a teen, Mack presented himself as a male, and when he was in his 20s, he officially transitioned to male. But in a contrast to Monique, Mack has always been attracted to other men, so he identifies as gay. Mack's identification is as a transgender man who is gay.



And these are just a few examples of how people might identify when asked to think about the various elements around sex, gender, identification, expression and orientation that makes people...well, who they are. The possible combinations are infinite when we move away from the belief that everyone must be on the traditional binaries.

**An important take-away is this: One element is not necessarily a predictor of another.**

As most people are beginning to know, being born female doesn't necessarily mean that an individual's attraction will be towards men. In the same way, identifying as transgender does not dictate anything about an individual's sexual orientation. Some trans people will identify as straight, some as bisexual, others as gay or lesbian, and there are still others that identify as someone more fluid. Sexual orientation doesn't depend on how someone understands their gender or who they are—it just depends on who they are attracted to.



## Your Invitation...

### Ever spent any time thinking about how you identify?

Many people never really will, because they never see a need to. But why not give it a whirl? You can download a copy of the chart that we've used in this section at [straightforequality.org/trans](http://straightforequality.org/trans).

Go through the exercise and think about where your identifications might be completely expected, and where you might embrace aspects that are less traditional.

*I'm still not completely out as trans, but one thing I did do was change my name on my personal Gmail account from Jessica to Jay. My sister-in-law noticed, and she sent me a wonderfully supportive e-mail where she asked what pronouns I prefer and whether I'd like to be addressed by my niece as Uncle Jay instead of Auntie Jess. Being offered that kind of support by a trans ally, without even asking, really made me feel more comfortable about being out around my family.*

Jay

## chapter two:

### Who are allies, anyway?

Let's acknowledge what we're all thinking about chapter one: that was a lot to learn and wrap your brain around.

There's no arguing with that. But stick with us, because now is the time when we add one more very important word to the conversation:

#### Ally.

Simple to understand, right? Perhaps. But by this time you've probably figured out that we think that more is better when it comes to understanding who we are and the roles that we can play in achieving equality for all, so let's talk about what "ally" really means.

#### In the beginning, there were lists

As PFLAG National developed the Straight for Equality project in the time leading up to the 2007 launch, we actually started by researching how the word "ally" was being used within the LGBTQ equality movement. Certainly allies have always been here and doing important work, but we needed to explain who an ally is and the expectations we have for allies to be effective. After all, what is the chance that someone would say they'd like to be an ally if they don't know what it is, or what it entails?

We went to work. We searched high and low for definitions of what allies are within the LGBTQ movement and what we found were lists.

There was the list of five things you must believe to be a good ally. The list of 25 things you must be doing to be a good ally. Even the list of 150 things that you need to believe and do before you earn the right to call yourself an ally. And even the explanations that were not list-based had some pretty big requirements for people who wanted to adopt the term: allies had to challenge homophobia and transphobia every single time they encountered it. Allies had to vote in a very specific way. Allies need to acknowledge and work to subvert their heterosexual



and cisgender privilege. Allies had to give money to LGBTQ organizations. Allies needed to only belong to faith communities that are openly supportive of people who are LGBTQ.

Don't get us wrong: these are some pretty lofty goals, and are good options for some allies. But in the end, the same question kept coming up: aren't people worth so much more than being reduced to a list or a set of rigid demands—some of which would probably exclude a lot of people from the effort?

### **We think so.**

So we went back to the drawing board and thought about what the path to being an ally really looks like, and how we might be able to expand it to bring more people on the journey. In the end, we found ourselves looking at the whole project differently. Our first step was to do a definition purge, and the second entailed drawing a picture.

Rather than developing a stiff set of requirements or beliefs for someone to be an ally, we created a list of some of the qualities people—regardless of where they are on their ally journey—possess:

- **Allies want to learn.** Allies are people who don't necessarily know all that can be known on LGBTQ issues or about people who are LGBTQ, but they want to learn more.
- **Allies address their barriers.** Allies are people who might have to grapple with some barriers to being openly and actively supportive of people who are LGBTQ, and they're willing to take on the challenge.
- **Allies are people who know that “support” comes in many forms.** It can mean something super-public (think covering yourself in rainbow glitter and heading to a Pride celebration with a sign reading, “PROUD ALLY”<sup>\*</sup>). But it can also mean expressing support in more personal ways through the language we use, conversations we choose to have, and signals that we send. And true allies know that all aspects of ally expression are important, effective, and should be valued equally.
- **Allies are diverse.** Allies are people who know that there's no one way to be an ally, and that everyone gets to adopt the term in a different way...and that's ok.

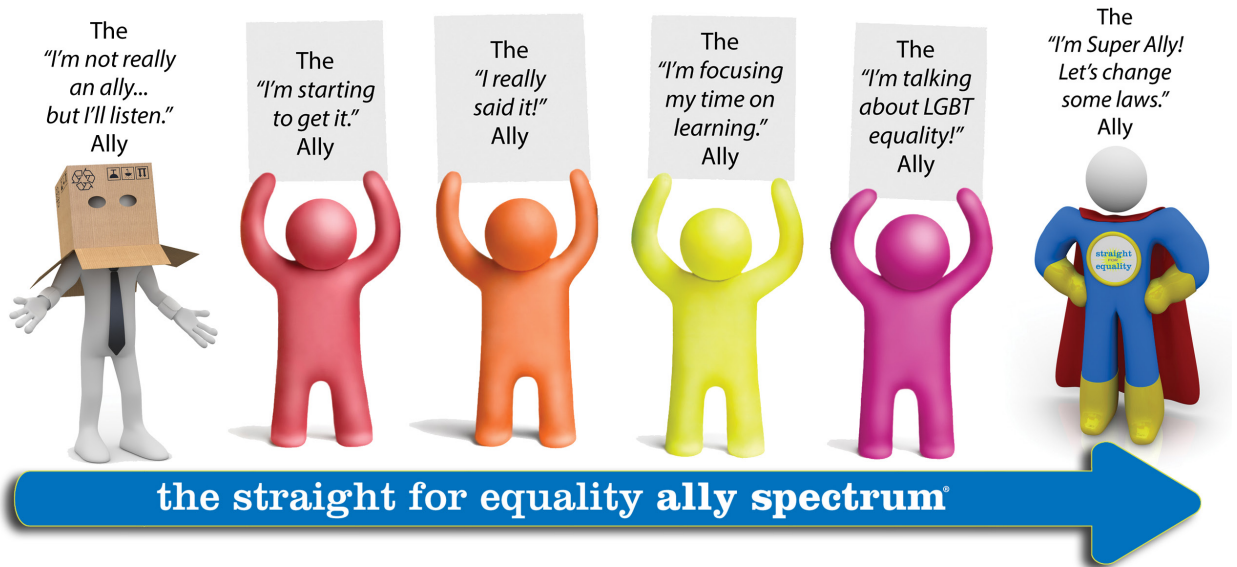
---

<sup>\*</sup>*An interesting and bold choice, but especially challenging in hot or windy weather. Probably not for everyone.*

As we started to think about the qualities of allies, the terms “journey” and “spectrum” kept coming up. The process of going from “not my issue” to “someone take me to my legislator to fix some laws!” rarely happens overnight. It usually entails a process of learning more, becoming comfortable to talk about the issue openly, knowing how to take on pushback, and being able to help others in their ally journeys, too.

And that ally journey, as we looked at it, felt like its own coming out process of sorts. So we grabbed our sketchpads and went to work.

### Behold, the Straight for Equality Ally Spectrum®:



## Why is the ally spectrum useful?

First, it acknowledges that allies can be found across the spectrum of support, from the people who say, “Not my issue...but I’ll listen to you,” to those who feel comfortable finally saying “LGBTQ” and talking about issues out loud, to those who get the LGB part, but want to understand the T, right through our super allies, who are off and taking care of things on their own.

Second, it is a reminder that no matter where people are on the spectrum, they are allies. No need to become an advanced ally before you claim the title. There are things to learn and things to do at every single point.

Finally, it gets rid of that icky feeling that we all get when we’re forced to ignore all of the characteristics, background, and experiences that make people who they are and try to squeeze them into a box to fit our own ideas about who they ought to be. Shake free the chains of being just a list or one definition, people! Now is your time to embrace your ally diversity.

## So why is this term so important? Why the “label”?

Even super-brainy people have taken on this issue. Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (ally status unknown) once wrote that, “Once you label me, you negate me,” suggesting that labeling any individual compromises their individuality.

We actually agree. Labels really aren’t for people at all.

But to us, identifying as an ally isn’t a label—it is a term of empowerment. It is a state of being, an explanation of who someone is, and where their values lie. It communicates key things that matter to them—LGBTQ equality, care for their LGBTQ friends, family, and colleagues—in a powerful way. It is a vocal and positive stand that clarifies an important point: **while I may not be LGBTQ, LGBTQ issues are my issues, too.**

## And yet, you're messing with my head. Straight allies, and cis allies, and allies with no specifics...why?

There's a lot of conversation about this, and it tends to sound something like this: if the point is that your sexual orientation and gender identity shouldn't matter, then why make such a point of mentioning it when we talk about being allies?

**Short answer: Because it does matter.**

Don't get us wrong—the goal is that one day none of this will be relevant. (At PFLAG, we joke that our job is to do such a good job at achieving equality and inclusion that we'll be able to put ourselves out of business.) But for now, it is relevant.

Consider this: As of this writing, roughly 50% of people who are LGBT are not out in their workplaces. In more than half of the states in the U.S., LGBT people can get fired from their jobs. About 90% of people who are trans say that they have experienced discrimination at work simply for being trans. And an alarming 41% of trans-identified youth will attempt suicide before the age of 18, compared to just 1.8% of the general population.

In order to change these jarring statistics, we need to have a broad spectrum of diverse voices expressing their support for equality and inclusion—and that includes people who are not members of the LGBTQ community. They have a unique power to send the message that inclusion and equality aren't just things that people in the group affected want (in other words, LGBTQs), but something that everyone wants. And in order to make that unique, "It's not about me, but it really is about me" statement, talking about our background as someone who isn't LGBTQ, but owns this issue is often necessary.

Putting your specifics in front of the word ally also creates unique educational opportunities. For example, within the LGBTQ community, there are still challenges for some to being inclusive of people who are trans. So when an LGB individual states that they are a trans ally (or if you want to go super-brainy, cis ally) they are making a statement within the community that they are striving to be more inclusive...and will be a resource and a person who is willing to talk and educate. Without that adjective, that's not likely to happen.

## Where do we go from here?

By now, you've hopefully started taking a bit of an ally journey of your own. Maybe you're rethinking how you personally understand the term "ally." There's a chance that you considered where you might be on your ally spectrum right now and what it will take to move forward. Maybe you've even started thinking about what some of your barriers might be to becoming an out and proud trans ally.

**If you've thought about these things—or you're thinking about them now—we're on the right track.**

## THE POWER OF TRANS ALLIES

Here are just a few examples of trans allies making a big difference in someone's life.

*I was having a medical issue that had nothing to do with my transition and had to go to the emergency room. I was in extreme pain and had visible, deep wounds. The doctor came in took one look at me and asked, "What are you?" My ID doesn't match my gender appearance. He was noticeably uncomfortable. I heard him call me "it" and make fun of me with a nurse outside the curtain. I was not treated for over an hour and the doctor kept walking in and out asking questions about transition rather than looking at my wounds. Eventually the friend that drove me to the hospital calmly put her things down and went to get help from the patient advocate on site. She also spoke to the doctors and nurses explaining calmly and lovingly what it means to be a trans man. After she did this, I finally got treated. The doctor and nurse later apologized. —Oscar*

*I am a male-to-female trans person, and the congregation of my home church is comprised of a great many trans allies in the clergy and laity. When my marriage was falling apart and I was feeling unworthy of love, my congregation lifted me up and supported me as my transition progressed. —Connie*

*As an undergraduate, I experienced extreme anxiety and challenges navigating campus and society as a gender variant/trans\* individual. There was one ally on campus who had a Safe Zone placard [a sign indicating that the individual is LGBT-inclusive] in their workspace who I reached out to. This trans ally listened to me, helped build my confidence, and assisted me with strategizing on how to deal with these everyday situations. This person is still my mentor and role model to this day, as a trans ally, they literally changed my life. —Dana*

*Being transgender is hard enough, and not having support from your parents makes coping with daily life substantially more difficult and nearly unbearable. I can imagine that this feeling is similar to that which a parent experiences when hearing their child is transgender. The hopes and expectations they once had for them are now gone. Only by going through the challenging and emotional storm (appropriately named the Stages of Grief) can a parent arrive at the calm waters of acceptance of their child. My mother achieved this feat, and I am so very blessed to be supported by her, and proud to be her son. —Allen*

*I'm gay and have been out since I was 18 (I'm 51 now). While I never excluded people who are trans, I wasn't actively supportive. I didn't understand how trans fit into the whole gay community, and when it came to legislation, being trans-inclusive wasn't a priority for me at all. Then I met a trans woman who shared her coming out and transition story with me, and I immediately got it. I suddenly understood that her experiences were a lot like mine, and I needed to use my cis privilege to support her just like I want straight people to include me. I'm not perfect, and I still have a lot of learning to do, but I'm proud to be an ally to people who are trans. It was all about hearing that story.*

**Gary**

## chapter three:

### Working through the barriers

Some of the hardest work that trans allies need to do is coming to terms with The Great Unknown. In other words, how does a person figure out where some of their barriers to being openly supportive are? How can they commit to working through them so they can move from feeling good about being supportive to doing something outwardly supportive?

#### **We have some great news for you: Your answers are here.**

Just a quick reminder: encountering barriers does not make anyone a bad person, or a subpar ally. It makes them human. In fact, any ally (even the Super Allies) sometimes struggle with getting past their own fears to speaking up. Becoming supportive—and, for that matter, evolving yourself so your support can get bigger—is a process. Mistakes will be made. Tripping is likely to happen. Feeling a little lost is par for the course. But that's ok. The ally journey is a pretty interesting experience.

#### **Barrier One:**

#### **I'm feeling awkward, but don't judge me!**

*"This is all just very, very new for me. I've got gay friends, so I feel like this should just be easy to understand—you know, LGBT and all. But it feels different, and I'm just a little uncomfortable. But I'm not a hater!"*

So there are a few truths going on here: this *is* different than the LGB stuff that people often know. And being uncomfortable is normal when people are learning something new. Finally, being a little uncomfortable with new ideas doesn't mean the person is a hater—they're trying to understand, and when it doesn't happen immediately, things can get frustrating.

#### **How about we start here: Accept that gender is a really complex thing.**



This is the case for everyone, whether you're someone who identifies as trans or someone who doesn't. Our ideas about what gender is and what it means for who we are have been practically hardwired into many of our social structures. If the doctor says, "It's a girl!" there are a lot of assumptions about what that individual's sex will mean for their lives. As children, it dictates how parents will dress the child, what toys they'll be given (or even permitted) to play with. And while society has, to some extent, evolved past such rigid expectations, they still play a significant role over many of our immediate and even unconscious judgments about the people we meet. Think about when some people meet someone and can't immediately tell if they're male or female. It causes stress and for some, is a very uncomfortable feeling since we're raised seeing things in terms of one or the other.

Yet wrapped up in all of this is an idea that is much harder for people to rethink—the very concept that a person's gender can be something else than they expected. Most people are not raised thinking outside of the structure of something like "Born a man, always a man." (To be clear, there are some exceptions to this. See concepts like *two spirit* in the Equality Literacy section for examples.)

Even when people try to understand why some people are transgender, they often find themselves more confused than ever, since the very experience of, "I'm not in the right body" is so completely different from their own experiences. That's why when some people encounter someone who has transitioned, it flies in the face of much that most have been socialized to believe. And that can be a new or even rattling experience.

**So this brings us back to where we started:  
Gender is a complex thing. But what can an ally do about it?**

Here's what to do: think differently about what gender is, and how it can be defined. Begin moving away from the idea that people are one or the other (or part of the gender binary), and move toward the idea that what the doctor said on the day a person was born is not necessarily their destiny.

You don't actually need to know a transperson to change how you think about gender in the same way that you don't need to know a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person to rethink sexual

orientation. Start paying attention to how the rigidity around how we understand gender is changing in front of our very eyes. Gone are the days of baby dolls for girls and trucks for boys—Barbie® is an entrepreneur, and boys are learning culinary skills. Look at how these messages and expectations are evolving and use them as reminders that we're moving in a direction where the toys we play with, the clothes we wear, and the careers we pursue aren't dictated by biology. In other words, biology is no longer (or ever truly was) destiny.

**Most importantly, start thinking about this: People should have the right to define their own gender—and allies should be the ones to accept and respect that identification.**

There's a whole lot to be said about the power of setting a great example through our words and our actions. When you meet someone who is trans, accept their identification whether it seems to make sense to you or not. A good ally knows that there are countless ways for us to express who we are, and everyone's expression should be validated.

Finally, remember that while the acronym "LGBTQ" gets used all the time, that there are, in fact, differences in what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer/questioning and what it means to be transgender. The LGB part refers to people's sexual orientation, while the T part refers to gender identity or expression. So while the different groups tend to be seen in the same community—often because of common experiences, shared history, and the overlap that can exist (for example a trans man who also identifies as gay)—they involve different learning and understanding. And the familiarity that a person might have with all of their LGB friends does not necessarily translate into the same familiarity with people who are trans. So be patient with yourself and be listen to people who are trans for their individual perspectives.

You don't need to shake your discomfort off right away, because becoming accepting generally entails a lot of inward thinking about how we see the world and who is in it. This is pretty profound meaning of life type stuff—the kind of stuff that doesn't get resolved in a day. Because it is evolving, allies need to evolve over time, too. Sometimes there are snags, but knowing what they are is the key to moving it forward.

*P.S.: We still don't think you're a hater.*



## Your Invitation...

### Put yourself in check

Change begins with you. A great way to start expanding your ability to conceptualize and accept different understandings of gender identity and expression is to begin by being conscious of our own assumptions and expectations. Start questioning yourself. Think about where you have challenged gender stereotypes and what the response may have been—were you a boy with long hair? Girl who hated dresses? And when you find that you might be making assumptions about someone based on their gender, put yourself in check. Are you judging someone because they aren't meeting your expectations of who they should be and how they should behave based on what was assigned to them at birth? Are you repeating gender-policing behaviors that you might have been hurt by in the past? Now's the time to own it, and start working to end it.

Want an example of how powerful changing this aspect of yourself can be, and what it means for a person who is trans? Someone shared the following story:

*"The support of allies has been crucial to my family. Just last week my son was repeatedly teased about being a girl (he hates this). Several girls in his class stood up for him and his right to wear what he wants. They know that boys can wear dresses and like pink. These children—and their vocal ideas about gender—are vital to making my son safe."*

## THE BATHROOM BLUES

As many start to become aware of people who are trans, they often begin to wonder what they'd do in certain situations. And before long, the perennial question is raised: "What about the bathroom???"

*(We inserted three question marks to add a wave of drama to this question.)*

To be a little more specific, many people want to know what bathroom a person who is trans should use, and what they're supposed to do when that person walks into the facility.

On the first point, people who are trans should be allowed to use the facility that corresponds to their gender identity and expression. Trans women and girls in the ladies' room, trans men and boys in the gents'. There is also a growing trend towards gender-neutral facilities, and even mixed gender facilities, which provide a few other options. But remember that part about being an ally by accepting a person's gender as they define it? This is a great example of what it means when put into action.

Here's the most important step while you are ensconced in the loo: just keep doing your business. If someone is in the restroom, they're there for a specific purpose, regardless of their gender identity, and it is probably the same purpose that you have. (Please don't make us say it.) For all intents and purposes, the person in the next stall or at the next sink is in just the place where they belong.

## **Barrier Two: Stop me before I make a mistake!**

*"I am officially stressed out. What if I mess up? There are so many new words and ideas here. Am I just going to make a situation worse? Will I offend someone? I want to be a good trans ally! Help!"*

**Accept this: messing up is probably going to happen.**

*Be open to the idea of being wrong. The process of discovering what the role that being transgender plays in our lives isn't always a linear process. It is sometimes fraught with dead ends and second guesses, but that's ok.*

**Loren**

The good news is that it means that you're actually doing something to try to start the conversation. So there are a few ways to handle it when a mistake happens.

### **Breathe, apologize, and ask for guidance.**

Did you just mean to talk about people who are trans and found yourself mentioning the word "intersex"? Having a conversation about someone who is trans, and unintentionally used the wrong pronoun? It happens. And when it does, the first thing that you should do is breathe. Let the moment of panic pass. When you're back to being grounded, apologize for your trip-up: "Wow. That was not the word I meant to use. I'm really trying hard to be a better ally and learn the right terminology, but I'm still working on it. If you hear me misuse something, I'd really appreciate if you could let me know."

**Seriously, it is as easy as that. But make the commitment to catch yourself when something goes awry and own it.**

Similarly, if someone who is trans objects to or challenges how you've used a term or talked about an issue, be open to truly hearing what they have to say. As we might have mentioned a few times already, this is an ever-changing and evolving conversation with countless perspectives. What you learn in this book might be understood very differently by someone else. Don't suggest that you know the one definitive answer, but listen to the different perspective. Follow people's guidance and respect the language they use. And always thank people for taking the time to talk to you and share their stories.



### Phone-a-Friend

*“What if I just don't even know where to start a conversation when I meet someone and I'm not sure about how they identify?”*

Hopefully by now, we've established that you can't necessarily know anything about someone's gender identity by just looking at them. (If you haven't gotten that message, absorb it now.) So for some allies, there is a question about how to approach people and have a conversation when they're not sure what pronouns or words they should use.

Here's the big solution: ask them. When you're unclear about how to refer to someone, ask them what they would like used. As in, “I want to be sure I'm being respectful, so can you let me know what gender pronouns you'd like me to use?” This is good manners and a great way to signal your support by just asking the question. When someone gives you the response, thank them and follow their guidance.

Michigan State University's Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender Resource Center offers additional guidance. Visit them at <http://lbgtrc.msu.edu> then click on Resources > Trans Educational Materials > What Are Preferred Gender Pronouns.



## Gender-Neutral Pronouns

*"I mastered the LGBTQ acronym, started using inclusive terms like 'partner' and 'spouse' and then someone mentioned that I should use the pronoun 'ze.' And now I'm just completely lost." —Renee*

When we get into pronouns, be aware that it is possible that you might meet someone who asks you to use gender-neutral pronouns (like "ze", "hir", or even "they") or to use no pronouns at all, for example, rather than saying "his office space" you'd say "Drew's office space." If you encounter this, don't panic. It is just another way of identifying. There are some definitions in the Equality Literacy section that might help, but don't forget about the power of a Google search to give you more background.



## Your Invitation... Respectful pronouns for all!

Want to start setting the tone for respecting people's identifications? If you're conducting an event, holding a meeting, or teaching a class in which people are wearing name tags, consider creating a space on the tag where people can fill in their preferred pronouns on the badge. If there is someone who is transgender or gender nonconforming, this could be a great way to help them communicate their preferred pronouns as well as a chance for you to subtly signal your support. And if there isn't, it may give you the chance to talk about why, as an ally, you are doing this.

## THE "T" WORD

There's been a lot of controversy about the word "tranny" in the LGBT community. If you haven't followed any of the debates, the very brief version is this: Some people find the term to be a deeply offensive word that has historically been used as a slur to describe people who are trans. Others embrace the term as one of empowerment, in the same way "queer" has moved from epithet to positive identity for some. Meanwhile, there are people who claim that everyone just needs to lighten up and accept that the word is just a word and that we need to move on.

We'd like to tell you that we've figured out the definitive solution to this one, but we haven't. Still, we're happy to offer our perspective.

Since the term "tranny" has long been perceived as deeply offensive, proceed with caution. At this time, the term packs a significant emotional punch for some people which should, at the minimum, warrant some discretion on how, when, or if it is used.

In other words, for most allies, it is best not to presume that this word should be used to describe an individual or a group of individuals. Under no circumstance should it be used as an umbrella term. Instead, it should be treated on a case-by-case basis, finding out by listening or asking if someone uses the term themselves and if it is the term that they want you to use in describing them. In other words, practice the Platinum Rule: treat people as *they'd* like to be treated.

Here's a somewhat parallel example that might help you understand what we're getting at: the term "dyke" is seen by people in many different ways—from an identity to a deep insult. Most allies would not use "dyke" to describe a lesbian when they first meet her. They'd find out what that woman's comfort zone and preferences are first, and then work from there.

Same rule applies here. Given the nature and history of the word, err on the side of caution and respect. Listen to hear if people use it themselves. Ask what term they'd like for you to use. Apply what you've learned to that individual only. And repeat.



## Barrier Three: The well-intentioned but TMI ally.

*"I have a lot of questions. This is fascinating. I didn't know people could even change like this and I want to know everything about what their experiences are like so I can really wrap my head around it."*

Makes sense, right? Kind of that great ally can-do attitude? Well...yes. *And no.*

For many allies, the need to know as much as possible is part of their DNA. Get the terminology down. Memorize some statistics. Read narratives. Watch films. Get to know people. Initiate conversations. This is all good stuff. But when it comes to being a trans ally, the desire to know as much as possible needs to get tempered a little by recognizing what questions are good to ask, and which are off-limits.

So first, how do you appropriately ask a question to someone who is trans (or, in the case of trans or gender nonconforming children, their parents or guardians) about their experiences or perspectives? The magic trick here is that you should do it the same way that you would ask any other person about their experiences or perspectives.

1. **Understand that your desire to know something does not mean that a person is required to give you an answer.** Different people have different comfort zones, and accept when an individual says, "I really would prefer not to talk about that."
2. **Ask in a way that allows the person to decide if they want to answer the question, and allow them the right to set the time and the space for the conversation.** One of our favorite strategies goes a little like this, "Would it be ok if I asked you about \_\_\_\_\_ sometime?" Simple, right? But it puts the power to decide where the conversation is going to go in the hands of the person who will respond.
3. **Listen.** And we mean really listen. Just like LGB people, there are countless experiences of what it means to be trans, and the chance that you'll hear two that are identical will happen at the probability of 246,010,509,452,038,449,043, 297,534,759,342 to one. So be present when you're getting the response that you asked to hear.
4. **Say thank you.** Probably an obvious one, but dad was right: "Please" and "thank you" go a long way.

## So what's off-limits?

The truth is that there is no definitive list of things that you should or should not ask a person who is transgender. However, there are a few points that by and large seem to be accepted.

- **Do not ask about a person's surgical status or body parts.** The reasoning is this: some things—like the condition of our bodies—are private and should only be discussed if someone proactively brings up the subject. Remember that not every trans person has the means or the desire to go through surgical changes, and this does not make them any “less” trans. When you ask this question of someone, it could touch on other issues which are not generally for public discussion.  
So what's the alternative? Accept people for who they are, as they are. You don't need to know what happens “down there” to understand a person's gender.
- **Do not ask to see pre-transition photos or ask what a person's name “used to be.”** If we start from the place of accepting people for who they tell us they are (probably one of the biggest trademarks of a trans ally) then knowing who they were once seen as is irrelevant. Sure, you might be very, very interested in who the person once appeared as, but it is in the past, and for many trans people, a piece that should be left in the past (not unlike one's middle school photos).
- **Do not ask when a person “became” transgender.** Just like the LGB coming out process, the trans coming out process is often long and challenging and involves a lifetime of self-understanding and awareness. No one suddenly “becomes” trans any more than they “turn” gay or lesbian. Science-y types are constantly learning more about the points at which humans start to understand their own gender, and evidence is pointing to it happening as young as three years old. So the experience of realizing that someone's assigned sex does not match their internal sense of their gender can be a long-term experience, while for others it may be clear as a bell from a very young age. Implying anything else suggests that there is some element of choice in gender identity.

- **Do not ask how people have sex.** It does seem a little unusual to have to call such a question out, but many people wonder what being trans means for sexual activity. And while an interest might be there, it is no more appropriate to ask this of a transperson than it would be to ask anyone else. Just...don't.

*Educate yourself and remember that nobody owes you an explanation or an answer to a question. One trans or gender nonconforming person can't be a representative for all of us. Don't treat us like encyclopedias. That said, sometimes there's only so much Google can do. If you feel you need to ask someone about something you don't understand, respectfully acknowledge that you are not entitled to an answer, but you wish to educate yourself and are hoping for advice.*

Dylan

## Barrier Four: The conflict-adverse ally.

*"I don't do conflict, period. So if being an ally means getting into arguments and debates, I'm probably not going to be a very good ally. I'm just not confrontational!"*

Oddly enough, this ally is actually in a really great space. We don't do confrontation either.

Why? Simply put, confrontation rarely works in actually transforming how people think or behave. Few people have ever had truly heartfelt changes in the way that they act because someone has aggressively called them out and pointed to what's wrong with them.

This isn't to say that we're suggesting that you should let anti-trans comments, jokes, and remarks slide. The truth is that when people let things go, bad behavior is seen as acceptable. But instead of confronting someone who has made your Trans Ally Sense (which is kind of like Spidey Sense, but with more heroism) go wild, why not commit to a conversation instead? It is much less scary, doesn't involve making a scene, and tends to deliver better results.



### Your Invitation...

#### Make your conversations transformational

Not sure where to start in standing up to someone who has said something that wasn't trans-inclusive, or even just plain mean? Try this strategy:

- **Take a deep breath: Or maybe a few deep breaths.** If you're extremely upset, the way that you approach the conversation will reflect it. Step back and let your temperature come down.
- **Assume nothing: You don't always know why someone made a comment.** Sure, it may be really gross transphobia. But it also might be because they didn't think it was hurtful, or because they thought people would see it as a joke. Give people room to explain.

- **Pick the right time and place.** While (we admit it) there may be a momentary rush of self-satisfaction in making a scene as you point your finger, the approach is probably going to put the person at the other end of the conversation in an even more confrontational place and shut down the opportunity for meaningful conversation forever. Instead, approach the person and ask if you can have a quick private conversation.
- **Address the behavior.** It is important to let someone know specifically what was said that has brought you to this conversation, so be sure to explain what you're referring to—and *then keep the conversation about that specific behavior*. In other words, "I felt like the joke you made about trans people was really messed up," works because it makes the topic of conversation the joke. Whereas, "I am here to tell you that I think that you're a great big transphobic jerk" is pretty broad and doesn't address the behavior, but attacks the person's character. One gives you room for an important conversation, the other will probably make the person you're speaking with feel confronted and they'll start shutting down, because really, who responds well to being called a jerk (or worse)? And who's listening after they feel like they've been attacked?
- **Explain why it bothered you, and use your trans ally angle.** Be sure to let people know why you felt that something is wrong and the impact that it had. Also let them know why you're bringing up the topic. Try something like this: "As someone who is an ally to people who are trans, I feel it is my obligation to talk to people when they say something that feels wrong. And I feel like the joke you made is insulting to people who are trans."
- **Listen and offer support.** After you've made your statement, listen to the other person to hear what they've got to say. Maybe they'll apologize immediately. Maybe they'll tell you they didn't think it would hurt anyone, but now they'll be more careful. Maybe they'll say something that will suggest that you can help them understand things differently. You won't know unless you're listening. Let them know that you're a resource if they ever want to talk.
- **Say thank you.** This is important. You've just done something big, and engaged someone else in the process. No matter how it goes, thank people for their time.

## BEING OUT AND DISCLOSURE

*"I was talking to a friend of mine who is trans, and I mentioned something to her about being an out trans woman at work. She paused, looked at me, and said, 'I'm just a woman. I was always meant to be a woman. I'm not ashamed of being transgender, but it is not my identity. Female is.' When she said this, I was embarrassed. I didn't even think about that perspective. I thought, 'LGBT means out.' But for her, it just means presenting as who she's always been. Now I know." —Siobhan*

"Coming out" is a process for many people, whether they're lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or an ally. This process should be driven out of a personal decision to reveal more about themselves to people and should never be forced (sometimes called "outing").

And while most people can say that they personally know someone who is LGB and out, the familiarity tends to be lower when it comes to trans people. A key aspect of being a great trans ally is to remember that the concept of being out looks very different for some trans-identified people than what many know from LGB friends.

If you're in the market to become a powerful ally, keep this in mind. Some trans people will openly identify as such, while others just want to be seen as their gender-affirmed selves (sometimes referred to as being *stealth* or *private*). For some people, this choice may be simply how they'd like to live, not a desire to be "in the closet." For others, the lack of protections for people who are trans and threats of discrimination and violence may drive the decision not to *disclose*—or share information with others in specific circumstances. This isn't about being in the closet, but rather about addressing different situations in a way that best meets the individual's needs.

As you get to know people, find out what their perspectives are, and respect them. And remember, it is never the role of an ally to out someone who is trans. Remember that there are obvious ways that someone may be outed (e.g. "Jack is transgender"). But there are also more subtle ways that are still outing (e.g., "I remember Jack when he used to be Samantha"). Be conscious of your words and how they might reveal sensitive information.

## Barrier Five: The over-ambitious ally.

*"I'm so totally into talking about the complexities of gender. In fact, I'm so attuned to it that I consider myself gender-blind when I look at people in the same way that I'm completely color-blind about race. I've experienced gender discrimination, so I really can identify with trans people."*

Well...congratulations?

This is a barrier for people who might be a little further along in their ally journey. But it is still a barrier. Making comments like this sends a message that gender doesn't matter, when, in fact, it does. People see gender, people experience what gender entails, people are subject to what it means in their culture, and grapple with what role it plays in their own lives. So while your perception of gender may be that it does not matter, making comments like this often minimizes or even shuts down people whose experience is not the same, or who might feel differently.

And while someone who is not trans can certainly *empathize* with some of the experiences that trans people have had, being a victim of gender discrimination doesn't mean that you really *identify* with the transgender experience. That experience is many things, and not limited to what gender discrimination feels like.

### Your Invitation... Share your journey to where you are today.



Allies who have worked through the more traditional challenges of understanding what transgender is and their roles as allies can be great companions on a new ally's journey. Be willing to admit when you weren't totally there, acknowledge some of the mistakes you made and, share what experiences led you to start thinking outside of the traditional understanding of gender. Tell people about what brought you to be a trans ally. Explain to others what they can be doing to become one, and position yourself as a resource. These activities will give you space to talk about the issues without, from the outset, dominating with your lone worldview.

# 5

## POSITIVE WAYS TO BE A TRANS ALLY

1. **Accept** that people have the right to define their gender, regardless of assigned sex.
2. **Respect** people's gender identifications, pronouns, and names.
3. **Challenge** anti-trans and sexist remarks, jokes, and comments through personal conversations.
4. **Listen** to the stories of people who are trans to better understand their experiences.
5. **Say** that you're a trans ally and why.



*My first in-person encounter with a transgender person was when I taught a university course, Psychology of Women. One focus of our course was to develop a better understanding of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender development, and the ways that we define gender in our culture. It was fortunate that, at the time, our department secretary was in a relationship with a male-to-female (MTF) person in transition, who was in the process of coming to terms with the gender identity that was most authentic for her. She agreed to come to our class to make a brief presentation and answer students' questions.*

*It was a great experience in opening awareness for students, as well as an exercise in experiencing non-judgmental acceptance for the person presenting. This experience, and my own improved understanding of the issues transgender folks encounter, made me an ally for life.*

”  
**Marie**

## chapter four:

### Going Further on the Journey

This may have come up a few times already, but let's reiterate it one more time:

#### **This is a lot of information.**

Perhaps if you've come to this guide as someone who already identifies as a trans ally, some of the content has been a refresher, or helped build on what you already knew. And if you started this as a trans ally at the beginning of your ally journey, there have been lots of new ideas to absorb and explore. But no matter where you started, you'll get to a point where understanding terminology and etiquette will only get you so far.

That means it's time to apply that knowledge and open up new paths to learn more about people who are trans, the challenges that they sometimes face, and—importantly—understand the role that you as an ally play in getting more people to engage in the journey.

A note of disclaimer before we pontificate any further: there are countless topics associated with people who are transgender. In this chapter, we've selected just a few of those topics as possible places where you can start learning more and connecting some ally actions to your learning.

If you look at the resource pages in this publication or (even better) the resources that we've posted on the Straight for Equality website at [straightforequality.org/trans](https://straightforequality.org/trans), you'll find even more suggestions.

#### **1. Get to understand the challenges in depth faced by people who are transgender.**

The bad news? You'll learn that rates of discrimination, rejection, hostility, and violence are disturbingly prevalent no matter where you look. The good news? There are great resources that will help you understand these challenges in-depth and you can access them right now.

**Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey** addresses the rampant discrimination faced by trans and gender nonconforming people in every area of life: education, employment, family life, public accommodations, housing, health, police and jails, and ID documents. Published by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National LGBTQ Task Force, it offers a 360-degree picture of discrimination against transgender and gender nonconforming people in the U.S. It provides critical data points for policymakers, community activists and legal advocates to confront the appalling realities and press the case for equity and justice.

On the issue of transgender and gender nonconforming youth, there are two excellent reports that you can access for free that will help you understand the unique challenges they face. GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) released **Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools**, a report detailing the challenges of trans and gender nonconforming youth in schools and documenting their experiences of bullying, harassment, and rejection. The Human Rights Campaign, in partnership with Gender Spectrum, published the **Supporting and Caring for Our Gender Expansive Youth** report, examining the experiences youth whose gender identities or expressions expands the conventional understanding of gender and how best to support them.



## Your Invitation...

**Download the reports and use them to fuel your conversations!**

All of the reports mentioned here are available as free downloads from these great organizations:

- **Injustice at Every Turn:** Download from the National Center for Transgender Equality ([transequality.org](http://transequality.org)) or the National LGBTQ Task Force ([thetaskforce.org](http://thetaskforce.org)). While you're there, check out the special focus reports, including results from trans people of color.
- **Harsh Realities:** Download from GLSEN ([glsen.org](http://glsen.org)).
- **Gender Expansive:** Download from the Human Rights Campaign ([HRC.org](http://HRC.org)).

Spend some time reading the findings. Chances are that they will provide you with some great data and perspectives that will make the conversations you have about people who are trans—and why you’re a trans ally—even more effective. And if you encounter someone who seems to have misinformation about people who are trans, be ready to share it with them so that you’re creating powerful teaching moments.

## 2. Understand more of the legal and legislative challenges that people who are trans face each day.

*I truly became an ally to the trans community after I attended a program where several trans people shared their stories. Common threads in their stories were the difficulties in finding the most basic things like medical care and safe toilet facilities. It truly broke my heart and motivated me to do more as a trans ally.*

AI

Did you know that people who are transgender or gender nonconforming can be fired from their jobs under state law in more than half of the states in the U.S. simply for being transgender—and that it is perfectly legal because there’s no federal law that explicitly bans this kind of discrimination? Have any idea about the challenges that people who are trans face in accessing basic legal documents, like driver’s licenses because some states require proof of sex reassignment or gender affirmation surgery before granting the request? Ever hear that while federal hate crime legislation passed in 2009, the number of hate crimes against transgender people continues to rise and increase in severity?

There are a lot of challenges that still exist, and even more solutions that are constantly being proposed. However, any progress in creating policies or laws to fix a problem require knowledgeable and vocal supporters. Supporters (in the form of trans allies) can make the case as to why these changes aren’t just an issue being advocated for by people who are trans, but also by those who are not and who value equality.

A small note here: You may be thinking, “Wait...they promised no politics!” We sure did. But there’s a lot of ways to approach this. If you’re a newer ally—or even a politics-adverse one—this doesn’t have to be about political activism, but rather an opportunity to learn about some of the ways current laws create challenges for people who are trans. And if you’re further along and waving your Super Ally banner, here’s your chance to consider a little advocacy work.

Here is some even more good news: There are many organizations that are completely dedicated to educating and advocating trans issues, and others that do it as part of their LGBTQ equality missions. The project for a trans ally, of course is to make the choice to take advantage of the information and action opportunities that they offer.



## Phone-a-Friend

Looking to connect with organizations that can keep you informed? Want to find out about possible advocacy opportunities for trans allies? Here just are a few of our go-to transgender-focused organizations who fit the bill:

- **National Center for Transgender Equality:** [transequality.org](http://transequality.org)
- **Sylvia Rivera Law Project:** [srlp.org](http://srlp.org)
- **Transgender Law Center:** [transgenderlawcenter.org](http://transgenderlawcenter.org)
- **Transgender Law and Policy Institute:** [transgenderlaw.org](http://transgenderlaw.org)

Meanwhile, several national LGBTQ and civil rights organizations focus significant effort on LGBTQ legislation and policy issues. Just a few include:

- **PFLAG National:** [pflag.org](http://pflag.org)
- **American Civil Liberties Union:** [aclu.org](http://aclu.org)
- **Center for American Progress:** [americanprogress.org](http://americanprogress.org)
- **Lambda Legal:** [lambdalegal.com](http://lambdalegal.com)
- **The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights:** [civilrights.org](http://civilrights.org)
- **National Center for Lesbian Rights:** [nclrights.org](http://nclrights.org)
- **National LGBTQ Task Force:** [thetaskforce.org](http://thetaskforce.org)

Once again, these lists can—and should—go on. Check out the Straight for Equality website ([straightforequality.org/trans](http://straightforequality.org/trans)) for additional suggestions.

### 3. Understand the journeys, experiences, and challenges that transgender and gender nonconforming youth face—and know your role in supporting them.

*Our daughter [who was assigned male at birth] was only three years old when she informed us he is a she. We showed up at a family's home who wouldn't allow her to come in unless she was dressed like a boy. When I saw the utter destruction of her soul that day, I made the decision then and there, that I will always advocate for her right to express how she feels.*

Carmel

The stories of youth who identify as trans and gender nonconforming have become the content of news reports, documentaries, TV shows, and films. This visibility has led to increased awareness when it comes to understanding the point at which youth understand their gender and the challenges they face once they start to self-identify. One of the other benefits of increased visibility is the vast expansion of resources and networks to support these young people and their families.

Organizations like Gender Spectrum ([genderspectrum.org](http://genderspectrum.org)) have created a national network of shared resources and support services for both youth and their families. From understanding how youth express their identities, to learning about what a transition entails for young people, to understanding the policies that parents may encounter in the school system, these organizations are breaking the silence on the topic and reminding families that they are not alone. Meanwhile, groups like PFLAG National (*disclosure: Straight for Equality is a neat little project of PFLAG National*) have used their national platform to create resources (check out the book [Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends](#)) as well as foster support services through their grassroots chapter network.



## Your Invitation...

### Create safe spaces for trans and gender nonconforming youth in schools

Do you know if your school district has a nondiscrimination policy that specifically includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/gender nonconforming youth?

#### **Ask.**

That's it: ask. Are you a parent or caregiver to a child? Next time you're at Back to School Night, or a parent-teacher meeting, ask the question. Bullying and harassment of kids is rampant, and one of the core causes for being harassed is because of the way youth present themselves. Is a boy harassed for being "too girly" for choosing to join cheerleading instead of football? Is a girl attacked for wearing boy's clothes? These are examples of harassment based on gender expression that can happen to any child—not just ones who identify as trans or gender nonconforming.

When we create environments in which this kind of harassment isn't tolerated, we create spaces in which all youth feel safer expressing who they are, whether transgender or not. It also helps send the message to youth that gender and how they express it never needs to be "traditional" for them to be accepted.

Finding out if your school has a policy in place to address this topic is a powerful first step in creating these safe spaces. If they have inclusive policies, be sure to thank your contact and tell them why this matters to you ("As an ally for trans and gender nonconforming youth, I'm happy that we're working to ensure all kids are accepted.") If there isn't a policy, find out what role you might be able to play in getting that conversation started.

*I began to identify as an ally when a fellow student shared their disgust and hurt about being called by their birth name and not the preferred name the student chose as part of their gender affirmation because our school does not have a policy on name changes. This motivated me to see what I can do for other students.*

*No one should be calling people by a name that isn't the one that they want to be called.*

Fred



### **Feeling kind of intimidated about speaking up? Get the sense that this might push you out of your comfort zone?**

*"I can't lie—this is still very new, and sometimes even kind of weird for me. I can't imagine what being trans must be like, and the experience of learning about trans people has challenged a lot of my beliefs. I feel bad that I'm not yet ready to start announcing my ally status...but I'm on the way. I just need some time."*

Remember the ally journey. Any individual's ability to express themselves as an ally is something that develops over time. So while this may not be something you're ready to try immediately, keep it in mind as a possible goal for when you're feeling more comfortable to speak up.

Also keep in mind that you never need to go at any effort alone. In the case of schools and with youth, you'll find great resources to help you have this conversation and get help on the GLSEN website ([glsen.org](https://www.glsen.org)) and Gender Spectrum site ([genderspectrum.org](https://www.genderspectrum.org)). Check it out when you're ready to plan your conversation.



#### 4. Become aware of stories of people who are transgender on the news, in the media, and even in history—and share what you learn.

Sylvia Rivera. Brandon Teena. Laverne Cox. Billy Tipton. Marsha P. Johnson. Chaz Bono. Jazz Jennings. Janet Mock.

Know any of those names?

Chances are that you might because of the increase in coverage that is happening in mainstream media about people who are transgender. But much of the coverage that's happening is focused on the present, and the incredible stories of the people who forged visibility for the trans community tend to get lost.

This isn't so much about taking a history class as it is about taking the time to connect the dots between the accomplishments of people who are trans and the influence that they have had on their own community, the LGBTQ movement, our understanding of gender, and the story of social change. These stories can help you understand the intersections of multiple identities and what the intersections of identities mean for people—what does it mean to be both a person of color and trans? What's the role that a person's generation has played in how they are seen? What role does faith play in the experiences of people who are trans?

These stories also help us understand why people who are trans are often grouped with people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the LGBTQ acronym, since the stories demonstrate how the sources of discrimination against these communities are similar and rooted in rejection of anyone who does not conform to the binaries. (Remember that word? If you need a refresher, look on page 63.)

#### **So where do you get started?**

First start paying attention to the stories around you. In 2014, Laverne Cox, an actress who is transgender, appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and shortly afterwards made front-page news again as the first person who is transgender to ever get nominated for an Emmy®. That's history in the making. You just need to be looking for it, so keep your ally radar on and sharp at all times. When you see history in the making, talk about it.

And when you're ready, go a little deeper. Like most topics here, there are countless publications and websites that can help you learn more, and we've got a more extensive list on the Straight for Equality website. But a few of our starting points include:

- **Transgender History** by *Susan Stryker*
- **Transgender Warriors: The Making of History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman** by *Leslie Feinberg*
- **The Transgender Visibility Timeline** from GLAAD, available at [glaad.org/blog/timeline-look-back-history-transgender-visibility](http://glaad.org/blog/timeline-look-back-history-transgender-visibility)



## Your Invitation...

### Start using what you're learning to come out as a trans ally

Social media is a kind of amazing thing. Not only does it allow us to share countless kitten and puppy videos in one quick click, but it also creates a great way to share news, information, and even engage people in conversations.

So why not use it to educate others about trans issues and why you're an ally?

To get started, pick a few of the resources that we've mentioned here—or any others in which you have interest—and either follow or like them online. Then, as they start to post stories that can be used to engage people in learning about or discussing trans issues, share them. Personalize with a line about why you're posting the information. This helps you “come out” as an ally online as well as offer people ways to learn more and engage in conversation.

*“Hearing Jennifer Finney Boylan’s interview on Oprah 10 years ago and reading her memoir was the start of my ally journey. It changed the way I empathized with transgender people and all people. It taught me that you never know what another person is going through or struggling with and that looks can be deceiving.”*

Lisa

*I am amazed at how my family has found trans allies in people we never would have thought of including former classmates, co-workers, neighbors, community members, and Facebook friends. Even though our child is the first trans\* person they have ever known, they openly support us by sending positive messages, asking questions, demonstrating an interest in our lives, respecting our wishes for privacy, and honoring our child for who she is. Many have told us that learning about our situation has expanded their interest in learning about gender differences. That knowledge has helped them be more supportive of other trans and gender nonconforming people they have met. The more they have learned through our situation, in the better position they are in to be visible trans allies to someone else. That is powerful.*

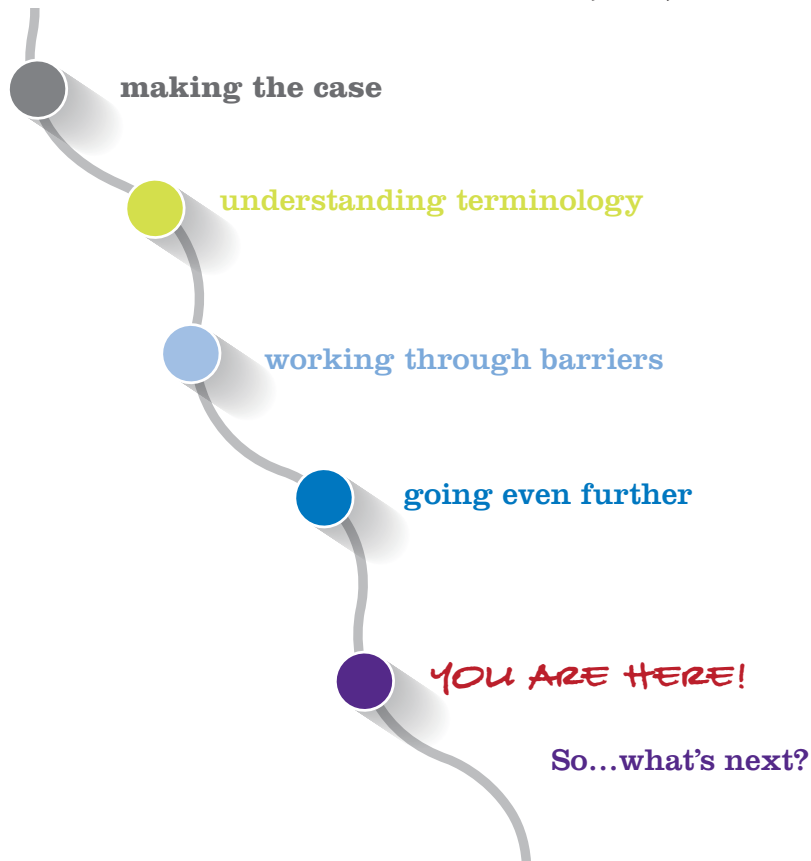
**Ali**

# chapter five:

## Come out, come out, wherever you are...

By now it is probably a well-established fact that we are really attached to drawing pictures. And now that we're finally here in the final chapter, it would be strange to not add at least one more.

When we take a look at where we've been so far, this is where the journey has taken us:



## Where does that leave us?

Interestingly enough, we're back where we started: talking about the importance of visible allies. During the journey there have been plenty of suggestions on how to learn more and address challenges. But now that we're here at our endpoint we'd like to offer you one more way to come out and start talking.

Honestly, we think you're ready for this one.

**Start visibly signaling how you're going to be a trans ally.**

And we've got one tool to help you do it right now:



## Here's how it works:

5. **DOWNLOAD** the Straight for Equality trans ally card from [straightforequality.org/trans](http://straightforequality.org/trans) and print it. (No need to cut up this lovely little book.)
6. **FILL OUT** one of the ways you're committing to actively being a trans ally.
7. **POST** the card somewhere that others will see it. Maybe it will be in your cubicle at work. Perhaps you'll put it on your refrigerator. You might even consider taking a photo of yourself holding it and posting it to your social media feeds.\*
8. **TALK** with people when they ask you what it means, why you're a trans ally, and be ready to do some educating!

## Yep. It really is that simple.

So why does this work? First, it gives people a way to see that you have chosen to openly talk about the fact that you are a trans ally. Second, it does better than just saying that you're an ally. It tells people one way you are being an ally...and how they might be one too. Finally, it can position you as someone who wants to engage in a conversation about people who are trans and how allies can support them. You may become the first person with whom a friend ever has this conversation! And it all happened because you initiated the effort.

As we often say here at Straight for Equality, each time we start a new conversation, we're starting another opportunity to change the world in which we live.

## You can do this.

---

\*See page 71 for more info on how you can share a photo with the Straight for Equality community online.

## And this is where we say goodbye. (Sniff.)

*Over the past 13 years, I have experienced more positive support than I ever imagined when I came out about having a transgender son. I am fortunate to have an accepting family, friends, past co-workers, and church members. We often discuss LGBT issues that would never have been in my vocabulary prior to my son's coming out. There still are those family members and friends who do not understand; my advice to them is to simply befriend a transgender person to cultivate compassion and become more aware of the existing barriers to acceptance. Do not give up on unconditional love.*

Joe

To quote the wise words of Bugs Bunny, "That's all folks!"

### **But really, this isn't the end. This is just the beginning.**

As you've read through this book, there may have been a few places where you struggled a little, or realized that you'll need some time to explore things on your own. There have hopefully been a couple of "ah-ha!" moments, too. And we'd like to think of the dozens of suggestions that have been put out there about the ways you can become an active, out, and proud trans ally, you've found a few in which you thought, "That's the one for me."

But this is just goodbye from one part of what we know is going to be an amazing and long-term journey for you as a trans ally. Today was just the start for you.

Begin trying out a couple of the suggestions in here and see where it takes you.

Connect with us online, and let us know how things are going, or where we might be able to provide more help (contact information is at the end of this publication).

Share this book with someone, too. You can start the trans ally journey for someone else **right now**.

**The important thing is this: Keep walking. Keep listening. Keep talking. And make sure that you're seen.**

We hope to see you again on your ally journey.





# equality literacy:

## Ready to have your trans ally conversations?

*Here's a list of terms that will help make your efforts even more effective. Please remember that terminology is a constantly evolving topic, so be aware that some people may have differences in how they understand certain words, and preferences for how they describe themselves. Remember to listen to each individual and respect their identifications. And keep in mind that terminology may change over time, so if you're unsure about a word, check online by visiting one of the many resource sites we list in this book and on our website.*

**Affirmed gender:** The gender to which someone has transitioned. This term is often used to replace terms like “new gender” or “chosen gender,” which imply that the current gender was not always a person’s gender or that their gender was chosen rather than simply in existence.

**Agender:** A person who does not conform to any gender.

**Ally:** A term used to describe someone who does not identify as LGBTQ but who is supportive of LGBTQ equality in its many forms and through a wide variety of different expressions, both personal and private.

**Androgynous:** A non-binary gender identity, having both male and female characteristics. Can be used to describe people’s appearances or clothing.

**Asexual:** A person who does not experience sexual attraction. This term is a self-identity.

**Assigned gender:** The gender that is given to an infant at birth based on the infant’s external genitals. This may or may not match the person’s gender identity in adulthood.

**Assigned sex:** The sex (male, female intersex) that is assigned to an infant at birth.

**Biological sex:** Sex determined by the physical characteristics of the body at birth, such as genetic markers and internal/external genitalia. Biological sex may differ from identity.

**Bisexual:** An individual who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to men and women. This is sometimes stated as “bi.” People who are bisexual need not have had equal sexual experience with both men and women and need not have had any sexual experience at all; it is attraction that determines orientation.

**Cisgender:** A term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. This is a term that is preferable to “non-trans,” “biological,” or “natal” man or woman.

**Coming out:** For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the process of self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life. People often establish a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity to themselves first and then may decide to reveal it to others. Coming out can also apply to the family and allies of people who are LGBT. There are many different degrees of being out: some may be out to friends only, some may be out publicly, and some may be out only to themselves. It’s important to remember that not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and to respect where each person is in that process of self-identification. It is up to each person, individually, to decide if and when to come out or disclose.

**Cross-dresser:** Someone who wears the clothes typically worn by another gender, sometimes only in their home, or as part of sexual play, and sometimes at public functions. It can be a self-identity. This term is not interchangeable with transgender, and some people who cross dress may consider themselves to be part of the trans community, while others do not. (This is a newer word for the older and less preferred term “transvestite” that is sometimes still used in this context.)

**Disclosure:** The act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender nonconforming identity to another person in a specific instance. Related to, but not the same as, coming out.

**Drag:** The act of dressing in gendered clothing and adopting gendered behaviors as a part of the performance. Some perform in drag for entertainment, others as a political commentary, and others see it as personal enjoyment.

**Drag king/Drag queen:** Someone who dresses in either male (king) or female (queen) clothing as performance. People of all assigned sexes and gender identities can perform drag, and it does not necessarily follow that the individual will identify as transgender.

**Female-to-Male (FTM):** A term that describes someone who was assigned a female sex and gender at birth and currently has a male gender identity. The individual may or may not have had surgery or taken hormones to physically alter their appearance. Affirmed male is sometimes the preferred terminology.

**Gay:** The adjective used to describe people whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, “lesbian” is often a preferred term for women. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Gender:** A set of social, psychological, or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations that classify an individual as either feminine or masculine.

**Gender-affirming surgery:** Surgical procedures that help people adjust their bodies in a way that more closely matches or desired gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This should be used in place of the older and often offensive term “sex change.”

**Gender binary:** The concept that there are only two genders, male and female, and that everyone must be one or the other.

**Gender dysphoria:** A mental health diagnosis that is defined as a “marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender.” This term replaced Gender Identity Disorder in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition.

**Gender expression:** The manner in which a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through external means such as clothing and/or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people’s understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions—or neither—through androgynous expressions. The important thing to remember and respect is that every gender expression is valid.

**Gender fluid:** Someone who embodies characteristics of multiple genders, or shifts in gender identity. (See genderqueer.)

**Gender identity:** One’s deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or neither. One’s gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex (i.e., a person assigned female at birth identifies as male or a person assigned male at birth identifies as female). Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced in infancy and reinforced in adolescence.

**Genderless:** Not identifying with a particular gender.

**Gender marker:** A legal indicator of one’s gender. This can include one’s gender on a passport, birth certificate, license, or insurance card.

**Gender neutral:** Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

**Gender nonconforming:** A person who views their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly female or male. This is an umbrella term that can encompass other terms such as “gender creative,” “gender expansive,” “gender variant,” “genderqueer,” “gender fluid,” “gender neutral,” “bigender,” “androgynous,” or “gender diverse.” Such people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the male and female binary paradigm.

**Gender norm:** Societal expectations about how people of different designated genders are supposed to act, live, and look.

**Gender policing:** Enforcing gender norms and attempting to impose gender-based behaviors on another person.

**Genderqueer:** A term that is sometimes used to describe someone who defines their gender outside the constructs of male and female. This can include having no gender (agender), being androgynous, or having elements of multiple genders.

**Gender variant:** A term, often used to describe children and youth, that describes those who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not confirm with dominant gender norms. Some people do not use this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal. (See gender nonconforming.)

**Homosexual:** An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the preferred terms, “gay” and “lesbian.”

**Intersex/disorders of sex development (DSD):** A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy or genetic construct that does not fit the typical definitions of male and female. Not everyone who has one of these conditions identifies as intersex. This term is not interchangeable with transgender.

**Lesbian:** A woman whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

**LGBT:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender which refers to these individuals collectively. It is sometimes stated as “GLBT” (gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender). Occasionally, the acronym is stated as “LGBTQA” to include allies, “LGBTQ,” with “Q” representing queer or questioning.

**Male-to-Female (FTM):** A term that describes someone who was assigned a male sex and gender at birth and currently has a female gender identity. The individual may or may not have had surgery or taken hormones to physically alter their appearance. Affirmed female is sometimes a preferred term for FTM.

**Medical transition:** The process of taking hormones or undergoing surgical procedures in order to change one's body in a way that affirms one's gender identity. Surgical procedures are sometimes discussed separately as surgical transition.

**Pansexual:** A person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of all gender identities and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; attraction determines orientation. Sometimes referred to as omnisexual.

**Physical transition:** The process of making physical changes to the body, such as taking hormones, having surgery, or undergoing procedures as part of a gender transition.

**Preferred gender pronouns (PGP):** Refers to the set of pronouns that a person prefers (e.g., him, he, she, her, ze, hir, they). It is polite to ask for a person's preferred gender pronoun when meeting them for the first time.

**Queer:** A term currently used by some people—particularly youth—to describe themselves and/or their community. Some value the term for its defiance, some like it because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and others find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay, "queer" is disliked by some within the LGBT community, who find it offensive. Due to its varying meanings, this word should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as queer (i.e. "My cousin self-identifies as queer.")

**Questioning:** A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**Sex:** Refers to biological, genetic, or physical characteristics that define males and females. These can include genitalia, hormone levels, genes, or secondary sex characteristics. Sex is often compared or interchanged with gender, which is thought of as more social and less biological, though there is some considerable overlap.

**Sexual orientation:** Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay or lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who are bisexual experience these feelings for people of both sexes. And people who are asexual experience no sexual attraction at all. Other terms describing sexual orientation include (but are not limited to) pansexual and polysexual. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, while sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one's sexual orientation. One's sexual activity does not define who one is with regard to one's sexual orientation; it is the attraction that determines their orientation.

**Social transition:** Transitioning in the context of everyday life and social space, without necessarily taking steps to medically transition.

**Standards of care (SOC):** Guidelines developed by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) to assist health providers in caring for transgender people.

**Stealth:** A term used to describe transgender individuals who do not disclose their trans status in their public lives.

**Transgender:** A term that may be used to describe people whose gender expression does not conform to the cultural norms and/or whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth. Transgender is also considered by some to be an "umbrella term" that encompasses a number of identities which transcend the conventional expectations of gender identity and expression, including FTM, MTF, genderqueer, and gender expansive. People who identify as transgender may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity (see transsexual.)

**Trans\*:** An asterisk is sometimes added to the word trans to signify that trans communities are diverse and include many different identities. Can be read as "trans star."

**Transition:** The process one goes through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. This can, but does not always, include taking hormones, having surgeries, or going through therapy.

**Trans man:** A person who is transgender who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a man.

**Transsexual:** A term used to describe those who have undergone some form of gender-related surgery. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

**Trans woman:** A person who is transgender who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a woman.

**TGNC:** Acronym which stands for trans and gender nonconforming. Often used when talking about groups of people with diverse gender identities.

**Third gender/third sex:** A term that incorporates genders other than male or female such as the Fa'afafine in Samoa, Kathoey or Ladyboys in Thailand, and Hijras in India and Pakistan. Some people in the United States, especially in communities of color, use the term third gender to self-identify.

**Two spirit:** A self-identity adopted by some indigenous North American people who take on a multitude of gender roles, identities, and expressions. Those who identify as Two Spirit often see themselves as embodying both masculine and feminine spirits and characteristics.

---

*All definitions taken and/or adapted from PFLAG National's terminology guide ([pflag.org](http://pflag.org)) and the Glossary included in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves* ([transbodies.com](http://transbodies.com)).*



## one last thing...

This publication—like all of our Straight for Equality materials—could not have been written without the help of countless individuals from both the PFLAG family and its supporters who shared their personal stories about being a trans ally or being trans-identified themselves. Some dedicated their time to reviewing this book, too. We're deeply grateful for all of these contributions.

Each of the stories in this publication has been taken from narratives submitted to the Straight for Equality team via e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and during in-person learning sessions. The stories have been edited for length and content, and names have been changed, but each one is real and represents one of the millions of critically-important voices in this conversation.

You can be one of those voices too. In fact, please consider this your invitation to be an important part of the dialogue.

Connect with us online and let us know what you think, what you need, and how your journey as a trans ally is going.

### Reaching us is easy:



Connect on Facebook: [facebook.com/S4Equality](https://facebook.com/S4Equality)



Follow us on Twitter: [@S4Equality](https://twitter.com/S4Equality)



Visit our website: [straightforequality.org](https://straightforequality.org)



E-mail us: [info@straightforequality.org](mailto:info@straightforequality.org)

## ok, maybe not...

### P.S.:

Want to share your trans ally photo with us so we can post on the Straight for Equality social media feeds? After you download the card at [straightforequality.org/trans](http://straightforequality.org/trans) and fill it out, take your picture (be sure it is close enough so we can read the card). Then submit it to the straight for equality team at [info@straightforequality.org](mailto:info@straightforequality.org) to participate in our effort on Facebook.

# About PFLAG National:

Straight for Equality is a neat little project of PFLAG National.

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the original family and ally organization. Made up of parents, families, friends, and allies uniting with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), PFLAG is committed to advancing equality through its mission of support, education, and advocacy. PFLAG has more than 350 chapters and 200,000 supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states.

This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and supported by the PFLAG National office (located in Washington, D.C.), the National Board of Directors, and the Regional Directors Council. PFLAG is a nonprofit organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

## **PFLAG National**

1828 L Street NW, Suite 660

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 467-8180

info@pflag.org

pflag.org



/pflag



@pflag



/pflag



/pflagnational



/pflagnational

\* made you look

## the guide to being a trans ally

Copyright ©2014 PFLAG National

Learn more about PFLAG National by visiting [pflag.org](http://pflag.org).

All rights reserved. This publication is available for online download or purchase at [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org). Visit us there to get this book and find out how to access lots of other ally-friendly Straight for Equality goodies.<sup>‡</sup>



[straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org)

*Straight for Equality is a project of PFLAG National*

PFLAG National Office  
1828 L Street NW, Suite 660 | Washington, D.C. 20036  
(202) 467-8180 | [pflag.org](http://pflag.org)

<sup>‡</sup>Another footnote, you say? Where will it end? Honest, it's just this last one. We wanted to wave goodbye one more time. Couldn't help it. We're really going to miss you.