
Transgender Terminology



The terms that different communities use to describe their identities is constantly changing. Additionally, there is no consensus among any given group on which terms are preferred. As aspiring allies, it's important for us to try and keep up to date on current usage of terminology but also remember that every individual has a right to decide which terms feel best for them. This is not an exhaustive list of terms. Please let GSAFE know if you feel we are missing any.

Ally: Any person who actively supports the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning) community and speaks out against discrimination and injustice.

Cisgender: This term describes a person who identifies with the sex that they were assigned at birth. For example, a cisgender (or “cis”) woman is someone who was declared to be female at birth and still identifies with that label.

FTM: female-to-male. This describes a person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man and likely has socially and/or physically transitioned to live as a man. *This term is falling out of popularity and some find it offensive. “Transmasculine” is a preferred term.*

Gender: Gender describes the set of societal ideas about what it means to be masculine or feminine. Gender is different from biological sex. It is socially constructed, varies from culture to culture, and changes over time.

Gender binary: This term describes the commonly held belief that there are only two genders.

Gender expression: This term describes how a person communicates their gender to the world. This can include physical aspects like clothing and hairstyle, but it can also describe more personal qualities such as the way someone speaks or how they carry themselves. Gender expression is what people tend to read or categorize as feminine and masculine; it should not be used, however, as an indicator of a person’s gender or sexual identity.

Gender identity: This term describes a person’s innermost feelings and self-concept of being a man, a woman, neither, or a blend of different genders. A person’s gender identity is separate from and is not determined by the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender role: This refers to the sets of activities, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are traditionally considered normal or typical for men and women within a given culture.

Gender variant/Gender non-conforming: These umbrella terms are used to describe anyone whose gender expression falls outside of what is typically considered standard for males and females. An example would be girls who get called “tomboys” because of how they play.

Genderfluid: This term is used by some people who feel that their gender fluctuates from day to day or over time. Their gender expression may also change and fluctuate to reflect this shifting of their gender identity.

Genderqueer: This term is used by some people whose gender identity is neither “man” nor “woman”, but rather falls outside of the gender binary.

Intersex: This term describes a person who is born with a combination of hormones, chromosomes, or genitalia (internal or external) that falls outside of what is typically classified as biologically male or female. There are many different ways to be born intersex, and being intersex is simply a normal part of biological diversity.

MTF: male-to-female. This describes a person who was assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman and likely has socially and/or physically transitioned to live as a woman. *This term is falling out of popularity and some find it offensive. “Transfeminine” is a preferred term.*

Nonbinary: This umbrella term is used to describe people who feel that their gender identity falls outside of the man/woman binary. Examples are genderqueer, agender, pangender, etc.

Sex (biological/anatomical): Different from gender, this term describes the combination of chromosomes, hormones, and genitalia (both internal and external) that is used to classify a person as male, female, or intersex, typically at the time of birth. Given the many variations in sex characteristics that exist, biological sex should not be considered as binary.

Sexual orientation: This word describes a person’s experience of being attracted (physically and emotionally) to people of a similar/same gender, different gender(s), many genders, or to no one. Words like gay, lesbian, asexual, queer, bisexual, pansexual, and straight all describe sexual orientations, which are separate from a person’s gender identity.

Transgender: This term is used both as an umbrella term and as an identity. Broadly, this term describes a person who does not identify with the sex they were declared to be at birth.

Transition: The process through which a transgender person strives to have their physical presentation more closely align with their gender identity. This may include social transition (names, pronouns, clothing, etc.) and physical transition (hormone therapy, gender confirmation surgeries).