

BE YOURSELF:

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,
TRANSGENDER, QUEER, AND
QUESTIONING YOUTH

A large, stylized graphic of a rainbow flag is positioned at the bottom of the page. The flag is rendered in a light, semi-transparent red color, matching the background. It features the characteristic horizontal stripes of the rainbow flag, with a white stripe at the top and bottom. The graphic is partially obscured by the PFLAG logo and website address.

PFLAG
pflag.org

We encourage you to immediately seek out help if you or a loved one needs it, especially if you or a loved one are in danger or have thought about self-harm in any way.

For LGBTQ+ youth, please contact The Trevor Project online at thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now, or call one of the following:

Helplines

The Trevor Project:

(866) 488-7386

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

(800) 273-8255

Ali Forney Day Center:

(212) 206-0574

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Info:

(800) 342-AIDS (2437)

Spanish service:

(800) 344-7432

TDD service for the deaf:

(800) 243-7889

[10:00am till 10:00pm EST, Monday through Friday]

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline:

(888) 843-4564

The GLBT National Youth Talkline (youth serving youth through age 25): (800) 246-7743

The National Runaway Switchboard:

(800) RUNAWAY (786-2929)

Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation's first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies. PFLAG has over 400 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas across America. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and supported by the PFLAG National office (located in Washington, DC), the National Board of Directors, the Regional Directors Council, and our many advisory councils and boards. PFLAG is a nonprofit organization not affiliated with any political or religious institution.

Our Vision. PFLAG envisions a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Our Mission. Our mission is to build on a foundation of loving families, united with LGBTQ people and allies, who support one another, as well as educate ourselves and our communities to speak up as advocates until all hearts and minds respect, value and affirm LGBTQ people.

About this publication:

Be Yourself: Questions & Answers for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Youth is copyrighted. For reprint permission, please contact the PFLAG National office, info@pflag.org, (202) 467-8180.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are complex concepts and discovering your own unique identity can be confusing. Deciding to come out as LGB or queer—or disclosing yourself as transgender—can be challenging and puzzling, and leave you filled with questions.

Think about it: you're becoming an adult, which can feel both exciting and frustrating, especially when you don't yet have an adult's rights. You're becoming more independent, and your relationship with your parents, guardians, or family members is changing. It's a new experience for them; they're learning to accept that you're not a little child anymore.

Then, all of a sudden, your peers realize that the opposite sex isn't that bad and couples start popping up all over school. Soon such relationships might seem like the most important things in the world.

But what if you can't relate? If you're a teen who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or gender expansive—or wondering if you are—you may feel unprepared, uninformed, and even excluded.

Maybe your friends and family have talked to you about dating, falling in love, and getting married. But they probably have never talked about what happens when a boy falls in love

with another boy or about what you can do when your physical anatomy just doesn't "match up" with how you feel inside. In fact, a lot of what you've heard about LGBTQ+ people might have come from people at school, where "gay," "lesbian," "queer,"

"fag," "dyke," and "tranny" are words sometimes used to harass and insult other people; you may even have experienced this discriminatory language within your own family.

Our culture is dominated by heterosexual and gender-conforming images and messages. Television, movies, and magazines mostly show men and women together, most music is about falling

Realizing that I'm not straight was the least expected thing to happen to me. One night I was journaling, and without thinking, wrote down "I'm bisexual". Since then, I've realized that I don't really like labeling myself.

- Anonymous, 16, Cleveland, Ohio

in love with someone of the opposite sex, and many of your friends are probably talking about the opposite sex. And, while most people your age seem to fit neatly into expected gender roles, you may feel you don't—or don't want to.

This publication aims to help you understand yourself and the LGBTQ+ community by answering some of your questions and recommending supportive resources. The questions other youth have asked about being LGBTQ+ shape this publication; we hope it will help you find answers of your own.

Once I came to terms with being male, I felt so much better. I accepted who I am and immediately wanted others to do the same.

-Anonymous, 15, Jasper, Georgia

Three important points:

One: There is nothing wrong with being LGBTQ+; it's as normal as being left-handed. It's just another part of who you are. Everyone has a sexual orientation, a gender identity, and a gender expression.

Two: It takes time to know who you are. It's okay to be confused, it's okay to be unsure, and it's okay to take your time finding out. There's no need to rush the process.

Three: You're not alone. Right now, there are tens of thousands of out LGBTQ+ youth, and thousands more who are wondering if they are LGBTQ+ too. It may seem hard to imagine,

especially if your community isn't exactly LGBTQ+-friendly.

However, there are ways to reach out to other LGBTQ+ young people. If you call any of the numbers at the back of this book or log on to any of the websites listed, you can reach thousands of other youth who have already gone through, or are currently going through, their own journeys of self-discovery. They are people with whom you can talk openly, compare unique life experiences, and seek advice.

Obviously, this publication cannot ask or answer every question, but we hope it gives

you a place to start. You don't have to be alone when learning about and identifying your sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. The resources beginning on page 39 will give you a place to continue your own journey—to find information, to find answers, to find friends, and to get support.

Our best advice? Be yourself. If you are LGBTQ+, you'll soon find that you have the power to shape and define your identity and the way you choose to express it.

While coming out will present you with questions and situations you have never faced before, you'll also find great joy and comfort in the journey of self-discovery.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DANGER/SELF-HARM

- I am in danger, and sometimes think of harming myself. I need help!

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- How do people become straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other orientations?
- I think I might be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. How do I know for sure?
- How can I be sure of my sexual orientation if I'm not sexually active?
- I thought LGB people act a certain way. If I don't fit the stereotype, am I still LGB?
- I have a crush on my same-sex best friend. Does this mean I'm LGB?

- I have a crush on someone at my school. How can I tell if they're LGB too?

GENDER IDENTITY/ EXPRESSION

- What's the difference between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?
- What's the difference between being transgender and being transsexual?
- When do transgender people know that they are differently gendered?
- What is the typical transition process for transgender people?
- What does it mean to be gender expansive or nonbinary, and how is that different from identifying as transgender?

- Aren't there only two genders?
- I think I might be transgender or gender expansive. How do I know for sure?

MENTAL HEALTH

- Is being lesbian, gay, or bisexual a mental disorder?
- Is being transgender a mental disorder?
- What about “ex-gay” ministries and so-called “conversion therapy”—can they help me?

THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

- I don't see other LGBTQ+ people around me. Am I the only LGBTQ+ person in my community?
- Sometimes I don't see myself reflected in the LGBTQ+ community. Are there resources for youth of color?

COMING OUT

- Should I come out?
- How should I come out?
- Should I come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s), and how should I do it?
- I can't come out to my parent(s) or guardians(s). Whom should I tell?
- Will people accept me after I come out?
- Will I lose my non-LGBTQ+ friends? Where will I find LGBTQ+ friends?
- Can I have a family of my own?
- I feel so alone, are there people I can talk to?

STAYING SAFE

- What if I'm harassed at school?
- What if I'm harassed outside of school?
- Do I need to worry about HIV/AIDS?

DANGER/SELF-HARM

I am in danger, and sometimes think of harming myself. I need help!

THE SHORT ANSWER: If you are in crisis or thinking about self-harm or suicide, you need immediate support. Please turn to the inside front cover of this publication for important contact information to get the help you need.

You are a unique person, worthy of love, friendship, and support. Regardless of how you identify or whom you love, you have the right to feel safe and secure. If you feel unsafe, if you feel unsure, if you feel like you have nowhere to turn, there are people who can help.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

How do people become straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other orientations?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No one really knows for sure. However, the vast majority of credible professional experts believe that sexual orientation is not a choice but rather part of our human condition, like handedness.

Remember, everyone has a sexual orientation. There is more than one school of thought about why some

people are LGB. Most experts believe that we are born with our sexual orientation—a concept called the “nature” argument. Other believe that being LGB is a choice, influenced by upbringing, cultural influences, and other external factors—the “nurture” argument. And some believe it is a combination of both nature and nurture. Regardless of how our sexual orientation develops, the majority of evidence states that it is nearly impossible to change.

The American Psychological Association (APA) is the largest association of psychologists worldwide. In its online Psychology Help Center, which discusses “Sexual orientation, homosexuality and bisexuality,” the APA confirms its stance—declared publicly in 1975—that: “...most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.” The APA goes on to explain that sexual orientation is created by a complicated mixture of genetics, hormones, development, and influences both cultural and social; no single factor solely determines one’s sexual orientation. To read more about health, emotional awareness, and sexuality, visit the APA’s Online Help Center at apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx.

I think I might be lesbian, gay, or bisexual. How do I know for sure?

THE SHORT ANSWER: You'll know when you know. It could take a while, and it's OK to remain unsure. There's no need to rush.

There are hundreds of different ways to realize you are not straight. Some LGBT people say that from the time they were very young they just “felt different” or “just knew” they weren't like their friends. Some didn't share the same opposite-sex grade-school crushes and some were more interested in their same-sex classmates.

People who are LGBT often say it took a while to put a name to their feelings. Once they learned what being LGBT was, it started to make sense to think about their own sexual orientation in those terms. It fit with the feelings they'd had while growing up.

Many don't begin to think about their sexual orientation until they're teenagers or adults. This is completely normal. We figure out our identities in our own time—sometimes it takes months, other times it takes decades.

Since first realizing three years ago that I am bisexual, and coming out to most of my family and friends in the intervening years, I have grown tremendously as a person. I am on my way to living a more authentic life.

- Lauren O., 24, Frisco, Texas

If you think you're LGBT, try not to hide your feelings from yourself. Yes, figuring out who you are can be stressful, emotional, and a little scary—you may not want to deal with it—but taking some time alone to think about how you feel is the first step toward accepting yourself. Give yourself permission to explore your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Remember, everyone is unique and wonderful in their own way.

How can I be sure of my sexual orientation if I'm not sexually active?

THE SHORT ANSWER: You don't need to have sex to discover who you are. It is the attraction that helps determine sexual orientation.

It's important to know that you don't have to have had a sexual experience

to know that you're lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Most people experience crushes when they are quite young, before they become sexually active. Think about your own past

crushes: Your feelings and your emotional and physical attractions will help tell you who you are.

I thought LGB people act a certain way. If I don't fit the stereotype, am I still LGB?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Ignore the stereotypes. Some people fit them, some people don't.

People who are LGB, like people who are straight, can act in many different ways, and might or might not fit stereotypes. If you don't fit a common stereotype for an LGB person, it doesn't mean you're not really LGB—there is a wide range of diversity within that community, just as there is throughout every part of society. People use stereotypes to help them understand what to expect from certain groups of people. However, some stereotypes stem from a lack of experience with the type of person in question or from ignorance or prejudice, and are simply incorrect. For example, you might hear that gay men aren't strong or athletic. Or that lesbians appear or act more masculine. But these are stereotypes, and aren't one-size-fits-all. Visit lgbthistorymonth.com for a searchable database of LGB icons and note the diversity of the people listed there.

Bottom line: Don't worry about the stereotypes, and don't let labels define you. There are as many different ways to express your LGB identity as there are people in this world.

Remember: you don't need to prove anything to anybody. Be yourself.

I have a crush on my same-sex best friend. Does this mean I'm LGB?

SHORT ANSWER: Not necessarily.

Enjoying intimate experiences—like cuddling, kissing, or holding hands—with someone of the same sex doesn't automatically mean you're lesbian, gay, or bisexual, just as enjoying intimate experiences with someone of the opposite sex doesn't automatically mean you're straight.

Many people develop crushes on someone of the same sex at some point in their lives, and we often explore or identify with different gender roles and expectations throughout our lives. Many LGB people have some sexual experiences with someone of the opposite sex, and many non-LGB people have some same-sex sexual experiences. Those who enjoy such experiences with both sexes often identify as bisexual. However, sometimes it takes some trial and error to determine what we like and what we don't like.

Think of sexuality as a range, or “sexual continuum.” At one end of the range are many people who are attracted only to the same sex. At

the other end of the range are many people who are attracted only to the opposite sex. And in between are people who are attracted to both sexes in varying degrees.

Again, remember that our sexuality develops over time. Don't worry if you aren't sure. Your early years are a time of learning, bit by bit, what works for you, and crushes and experimentation are often part of that process. Over time, you'll find that you're drawn mostly to men, women, or both—or neither!—and then you'll know. You don't have to label yourself.

I have a crush on someone at my school. How can I tell if they're LGB too?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
You can't definitely, without asking—which presents its own unique challenges.

It's impossible to know for sure whether someone identifies as LGB just by looking at them. We shouldn't assume people are LGB because of the way they look, dress, or act. Doing so would mean making assumptions about the

person based on hurtful and often unsupported stereotypes (see our answer to “I thought LGB people act certain ways. If I don't fit a stereotype, am I still LGB?”).

People sometimes joke about having “gaydar,” a “radar” that senses who is LGB. Figuring out if someone is LGB if they're not completely out is like figuring out if someone is interested in you: Sometimes you can tell, sometimes you can't. It can be an extremely frustrating and stressful process, but it is part of getting to know the people around you. It takes time and sometimes more patience than you think you might have!

Asking your friends or theirs won't guarantee an accurate answer. And while you can casually observe them to try to find some clues—do they have pro-LGBTQ+ stickers on their backpack or locker? Are they a member of the Gay-Straight or Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at your school?—these things mean that they may be LGB, or they may be a supportive ally. The only way to find out someone's sexual orientation is to talk to them about it directly. However, it's extremely important to respect another

When I was a sophomore in high school I realized that my attraction to girls was stronger some ordinary “girl crush.” I didn't think I could be gay because I am very feminine. I love fashion and makeup, and it was hard for me to push past the stereotypes.

- Rachel, 17, Highland Park, New Jersey

person's privacy. They may not want to talk about it, could be upset that you asked them, or may not want to be recognized as LGB. As a general rule, be very careful when asking someone such a personal question unless you know them very well, and even then, be sensitive to the other person's privacy. Approach them the way you would want to be approached about the subject.

Remember, you can't expect someone else to come to terms with their sexual orientation any more quickly than you are coming to terms with your own. But be patient. One day (if it hasn't happened already), someone will have a crush on you and they will be wondering whether you're LGB or straight (or neither!) too.

GENDER IDENTITY/ EXPRESSION

What's the difference between sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Every person in the world has a sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. One describes our sexual attractions; one describes our internal feeling or sense of being male, female, some combination of both, or neither; and one describes how we present ourselves outwardly to others.

It's pretty common for people to see the acronym 'LGBTQ+' and think it's all about sex or sexual orientation. But it's not! The 'transgender' portion of the acronym represents gender identity and is completely separate from sexual orientation and sexual behavior.

Many people think that all transgender people or all people with expansive or creative gender expressions are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. They aren't!

In fact, just as each of us has a sexual orientation (straight, gay, bi, asexual, pansexual, etc.), we all have a gender identity and a way of expressing it. Our gender identity is how we feel inside about being a girl, a boy, somewhere in between, or neither; our gender expression is how we dress and act to express or communicate our gender outwardly (which may or may not correlate with our gender identity); and our sexual orientation describes to whom we are attracted. Sexual orientation is separate and distinct from gender identity, and gender expression is separate and distinct from both sexual orientation and gender identity.

What’s the difference between being transgender and being transsexual?

THE SHORT ANSWER:

Transsexual people often, but not always, use medicine and surgery to help their bodies match their gender identity, while many transgender people do not.

The term ‘transgender’ describes a person’s gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. This word is also sometimes used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression. ‘Transsexual’ is a lesser-used term (considered by some to now be outdated) which refers to people who are transgender who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy and/or surgery as part of the process of expressing their gender. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. For full definitions of both terms, visit the glossary at the back of this publication.

“When I came out to my parents as transgender, it was after thought and debate...I was tired of hiding myself at home and pretending being misgendered didn’t bother me.”

- Anonymous, 17, Madison, WI

The words ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ do have one thing in common: they are both adjectives (used to describe something) not nouns (used to identify something). Just as you wouldn’t say someone is “gayed” or “straightened,” so too you wouldn’t say someone is, or has been, “transgendered.” Saying “Alice is a person who is transgender” is correct—just like saying “Alice is blonde”—but saying “Alice is a transgender” or “Alice is transgendered” is not. Using these adjectives as nouns or verbs is considered offensive, so avoid using them in those ways.

When do transgender people know that they are differently gendered?

THE SHORT ANSWER:

One’s sense of gender happens at different times for different people.

Many transgender people remember “feeling different” from their earliest childhood memories. But because of stigma and lack of information, they can struggle for many years to accept this difference. As more information for transgender

people becomes available, we are seeing transgender people openly expressing their true gender identity at younger ages.

What is the typical transition process for transgender people?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
There is no “typical” transition process, because there are many different ways to transition.

For transgender people, transitioning means different things. For some, it means medical treatments, including use of hormones and gender-affirming surgeries. For others, it means social transition, which might include things such as choosing a new name or altering outward appearance with clothing or hairstyles. There is also legal transition, which is the process of changing names and gender markers on important legal documents such as a birth certificate, passport, or social security card. And for still others, it means a combination of some or all of the above.

What does it mean to be gender expansive or nonbinary, and how is that different from identifying as transgender?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Identifying as transgender versus identifying as gender expansive, genderqueer, or other terms (see the glossary at the back of this book) are different things. The first relates to gender identity; the latter more usually relates to gender expression.

Gender-expansive individuals are generally those whose gender expression is different from the societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Just as with transgender people, gender-expansive people may or may not identify as transgender, male, female, both, or neither.

Nonbinary people (sometimes called ‘enby’ or ‘genderqueer’) identify outside of the gender binary of being either a man or a woman. They may think of themselves as both man and woman, neither man nor woman, moving between two genders, or as a third gender altogether. Refer to the glossary at the back of this book for more terminology.

Aren’t there only two genders?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No. While we used to think of gender as binary—masculine/man/male and feminine/woman/female—we have come to learn that gender exists more

on a spectrum. This is a new concept in the United States, but many cultures recognize more than two genders and have for a long time.

In American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) communities, there are Two Spirit individuals who identify as having both a male and a female essence or spirit. In India and Bangladesh there is a third gender called “Hijra” that is neither male nor female. The Fa’afafine are a third gender in Samoa. Learn more about how other cultures perceive gender from this interactive map—and supplementary materials—from PBS: http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/.

There is a whole range of identities to be found on the gender spectrum. Throughout our lives, we can experience and express our gender in a variety of ways. Our gender expression can change over time as we have new experiences and become aware of new ideas.

Remember, gender is a label created by people. Labels like gender are used to help us figure out what to expect from one another. They aren’t set in stone, and there is no right or wrong gender to have or express.

I think I might be transgender or gender expansive. How do I know for sure?

**THE SHORT ANSWER:
You’ll know when you know.
It could take a while, and it is okay to remain unsure.
There’s no need to rush.**

There are hundreds of different ways to discover your internal sense of gender and how you want to express your gender. Some people say that from the time they were very young they “felt different” or “just knew” they weren’t like their friends, rejecting the stereotypical gender

characteristics they were “supposed” to display.

Some transgender or gender-expansive people say it took a while to put a name to their feelings—it wasn’t until they learned what the terms meant that it made sense to think about their gender

identity and/or expression in those terms; it fit with the feelings they’d had while growing up.

Many other people don’t begin to figure out their gender identity until they’re teenagers or adults. This is completely normal. We figure out our identities in our own time—

I came out to everyone at my school’s first-ever GSA meeting...instead of giving my feminine birth name, I introduced myself as Elijah and admitted that I was trans. I remember trembling with fear but everyone was brilliantly accepting.

***- Anonymous, 16,
Olmsted Falls, Ohio***

sometimes it takes months, other times it takes decades.

As with sexuality, some people know their gender identity from an early age, and know that it doesn't match the "boy" or "girl" label they were assigned at birth. For others, gender identity develops and changes over time. If you feel that your gender identity does not match up with the "boy" or "girl" label others assume you to have, it is completely normal to explore and learn about other ways to express yourself.

Try not to hide your feelings from yourself. Yes, figuring out who you are can be stressful, emotional, and a little scary—you may not want to deal with it—but taking some time alone to think about how you feel is the first step toward accepting yourself. Give yourself permission to explore your thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Remember, everyone is unique and perfect in their own way.

MENTAL HEALTH

Is being lesbian, gay, or bisexual a mental disorder?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Absolutely not.

The American Psychiatric Association declared in 1973 that homosexuality is not a mental disorder or disease, and

the American Psychological Association says that it would be unethical to try to change a person's sexual orientation. Often referred to as "conversion therapy" or "reparative therapy," it is a harmful practice that has been banned in numerous states, with even more states looking at bans. See the next page for more information.

Is being transgender a mental disorder?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Absolutely not.

Being transgender or gender expansive is not a disorder. It is important to know, though, that in July 2012, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed the diagnostic term 'gender identity disorder' from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and replaced it with 'gender dysphoria,' in the new edition, published in May 2013. The DSM says that gender dysphoria can be diagnosed when a person's gender identity/expression is different from their assigned gender at birth and at the same time associated with "clinically significant distress or impairment" in their social life, career, or other important areas of life. As a result of such distress, those with untreated gender dysphoria have a "significantly increased risk of suffering." However, gender

dysphoria narrows treatment to those who experience distress over their gender incongruity.

Therefore, gender dysphoria isn't about simply being gender expansive. It has to do with the absence or presence of suffering and discomfort a person might feel if they are unhappy or uncomfortable with their gender identity or incongruity. As documented by empirical and clinical data, there are many transgender and gender-expansive people who are very happy and comfortable with their gender identity and don't need or seek treatment.

What about “ex-gay” ministries and so-called “conversion therapy—can they help me?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No. Not only do these measures—like “pray the gay away”—not work, but also they are likely to harm you. Every major mainstream medical, psychiatric, and psychological association has denounced this type of so-called therapy.

Because sexual orientation and gender identity are not chosen, you cannot “change your mind” or “pray the gay away” if you are LGBTQ+.

After all, did our non-LGBTQ+ friends and loved ones choose to be non-LGBTQ+? These measures have been proven to cause serious damage and potentially dire consequences for the patients involved.

I was raised in a Christian home, so homosexuality was off limits. I tried so hard to be straight, but it just didn't feel right. After having a boyfriend for three months, I just gave up and came out. Now I have a girlfriend and I am ecstatic.

*- Anonymous, 20,
Bloomington, Indiana*

A few things to know:

- In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence shows that so-called reparative therapy does not work, and that it can do more harm than good.
- In 1997, the American Psychological Association again publicly cautioned against this harmful practice, also known as “conversion therapy.”
- In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association stated that “psychiatric literature strongly demonstrates that treatment attempts to change sexual orientation are ineffective. However, the potential risks are

great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive [suicidal] behavior.”

- The American Medical Association states in policy number H-160.991 that it “opposes the use of ‘reparative’ or ‘conversion’ therapy that is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation.”
- In 2001, the U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior asserted that homosexuality is not “a reversible lifestyle choice.”
- In 2009, the American Psychological Association added a resolution stating “mental health professionals should avoid telling clients that they can change their sexual orientation through therapy or other treatments,” because there was no evidence that these efforts worked.
- In 2013, Exodus International—the world’s largest “ex-gay” ministry organization—shut its doors, its founder issuing an apology for the many harms their methods caused over the years.

The practice is deemed so harmful that there are now laws in many states outlawing the practice for minors, with other states—and the federal government—considering similar bills. Many PFLAG parents have seen firsthand how damaging the practice has been to their children. PFLAG members believe that it is important to educate society based on scientific facts and reputable professional opinions, not on the ideological and pseudo-scientific beliefs expressed by ex-gay ministries and advocates of reparative therapy.

Knowing who these groups are and the various names under which they work is important. See the *Resources* section at the back of this book for a list of some of them.

THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

I don’t see LGBTQ+ people around me. Am I the only LGBTQ+ person in my community?

THE SHORT ANSWER: No. You are definitely NOT the only one; you are one of many.

According to a study released in by the Williams Institute, the percentage of the adult population in the United States who identify as LGB is roughly 3.5%. And in

2016, another Williams Institute study showed that 0.6% of adults in the United States, or 1.4 million individuals, identify as transgender.

These LGBTQ+ people are a widely diverse population: they're white, black, Asian, Pacific-Islander, Latinx, Hispanic, and Native American. They're Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Baptist, Protestant, Hindu, Mormon, Baha'i, and Buddhist. They're old and young, rich and poor, Democrat, Republican, Green Party and independent. They're doctors and nurses, construction workers, teachers and students, secretaries, ministers and rabbis, store clerks, mechanics, business people, police officers, politicians, and athletes. And when they were teenagers, most of them probably felt the same way you do. If you get the feeling you're all by yourself, just remember: thousands of people have gone through the journey you are undertaking. ***You are not alone!***

Sometimes I don't see myself reflected in the LGBTQ+ community. Are there resources for youth of color?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes, there are more and more resources for LGBTQ+ youth of color and for others who have multiple identities (youth with disabilities, youth who are homeless, and others).

As an LGBTQ+ youth of color you might face issues that affect how you experience, act on, and come out regarding your sexual orientation or gender identity—including cultural and family traditions, access to

resources, and immigration status. When deciding whether to come out, you might worry about jeopardizing your relationships with your family and friends in your racial/ethnic community, about

being accepted as a person of color in white LGBTQ+ groups, and about potential racism and ignorance that you may find in some segments of the LGBTQ+ community.

However, there are people who are LGBTQ+ in all communities and in all cultures, as well as an increasing number of resources available for you and your family. For a list of resources for LGBTQ+ youth of color, please visit safeschoolscoalition.org/RG-glbtyouth_of_color.html.

I've told only a few people I'm asexual. I used to think there was something wrong with me, but my friends and my boyfriend are all supportive, and it's great to know I'm not alone.
- Kelly F., 21, Allentown, PA

COMING OUT

Should I come out?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Only if you want to, and only when you're ready and feel safe to do so. Don't come out just because someone else thinks you should.

Think of yourself as a puzzle. There are thousands of little pieces which make up who you are. Your sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression are just three parts of that puzzle—but without them, your picture would be incomplete.

Realizing you're LGBTQ+ doesn't change who you are. It just fills in some of the blanks. Now, you can choose to keep your personal picture to yourself. Or you can display it for others to see; it's up to you.

You can come out, or disclose, to one person, to friends and family only, or to everyone you know.

There's no reason to come out if you aren't ready. Sometimes there are very good reasons not to come out. There are people who won't accept you if you're LGBTQ+, people who will do and say terrible things. They could be your parents, friends or classmates, or teachers or coworkers, people you love or depend on for financial help, companionship, encouragement, or other support. Like any big decision we make, there

are real risks to coming out.

However, there are also very good reasons to let some people know that you're LGBTQ+. Hiding your sexual orientation or gender identity keeps the important people in your life from knowing about a big part of you. By coming out you can live with integrity in regard to your sexual orientation or gender identity, begin building community support, and form healthy relationships. At some point, many LGBTQ+ people find that the loneliness and isolation of keeping a secret is worse than any fear of coming out.

Whatever your reasons for thinking you should or shouldn't come out, it's your decision and no one else's. It's also one you should make at your own speed.

How should I come out?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Start by coming out to yourself. Then, choose those who are closest to you to tell first.

Before you come out to others, you have to come out to yourself. It may sound strange, but it's actually very important. Knowing that you're LGBTQ+ is one thing, but being comfortable with being LGBTQ+ and being sure of who you are as a person is another. A lot of people have learned to say, "I'm

not straight, and that's OK!" as a first step in the coming-out process. Remember, any step forward is a step in the right direction.

There's no standard or correct way to come out. Sometimes people make a joke out of it, surprise their friends, or slip it into a casual conversation. Some kids decide to sit their parents down and talk about it, while others feel more comfortable writing their parents a letter or an email. It all depends on your relationship with your friends and family, how you communicate best, and how you feel most safe.

You may consider becoming more educated about sexual orientation and gender identity before you come out. By doing so, you will be able to respond to people who may have questions or wrong ideas about LGBTQ+ topics. You'll feel proud to know the facts if someone asks you a question or if you want to correct someone's incorrect information about people who are LGBTQ+. Explore the resources listed at the back of this publication. By learning about others' experiences and talking about yourself, you'll know

more about who you are and what to expect when you come out. Let your friends and allies know that you're getting ready to come out so they can support you.

A support system is important when you're coming out. You'll want people around you who care about you and will be there for you, whether it's just to talk or to give

you a hug when you need one, or to give you a place to stay, if necessary. If you don't feel that you already have people like that, contact the nearest PFLAG chapter or one of the other groups listed at the back of this publication.

My friend and I were discussing David Tennant from DR. WHO and I, then a closeted lesbian, said, "That man makes me question my sexuality." The friend asked, "Do you have something to tell me?" as a joke, and I replied, "Yes," with a complete deadpan. It was awesome.

*- Anonymous, 16,
Germantown, Maryland*

Should I come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s) and how should I do it?

THE SHORT ANSWER: If you're ready—and with care.

Many youth who are LGBTQ+ say that their relationship with their parents was much closer after they came out because it was more honest. They say it was a relief to feel like they weren't keeping a secret any more.

Sometimes a child doesn't come out to their parents, but, rather, their parents discover that their children at a much earlier age—sometimes as young as two or three years old—are expressing signs of gender creativity. For these children, they and their parents work through the process together.

But it doesn't always work that way. Some teens are forced to leave home. Some parents are abusive. And some family relationships never recover.

Before you come out to your parents, there are some things for you to consider:

- Think about your parents' general reaction to LGBTQ+ people. Find out as much as you can by observing your parents or asking indirect questions. Do they have friends who are LGBTQ+? Do they read books or go to movies that include same-sex relationships? Is their faith community accepting of people who are LGBTQ+? Have you heard them say that there's nothing wrong with being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender expansive, or queer?
- Think about your relationship with your parents. Have they shown that they love you even when

they're upset with you? Have they stuck by you even when you've done something they didn't like?

- Think about having a plan in place if they don't respond well, including someone to call right away if you need support. If you had to leave home, do you have a place to stay? If your parents cut off financial support, do you have someone else who can help you?

You're the only one who can answer these questions. Weigh the balance of "yes" and "no" responses when you're thinking about coming out. Trust your gut. It's almost always frightening coming out to your parent(s) or guardian(s), but if you're terrified about it, you should pay attention to that. Not all parents will be accepting.

If your answer to all or most of the questions above is "no," do not come out to your parents until you have a safe place to go to and a way to support yourself. You might be better off waiting until you're on your own. If your answer to all or most of these questions is "yes," then it's probably safe to tell them.

If you decide you can and want to tell your parent(s), think about how you can make it easiest on them and yourself.

- Pick a time when your parents are relaxed and not pressured by work, family worries, or the holidays. Otherwise, they might react negatively because they feel they don't have the time to deal with it.
- Visit pflag.org/find to locate your local PFLAG chapter and speak to a parent who can talk with you about how your parents might react. This firsthand support is invaluable. Be sure to ask that parent if you can have permission to put your own parents in touch with them, should they need that support.
- Visit our publications page at pflag.org/publications. There you will have access to two helpful publications, both free for download. We highly recommend printing out the appropriate publication to give to your parents or family members:

Our Children. One of our most popular publications, this booklet answers several commonly asked questions

When I came out to my parents, my mother cried. She cried because she could no longer officiate my wedding ceremony which had been a dream of hers since I was a child. She would be defrocked if she attempted to officiate.
 - Meg B., 22, Westerville, Ohio

about having an LGB child and includes a list of related resources that will help your parents in their own journey.

Our Trans Loved Ones. This publication is available for you and your parents if you identify as transgender or gender expansive.

Most of all: be prepared for your parents to need some time to accept your being LGBTQ+—just as you probably needed some time yourself.

Even if they're accepting of LGBTQ+ people in general, your parents may be surprised to learn that you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. They may not want to believe it at first and may need time to adjust to a different future than they had envisioned for you. In the extreme, they may talk about bringing in a psychiatrist to "cure" you.

Before the psychological and psychiatric associations concluded that being LGBTQ+ is perfectly OK, there were a lot of theories blaming parents for playing a role in influencing their child's sexual orientation and gender identity. As a result of such theories, your

parents may worry about what you being LGBTQ+ says about them. They may worry whether they have failed you in some way as parents, and that worry can come out as anger and defensiveness.

Your parents could also feel that you've rejected them or their way of life by being LGBTQ+, or that you've somehow changed their dreams for you. This feeling of rejection is very common among parents of all teens, as teens become more independent and parents have to let go of their image of who or what their child will be. Parents of children who are LGBTQ+ might feel this sense of loss and rejection even more strongly.

Even if they don't have those reactions, your parents are probably going to feel worried about you. In fact, they may have some of the same worries you once had or still do have: whether this will put you in danger, whether your life will be happy, whether you'll have a family of your own. These concerns can cause them to ignore or deny what you've told them.

They may worry about how they're going to tell other family members and their friends. Before they do, it is important that they have your permission to come out about you to others. That's right: when you come out, your parents will start a coming-out process of their own. And the best thing you can do is be ready with answers—or suggest

people with whom they can talk. The more homework you've done, and the more self-assured you seem, the more you'll convince your parents that you're ready to take responsibility for yourself, and they may worry less. Ultimately, the more support you—and they—have, the better.

I can't come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s). Whom should I tell?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
If not your parent(s) or guardian(s), tell only those people whom you want to know and whom you have reason to trust.

Coming out isn't something that you do once, and then it's over.

You might decide to come out now to family members and later to friends, or the other way around. Or perhaps you could come out to a sibling now, and later to the rest of the family and your friends.

If you are transgender or gender expansive, some people—including your teachers, principal, and classmates—might be uncomfortable with how you publicly express yourself, especially if it challenges people's sense of how they believe women and men are supposed to dress and act. How you express your gender is something to think about, discuss with people you trust, and

evaluate in terms of your safety and what kind of community you have to support you.

The people you tell first should be the ones you trust the most. You need to be able to trust them not to hurt you, to accept you for who you are, and to respect your privacy and not tell anyone you don't want told.

Think about what you could lose by telling a particular person. If it's a friend, are they likely to withdraw from you? Would they tell other kids at school? What would happen if they did?

Do you have a support system to help you if this is the case? Having a strong support network is critical as you start the coming out process. The resources at the back of this publication—including your local PFLAG chapter—are a great place to start!

Think also about what you could lose by not telling a particular person. Is your relationship with your friend strained because you're keeping a secret from them? Would you be closer with them and be able to get more support from them if they understood why you were acting withdrawn?

Think about what kinds of things you've been able to share with them in the past and how they have reacted. If you want to come out to someone in particular, and you aren't sure how they'll react, try to feel them out first. You could get them talking about a current event, book, movie, or TV show about people who are LGBTQ+.

Lucky to be from a family of free thinkers, coming out to my parents was easy. What was not so easy was losing friends I trusted. But for every friend I lost all those years ago, I'm fortunate to have two in their place that understand and cherish me for who I am.

- Wain S., 21, Casper, Wyoming

Keep in mind that someone's reaction to an LGBTQ+ person in a movie might not be the same as it would be if that person were their sibling or their friend. And it can work both ways: people might seem either more or less prejudiced in a hypothetical or

fictional situation than they would when responding to someone close to them.

For example, because homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are so common, a friend or a loved one might without thinking joke about an LGBTQ+ character in a movie—or might do so because they think you expect that—but show far more thoughtfulness and a desire to understand when responding to your coming out. On the other hand, friends and loved ones who seem accepting of LGBTQ+ characters in the media might be

far less accepting of someone close to them who identifies as LGBTQ+.

To get a sense of how someone might react to your being LGBTQ+, try to keep your questions specific, personal, and thought provoking. If, for example, you have a friend who has an older brother off at college or in the military, you could say something like, “I’ve been reading about gay-straight alliances on college campuses” or “I’ve been reading about marriage equality for people who are gay and lesbian. Would you be upset if your brother came home and told you he was gay?” (Your friend might even surprise you and answer, “My brother is gay.”)

Will people accept me after I come out?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Some people will accept you and some won't.

Prejudice and discrimination are everywhere in America and around the world and it takes time to overcome bias and change attitudes.

If you are LGBTQ+, it is more likely than not that you will run into prejudice. Our society has a “straight assumption.” We’re taught by our families, our schools, our religions, and the media to assume that everyone is straight, which often influences us to discriminate

against those who aren’t or who don’t appear to be. That assumption has begun to change, but it is still real for many people.

Our society also has assumptions about what it means to be a boy or girl or a man or woman and may judge others by how they conform to those preconceptions. These are called “traditional gender roles” or “gender stereotypes,” and they refer to how people are “supposed” to behave. These biases are changing too—women in the workforce have transformed perceptions about the professions they “should” be in, for example. But roles remain rigid in many places. Men with long hair are more accepted now than in the past, but having long hair is not seen as acceptable in all areas of our culture.

The prejudice you run into could be fairly mild. For example, someone assuming you’re straight and thereby embarrassing you (and themselves). Or it could be far more serious: people who are LGBTQ+ are sometimes kicked out of their homes, fired from their jobs—or worse—just for being LGBTQ+.

Anti-LGBTQ+ biases are being challenged, however, as more and more people are getting to know people who are LGBTQ+, because more of them are out than ever before. Attitudes are also changing because other people are standing up with the LGBTQ+ community to say, “They are my friends,” “they are my colleagues,” or “they are

my neighbors”—and “I’m proud of them.” We call these supportive individuals “allies.”

Right now in the U.S., it is estimated that eight in ten people say that they personally know someone who is LGBTQ+. If you choose to come out, you’ll be part of making that number even bigger, giving people the opportunity to get to know you, and transforming biased beliefs to ones of acceptance.

Will I lose my non-LGBTQ+ friends? Where will I find LGBTQ+ friends?

THE SHORT ANSWER: To the first question—probably not. And to the second—everywhere.

It is usually easier to be close to someone who is not hiding anything and is comfortable with themselves.

When coming out, though, be careful to trust only those who you are confident will respect your privacy and confidentiality. Friends who tend to gossip can cause problems, even if they don’t mean

to hurt you.

Some friends will be supportive right away. One or two friends might have already guessed that you’re not straight or that you are transgender, and you may find that you already have LGBTQ+ friends and didn’t know it.

Just as with your parents, consider how each friend is

likely to feel when they learn that you are LGBTQ+, and how you can let them see that you haven’t changed as a person; offering them some of the resources listed in the back of this publication can help.

Talking to friends who are LGBTQ+ about their coming-out experiences can also help. Finding new friends who are LGBTQ+ is really important. These are people who know exactly what you’re going through because they’ve been there, or are in the process of coming out themselves.

LGBTQ+ youth organizations are a good place to start because you won’t have to try to figure out whether another teen there is LGBTQ+ or an ally. Most major cities have LGBTQ+ youth organizations where you’ll be able to meet people easily. You’ll find new friends with whom you can share experiences and support,

I came out as a lesbian to my sister, and it was easy. I came out as a lesbian to my mother, and it was okay. I came out as a lesbian to my father, and it was difficult. I came out as a lesbian to my friends, and it was near impossible.

*- Anonymous, 16
Hayle, Cornwall, United Kingdom*

and learn more about yourself. Your school might have a Gay-Straight or Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA), and GSAs almost always have a supportive teacher or staff member as a sponsor. This is another excellent place to find not only peer support but also a trusted adult.

If you're in a small town or in a rural area, it may be harder to find groups like these. In that case, you can get in touch with peers through the websites and

hotlines listed in the back of this publication. The organizations in the resource directory can also help you find more specific groups, such as organizations for LGBTQ+ people who are African American, Arab, Asian-Pacific Islander, or Latinx, or support groups for LGBTQ+ people who are differently abled.

Even if it seems to you that you must be the only LGBTQ+ person at your school, you aren't. There are other LGBTQ+ students at your school whom you might already know (but not know that they're LGBTQ+) or whom you might not yet have met. Remember this the next time you may feel alone.

Can I have a family of my own?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes.

Throughout the world, same-sex couples form and build long-lasting families. And now, in many places, they can marry. As of June 26, 2015, marriage equality has been the law of the land in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., as well as all U.S. territories

Close friends were a very important and helpful support network. By surrounding myself with positive people, allies and volunteering with LGBT organizations I found comfort and confidence.

- Lauren M., 22, Phoenix, Arizona

except American Samoa, since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state-level bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional. As of September 2017, same-sex marriage is legally recognized in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

A record number of companies, including a majority of companies in the Fortune 500, treated same-sex partners the same as married couples and provided health-care coverage and other benefits for their LGBTQ+ employees' partners.

Now that same-sex marriage is legal in the United States, same-sex married couples are legally afforded the same benefits as opposite-sex married couples.

Many same-sex couples have children. Some couples and individuals have used assisted reproduction in order to conceive a child. Other LGBTQ+ people are raising children from previous opposite-sex relationships on their own or with their new partners. As people become more educated and society's attitudes continue to change, adoption of children by LGBTQ+ couples is becoming more common. An estimated 110,000 adopted children live with LGBTQ+ couples, and an additional two million same-sex couples say they would be interested in adopting a child at some point in their lives.

While there are still many legal and legislative challenges for same-sex couples, LGBTQ+ people throughout the world are living with partners or spouses in happy, healthy, and thriving relationships and families. They also play a tremendous role in helping create a society in which these relationships receive support to thrive.

I feel so alone, are there people I can talk to?

THE SHORT ANSWER: You aren't alone. There are people out there who are ready to help.

First and foremost, if you have any thoughts of self-harm, turn immediately to the front inside cover of this book for a list of helpline numbers that you can call.

The best thing you can do is find someone to talk to whom you can trust. Maybe it is an individual you already know—a friend, parent, sibling, or a friend's parent or older sibling. Maybe it's an adult to whom you have confided in the past and whom you know you can trust again.

If you don't know anyone with whom you're comfortable talking and who will be supportive and understanding, start by calling one of the helpline numbers or online help sections of the organizations listed in the back of this publication. You don't have to give your name, and they won't try to talk you into or out of anything.

If you don't feel ready to talk with someone on the phone, you can learn more by reading resources and information from other youth on some of the websites listed

at the end of this publication. Many organizations provide email addresses to which you can send questions confidentially. Others have live chat support. Please remember to use good judgment when making any contacts, whether on the phone, online, or in person. Your safety and well-being should always be your top priority.

One of the best places to find support is at a PFLAG chapter meeting. PFLAG has nearly 400 chapters across the country, and can provide you—in confidence—educational materials as well as a listing of youth resources in your community.

Start by visiting pflag.org/find to find the chapter nearest you. You can also reach out to us on social media, via our website, or by phone. Visit the inside front cover of this publication for all of our contact information.

Whatever you choose, talking does help. Talking to others and being open and honest can be an affirming way for you to connect with your own feelings, connect with others in your life, and connect with those in vibrant and diverse LGBTQ+ communities. And best of all, you'll learn that you're really not alone.

STAYING SAFE

What if I'm harassed at school?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
You do not have to tolerate harassment at school; there are many resources—and people—available to help you.

School can be challenging for LGBTQ+ youth, who might hear jokes and insults on a regular basis not only from other students, but sometimes from teachers or school employees as well. Some people who are LGBTQ+ are physically assaulted at school or by classmates off school property. For transgender youth, most schools do not have dress codes, bathrooms, locker rooms, or gym classes that meet their needs. Many schools also do not have inclusive policies for trans athletes.

Regardless of your sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, you have the right to a safe learning environment, and there are lots of resources available to help you and your parent(s) or guardian(s) create such an environment. One of PFLAG's top priorities is to help students, parents, guardians, and educators create safe and affirming schools. To learn more about safe-schools programs available through a chapter near you, please visit pflag.org/safeschools.

What if I'm harassed outside of school?

If you are being harassed by your peers or finding barriers to being yourself at school, try talking to a supportive teacher or staff member or to someone else in your life who can listen and give you support.

Ask to see your school's harassment, bullying, and discrimination policies. Many states have laws that require schools to respond to reports of bullying and harassment. In other places, courts are holding schools responsible for failing to provide remedies to anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment. You do not need to endure this treatment from anyone.

If you are not getting support at school and are looking for help, you can contact PFLAG or one of the other organizations listed in the back of this publication.

Visit pflag.org/safeschools and pflag.org/claimyourrights for more information and safe school resources.

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Harassment outside of school should be reported to the local police or to an adult you trust.

If you are harassed, assaulted, or victimized in any way because of your sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, contact your local police or tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. You may have been the victim of a hate crime.

Hate crimes occur when someone targets another person based on a characteristic they have or a group they belong to, like being LGBTQ+ or being a member of a certain race. In America, any violent assault against an LGBTQ+ person because of their

sexuality or gender identity can be considered a federal crime. This is part of the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act*, which was passed into law in 2009.

When I was in 8th grade, I was outed, endured bullying, and became depressed. My mom really struggled with my sexuality for years. Finally, through a lot of struggle, I accepted it and so did she. Five years later, I am a strong and proud member of the LGBT community and my mom started working for the PFLAG in our state.

- Magdalen S., 17, Fenton, Michigan

Many states have their own hate crime laws which protect their citizens. Even if your state doesn't protect against crimes committed due to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression bias, you can still file a police report and seek justice.

If what happened to you wasn't exactly a crime, but it made you feel threatened, you can still file an incident report at your local police station. It's very important to tell the police what happened—imagine if the people who tried to hurt you try to hurt you again, or try to hurt another person in town. The police have a sworn duty to protect you, your friends, and your family, no matter who you are.

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, cyber bullying is using the Internet, cell phones, video game systems, or other technology to send or post text or images intended to harm or embarrass another person. If you are at any time harassed, threatened, taunted, or teased via technology—no matter where you are—it is important to contact a trusted adult or authority as soon as possible.

Remember: You are not alone, and there are people ready to help. Visit pflag.org/claimyourrights for more information. Additionally, the *Resources* section of this publication will help you find organizations that can provide assistance.

While harassment and cyberbullying do not always elevate to the level of a hate crime, they are just as potentially detrimental and dangerous.

Do I need to worry about HIV and AIDS?

THE SHORT ANSWER:
Everybody needs to be informed about HIV and AIDS.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). Unlike some viruses, HIV cannot be eliminated by the human body: as of now, once you have HIV, you have it for life. Doctors, researchers, activists, and others around the world are working hard to find one, but there is still no cure for HIV/AIDS. Improved treatments, however, are increasingly alleviating the symptoms and prolonging life.

Since the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many people have viewed HIV/AIDS as strictly a gay issue. The LGBTQ+ community—including PFLAG's founders and first leaders—mobilized early in the epidemic to organize a response. This response included educating communities, increasing LGBTQ+ visibility to reduce stigma, developing prevention strategies, and advocating for appropriate care and treatment options for people living with HIV/AIDS. Yet the epidemic

has continued to progress and take its toll on many diverse communities globally. Still, despite overwhelming statistics documenting the spread of HIV/AIDS in other communities, many people still choose to view HIV/AIDS as only a gay issue. Visit cdc.gov/hiv/basics/transmission.html for a comprehensive list of how HIV/AIDS is spread.

The fact is that being LGBTQ+ does not infect a person with HIV or

AIDS. Certain sexual behaviors, IV drug use, and other factors can put one at risk for becoming infected with HIV as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

For the most up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS, including high-risk behaviors, testing, treatment, and more, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's HIV/AIDS website at cdc.gov/hiv/.

AFAB: Acronym meaning Assigned Female at Birth. AFAB people may or may not identify as female some or all of the time.

Affirmed Gender: An individual's true gender, as opposed to their gender assigned at birth. This term should replace terms like new gender or chosen gender, which imply that an individual's gender was chosen.

Agender: Refers to a person who does not identify with any gender.

Ally: A term used to describe someone who is supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Allies include both heterosexual and cisgender people who advocate for equality in partnership with LGBTQ+ people, as well as those who are LGBTQ+ who are supportive of other identities within the community.

AMAB: Acronym meaning Assigned Male at Birth. AMAB people may or may not identify as male some or all of the time. (See Gender)

Androgynous: Having elements of both femininity and masculinity. An androgynous individual, whether expressed through sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, is known as an androgyne.

Aromantic: Refers to an individual who does not experience romantic attraction. Sometime abbreviated as aro.

Asexual: Refers to an individual

who does not experience sexual attraction. Each asexual person experiences relationships, attraction, and arousal differently. Asexuality is distinct from celibacy or sexual abstinence, which are chosen behaviors, in that asexuality is a sexual orientation that does not necessarily entail either of those behaviors. Sometimes abbreviated as ace.

Assigned Sex: The sex that is assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs, including genitalia and other physical characteristics.

Assigned Gender: The gender that is assigned to an infant at birth, which may or may not align with their sex at birth.

Assumed Gender: The gender others assume an individual to be based on the sex and gender they are assigned at birth, as well as apparent societal gender markers and expectations, such as physical attributes and expressed characteristics.

Binding: The process of tightly wrapping one's chest in order to minimize the appearance of having breasts, often by using a binder.

Biological Sex: Refers to anatomical, physiological, genetic, or physical attributes that determine if a person is male, female, or intersex. These include both primary and secondary sex characteristics, including genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hor-

hormone receptors, chromosomes, and genes. Often also referred to as “sex,” “physical sex,” “anatomical sex,” or specifically as “sex assigned at birth.” Sex is often conflated or interchanged with gender, which is more social than biological, and involves personal identity factors as well.

Bisexual: Refers to an individual who has the capacity for attraction—sexually, romantically, emotionally, or otherwise—to people with the same, and to people with different, genders and/or gender identities as themselves. People who identify as bisexual need not have had equal experience—or equal levels of attraction—with people across genders, nor any experience at all: it is attraction and self-identification that determine orientation. Sometimes referred to as bi or bi+.

Cisgender: Refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming Out: For people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, the process of self-identifying and self-acceptance that continues throughout one’s life, and the sharing of their identity with others. Sometimes referred to as disclosing (see Disclosure below). Individuals often recognize a lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender/gender-expansive, or queer identity within themselves first, and then might choose to reveal it to others. 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 coming out is an incredibly personal and transformative experience. Not everyone is in the same place when it comes to being out, and it is critical 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.

Demioromantic: Used to describe an individual who experiences romantic attraction after a sexual connection is formed.

Demisexual: Used to describe an individual who experiences sexual attraction after an emotional connection is formed.

Disclosure: A word that some people use to describe the act or process of revealing one’s transgender or gender-expansive identity to another person in a specific instance. Some find the term offensive, implying the need to disclose something shameful, and prefer to use the term coming out, whereas others find coming out offensive, and prefer to use disclosure.

FTM/F2M: A trans male/masculine person assigned female at birth.

FTX/F2X: A genderqueer or gender expansive person who was assigned female at birth.

Gay: The adjective used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves. People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determine orientation.

Gender: A set of social, psychological, and/or emotional traits, often influenced by societal expectations, that classify an individual along a spectrum of man, woman, both, or neither.

Gender-Affirming Surgery (GAS): Surgical procedures that can help people adjust their bodies to more closely match their innate gender identity. Not every transgender person will desire or have resources for surgery. This term should be used in place of the older term sex change. Also sometimes referred to as sexual reassignment surgery (or SRS), genital reconstruction surgery, or medical transition.

Gender Binary: The disproven concept that there are only two genders, man and woman, and that everyone must be one or the other. Also implies that gender is biologically determined.

Gender Dysphoria: The distress caused when a person's assigned sex at birth and assumed gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSMV), the term "...is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

Gender Expansive: An umbrella term sometimes used to describe people that expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond what is perceived as the expected gender norms for their society or context. Some gender-expansive individuals identify as a man or a woman, some identify as neither, and others identify as a mix of both. Gender-expansive people feel that they exist psychologically between genders, as on a spectrum, or beyond the notion of the man/woman binary paradigm, and sometimes prefer using gender-neutral pronouns (see Personal Gender Pronouns). They may or may not be comfortable with their bodies as they are, regardless of how they express their gender.

Gender Expression: The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, 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. An individual’s gender expression does not automatically imply one’s gender identity.

Genderfluid: Describes a person who does not consistently identify with one fixed gender, and who may move between gender identities.

Gender Identity: One’s deeply held core sense of being a woman, man, some of both, or neither. One’s gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. Awareness of gender identity is usually experienced as early as 18 months old.

Gender Neutral: Not gendered. Can refer to language (including pronouns and salutations/titles—see Gender-neutral salutations or titles), spaces (like bathrooms), or identities (being genderqueer, for example).

Gender-Neutral Salutations or Titles: A salutation or title that doesn’t identify the gender of the person being addressed in a formal communication or introduction. Also used for persons who do not identify as a binary gender, addressing someone where the gender is unknown, or if the correspondence-sender is unsure of the gender of the person to whom the

correspondence is being sent. Mx is the most commonly used gender-neutral salutation (e.g. “Dear Mx. Smith...”).

Gender Nonconforming: An outdated term used to describe those who view their gender identity as one of many possible genders beyond strictly man or woman. More current terms include gender expansive, differently gendered, gender creative, gender variant, genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, gender fluid, gender neutral, bigender, androgynous, or gender diverse. PFLAG National uses the term gender expansive.

Genderqueer: Refers to individuals who identify as a combination of man and woman, neither man or woman, or both man and woman, or someone who rejects commonly held ideas of static gender identities and, occasionally, sexual orientations. Is sometimes used as an umbrella term in much the same way that the term ‘queer’ is used, but only referring to gender, and thus should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies as genderqueer.

Gender Socialization: The process by which an individual is taught and influenced on how they should behave as a man or a woman. Parents, teachers, peers, media, and books are some of the many agents of gender socialization.

Gender Spectrum: The concept that gender exists beyond a simple man/woman binary model, but instead exists on a continuum. Some people fall towards more masculine or more feminine aspects, some people move fluidly along the spectrum, and some identify off the spectrum entirely.

Gender Variant: A term, often used by the medical community, to describe individuals who dress, behave, or express themselves in a way that does not conform to dominant gender norms. (See gender expansive.) People outside the medical community tend to avoid this term because they feel it suggests these identities are abnormal, preferring terms such as gender expansive and gender creative.

Heteronormativity: The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities.

Heterosexual: Refers to a person who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to a person of the opposite gender

Homophobia: An aversion to lesbian or gay people that often manifests itself in the form of prejudice and bias. Similarly, biphobia is an aversion people who are bisexual, and transphobia is an aversion to people who are transgender. Collectively, these attitudes are referred to as anti-LGBTQ+ bias.

Homosexual: An outdated clinical term often considered derogatory and offensive, as opposed to the generally preferred terms gay, lesbian, or queer.

Intersex/Differences of Sexual Development (DSD): Refers to individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or bodies that appear neither typically male nor female, often arising from chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Medical professionals often assign a gender to the individual and proceed to perform surgeries to 'align' their physical appearance with typical male or female sex characteristics beginning in infancy and often continuing into adolescence, before a child is able to give informed consent. The Intersex Society of North America opposes this practice of genital mutilation on infants and children. Formerly the medical terms hermaphrodite and pseudo-hermaphrodite were used; these terms are now considered neither acceptable nor scientifically accurate.

Latinx: An inclusive, gender-neutral term, sometimes used in place of the gendered, binary terms Latino or Latina, used to describe a person of Latin-American origin or descent.

Lesbian: Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

LGBTQ+: An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. It is sometimes stated as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) or GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). The addition of the Q for queer is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition, which recognizes more fluid identities; and as a move towards greater inclusivity for gender-expansive people (see Queer below). The Q can also stand for questioning, referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. The “+” represents those who are part of the community, but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity.

Lifestyle: A negative term often incorrectly used to describe the lives of people who are LGBTQ+. The term is disliked because it implies that being LGBTQ+ is a choice.

Misgender: To refer to someone, especially a transgender or gender-expansive person, using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect the gender with which they identify.

MTF: A trans female/trans feminine person who was assigned male at birth. Often considered an over medicalized and somewhat outdated term.

MTX: A genderqueer or gender expansive person who was assigned male at birth.

Nonbinary: Refers to individuals who identify as neither man or woman, both man and woman, or a combination of man or woman. It is an identity term which some use exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like genderqueer, gender creative, gender nonconforming, gender diverse, or gender expansive. Individuals who identify as nonbinary may understand the identity as falling under the transgender umbrella, and may thus identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as NB or Enby.

Out: Generally describes people who openly self-identify as LGBTQ+ in their private, public, and/or professional lives. Some people who are transgender prefer to use the term disclose (defined above).

Outing: The deliberate or accidental sharing of another person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression without their explicit consent. Outing is considered disrespectful and a potentially dangerous act for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Pansexual: Refers to a person whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people inclusive of all genders and biological sexes. People who are pansexual need not have had any sexual experience; it is the attraction and self-identification that determines the orientation.

Personal Gender Pronouns: A personal gender pronoun, or PGP—sometimes called proper gender pronoun—is the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual personally uses and would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are gendered, so some individuals may prefer that you use gender neutral or gender-inclusive pronouns when talking to or about them. In English, individual use they and their as gender-neutral singular pronouns. Others use ze (sometimes spelled zie) and hir/zir or the pronouns xe and xer. Replaces the term Preferred Gender Pronoun, which incorrectly implies that their use is optional.

Queer: A term used by some people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use, the term is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who 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 still sometimes disliked within the LGBTQ+ community. 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 identifies as queer”).

Questioning: Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. For many reasons this may happen later in life and does not imply that someone is choosing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.

Same-Gender Loving: A term sometimes used by some members of the African-American/Black community to express an alternative sexual orientation (gay/bisexual) without relying on terms and symbols of European descent.

Sexual Orientation: Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. While sexual behavior involves the choices one makes in acting on one’s sexual orientation, sexual orientation is part of the human condition, one’s sexual activity does not define one’s sexual orientation; typically, it is the attraction that helps determine orientation.

Stealth: A term used to describe transgender or gender-expansive individuals who do not disclose their transgender or gender-expansive status in their public or private lives (or certain aspects of their public and private lives). The term is increasingly considered offensive by some as it implies an element of deception. The phrase maintaining privacy is often used instead, though some individuals use both terms interchangeably.

Transgender: Often shortened to trans. A term describing a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend conventional expectations of gender identity or expression—such groups include, but are not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous. See above for common acronyms and terms including female to male (or FTM), male to female (or MTF), assigned male at birth (or AMAB), assigned female at birth (or AFAB), genderqueer, and gender expansive.

Transition: A term sometimes used to refer to the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to discover and/or affirm one's gender identity. This may, but does not always, include taking hormones; having surgeries; and changing names, pronouns, identification documents, and more. Many individuals choose not to or are unable to transition for a wide range of reasons both within and beyond their control. The validity of an individual's gender identity does not depend on any so-

cial, legal, and/or medical transition; the self-identification itself is what validates the gender identity.

Transsexual: A less frequently used—and sometimes misunderstood—term (considered by some to be outdated or possibly offensive, and others to be uniquely applicable to them) which refers to people who use (or consider using) medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgeries (GAS), also called sex reassignment surgery (SRS) (or a combination of the two) or pursue medical interventions as part of the process of expressing their gender. Some people who identify as transsexual do not identify as transgender and vice versa.

Two-Spirit: A term used within some American Indian (AI) and Alaska Native (AN) communities to refer to a person who identifies as having both a male and a female essence or spirit. The term--which was created in 1990 by a group of AI/AN activists at an annual Native LGBTQ conference--encompasses sexual, cultural, gender, and spiritual identities, and provides unifying, positive, and encouraging language that emphasizes reconnecting to tribal traditions. (With thanks to Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board [NPAIHB].)

RESOURCES

LGBTQ+ Support Organizations:

The following list includes just a few of the groups that may be able to provide you with information or services.

For resources by state, visit <https://pflagnation.al/stateyouthresources>.

Advocates For Youth
advocatesforyouth.org
(202) 419-3420

Ali Forney Center
aliforneycenter.org
(212) 222-3427

Bisexual Resource Center
biresource.net
(617) 424-9595

COLAGE
A program of Family Equality
colage.org
(415) 861-5437

Family Equality
familyequality.org
(617) 502-8700

GLSEN
glsen.org
(212) 727-0135

Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network)
gsanetwork.org
(415) 552-4229

GLAAD
glaad.org
(323) 933-2240

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)
hrc.org
(202) 628-4160

It Gets Better
itgetsbetter.org

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund
lambdalegal.org
(212) 809-8585

Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC)
lyric.org
(415) 703-6150

National Black Justice Coalition
nbjc.org
(202) 319-1552

National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)
nclrights.org
(415) 392-6257

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)
transequality.org
(202) 903-0112

National LGBTQ+ Task Force
thetaskforce.org
(202) 393-5177

National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
nqapia.org
(202) 422-4909

Planned Parenthood
plannedparenthood.org
(800) 230-7526

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS)
SIECUS.org
(212) 819-9770

The Transgender Law Center
transgenderlawcenter.org
(415) 865-0176

The Trevor Project
thetrevorproject.org
thetrevorproject.org/chat
(866) 488-7386

True Colors United
truecolorsunited.org
(212) 461-7386

Anti-LGBTQ+ Organizations to Avoid:

The following is a list of names of just a few of the groups that have formed to oppose basic civil rights and equality for people who are LGBTQ+.

Knowing who they are and the harm that they pose is critical.

People for the American Way (pfaw.org) has a resource center that lists more of these groups, descriptions of their work, and archives of what they've advocated in their own words. You can also visit the Southern Poverty Law Center's Anti-LGBTQ+ pages at <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/anti-lgbt>.

- American College of Pediatricians
- American Family Association
- Center for Family and Human Rights (C-FAM)
- Courage/Encourage
- Eagle Forum
- Family Research Council
- Family Research Institute
- Family Watch International
- Focus on the Family
- Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality (JONAH)
- Liberty Counsel
- Mass Resistance
- National Association for Research and Therapy for Homosexuality (NARTH)
- Public Advocate of the United States
- Parents & Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX)
- Positive Alternatives to Homosexuality (PATH)
- Traditional Values Coalition



PFLAG
PFLAG National
1828 L Street, NW, Suite 660
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 467-8180
pflag.org