

Coming Out: Living Authentically as Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual+

*Human Rights Campaign Foundation, Updated October 2022 |
25 Minute Read.*





**No matter who we are or
who we love, we all deserve
the right to live out our lives
genuinely, completely and
honestly.**

A Note On Terminology

In this report, we use the term “LGB+” as an umbrella term for sexual identities that are non-straight, such as lesbian, gay and bisexual (“LGB”), as well as any and all additional non-straight sexual identities (“+”). While we use “LGB+” in this report as shorthand, it is meant for anyone who identifies as any one of the multitude of sexual identities which people may feel best describe themselves.

Coming Out is a Personal Choice



The majority of people are straight, which refers to men

Still others may formally “come out” and disclose their LGB+ identity to those important to them. While we strive for a



who are usually romantically or sexually attracted only to women and women who are usually romantically or sexually attracted only to men.

Many straight men and women are openly attracted to and have relationships with transgender men and women. Many men who are attracted to only cisgender or transgender women consider themselves straight, as do many women who are only attracted to cisgender or trans men. Other people may be attracted to people of the same or similar genders to their own, or to more than one

world where straight identities aren't assumed to be the norm, the coming out process remains a common experience for LGB+ people. In this resource, you will find advice for safely and comfortably coming out.

Every day, each and every one of us makes deeply personal decisions about how open we want to be with ourselves and with others about our non-straight sexuality, to whom we want to open up, and when and where we want to open up to them. Each of us comes out in our own way and in our own time. Throughout the process of coming out and living ever more openly, you should always be in the driver's seat about whether, how, where, when and with whom you choose to be open.

gender. We use many words to describe non-straight attraction — lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer and fluid are all commonly used labels.

Because straight people are the majority, LGB+ people are often assumed to be straight unless they indicate otherwise. Some LGB+ people may indicate their sexuality through their outward expression, such as tattoos, clothes or accessories with LGB+ symbols. Others may casually mention their LGB+ identity when it comes up in conversation.

This resource was designed to help you and your loved ones through the coming out process in realistic and practical terms. It acknowledges that the experience of coming out and living openly covers the full spectrum of human emotion — from paralyzing fear to unbounded euphoria.

We hope this resource helps you meet the challenges and opportunities that living openly offers to each of us.

A Special Note

No resource can be fully applicable to every member of the LGBTQ+ community. HRC offers other resources beyond this general one, including materials specifically designed for transgender and non-binary

people, [Bi+ people](#), [Black LGBTQ+ people](#), [Latinx LGBTQ+ people](#), [Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ people](#), and allies. Visit [HRC's Coming Out resource page](#) for additional information.

Coming Out and Inviting In:

When a person realizes they are LGB+, they may decide to tell others about their identity, a process often called “coming out.” The phrase “coming out” may also refer to the process by which a person accepts themselves as LGB+. Some LGB+ people may choose to describe the process of telling others as “inviting in” and letting others know important parts of themselves. The concept of “inviting in” reminds us that others must put in the work to allow us to feel safe and comfortable being fully open as our authentic selves.

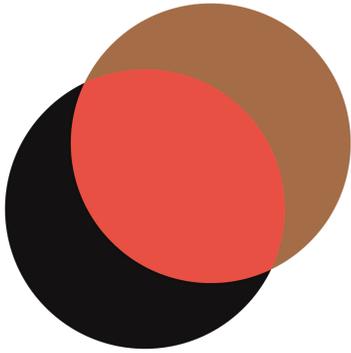
Every LGB+ person makes a decision about whether, how, where, when and with whom we want to be open.

While no one resource can be fully applicable to every LGB+ person, this resource aims to help you and your loved ones through this process in realistic and practical terms, regardless of what that process may look like.

The experience of coming out or inviting in covers the full spectrum of human emotion — from paralyzing fear to genuine happiness. We are here to walk you through what that may look like.

What Does It Mean To Be Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual+?





Non-straight people may identify themselves in a myriad of ways. While terminology for many identities can differ over time and across communities, the following definitions are a good starting point.

Sexual orientation: Term used to describe one's overall inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attractions to other people. Essentially, it is who you are 'oriented' towards. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

Sexual identity: The label one uses for their sexual orientation. Essentially, it is the term you use to indicate your sexual orientation, to yourself and to the world. While most people who use a specific sexual identity (e.g., lesbian) use it to refer to a specific sexual orientation (e.g., a woman who is attracted to other women), others may use different identity labels to describe that same sexual orientation — and others still may use the same identity label to convey different sexual orientations.

Below we offer some definitions of what it means to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual+, focusing on the most common sexual identities, and the most common and 'typical' sexual orientations they reflect. However, these not meant to be definitive. Every single person has their own sexual identity and sexual orientation, and there is no right or wrong way to define either. This guide is still for you, even if you have a different sexual identity than what is listed below, and even if your sexual orientation and sexual identity do not match the definitions we provide.

See the glossary at the end of this guide for additional terms and definitions.



Lesbian: A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Many lesbian women are also sexually and romantically attracted to trans women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Gay: A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to

For other people, queer may reflect their sexual orientation, leading them to identify as queer as opposed to lesbian, or bisexual, or something else; for them, queer often reflects those who are attracted to/partner with people who are transgender, non-binary, or gender-expansive. Still others may use queer to define themselves as a reflection of their own non-binary or gender-expansive

members of the same gender. Many gay men are sexually and romantically attracted to trans men, and many gay women are sexually and romantically attracted to trans women. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

Bisexual: A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. This is sometimes written as bisexual+ or bi+ to incorporate many non-monosexual identities, such as pansexual, omnisexual, or fluid. Bisexuals make up the majority of the LGBTQ+ population – according to a [2021 Gallup poll](#), over half (56.8%) of all LGBTQ+ adults in the United States identified as bisexual.

Queer: Queer has many meanings. For some people, “queer” is a general catch-all/umbrella term, used as a shorthand to capture all non-heterosexual sexual identities, and/or non-cisgender gender identities.

identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement. Like all identities, you should only refer to someone as queer when they have let you know they identify that way.

Monosexual: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of only one gender.

Pansexual: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with omnisexual, queer, bisexual.

Fluid: A term people often use to describe their sexual orientation if their orientation changes with time, or if their orientation has the potential to change with time.

Keep in mind that even if one label (or more than one label) speaks to you,

you are not stuck with that label forever. As humans, we learn about ourselves and grow throughout our entire lives, and we may later find that a certain label doesn't fit us as well as it once did. It is ok if one day you wake up and realize that you're not exactly who you thought you were.

Know that you, and only you, are in charge of your own identity, and you alone have the freedom to define yourself.



Being Open With Yourself



From birth, most of us are raised to think of ourselves as fitting into a certain mold.

Our culture, and often our families, teach us that we are “supposed to” be attracted to certain people and look, act and carry ourselves in specific ways. Few of us are told that we might have a sexual orientation that differs from straightness, or that we might feel compelled to express ourselves in ways that aren’t traditionally associated with our sexual orientation.

There is no one moment when it’s “right” to be open about your own

sexuality. Some LGB+ people have long struggled to live the lives they think they're supposed to live, instead of the lives they know they were meant to live. Some come to question or recognize their sexualities suddenly and immediately take action. Others take more time.

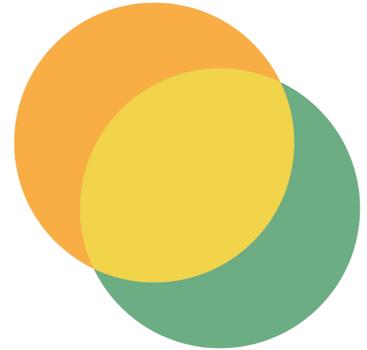
We can realize who we are at any and all stages of our lives — when we're children or teens, seniors, married, single, with children or without. There is no wrong time in your life to realize and begin living openly as who you are.

When you're ready, no matter when that is, we will be here for you.

Deciding to Tell Others



Disclosure of your LGB+ identity to others can be both critical and stressful. Some LGB+ people may feel little need to disclose themselves, while others feel the desire to tell people as soon as they realize it themselves. Both of these timelines, and everything in between, are valid.



Given the vast diversity of LGB+ people, there's no single rule to be applied as to whether a person should (or can safely) disclose their identity to others. Throughout the self-disclosure process, it's common to feel:

**Scared • Unsafe • Confused • Guilty • Empowered •
Exhilarated • Proud • Uncertain • Brave • Affirmed •
Relieved**

All of these feelings, and others, are normal, no matter the intensity or

duration. Disclosure can be a complicated process. What's important is to check in with yourself and the emotions you are having along every step of the way.



Making a Disclosure Plan



When you're ready to tell that first person — or even those first few people — we recommend giving yourself time to prepare.



It can help to think through your options and make a deliberate plan of whom to approach, the right time to do so and how to do it. You can also consider asking yourself the following questions:

Do I know what I want to say?

Many people are still answering tough questions for themselves and are not ready to identify as LGB+, especially at the beginning of the disclosure or coming out process. Others may know they are LGB+ without knowing exactly what that means to themselves or to others. That's ok. Maybe you just want to tell someone that you're starting to ask yourself these questions. Even if you don't yet have all the answers, your

Consider whether this is a good time for you to say it, and deal with any potential reactions: It may never feel like the right time to come out. Come out when it feels best for you and when the person you are coming out to is in a position to receive that information.

Can I be patient?

Just as it may have taken you time to come to terms with being LGB+, some people will need time to think things

feelings and your safety are what matter. To work out what you want to communicate, try writing down ideas or a script, meditating, and brainstorming.

How can I tell others?

There are many ways you can tell others about being LGBTQ+. You may choose to have a conversation, either in person or on the phone. You may write to people via letter, email or text. Some people decide to live openly and not tell others until they notice or decide to ask.

If you just want to tell someone, but don't necessarily want to immediately engage in a discussion or conversation, it may be helpful to write out what you want to say and send it to them via email or text message. That way, if they respond, you can choose when and how to read and engage with their response.

Who should I tell first?

Who you disclose to first can be a critical decision. You may want to select people who you suspect will be most supportive, as their support can help you share with others. Consider who might be your champion — is it a close friend or colleague, your favorite teacher or professor, a parent or sibling, or another trusted person in your life? Is it someone else in your life who also

over after you disclose that news to them. The reason you've chosen to be open with these people is that you care about them or that you found it necessary. You may disclose to a range of people — family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, medical providers, faith leaders or others — and their reactions may vary. Those closest to you may have some of the strongest reactions — both positive and negative — and affect you the most. Sometimes their support will only reveal itself over time. Other times, important people in your life may never provide you with adequate support and recognition of your sexuality. No matter how anyone in your life chooses to react, your sexuality is valid and there are people who will support you.

Is it safe to disclose to those closest to me?

If you have any doubt at all as to your safety, carefully weigh your risks and options for disclosure. LGBTQ+ people may face bullying and harassment or even be forced out of their homes by unsupportive family members, landlords and housemates. Others may face physical violence that can even be fatal. If you are under age 18 or financially dependent on your parents or caregivers, the decision to disclose should be made very carefully.

identifies as LGB+?

At the same time, know that this kind of news can travel quickly – even between the most well-intentioned people. If you'd prefer that people keep your news confidential, be sure to tell them so. It's also important to plan for the chance that someone, intentionally or not, may share your news with others before you have the chance to do so yourself. That being said, don't be discouraged. Set the boundaries that make the most sense to you and try to do things at your own pace, no matter what that pace may be.

What kinds of signals am I getting?

Sometimes you can get a sense of how accepting people will be by the things they say. You may notice the way people talk about LGBQ+ characters in movies or TV shows, or they may share their involvement in LGBTQ+ rights organizations with you. While these signs are important and encouraging, remember that some people may not react in the way that you expect. The most LGBTQ+ friendly person in the office may react negatively, while the person who said something insensitive about gay people might end up being your strongest supporter. Be sure to keep an open mind, and gravitate toward those who support you — especially

Knowing this, some LGB+ people choose to disclose being LGB+ in a safe space with friends by their sides. Others may relocate to a safe location, often with the help of other LGBTQ+ people and our allies. Even if you feel alone, know that there is a large community of LGBTQ+ people and our allies who will welcome you with open arms. Please, hold on.

Is it safe to disclose at work?

In 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* that makes it clear that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is prohibited under the federal employment non-discrimination law known as Title VII.

In addition, many private businesses and companies, as well as states and localities have laws protecting LGB+ people from employment discrimination. That being said, LGB+ people are still highly vulnerable to violence, harassment and discrimination. As a result, disclosure to someone could have real costs. However you decide to come out, it is important to know your rights and find allies who can support you.

What do I do if someone

those doing so with open arms and no qualms.

Am I well-informed and willing to answer questions?

People's reactions to the news that you're LGB+ can depend largely on how much information they have about LGB+ issues and how much they feel they can ask. While more and more people are becoming familiar and accepting of LGB+ people, and understanding of sexual identity, others may still have questions.

It is never your responsibility or duty to educate others about LGB+ people or issues in general. Nor is it ever your responsibility or duty to respond to someone who is being homophobic or biphobic or reacts negatively to your disclosure. However, if you are open to answering questions asked in good faith, and feel well equipped to answer more general (rather than personal) questions, and feel comfortable and safe doing so, it can go a long way toward helping others understand LGB+ identities. Some helpful facts and frequently asked questions can be found later in this resource to help get you started. If you prefer to just send a couple articles or books to people in your life, that's ok too. See the end of this resource for ideas.

reacts badly?

Not everyone will react positively. This is an unfortunate fact of being LGB+. Our world is changing, but not everyone is there yet. Just as when you change careers, change religions or move to a different city, you may lose friends when you disclose — and they may not be the ones you expected. What's important is that you know your truth, and that you don't let other peoples' uninformed opinions direct your own narrative. You know who you are, and that is enough. It will be hard, but many more people will accept you than you may expect. Focus your energy on them because they are the ones that are worth it.

What if someone outs me before I'm ready?

If someone shares information about your identity before you are ready, it is important to try to find ways to take back control of your own narrative. If it's safe, you can speak to the person who outed you to let them know that what they did was not ok. You can also speak to the person to whom you were outed, so you can tell them in your own words and let them know who it is and isn't ok to tell. It can also be helpful to develop a support system of people you are out to, so they can help you in times like these. Please see the end of this resource for a

Is this a good time?

Timing is key, and choosing the right time is up to you.

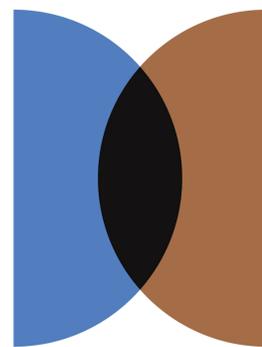
Consider whether this is a good time for the other person to hear it: Be aware of the mood, priorities, stresses and problems of those to whom you would like to come out. If they're dealing with their own major life concerns, they may not be able to respond to your disclosure constructively.

list of organizations that may also be able to support you.

Having the Conversation



It's common to want or hope for positive reactions from the people you tell, but that may not happen immediately. It might help to try to anticipate their likely reactions, potential questions and next steps.



The person to whom you disclose your sexual orientation might feel:

Surprised • Honored • Uncomfortable • Scared • Unsure how to react • Distrusting • Supportive • Skeptical • Relieved • Curious • Confused • Angry • Uncertain what to do next

You may want to verbalize the range of feelings they might be having and reassure them that it's ok to ask questions. Supportive people will generally take their cues from you as to how they should approach things, so if you're open about your feelings, they're more likely to follow your lead. That said, reactions vary and others may intentionally or unintentionally make you feel bad about your sexual orientation. Maintain awareness of your own feelings and make a plan for how to process a wide variety of responses. If someone to whom you come out has a

reaction that makes you feel negatively, consider letting them know that they hurt you. Always remember that you deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

It's also important to keep in mind that people may vary in their knowledge of LGB+ people. Some people may already be experts on LGB+ identities, some may have deep misconceptions, and others may not even know what those letters stand for. Additionally, information available about LGB+ people can be misleading and inaccurate. While you cannot control others' level of education when you come out, you may want to provide them with factual resources that point them in the right direction. See the end of this resource for ideas.

Telling Parents, Family, and Caregivers

Regardless of your age, you may be afraid your parents or caregivers will reject you if you tell them you are LGB+. Alternatively, when you come out, your parents may surprise you and become your biggest advocates or grow to accept and celebrate your sexual identity over time.

Sometimes, parents and caregivers are instantly accepting and will embrace your sexual identity. Other times, they may be initially hesitant or confused, but able to grow and recognize that you deserve love and respect in your sexual identity. Unfortunately, for some, your parent or caregiver may never come to an understanding and damage their relationship with you. The loss of a relationship with your parent or caregiver can be devastating. But the LGBTQ+ community also has a

long history of forming chosen families to support those who may not be adequately supported by their birth families. No matter how your parents or caregivers respond to you coming out, there is a large community of LGBTQ+ people and our allies who have your back.

Supportive or not, your parents' or caregivers' initial feelings may not reflect their feelings over the long term. Keep in mind that this is big news and there's no timetable for how long it takes to adjust.

When you disclose your sexual orientation to your parents or caregivers, they may:

- Embrace you with open arms and surprise you by knowing more about LGB+ people than you expected.
- Already know or have an inkling that you are LGB+.
- Feel a sense of relief.
- Know more about LGB+ people than you expected.
- Know that coming out is a cause for celebration and pride. You deserve to live a happy life as your authentic self rather than trying to

adapt to others' expectations of who you should be.

- React in ways that hurt, such as crying, getting angry or feeling embarrassed.
- Say they need to “grieve” over the dreams they’ve had for you before you came out.
- Ask where they “went wrong” or if they did something to “cause this.” Assure them they did nothing wrong and didn’t cause you to be LGB+. You can also let them know that there is nothing wrong with being LGB+.
- Not know much about LGB+ identities and ask you to teach them with open minds and hearts.
- Think of being LGB+ as a sin, or attempt to send you to a counselor or therapist in hopes they can “change” you.

Supportive or not, your parents' or caregivers' initial feelings may not reflect their feelings over the long term. Keep in mind that this is big news, and there's no timetable for how long it takes to adjust.

Telling Partners and Spouses

One reason that LGB+ people may not

For Family and Friends of LGB+ People

disclose being LGB+ is the fear of how partners or spouses will react. Before disclosing to a partner or spouse, it's important to remember that they may need time and patience — just as you'd expect time and patience while working through your own feelings. Counseling can be helpful to many relationships, as can talking with other people who have been through similar situations.

At the end of the day, things may not work out between you and your partner(s) or spouse after you come out to them. Just remember that this does not mean anything is wrong with you. Every relationship has a different dynamic and different needs, and sometimes peoples' lives move in different directions. Although this can be a difficult situation to deal with, your sexual orientation will forever and always remain valid.

Telling Your Children

There's no one right or wrong way to have this conversation. Coming out to your children can seem a daunting task. Depending on their ages, you may be worried about them rejecting you or about their safety if your sexuality is made public.

If you have a co-parent, you may want to have the conversation together, if that's

If your family member or friend has come out to you as LGB+, you may be wondering how to respond. Everyone does so differently. You might be confused and have questions, relieved to know what's been on your loved one's mind, or hurt that they didn't tell you sooner. You may feel a mixture of all three of these emotions, or many others. You may not even understand what it is that you're feeling.

Regardless of how you're feeling, it's helpful if you can reassure your family member or friend that your feelings for them have not suddenly disappeared. Let them know you will do your best to support them. It's ok to tell them you love them and that it's going to take some time to learn and adjust. In the end, knowing that you still care is what matters most to your friend or family member.

If you have questions for your family member or friend, first ask if they are open to answering questions. While many people will be, not all may want to do so. If they indicate that they are open to questions, be respectful. Recognize that your LGB+ loved ones are not your dictionaries and do your part to educate yourself. Don't ask them to speak for an entire community of diverse experiences and perspectives. Many of the answers you are looking for can be

possible. Or you might find that bringing a grandparent or other supportive family member into the conversation is a good idea. Your children may have questions that they feel more comfortable asking someone else for fear of hurting your feelings. Older children, especially, may need more time to think about the news you've shared with them before they're ready to talk.

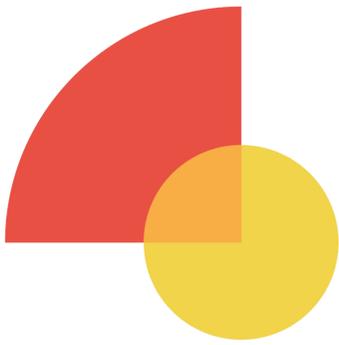
It may be helpful to arrange a family counseling session to sort through feelings. Giving your children the ability to talk to other children of LGB+ parents can be enormously helpful. Regardless of how the situation proceeds, it is important to remain open and honest throughout this process and have faith that your children will understand.

found in a range of books, documentaries, websites and support groups — both online and in many cities and towns across the country. See the end of this resource for ideas.



After Coming Out





Mass media often depicts coming out to the world as the “happily ever after” of the LGB+ story, but the truth is, life doesn’t end after coming out — it’s just the beginning.

After you’ve come out to others, you may feel lighter, heavier, happier, angrier, many of these emotions or none at all. Life will continue to be complex and not all of your problems will be solved. But you will be one step closer to being yourself.

While this resource is primarily for LGB+ people who are in the early stages of self-discovery, many confront the issue of coming out again and again, among new friends, family and co-workers. Some LGB+ people may not disclose their sexual orientation to many people at all, while others find that being more open about their lives and stories can be safe and affirming. Some even choose to speak out publicly about being LGB+, becoming advocates by sharing their stories in media interviews or by speaking to students at local colleges and universities or to business and community groups.

No matter the level of outness you would like to maintain, the choice is unequivocally yours. You can also shift your level of openness over time, depending on your comfort level. The journey is completely your own, and your choices ultimately belong to you. Your primary responsibility is

to take care of yourself — so make the choices that will keep you healthy and at peace.

Statistics



The Human Rights Campaign Foundation conducts vast amounts of data collection and analysis about LGBTQ+ people. Here is a brief snapshot of some current statistical information about LGBTQ+ people:



Estimates of the size of the LGB+ population in the United States vary across survey, and range from **4.7% (2017-19)** to **6.5% (2021)** to **8% (2021-22)** of adults (age 18+).

Bisexuals make up the majority of the LGBTQ+ population—according to **Gallup in 2021**.

**The HRC
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has tracked
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*Support for
same-sex
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ever been.*

Opposition to same-sex sexual relationships is the lowest it has ever been. While 84% of U.S. adults in 1976 said that same-sex sex is wrong, that number declined to 70% in 2004 and then to less than a majority (42%) in 2018.

The vast majority of the American public supports implementing nondiscrimination laws for LGBTQ+ people, that would protect them from discrimination in employment, public accommodations, and housing:

Glossary of Terms



ALLY: A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual+ community).

ASEXUAL: Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

BIPHOBIA: The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

BISEXUAL: A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. This is sometimes written as bisexual+ or bi+ to

LGBTQ+: Stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more.” Many people and organizations use “LGBTQ” as a catch-all term for the non-cisgender and non-straight community, but the acronym varies depending on culture and style. For example, some groups may add “I” for intersex (LGBTQI), “2” for two-spirit (LGBTQ2) or “A” for asexual (LGBTQA). HRC uses LGBTQ+, with the plus sign representing all of the many identities on the queer spectrum.

MONOSEXUAL: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of only one gender.

PANSEXUAL: Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with omnisexual, queer, or bisexual.

QUEER: Queer has many meanings. For

incorporate many non-monosexual identities, such as pansexual, omnisexual, or fluid. Bisexuals make up the majority of the LGBTQ+ population—according to [Gallup, in 2021](#), over half (56.8%) of all LGBTQ+ adults in the United States identified as bisexual.

FLUID: A term people often use to describe their sexual orientation if their orientation changes with time, or if their orientation has the potential to change with time.

GAY: A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

GENDER-EXPANSIVE: Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary (male/female) gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender identities.

GENDER IDENTITY: One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from the sex assigned at birth.

some people, “queer” is a general catch-all/ umbrella term, used as a shorthand to capture all non-heterosexual sexual identities, and/or non-cisgender gender identities. For other people, queer may reflect their sexual orientation, leading them to identify as queer as opposed to lesbian, or bisexual, or something else. For them, queer often reflects those who are attracted to/partner with people who are transgender, non-binary, or gender-expansive, or who themselves are transgender, non-binary, or gender expansive. Still others may use queer to define their gender /gender identity, reflecting those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement. Like all identities, you should only refer to someone as queer when they have let you know they identify that way.

SAME-GENDER LOVING: A term some prefer to use to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Term used to describe one's overall inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attractions to other people. Essentially, it is who you are 'oriented' towards. Note: an individual's sexual

HOMOPHOBIA: The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

LESBIAN: A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

orientation is independent of their gender identity.

SEXUAL IDENTITY: The label one uses for their sexual orientation. Essentially, it is the term you use to indicate your sexual orientation, to yourself and to the world. While most people who use a specific sexual identity (e.g., lesbian) use it to refer to a specific sexual orientation (e.g., a woman who is attracted to other women), others may use different identity labels to describe that same sexual orientation—and others still may use the same identity label to convey different sexual orientations.

Other Coming Out Guides





Black LGBTQ+ Coming Out Resource

For those who identify as Black LGBTQ+ people, the coming out process can be complex to navigate. Coming Out: Living Authentically as Black LGBTQ+ People is designed for those embarking on their own coming out journey at the intersections of LGBTQ+ and Black identities. This guide aims to recognize the unique experiences Black LGBTQ+ people have in coming out, while understanding that coming out is a personal choice and the lifelong coming out experience is different for everyone.



Asian and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ Coming Out Resource

For many Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, coming out is a lifelong process that can require a different approach because of cultural norms or traditions that emphasize duty to family and community. The National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance and HRC Foundation's Coming Out as LGBTQ+ Asian and Pacific Islander Americans resource is designed to aid LGBTQ+ API Americans in navigating the intersectional challenges when coming out.



Latinx LGBTQ+ Coming Out Resource

Coming Out: Living Authentically as LGBTQ+ Latinx Americans resource is designed to aid LGBTQ+ Latinx Americans in navigating the intersectional challenges when coming out. For those of us who identify as LGBTQ+ and as Latinx Americans, the coming out process can be even more complex to navigate. Often, it requires a unique approach that can cut across multiple languages, cultures, nationalities, religious identities and family generations.

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Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary

Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary will use the phrase “transgender and non-binary” to try to best capture this broad array of identities. That being said, it is important to recognize that not all people in these groups may identify as transgender or non-binary. In addition, there may be transgender or nonbinary

Coming Out: Living Authentically as Bisexual+

Coming out is different for every person. For bisexual people, coming out can present some unique challenges. This guide is designed to prepare you for potential challenges of coming out as bisexual and to give you the tools to come out and live openly wherever and whenever you are safe, able and ready.

[View Here](#)

Being an LGBTQ+ Ally

Being an LGBTQ+ Ally is designed to help build understanding and comfort. If you are new to LGBTQ+ issues, we will answer many of your questions. Or, if you have known LGBTQ+ people for years and are looking to find new ways to show your support, you can skim this resource and take the pieces that are relevant to you. It’s ok to not know everything — we’re here to help.

people whose gender does not fit in any of the terms described above.

This resource is meant for anyone and everyone whose gender does not fit what they were assigned at birth. No matter who you are, we affirm you, and your gender is valid.

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Understanding the Asexual Community

Asexual, often called “ace” for short, refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality

exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

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National LGBTQ+ Organizations



American Veterans for Equal Rights [↗](#)

Bisexual Resource Center [↗](#)

Bisexual Organizing Project [↗](#)

Family Equality Council [↗](#)

Gay & Lesbian Medical Association



Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network



Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation



Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund



Immigration Equality



Lambda Legal



National Black Justice Coalition



National Center for Lesbian Rights



National Center for Transgender Equality



National Gay and Lesbian Task Force



National Minority AIDS Council



National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance



PFLAG National



Straight For Equality



Still Bisexual



The Trevor Project



RELIGIOUSLY-AFFILIATED LGBTQ+ ORGANIZATIONS

Affirmation: LGBTQ Mormons, Family and Friends [↗](#)

Affirmation (United Methodist) [↗](#)

Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists [↗](#)

DignityUSA (Catholic) [↗](#)

The Evangelical Network [↗](#)

Gay Buddhist Fellowship [↗](#)

More Light Presbyterians

Muslims for Progressive Values [↗](#)

Reconciling Works (Lutheran) [↗](#)

Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship International [↗](#)

Unitarian Universalists Association Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns

United Church of Christ LGBT Ministries [↗](#)

Metropolitan Community Churches [↗](#)

Unity Fellowship Church Movement [↗](#)

The World Congress: Keshet Ga'avah (Jewish) [↗](#)

Hotlines



The Trevor Helpline 866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
(online chat available)
(800) 273-8255

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

Crisis Text Line Text START to 741-741

Trans Lifeline (877) 565-8860

State HIV & AIDS Hotlines

About the Human Rights Campaign Foundation

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and practices. We build support for LGBTQ+ people among families and friends, co-workers and employers, pastors and parishioners, doctors and teachers, neighbors, and the general public.

Through our programs and projects, we are enhancing the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people and their families, as we change hearts and minds across America and around the globe. The HRC Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.

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