

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

These terms are used to explain concepts and general categories related to sexual orientation and gender identity. It is extremely important to respect how litigants, clients, or colleagues identify themselves, even if their chosen identity doesn't seem to match these definitions.

LGBT: An inclusive (and evolving) acronym standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

Lesbian – A term identifying a woman who is predominantly or exclusively attracted to women emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.

Gay – A term identifying a man who is predominantly or exclusively attracted to men emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.

Bisexual – A term identifying a person whose attractions are not limited to people of one gender emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.

Transgender – A term that can be used to describe people whose gender expression is nonconforming and/or whose gender identity is different from their assigned birth gender. The term transgender can refer to a person who has fully affirmed their gender identity, who has taken some but not all the steps they want to affirm their gender, or who may still express themselves as the gender they were assigned at birth and who identifies as transgender. It is used as an adjective to describe someone, as in “a transgender person” or “a person who is transgender.”

Related terms:

Gender affirmation or **Transition** are terms used by transgender people to describe the process of living as or affirming their gender. The process often includes a change in style of dress, selection of a new name, and a request that people use the pronoun that matches their gender identity. In addition, transition or gender affirmation may, but do not always, include hormone therapy, counseling, and/or surgery. A person may be transgender even if they have taken no steps or only taken some steps to transition or affirm their gender.

Transgender man – A term identifying a person who lives and identifies as a man who was assigned a female gender at birth. A transgender man may also be referred to as *Female-to-Male (FTM)*.

Transgender woman – A term identifying a person who lives and identifies as a woman who was assigned a male gender at birth. A transgender woman may also be referred to as *Male-to-Female (MTF)*.

GENDER IDENTITY: A person's internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, something other, or in-between. This identity may or may not match the gender that the person was assigned at birth. *Everyone has a gender identity.*

GENDER EXPRESSION: A person's characteristics and behaviors—such as appearance, dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions—that are perceived as **masculine or feminine**. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of gender identity, assigned gender, or sexual orientation.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: A person's emotional and sexual attraction to other people, often based on the gender of the other person. A person may identify as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or another term. This is separate from gender identity. *Everyone has a sexual orientation.*

QUEER: Historically a negative term for gay people. More recently reclaimed by many in the LGBT community, particularly among younger generations, to refer to themselves. The term is often used to reference a more flexible view of gender and/or sexuality. Some LGBT people still find the word "queer" offensive. Others use it as a more inclusive term that allows for greater freedom of gender and sexual expression. Also used in academic fields, such as queer studies or queer pedagogy.

QUESTIONING: Frequently the term LGBT is accompanied by a Q for "questioning" (and/or "queer" – see above). The category "questioning" is included to make space for those who are not certain of or are exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

ALLY: An ally is an individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly.

Sources:

Beyond the Binary: A Tool Kit for Gender Identity Activism in Schools. Gay-Straight Alliance Network, Transgender Law Center and National Center for Lesbian Rights

It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School, A Guide to Community Organizing, Professional Development and K-8 Curriculum. GroundSpark, 2008

Welcoming Schools Guide. Human Rights Campaign Foundation, Family Project, 2007