

FAQs for Teens

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Teens

Frequently Asked Questions

Overview

What does LGBTQ mean?

"LGBTQ" is an abbreviation for [lesbian](#) , [gay](#) , [bisexual](#) [transgender](#) , and [queer](#) . The "Q" can also stand for [questioning](#) .

How common is it to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer?

In the United States, about 7 in 100 people are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or not [straight](#) , according to a [2021 Gallup survey](#).

Sexual Orientation

What is sexual orientation?

[Sexual orientation](#) is a person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people:

- "Lesbian" means you are a female who is attracted to other females.

- "Gay" means you are attracted to people of the same gender.
- "Bisexual" means you are attracted to people of more than one gender.
- "Straight" means you are attracted to people who are not your gender.

Is it OK if I don't feel completely straight or gay?

Many people feel that they are not 100 percent gay, straight, or bisexual. Some people may not use any of these labels, and that is OK too. It's also possible to not feel any sexual attraction. This is sometimes described as being [asexual](#).

The way you understand and describe your sexual orientation can change over time.

What makes a person straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer?

It's not known for certain what determines a person's sexual orientation. Who a person has sex with doesn't determine their sexual orientation. Many people have never had sex with a person of the same sex but still know that they are gay, just like straight people who have never had sex still know that they are straight.

What does queer mean?

Queer means any sexual orientation that is not straight or [gender identity](#) that is not [cisgender](#).

In the past, queer was a negative term for people who are gay. Now, some people use it to describe themselves, their community, or both in a positive way.

Genderqueer is sometimes used to describe a fluid gender identity (read about gender identity below).

What does questioning mean?

Questioning means you are exploring your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

What is gender identity?

Gender identity is your sense of your own gender. Your gender may be male, female, both male and female, neither male nor female, or something else. This identity may or may not be the same as the sex you were assigned at birth. Gender identity (who you are) is not the same thing as sexual orientation (who you are attracted to).

What does it mean to be transgender or nonbinary?

Most people are told they are a boy or a girl (male or female) based on the [genitals](#) they were born with. This is the sex you are assigned at birth. If someone is transgender or [nonbinary](#), that male or female label does not match their gender identity.

A [transgender man](#) is someone with a male gender identity and a female sex assigned at birth. A [transgender woman](#) is someone with a female gender identity and a male sex assigned at birth.

Some people may feel that they belong to neither gender or to both genders. People who feel this way are sometimes called gender nonbinary, gender fluid, or genderqueer. Some other terms may include androgynous, agender, gender neutral, and [gender nonconforming](#).

What does cisgender mean?

Cisgender means that your gender identity matches the sex you were assigned at birth.

What steps do people take to express gender?

Everyone has a [gender expression](#). People often express their gender through their choice of clothing and style of hair or makeup. Some transgender and nonbinary people may choose a name and pronouns that reflect their gender identity. They may openly use their chosen name and ask others to respect their pronouns (he, she, they, etc.).

Some people choose to take medications or have surgery so that their bodies more closely match their gender identity. Others do not. There is no "right" way to be a transgender or nonbinary person.

Read [Health Care for Transgender and Nonbinary Teens](#) to learn more.

When does a person know their gender identity?

Some teens may think about their gender identity for the first time during [puberty](#) . But most people have a steady sense of their gender starting very early in life, by about age 4. Many people have felt the same way about their gender identity since they were little or for as long as they can remember.

If you are confused about your gender identity, you can find support by talking with someone you trust, such as your doctor.

Finding Support

What are some concerns that LGBTQ people may face at home, at school, and in the community?

Many communities accept LGBTQ people without bias. But some communities do not. For adults and teens, hate crimes, job discrimination, and housing discrimination can be serious problems. For teens, bullying in school can also be a problem. If you are being bullied at school, talk with your parents or another trusted adult, a teacher, or your principal.

LGBTQ teens who do not feel supported by adults are more likely to have [depression](#) . Some teens cope with these thoughts and feelings in harmful ways. They may try to hurt themselves. They may turn to drugs and alcohol. Some skip school or drop out. Some run away from home. They may be more likely to smoke or have eating disorders.

If you need help, try to find support by talking with someone you trust, such as your doctor. There are also websites and hotlines where you can be anonymous (read the Resources section below).

Should I come out to my parents?

Some parents are open and accepting. Others may not understand what it means to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning. Some parents may believe stereotypes about LGBTQ people. Telling your parents can be a big decision. Help and support are out there if you need it. Read the Resources section below for help teaching parents, family members, and friends about what being LGBTQ means.

What if I want to talk with someone other than my parents?

If you don't want to talk with your parents, you can talk with a teacher, counselor, doctor, or other health care professional. It's a good idea to ask about what can be kept private before you talk to a professional. There are also websites and hotlines where you can be anonymous if you need information (read the Resources section below).

Staying Healthy

Who is at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

All teens who are sexually active are at risk of getting a [sexually transmitted infection \(STI\)](#) . [Barrier methods](#) (condoms, [dental dams](#) , and gloves) can be used to prevent STIs.

STIs can be passed from one partner to another through vaginal, anal, and oral sex. STIs include

- [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#)
- [human papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#)
- [genital herpes](#)
- [syphilis](#)
- [gonorrhea](#)
- [chlamydia](#)

Some STIs (HPV and genital herpes) can be transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. HPV can also be spread by contact between genitals and fingers.

Who is at risk of pregnancy?

If you have female sex organs and have sex with someone with male sex organs, you can get pregnant. All teens who are sexually active and want to prevent pregnancy need to use [birth control](#) . Read [Birth Control](#) for a list of options.

Condoms give the best protection against STIs, but they are not the best protection against pregnancy. It is best to use both condoms and another method of birth control,

such as an [intrauterine device \(IUD\)](#) , birth control pills, or a [birth control implant](#) , to protect against pregnancy and STIs.

Who should see an obstetrician–gynecologist (ob-gyn)?

All teen girls should have their first visit with an [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) between ages 13 and 15, even if they aren't sexually active. After the first visit, routine visits are recommended. Read [21 Reasons to See a Gynecologist Before You Turn 21](#) to learn how an ob-gyn can help you.

Transgender and nonbinary teens who have female sex organs or who are taking feminizing [hormones](#) should also see an ob-gyn. Read [Health Care for Transgender and Nonbinary Teens](#) for more information.

What happens during the first visit with an ob-gyn?

The first visit may be just a talk between you and your doctor. You can find out what to expect at future visits and get information about how to stay healthy. You may also have a general physical exam. You usually do not need to have a [pelvic exam](#) at the first visit unless you are having problems.

Your doctor may ask a lot of questions about you and your family. Some of them may seem personal, such as questions about your [menstrual period](#) or sexual activities (including vaginal, oral, or anal sex). If you talk honestly and openly, your doctor can help get you the resources you need to stay healthy and safe.

You may also get the following tests and vaccines:

- HPV vaccine—HPV can be passed from person to person during sexual contact, including vaginal, anal, and oral sex. HPV infection increases the risk of [cervical cancer](#) and genital warts. Everyone should get the HPV vaccine, regardless of sex or gender. This is a series of shots to protect against the most common types of HPV that cause cancer, precancer, and genital warts. The best age for the HPV vaccine is 11 or 12, but you can get the vaccine starting at age 9.
- STI screening tests—If you are sexually active, you may have tests for certain STIs. Most STI tests can be done with a urine sample or a swab of your genital area or mouth.

- Cervical cancer screening—Screening for cervical cancer starts at age 21. Read [Cervical Cancer Screening](#) for details.

Read [Your First Gynecologic Visit](#) for more information.

What is safe sex?

Safe sex includes

- using condoms, dental dams, or gloves when touching another person's genitals with your genitals, fingers, mouth, or a sex toy
- avoiding getting menstrual blood or semen into cuts or sores
- using a male condom to cover sex toys before use (clean sex toys before and after use)
- talking about safe sex before having sexual contact with a partner
- not mixing sex with the use of drugs or alcohol

The only definite way to prevent STIs is to not have oral, anal, or vaginal sex. If you are sexually active, you should practice safe sex to help protect yourself and your partner against STIs. You should practice safe sex no matter the sex or gender of your partner.

If you think you may have an STI or have had sexual contact that may have put you at risk, you should be tested for STIs. Even if you do not think you are at risk, your doctor may recommend testing for gonorrhea and chlamydia if you are sexually active.

Safe sex also includes consent, which means that you want and agree to have sex or sexual touching. Read [Healthy Relationships](#) for more information on staying healthy and safe with sexual partners.

Resources and Glossary

Resources

Resources

CenterLink

[954-765-6024](tel:954-765-6024)

www.lgbtcenters.org

Directory of community centers for LGBT people.

GLMA

202-600-8037

www.glma.org

Medical association of LGBTQ health care practitioners. Provides a [directory](#) of LGBTQ-friendly health care practitioners.

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

[212-727-0135](tel:212-727-0135)

www.glsen.org

Organization that supports safe and inclusive schools for LGBTQ students. Local chapters offer trainings, community outreach, and more.

Gender Spectrum

www.genderspectrum.org

Organization that supports gender-expansive children, teens, and their families.

It Gets Better Project

www.itgetsbetter.org

Videos of LGBTQ people and allies sharing their personal stories.

Iwannaknow.org

www.iwannaknow.org

Information on sexual health for teens and young adults from the American Sexual Health Association.

LGBTQ+ Healthcare Directory

lgbtqhealthcaredirectory.org

Directory of LGBTQ-friendly health care professionals.

PFLAG

[202-467-8180](tel:202-467-8180)

www.pflag.org

Network of communities for LGBTQ people, parents, and friends.

The Trevor Project

www.thetrevorproject.org

Crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and resources related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Hotlines

Trevor Lifeline

Toll-free: [1-866-4-U-TREVOR \(866-488-7386\)](tel:1-866-4-U-TREVOR)

Hours: 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

www.thetrevorproject.org

Confidential suicide and crisis counseling for LGBTQ teens and young adults. Text and chat options are available on the website.

LGBT National Youth Talkline

[1-800-246-PRIDE \(800-246-7743\)](tel:1-800-246-PRIDE)

Hours: Monday–Friday 1 pm–9 pm PST / 4 pm–12 am EST, Saturday 9 am–2 pm PST / 12 pm–5 pm EST

help@LGBHotline.org

Peer support and resources for LGBTQ teens and young adults.

National Runaway Safeline

Toll-free [1-800-RUNAWAY \(800-786-2929\)](tel:1-800-RUNAWAY)

Hours: 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

www.1800runaway.org

Hotline for runaway or homeless youth and their families. A live chat option is available on the website.

Trans Lifeline

Toll-free: [877-565-8860](tel:877-565-8860)

Hours: 7 am–2 am PST / 9 am–4 am CST / 10 am–5 am EST.

Peer support hotline run by and for trans people.

Glossary

Asexual: Not being sexually attracted to anyone.

Barrier Method: Birth control that stops sperm from entering the uterus, such as condoms.

Birth Control Implant: A small, single rod that is inserted under the skin in the upper arm. The implant releases a hormone to prevent pregnancy.

Birth Control: Devices or medications used to prevent pregnancy.

Bisexual: Being sexually attracted to people of more than one gender.

Cervical Cancer: A type of cancer that is in the cervix, the opening to the uterus at the top of the vagina.

Chlamydia: A sexually transmitted infection caused by bacteria. This infection can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

Cisgender: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

Dental Dams: Thin pieces of latex or polyurethane used between the mouth and the vagina or anus during oral sex. Using a dental dam can help protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Depression: Feelings of sadness for periods of at least 2 weeks.

Gay: Being sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Also used to describe men who are attracted to other men.

Gender Expression: The ways a person communicates their gender to others. This can include the clothes and hair styles they wear, the pronouns they use, and their body language.

Gender Identity: A person's sense of being male, female, or something else. This identity may or may not match the sex assigned at birth.

Gender Nonconforming: A term used to describe a person who does not follow other people's ideas about how they should act according to gender roles. Also called gender fluid, gender expansive, or genderqueer, among other terms.

Genital Herpes: A sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a virus. Herpes causes painful, highly infectious sores on or around the vulva and penis.

Genitals: The sexual or reproductive organs.

Gonorrhea: A sexually transmitted infection that may lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, and arthritis.

Hormones: Substances made in the body that control the function of cells or organs.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): A virus that attacks certain cells of the body's immune system. If left untreated, HIV can cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): The name for a group of related viruses, some of which cause genital warts and some of which are linked to cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, mouth, and throat.

Intrauterine Device (IUD): A small device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to other women.

Menstrual Period: The monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus.

Nonbinary: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity is neither male nor female.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Pelvic Exam: A physical examination of a woman's reproductive organs.

Puberty: The stage of life when the reproductive organs start to function and other sex features develop. For women, this is the time when menstrual periods start and the breasts develop.

Queer: Any sexual orientation or gender identity that is not straight and cisgender.

Questioning: A term used to describe a person who is exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Examples include straight, gay, and bisexual.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections that are spread by sexual contact.

Straight: Being sexually attracted to people who are not your gender.

Syphilis: A sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is caused by an organism called *Treponema pallidum*. This infection may cause major health problems or death in its later stages.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender Man: A term used to describe a person who was assigned female at birth but has a male gender identity.

Transgender Woman: A term used to describe a person who was assigned male at birth but has a female gender identity.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

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