



## Handling mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes, despite the best intentions and education. Language and norms are constantly evolving, and there are not always simple or universal right answers.

Take a deep breath and remind yourself that having these conversations is important. Fumbling through, making mistakes, saying the wrong, misunderstanding the situation, sharing bad information - this is all normal. The key is to keep learning. Keep trying, even when it feels overwhelming.

If you get something wrong, such as misgendering someone, asking an insensitive question, making an assumption, or making a statement that turns out to be based on misinformation or harmful stereotypes, listen to what the person who is hurt is saying.

They may be angry and frustrated - your small mistake may be the tenth time they've been misgendered today.

Apologize, correct yourself, and then keep working on learning about the community and how to be supportive.

## When someone comes out to you

If someone trusts you enough to come out to you, that's amazing!

The most important thing is to be affirming and supportive. Tell them that you believe them and thank them for trusting you.

Making the effort to educate yourself will help them feel supported and safe.

Coming out to medical professionals is fraught, and many folks either do not have a choice about coming out because information is in their file, or because they can't afford to lose access to care if they discover that their service provider is not affirming.

If you're confused or concerned, reach out to community resources for education.

Know that many folks lose friends or family support when they come out. It can be an incredibly painful experience, even though it is often an important step towards self-acceptance. Check in on the person who has come out to you and let them know that you recognize the importance of their choice to trust you.



# Speaking with Care

A pocket guide to speaking with and about LGBTQ2IA+ individuals and community

## People are the experts in their own identities and experiences.


If the only thing you do to act in solidarity with LGBTQ2IA+ folks is trust them when they tell you who they are and how to refer to them, that is a great start.

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*This resource was created by  
Tiffany Sostar, MNTCW.  
[www.tiffanysostar.com](http://www.tiffanysostar.com)*

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*You're not a bad person for making a mistake. We all do it.*



# Gender and Orientation

## Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to whether someone is a man, woman, or non-binary person.

If someone's gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth (for example, a child who was determined to be female at birth based on genitalia and who is a woman or vice versa), then they are *cisgender*.

If someone's gender does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth (for example, a child who was determined to be male based on genitalia and who is a woman or vice versa), then they are *transgender*.

*Non-binary* refers to people who are not men or women, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-binary is often considered part of the transgender umbrella.

Gender identity is separate from orientation. Trans folks can be straight, cis folks can be asexual, etc.

## Orientation

Orientation refers to the romantic or sexual relationships that a person is interested in. For example, straight, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer are all orientations.

## Intersex

Intersex refers to a wide range of biological sexes beyond male and female. Intersex folks are born with a variety of sex characteristics (including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, and/or genitals).

## (AN INCOMPLETE LIST OF) DEFINITIONS

**Asexual:** Not sexually attracted to people of any gender.

**Bisexual:** Attraction to two or more genders. Also sometimes an umbrella term for non-monosexual identities. (Non-monosexual: attraction to more than one gender).

**Gay:** Men who are attracted to men. Both transgender and cisgender men can be gay. Gay also sometimes refers to anything that isn't straight.

**Lesbian:** Lesbian refers to a woman who is attracted to women. Both transgender and cisgender women can be lesbians.

**Pansexual:** Attraction to all genders, or attraction regardless of gender.

**Queer:** An umbrella term for the whole non-heterosexual community. Queerness intentionally has no single definition beyond "not straight." When someone says they are queer, there is no way to know exactly what that means, and that is often intentional.

**Straight:** Straight (or heterosexual) folks are either men who are attracted to women, or women who are attracted to men. Both cisgender and transgender folks can be straight.

**Two Spirit:** Two spirit is an Indigenous-specific word. It means different things in each nation and to each person who holds that identity, and it is an identity that is culturally-specific, meaning that it belongs to Indigenous communities and cannot be used by non-Indigenous.

## PRONOUNS AND GENDERED LANGUAGE

Gendered and heteronormative language creeps into conversations constantly, and can make it difficult for LGBTQ2IA+ folks to feel safe, and to be comfortable coming out to medical service providers.

Get in the habit of assuming you don't know someone's gender or orientation until you're told. This includes not assuming the gender of someone's partner (using gender-neutral terms like "partner" can help) and not using gendered language to describe someone unless they have introduced the language first.

Create space for transgender and non-binary folks by introducing yourself with your pronouns, and making a habit of asking everyone what pronouns they use.

Get comfortable with singular they and gender-neutral language. "They/them" is the gender-neutral equivalent to she/her and he/his. It's even in the dictionary with this definition! You can also use non-gendered language like "folks," "friends," "colleagues," or "everybody" rather than gendered terms like "ladies and gentlemen."

Speak up if someone makes an antagonistic or unaware comment or a joke at the expense of the queer community.

The best way to be an ally is to educate yourself. Find the blogs of LGBTQIA2S+ folks and read them. Read books and articles by members of the community. Keep the phrase "nothing about us without us" in mind, and always consider the voices of the people within the community to be the experts.

