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Terminology

WHAT TO KNOW

- Many terms are associated with sexual and gender identities.
- Read the current terms and definitions used by the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH).



Words and definitions

Terminology continues to evolve. Below are some of the terms currently used by the DASH (Division of Adolescent and School Health). This is not an exhaustive list, there are many additional terms to describe the diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Both the list and definitions may change over time.

- **Bisexual:** Describes a person who is attracted to both people of their own gender and other genders.
- **Cisgender:** Describes individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gay:** Describes a person who is attracted primarily to members of the same sex or gender. Gay is most frequently used to describe men who are attracted primarily to other men, although it can be used for men and women.
- **Gender:** The cultural roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes expected of people based on their sex.
- **Gender Expression:** The way a person publicly expresses their gender to others through appearance and mannerisms (e.g., the way one dresses, talks, acts, moves). A person's gender expression does not necessarily indicate their sexual orientation.
- **Gender Identity:** A person's inner sense of being a boy/man/male, girl/woman/female, another gender, or no gender. It is how one self-identifies as a result of a combination of inherent and extrinsic or environmental factors. Gender identity is not the same as sexual orientation.
- **Gender Minority:** Individuals whose gender identity (man, woman, nonbinary, and additional identities) or expression (masculine, feminine, nonbinary, and additional) is different from their sex (male, female) assigned at birth.
- **Nonbinary:** Describes a person whose gender identity neither conforms to the idea that there are only two genders (boy/man/male, girl/woman/female) nor to the idea that a person must strictly fit into one category or the other..
- **Gender Nonconforming:** The state of one's physical appearance or behaviors not aligning with societal expectations of their gender (a feminine boy, a masculine girl, etc.).
- **Heterosexual or Straight:** Describes men who are primarily attracted to women or women who are primarily attracted to men.
- **Intersex:** Describes persons with variations in physical sex characteristics, including variations in anatomy, hormones, chromosomes or other traits, that differ from expectations generally associated with male and female bodies.
- **Lesbian:** A woman who is primarily attracted to other women.
- **LGBTQ+:** Acronym that refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning.
- **Queer:** A term used by some people whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual (e.g., queer person, queer woman). Typically, for those who identify as queer, the terms lesbian, gay, and bisexual are perceived to be too limiting and/or fraught with cultural connotations they feel do not apply to them. Once considered a pejorative term, queer has been reclaimed by some LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves. However, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBTQ+ community, so use caution when using it outside of describing the way someone self-identifies or in a direct quote.

- **Questioning:** For some, the process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- **Sex:** An individual's biological status as male, female, or something else. Sex is assigned at birth and associated with physical attributes, such as anatomy and chromosomes.
- **Sexual Minority:** Individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are attracted to or have sexual contact with people of the same sex or same gender.
- **Sexual Orientation:** Refers to a person's sexual and emotional attraction to other people and the behavior and/or identity that may result from this attraction (lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.)
- **Transgender:** Describes individuals whose current gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

* *Terms listed are referenced from APA's Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity and the World Health Organization's glossary of terms and tools.*

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[Adolescent and School Health](#); [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion \(NCCDPHP\)](#)