

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS



The terminology of gender and sexuality changes so fast that finding the right words can be a minefield.

This glossary aims to be a quick and accessible go-to guide to assist you with some of the things you might read.

Bear in mind when using this glossary, however, that **everyone's journey is different.**

### **Biological/Assigned Sex:**

Sex is distinct from gender. The category (usually male or female but sometimes intersex) assigned by a doctor at birth, based on what body-parts you have and other physical characteristics.

### **Gender:**

Gender is more complex than most of us have been taught. Gender is made up of:

- Gender expression (how we dress and act)
- Gender identity (how we feel inside)

For most people, assigned sex and these facets of gender line up, so they are typically gendered boys or girls (cisgender). For others, however, these facets align differently; these groups are gender-diverse, which includes transgender individuals.

### **Gender Role/Stereotype:**

The social expectations or generalisations of how an individual should act, think and feel based on assigned sex.

### **Sexual Orientation:**

A person's physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other forms of attraction to others. Gender identity is usually distinct and separate from sexual orientation.

### **Transgender:**

Typically refers to anyone whose gender identity does not align with their assigned sex and gender at birth. Some trans people are binary-identified and others are not.

### **Gender Binary:**

The system of dividing gender into two distinct categories: man and woman. Someone is binary-identified if he or she feels comfortable categorising themselves as one of these two options for instance as a trans man or a trans woman.

### **Trans Man:**

Generally describes someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a man. Sometimes trans men might also use the term FTM or female to male.

### **Trans Woman:**

Generally describes someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman. Sometimes trans women might also use the term MTF or male to female.

### **Non-Binary:**

A person who feels as though they are neither a man or a woman, they may feel like they can be both at once, either one or the other on different days, or just a mix of the two.

### **Gender-Expansive, -Variant or -Diverse:**

Often used concerning children. Conveys a broader, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

### **Cisgender:**

Someone whose gender identity matches the sex and gender they were assigned at birth; someone who is not transgender.

### **Gender Dysphoria:**

When a person experiences a mismatch between the sex-/gender assigned at birth and the gender that they feel themselves to be.

### **Transition:**

A process of expressing or assuming a gender identity that matches a felt sense of self. Can involve medical treatment or affirming healthcare but does not have to necessarily. Everyone's journey is different.

### **Social Transition:**

Ways in which a person can publicly affirm their gender identity such as changing their name, pronouns and/or gender expression.

### **Legal Transition:**

Can include changing documents to reflect chosen names on official public records, or changing sex/gender markers and identity numbers. In South Africa, this is facilitated through Act 49, commonly known as The Sex Description and Sex Status Act.

### **Medical Transition:**

Can include counselling and support, hormones and gender-affirming medical care.

### **Gender Affirming Healthcare:**

Considered the best way to talk about the healthcare needs of transgender individuals. For instance, we talk about gender-affirming medical care, gender-affirming behavioural healthcare, and gender-affirming surgical care. Each trans person's needs are different.

### **Gender-Neutral Pronouns:**

Are used to avoid referring to someone as "he/him" or "she/her." Some people explicitly ask for gender-neutral pronouns, as these are the most comfortable for them; other people will use them as generics. The most common gender-neutral pronoun is: They/them  
(They smiled • I called them • their cat purred • it's theirs • they like themselves)

### **Misgendering:**

Referring to someone using a pronoun, such as 'he' or 'she', which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

### **Deadnaming:**

Referring to a trans person using a given name that they have since socially or legally changed.



# Some Other Terms you Might Come Across:

## **Transsexuality:**

Considered out-dated and heavily medicalised, it describes being assigned "male" or "female" at birth, but identifying as the opposite sex.

## **Transphobia:**

Hate towards or fear of transgender people.

## **Intersex:**

An umbrella term used for people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definition of male or female. There are a range of intersex variations, and though people are born intersex, it doesn't always show up at birth. Intersex people, like anyone else, can have a variety of gender identities.

## **Masculinity:**

Refers to gender expression, or qualities, that are thought of as being 'manly', that are typically ascribed to men, and that are considered to be socially appropriate for a man's behaviour. People who exhibit self-described masculinity do not necessarily think of themselves as men.

## **Femininity:**

Refers to gender expression, or qualities, that are thought of as being 'womanly', that are typically ascribed to women, and that are considered to be socially appropriate for a woman's behaviour. People who exhibit self-described femininity do not necessarily think of themselves as women.

## **Gay/Lesbian:**

Someone whose attractions are exclusively, or almost exclusively, toward the same-gender. While anyone can identify as gay, the term tends to be associated more with men than with women (who may also identify as lesbian).

## **Heterosexual (or Straight):**

A person who is attracted exclusively or almost exclusively to the 'opposite' gender.

## **Bisexual:**

Someone who is attracted to their own gender and another.

## **Pansexual:**

Someone who is attracted to multiple genders.

## **Asexual:**

Someone who does not experience sexual attraction, either at all or as often/strongly, as others.

## **Heteronormative:**

A term for behaviour, comments or anything else that assumes heterosexuality or being straight is 'normal', and everything else is a deviation.

## **Cisnormative:**

A term for behaviour, comments or anything else that assumes being cisgender (not being transgender) is 'normal', and everything else is a deviation.

## **LGBTQIA:**

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual. This is by no means a complete list of the many sexual orientations and gender identities in the world.

## **Ally:**

Someone who believes in the dignity and respect of all peoples and takes action by supporting or advocating with groups for social justice. Parents of trans children can be allies.

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