

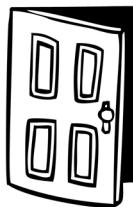
HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR NON-BINARY FAMILY MEMBER



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Processing.....	7
Initial reactions.....	8
Processing challenging feelings.....	9
For parents of adults.....	12
For parents of children & teens.....	14
For siblings & extended family.....	16
Mourning the gender bond.....	17
Understanding.....	18
Orientation vs. sex vs. gender.....	20
What is nonbinary gender?.....	25
Some common nonbinary genders.....	26
The lowdown on nonbinary folks.....	28
Support.....	32
Let's talk about burning questions.....	32
Actionable support.....	36
De-gendering your language.....	38
Using pronouns in real time.....	41
Closing.....	43
Caveats.....	45
Resources.....	46
Glossary.....	48

INTRODUCTION



So, a family member has told you that they're non-binary. In case you're hazy on what that means, a nonbinary person is anyone whose gender is not categorically male or female.

Coming out is often a charged experience for everyone involved, and it's rarely confined to one conversation. You may be confused or upset, or feel a flurry of emotions. That's totally okay. Sometimes our emotions are messy, but our actions are entirely within our control. It's in your best interest to be kind to your loved one, and process your feelings separately from them. Later in this zine (see page 9), we'll go over some strategies for processing those complicated feelings, but right now I'm gonna lay out some fundamental truths for you.

It's very important for you to know that coming out is a vulnerable thing. It's an act of trust, a leap of faith. It can be really scary for your loved one to share this information with you. It's more than just a declaration though, it's an open invitation. Your family member wants to be authentic with you, to let you in on their life instead of hiding a facet of their identity from you. You can let the experience bring you closer, or you can let it drive you apart. This zine exists to help you navigate new concepts and unpack complicated feelings so that you can be there for your loved one.

Here's the good news: You don't have to have the slightest

understanding of what it's like to be nonbinary in order to be accepting and respectful. If your loved one came out to you some time ago and you're just now reading this guide, it is absolutely not too late to start making an effort!

BASIC ACCEPTING THINGS YOU CAN DO WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU:

Let them talk, listen to them, and trust their experience.

Reward vulnerability with gratitude. You can say something like,

“Thank you for telling me, I don’t fully understand, but I love you no matter what.”

“Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me, I know it must have been scary for you.”

“Thank you for having the courage to be yourself.”

If your loved one has told you that they want to go by a new name and/or set of pronouns, make a commitment to begin using them right away, or at least try not to call them your son/daughter/sister/brother. You can say something like,

“I’m gonna try my best to honor your new name/pronouns, please correct me when I mess up! I appreciate your patience as I adjust.”

“Can you use the pronouns in a sentence for me so I understand how to use them?”

Be humble. Correct yourself briefly and move on when you mess up on the new name/pronouns.

“I ran into Nik the other day and he- oops I mean they lent me this book to read.”

You can offer a quick apology if you want, but making a big show of apologizing is not necessary and can actually be uncomfortable for your loved one.

If they correct you, thank them. Say something like,

“Oops, thank you!”

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You may be thinking, “But if I use this new language, doesn’t that mean I’ll have to explain to people that my kid/sibling/etc is nonbinary?” It depends. That is a question for your loved one.

Being “out” isn’t necessarily universal, sometimes people only come out to their most trusted loved ones, other people are fully out and want everyone to know. Never out someone without their permission.

### ***“Thank you” vs “I’m sorry.”***

When you get corrected, try saying “thank you” instead of “I’m sorry” as a rule. When you say “I’m sorry,” the onus is on the non-binary person to reassure you and grant you forgiveness. Saying “thank you” shows appreciation without centering your own feelings or further draining the non-binary person.



***ON THE FLIP SIDE,  
RESIST THE URGE TO DO THE FOLLOWING:***

Deny their reality. Avoid saying things like,

“There are only two genders!”

Attempt to process your complicated feelings with them.

“But you’re my son!”

“Using the new pronouns is too hard, I’m never gonna get it right.”

Get defensive.

“What’s wrong with the name I gave you?”

“Why does this have to be my problem?”

Be dismissive.

“This is just a phase.”

“They’ is plural, it’s grammatically incorrect!”

“I wish you hadn’t told me that.”

Out them to others without consent.

Get very clear on who they do and do not want to be out to by explicitly asking them, and don’t disclose their gender identity with anyone against their wishes. You may say something like, “Do you want to be out to everyone or are there certain people you’d prefer don’t know your gender/pronouns?”

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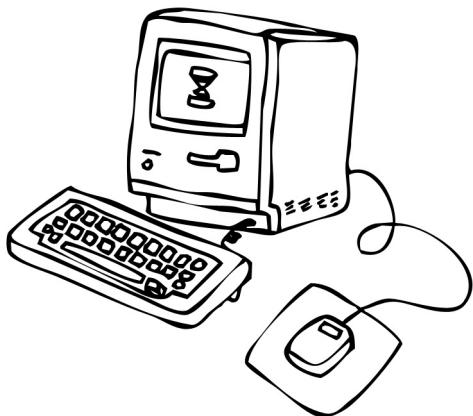
You may have these strong conflicting feelings about all this, but they are absolutely not for your loved one to hear. It's your responsibility to process difficult feelings in a way that is respectful to your loved one if you want to preserve the relationship. Sometimes, especially for parents, coming out can feel like a rejection when it's actually a bid for closeness. Try to keep that in mind.

Acceptance, support and understanding are not destinations, they're processes. You're gonna mess up, but messing up is a hundred times better than never trying. No one expects you to make a change overnight. Just show them you're trying your best. If you feel the urge to let them know how difficult it is to change your language, make sure you vent that to a trusted friend or therapist instead.

Coming out is really only the beginning of an ongoing conversation. If you feel like you might say something hurtful (even unknowingly), it's a good rule of thumb to bookmark the conversation for later. Say something like, "I need some time to process this. Can we pick a time to come back to it?" Pick a time, do some preparation, and honor that commitment.

Already said something hurtful? It's never too late to apologize. Say something like, "I'm sorry I reacted poorly, it's just all new to me and a lot to process. I'm working on it and appreciate your patience." Think about what you said, and get curious about why you said it. Were you reacting from a place of fear? Worry? Grief? Be a detective in your own feelings.





PROCESSING

"Love is worry"—Jeff Rosenstock

You probably have some big feelings to process. Grief and confusion are two common ones that come up. Fear, frustration, shame, sadness, resentment and embarrassment often make an appearance at the party, too. If anger shows up for you, be sure to dig a little deeper. Anger is an umbrella emotion, which is to say there's likely a combination of feelings underneath it. Sometimes it's just easier to be pissed off than it is to feel hurt.

Whatever you're feeling, it's totally fine, and you're allowed to feel it.

Allowing yourself to fully experience your reaction, however difficult it may be to sit with, is going to help you process and move on from it. You don't have to feel this way forever, and I promise that you won't, so long as you do a little leg work. Processing these feelings is an ongoing part of your job as a supportive family member.

INITIAL REACTIONS

"It's chaos. Be kind." —Michelle E. McNamara

There's a catch about these feelings that you're totally allowed to have. They're yours to unpack, **separately** from your family member. Feelings are also different from actions. Feelings can motivate actions, and actions can have consequences.

This is important. If you dump all of those complicated feelings onto your non-binary loved one after they have just done the big, scary task of coming out to you, you are going to hurt them. It's not their job to hold your hand through this, and it's not appropriate to try to process your messy feelings with them.

We can feel any number of ways, but the actions motivated by those feelings are what can sometimes get us into trouble. It's important to evaluate what feelings warrant actions, and what feelings we just need to sit with and unpack. If you've been ruminating on how illegitimate you think your kid's new gender is, it can feel like you have to tell them about it. I'm here to let you know that your feeling is not a fact, and you should sit that one out. You won't convince them, and they'll feel hurt by you. You can't change anyone, but you can change how you deal.

If you wanna maintain the relationship with as little strife as possible, you have to get some outside support for yourself. Sit down with someone you trust to begin processing those feelings in a constructive way, as soon as you can. Write all that stuff down in a journal, talk to a friend. Seek out support groups¹, read articles written by parents or siblings who have gone through similar experiences.² Consider speaking with a LGBTQ+

¹ You may not be able to find groups specifically for family of nonbinary folks, but LGBTQ+ groups can provide support. PFLAG is a good place to start: www.pflag.org/Family

² I've compiled some articles of that nature at: www.alyssagiannini.com/nonbinary101

friendly therapist, counselor or mentor.³

I know there can be stigma attached to seeing a therapist, but you don't have to be mentally ill to benefit from therapy. Seeing a therapist doesn't mean you're weak or can't handle things on your own. They are professionally trained to give people the tools to navigate difficult times, but you still have to do the work yourself. You're hard pressed to get any explicit instruction out of a therapist, they just listen to you nonjudgmentally and help you reframe things. Sometimes you'll have an "aha!" moment with their help, other times it's a relief to be able to vent in a confidential space.

You can't control your non-binary family member, there's no putting that cat back in the bag. What you can control, however, is how you handle yourself in response to this event.

PROCESSING CHALLENGING FEELINGS

I recommend grabbing a pen and a piece of paper for this part, but you can do it in your head if you want. This whole section is full of questions for you to reflect on.

I'm not a therapist, but this section incorporates practices that have been cherry picked from DBT (dialectical behavioral therapy). There are lots of DBT workbooks out there. You never even have to set foot in a therapist's office.

Intentionally set aside some time to sit with your thoughts. It doesn't have to be a ton of time.

³ It's important to seek out an LGBTQ+ affirming therapist to assure that they're equipped to help with your specific circumstances. You can filter for therapists with this experience on the Psychology Today website, www.psychologytoday.com, by typing in your zipcode and selecting "transgender" under the issues tab.

Think about your family member coming out to you. Tune in and notice what you're feeling when you reflect on that. Resist the urge to judge it or shoo it away, if it's not what you want to be feeling or think that you "should" be feeling. Maybe you feel 100% justified in your feelings, and want to double down on them. Resist the urge to prolong the feelings. They're not right or wrong or good or bad, they just are.

Try to name the emotions that you're feeling. You can detach from their intensity a little if you think of them as something you're experiencing rather than something that you are, i.e. "I feel angry and confused" instead of "I'm angry, I'm confused." Excuse the hokey imagery, but you are not these emotions, these emotions are just a wave washing over you.

Now that you've identified some emotions you're experiencing, it's time to get curious about why you feel that way. Are there any stories you're telling yourself about this situation? Are they helpful? Are they based in fact? Is there any situation that you experienced in the past that might be influencing your reaction?

If you notice you're feeling guilty about the way you feel, pay attention to your self-talk. Try to talk to yourself the way that you'd talk to a good friend. Extend yourself some compassion. You're dealing with an unprecedented situation in your life, and you're trying your best to grow. You can't bully yourself into a more likable version of yourself.

If you find yourself stuck in your anger, denial or resentment, remember that your loved one didn't confide in you to punish or hurt you. They told you because they love you, and they want you to be in on this important change in their life. Resentment often stems from unmet expectations, but other people are entirely out of our control. It's an understandable frustration to be let down, but how does it serve you to hold onto that betrayal? How would it feel to let it slide?

What are your fears? Are they founded?

What is your problem and what's not?

How would it feel to let go of the parts you can't control?

Can you put yourself in your loved one's shoes?

What are some ways in which you could cultivate some compassion for your loved one and yourself, as you both move through this challenging time?

How can you reframe the situation in a way that lets you feel less stuck, confused or betrayed? It could be something like: "The fact that they told me means that they don't want to shut me out of their life. I will rise to this challenge even though it's out of my comfort zone."

Can you try to put this event into perspective? How could it be worse? It could be something like: "Well, they could've put their confession on a brick and thrown it through my window. This is preferable to that."

The best thing about the process outlined above is you can do it as many times as you want, for any situation you desire. Some people also find it helpful to come up with some kind of mantra to remember when things get challenging. I'm a fan of Brené Brown's little mantra, "I'm not here to be right, I'm here to get it right."



FOR PARENTS OF ADULTS

I want to speak directly to the parents for a minute. Full disclosure: I'm not a parent, so I can't begin to know your specific struggle. I'm coming at this from the perspective of someone's adult offspring, but I've sought feedback from actual parents for this portion of the zine.

There is a major preoccupation with gender roles in our culture, and there's a big fixation on how different men and women are. Boys and girls are brought up differently, they're expected to turn out differently from one another, and they face very different societal expectations. I can imagine that it would be dizzying (to say the least) to spend so much time raising a girl or boy, only to find out that was not actually the case at all. It could feel like a bait and switch, like a betrayal. There's this script for how "normal" lives are supposed to go: your kids grow up, attend college, get married (ideally in a heterosexual relationship), start a career, buy a home and have 1.5 kids. There's nothing wrong with that script, but there are a lot of other paths that are perfectly acceptable, too (they just don't get as much air time). Your kid is probably headed down one of those less conventional paths. It might hurt, realizing that your expectations for your child aren't going to pan out. That's a loss, and it should be processed as such. It might also be frightening, because how are they supposed to find their way without the script? The script is there as a measuring stick for success and happiness, right?

You may have to modify your idea of what success looks like. So your kid has flipped the script. Their aspirations might totally be foreign to you. But are they happy? Are they pursuing the things that are important to them? Are they a kind and thoughtful person? What are the things you love about your kid that aren't related to their gender?

Binary gender distinctions selectively fall out of favor as

the world progresses. Women were once expected to stay at home and do all of the household chores while their husbands went to work. We now acknowledge that women are just as competent and capable as men in the workforce. We accept that women can have aspirations beyond getting married and having children. We accept that not all men lift weights and use power tools and eat red meat. It used to be customary for little boys to wear dresses up until a certain age, and pink was at one time considered a masculine color.

My point is, none of this gender stuff is set in stone. It's constantly evolving. I don't know if it'll soften the blow or not, but raising the "right" kind of boy or girl is not nearly as important as raising a decent person. Being a stand-up human isn't gender specific.

We often associate certain qualities with men or women that don't necessarily need that gender qualifier attached, because nowadays we know that biology isn't destiny, and men and women really aren't that innately different.⁴ I sure hope that in this day and age, people are raising their sons to be thoughtful and attentive ("feminine" attributes) in addition to all the other "manly" stuff. I would hope people are raising their daughters to be assertive and strong ("masculine" attributes) in addition to all the other "girly" stuff. Gender doesn't play a part in determining character. If you raised the best girl or boy you could, then you raised the best person you could. Those qualities don't disappear once your kid no longer identifies as such.

At the end of the day, your kids will sometimes disappoint you. Full stop. I'm pretty sure that's the cardinal takeaway of parenting. You birth them, you keep them safe, they become difficult teenagers and you hope they will grow into independent, adult people. Being non-binary does change a few things, but they're still fundamentally your kid. They might

⁴ Men and Women: No Big Difference, American Psychology Association, <https://www.apa.org/research/action/difference>

have a new name that you think is ridiculous, they might adopt pronouns that you find hard to understand or remember, they might dress or look a little different, but that's okay. You gotta work on letting go of ownership and expectation in regards to your child. If either of you are gonna be happy, you have to accept that what makes your kid happy may be wildly different from whatever life it was that you imagined for them. Try to applaud your kid for getting to know themselves better. All they want is to feel loved, accepted and supported by you. Ask them how you can help them feel that way.

It's important that you know this is not "your fault." It's not even actually about you. It's your job to transcend whatever opinion you may have about it and show up for your kid. It's gonna be messy and challenging and rewarding and joyous and exhausting, but the ball is really in your court.

FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN & TEENS

"Those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind." —Unknown

Accept that this may not be a phase, and that if it is a phase, it still deserves to be entertained. Be proactive about your support, and take your kid seriously. Trying to force them into a mold that they've already broken will only foster resentment.

Let them lead, even if it's terrifying. Encourage them to express their gender in ways that feel affirming to them. This can look like allowing them to get a haircut or wear clothes/ accessories that aren't in line with the gender they were assigned at birth. They might want to try out a different name (think of it as a nickname if it helps you accept it) or avoid being called gender-specific terms like girl or boy. Maybe you can make up your own term of endearment together, or just call them by

their name until you get the hang of it.

Try to resist the urge to quash their chosen gender expression, let them explore. If you find yourself scared of them not fitting in and you want to protect them, give them the most accepting homelife you can muster. Be on their team. Kids at school will always find some reason to be hostile, but when non-binary/trans kids have a good home life, they absolutely flourish.⁵⁶ You can't protect your kid through repression.

If the bullies get them down, remind your kid that they are vibrant and brave. Let your kid know that the bullying they experience has little to do with them and everything to do with the bully. Hurt people hurt people. Bullies tear other people down to build themselves up, because they lack support where they need it and being cruel gives them a sense of control. Remind them it's not fair, and that they don't deserve that kind of treatment.

Your job is to be their advocate. To love and defend them. Celebrate them, and all the differences that make them special. Don't employ shame to make them burn less bright, and don't let shame for their difference overtake you. Being weird is severely underrated. It's okay if they try on an identity for a while and it doesn't stick, it's okay if their identity is never fully pinned down, or changes day to day. Try to roll with it. Let them have agency, let them self-determine, and be proud. It's important to encourage them to be curious about their feelings and thoughts, so they can gain further insight into themselves.

If your kid is near puberty and wants to go on hormone blockers, make sure to get some extra support for yourself. This

5 Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities, Kristina R. Olson, Lily Durwood, Madeleine DeMeules and Katie A. McLaughlin, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/137/3/e20153223>

6 Fact Sheet: Gender Diversity and Transgender Identity in Children, APA Division 44, American Psychological Association, <http://apadivisions.org/division-44/resources/advocacy/transgender-children.pdf>

is a big deal and you're allowed to be emotional about it. Do the research, acquire as much insight as you can, and make sure to talk with them about the effects, both positive and negative.

Check in with them regularly about how they're feeling, and what support they need. Say things like, "Do you still feel comfy being called ____?" "How are you feeling about dresses?" etc. You may have to bite your tongue sometimes, you may not agree with them all the time, and you may find their gender expression mortifying. But your acceptance and support will be rewarded with trust and a well-adjusted kid who feels comfortable in their skin.

FOR SIBLINGS, EXTENDED FAMILY & PARENTS ALIKE

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, just be there for your loved one. Tell them you love and accept them regardless of anything, and make an effort to do the things that they describe as supportive. If someone comes out to you and you just sort of pretend like it never happened, you have a 100% chance of damaging that relationship, even if it just quietly injures the other person without creating tangible consequences for you.

A combination of effort, acknowledgement, research, and affirming language equals support. Don't wait until your loved one is visibly upset to begin trying to affirm them.

Siblings and extended family members are in a unique position to offer invaluable support, especially when getting parents on board is difficult. Having any family in your corner can feel like a life raft when you're up against the monumental task of coming out to parents. Sometimes it takes parents much longer to get the hang of the language of support because of their unique familial position. Non-parental family can be instrumental in helping advocate for a non-binary family

member, who may not always have the energy to correct misuse of pronouns/names and other language hurdles. You can also offer to practice using your family member's name/pronouns with other family (so long as you get consent), to help everyone get used to it.

MOURNING THE GENDER BOND

Our society places a specific importance on same-gender family bonds (re: father-son, mother-daughter, sister-sister, brother-brother). This is probably based on the assumption of shared experience. But ask yourself, is the bond in question really any less special when you remove gender from the equation?

It's common to feel like you're losing something, like you're no longer both members of some exclusive club. If you dig a little deeper, what you may actually be mourning is the feeling of a special connection and spending quality time together. There are other ways to make the bond special and specific, though. Get to know each other a little better. Afterall, if they came out to you, it's a good sign that they want to be closer. Are there hobbies or interests you share but haven't really explored? What do you have in common? Can you cultivate an interest together? Participate in a shared hobby? Set aside some regular quality time? Explore your options.



UNDERSTANDING



Growth is never comfortable, but it's always rewarding. Sometimes difficult changes are necessary to maintain a relationship.

COMMON WORRIES & FEARS THAT NON-BINARY PEOPLE EXPERIENCE ABOUT COMING OUT INCLUDE:

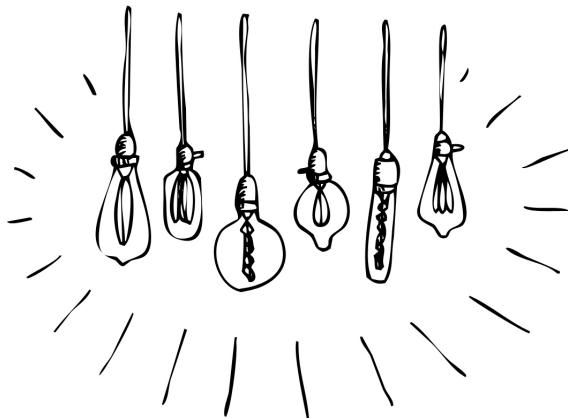
- Being cut off from or shunned by family
- Being denied, mocked or ridiculed
- Refusal to use chosen pronouns/name
- Dismissing it as a phase or need to be “trendy/special”
- Pretending that coming out never happened and not making any effort to be supportive or acknowledging
- Having to fight to justify/defend the validity of their identity

If these fears are confirmed, it can create a rift that is difficult to recover from. When bids for support are made and seldom returned over time, this can erode a relationship. The person bidding will eventually give up, assuming that their needs are a lost cause. Your non-binary loved one may take it as evidence that you don't care about them, even if you do and are

just finding this aspect of their identity difficult to deal with. Resentment can build. They may withdraw, become angry, or just be very quietly wounded without telling you. You can avoid having to do difficult restorative work later, if you accept the challenge to be clumsily accepting now.

Non-binary gender is a vast umbrella, and nonbinary people are not a monolith. The feelings, preferences and experiences of nonbinary folks vary greatly from person to person, so in order to best support your loved one, you have to ask them specifically what support looks like for them.

Do some independent research⁷ to get the gist, and then ask clarifying questions. Don't let embarrassment for not knowing all the concepts and vocabulary be a barrier. If you don't get curious, then the obligation lands entirely on the non-binary person to remind you of their identity and act as a gender encyclopedia, which is very exhausting when there's a whole internet out there. So many non-binary people who aren't actively supported or disowned live in the limbo of the "soft" coming out, where everyone says, "okay" and then never talks about it again. Living in that limbo really sucks, especially after you've shared yourself vulnerably in a bid for love and acceptance.



⁷ Congratulations, reading this zine counts as part of your research! Example questions provided on page 32.

ORIENTATION VS. SEX VS. GENDER

[As the doctors drop the baby into an incubator, the mother looks up.]

Patient: Is it a boy or a girl?

Obstetrician: Now, I think it's a little early to start imposing roles on it, don't you?

—Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*

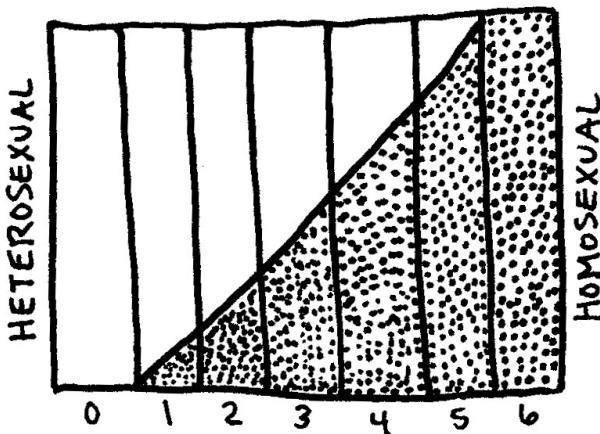
This bit can be confusing at first.

Before we delve deep, I just wanna lay out the basics. A person's sexuality (or orientation, as I prefer to call it) is who they love and/or desire to have sex with, and that orientation exists separately from their gender, which in turn is independent of their biological sex. A person's gender has no bearing on who they're attracted to, and a person's sex doesn't dictate their gender.

ORIENTATION ≠ GENDER ≠ SEX

If you don't get it, or you're shaking your fist at me, just read on.

The common societal belief used to be that one's orientation was fixed and unchanging (and you were expected to be straight, or something was wrong with you). That belief is gradually fading out as queer folks gain more visibility and acceptance. Greater society is slowly giving credence to the reality that romantic/sexual attraction isn't quite so cut and dry. These days orientation is generally thought of as a spectrum. The Kinsey scale was an early assertion of this idea, introduced in 1948. If you're not familiar, it's a scale that measures degrees of homosexuality, based on the idea that most people aren't exclusively straight or gay, but rather register at different degrees along a spectrum. Hopefully this concept makes a bit of sense to you, because it'll be a good foundation for understanding sex and gender.



Example of the Kinsey Scale

Alright, so if we can understand that attraction doesn't fit neatly into two columns, hopefully what I'm about to tell you doesn't come as too much of a shock. Sex and gender also exist along a spectrum. I know, this probably sounds ridiculous, but bear with me.

Sex is biology, it's chromosomes. Sex is what you're assigned when the doctor looks at your genitals after you're born. This is why you'll hear terms like, "AFAB" and "AMAB" within the transgender community, which are acronymns for "assigned female at birth" or "assigned male at birth." It's a way to talk about body stuff without misgendering anyone. These terms should not be leveraged to invalidate nonbinary identities.

The commonly held belief is that there are two sexes, male and female. An extension of that belief, is that 'sex' and 'gender' can be used interchangeably and refer to the same thing. Except we know that biological sex isn't actually binary, because intersex individuals exist.

Intersex folks have chromosomal/sexual characteristics

that don't fit neatly into the category of 'male' or 'female.'⁸ There's disagreement on how common it is to be born intersex, statistics vary from 1 in 100 (about as common as being a redhead) to 1 in 1500 people, depending on how narrowly you define intersex traits. You can do some research⁹ if you need to know exactly what that means, but basically this is bad news for the idea of two strict genders organized by genitals/chromosomes, because intersex people break that mold. The "two genders" argument, which intends to say that there are only two sexes, is categorically false. Being nonbinary is not the same as being intersex, though some intersex individuals may identify as nonbinary.

So, to recap: we know that orientation exists along a spectrum, and biological sex is not as binary as we've been led to believe. That brings us to gender, which differs from sex in a few key ways.

GENITALS ≠ GENDER

"Gender: self-expression, not anatomy."
—Leslie Feinberg

To put it simply, if sex is what's in your pants, gender is what's in your heart. Gender is behavior, feelings, qualities. Gender is nebulous, sex is more straight forward. This idea is the big one that's tough for people to wrap their heads around, and that's understandable, because you've probably been raised to conflate sex and gender.

A sexologist named John Money introduced the concept of gender roles in 1955, and feminist scholars later popularized the term gender in the 1970s, "as way of distinguishing 'socially

⁸ Answers to Your Questions About Individuals With Intersex Conditions, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/intersex.pdf>

⁹ Intersex Society of North America, Frequently Asked Questions, <https://isna.org/faq/>

constructed’ aspects of male–female differences (gender) from ‘biologically determined’ aspects (sex).”¹⁰

Now that you have some background, we can go over some vocab.

Cisgender: When your gender identity matches the sex you were assigned at birth. Sometimes shortened to “cis.” If you’re not trans, you’re likely a cis man or cis woman.

Transgender: When your gender identity does not match the sex you were assigned at birth. Sometimes shortened to “trans.” If you’re not cis, you may be a trans man, a trans woman, or a non-binary person.*

*Note: While non-binary people are not cisgender, not all of them use “trans” or “transgender” to describe themselves or their experience for various reasons. It’s important to let people self-identify.

Trans man: Someone who was assigned female at birth, but is a man and should be referred to as such.

Trans woman: Someone who was assigned male at birth, but is a woman and should be referred to as such.

Nonbinary person: Someone whose gender doesn’t align with the sex they were assigned at birth, but is not strictly a man or woman.

Nonbinary is sometimes shortened to “enby,” so a non-binary person could refer to themselves as “an enby” in place of “a man” or “a woman.” However, not all nonbinary folks like this abbreviation, so it’s important not to use it to describe anyone if they don’t explicitly apply it to themselves.

¹⁰ The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Titles, 1945–2001 David Haig, Ph.D., https://web.archive.org/web/20120615160110/http://www.oeb.harvard.edu/faculty/haig/Publications_files/o4InexorableRise.pdf

Some non-binary folks who don't identify as trans instead adopt the term metagender, an umbrella term for identifying beyond binary gender. Other nonbinary folks don't use metagender or any other qualifiers. Some folks like to narrow things down with hyper-specific labels, others don't, both camps deserve respect.

GENDER IDENTITY ≠ GENDER EXPRESSION

There's another distinction that is important to note, and that is gender vs gender expression.

Gender expression is the way we communicate our gender to the outside world. It's the way people dress and act, their personal style, mannerisms and traits. People can present as feminine, masculine, androgynous, or some combination.

You can't tell someone's gender just by looking at their gender expression. Just like anatomy doesn't dictate someone's gender, neither does the way they dress and act. Clothes, hairstyles and mannerisms are just a few tools we possess to express ourselves and tailor the way we're perceived, but they can't convey gender. You can't know someone's gender unless they tell you, and it's best not to assume.

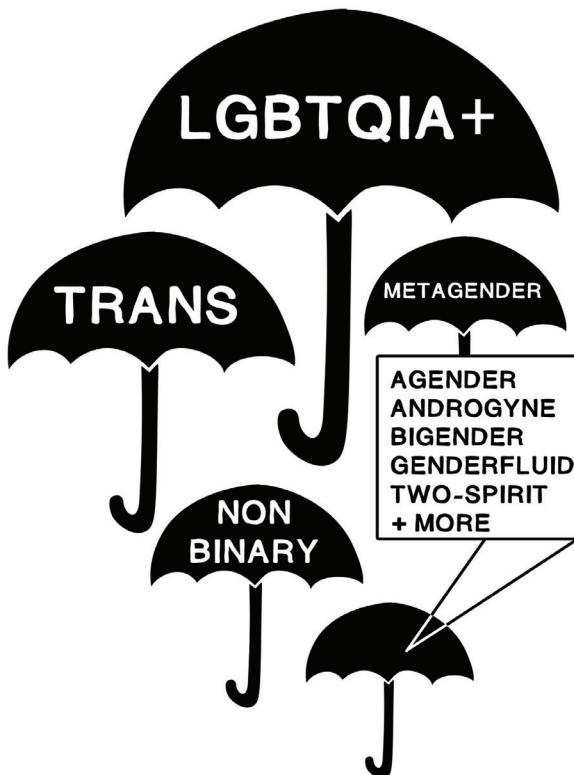
I know, it's a lot to take in. You don't have to integrate it all right away. Try to remember that language is an ever-changing tool, it evolves to describe feelings and ways of being that have always existed. Once we learn that sex has no bearing on gender, then gender becomes far more arbitrary and harder to pin down. When you're able to embrace the distinction between sex and gender, nonbinary/transgender identities will make a lot more sense to you.



WHAT IS *NON-BINARY GENDER*?

Non-binary gender is an umbrella term used to describe any gender identity that does not fit neatly into the commonly accepted male/female gender binary. Nonbinary people may identify as having no gender or neutral gender. They may feel somewhere in between male and female. They may feel both like a man and woman at the same time, or alternate between the two, and so on. Non-binary folks are neither, both, sometimes either, or beyond the male/female binary.

There are A LOT of non-binary genders, you don't have to learn them all, but do make sure to learn about your loved one's gender (if they identify more specifically under the nonbinary umbrella).



SOME COMMON NON-BINARY GENDERS

Non-binary: Otherwise unspecified. Some non-binary folks don't feel the need to narrow it down any further, others haven't found the language yet.

Genderqueer: This term was coined prior to the word "non-binary" and the two are sometimes used interchangeably. Genderqueer originated as an umbrella term for gender experiences that deviated from the norm.

Agender: Lacking gender/not identifying with any gender, having a neutral gender, having an unknown or undefinable gender, and/or feeling indifferent toward gender.

Androgyn: Associated with androgyny; feeling both male and female, in between male and female, or neither male nor female.

Bigender: Having two distinct gender identities, either simultaneously or fluctuating between genders (these two genders do not necessarily have to be male and female).

Genderfluid: Having a gender identity that is not static and changes over time, identifying as any gender or combination of genders over a period of time.

Two-spirit: This label is reserved for Indigenous folks. An umbrella term used by some North American Indigenous groups to describe gender-variant tribal members who fulfill a distinct social role that is not male or female.¹¹

¹¹ Indian Health Service, Health Resources, Two Spirit, <https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/health/twospirit/>

SOME ADDITIONAL GENDER DESCRIPTORS

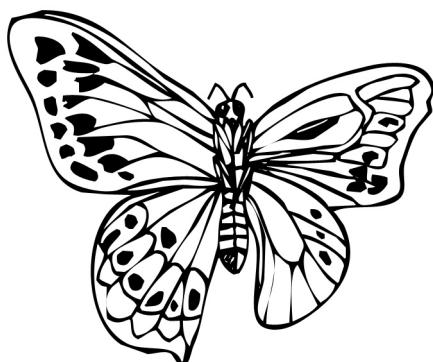
Trans: When someone does not identify with their AGAB (assigned gender at birth). Some non-binary individuals may say they are “nonbinary trans,” while others don’t make the distinction.

Transfeminine: A descriptor sometimes used by AMAB (assigned male at birth) people of varying identities who relate more closely to femininity. Sometimes shortened to “transfemme.”

Transmasculine: A descriptor sometimes used by AFAB (assigned female at birth) people of varying identities who relate more closely to masculinity. Sometimes shortened to “transmasc.”

Flux: This suffix literally means “to fluctuate.” It can be applied to any gender, indicating that the intensity of the identity varies at any given time. If you fluctuate between feeling agender and a man, you may call yourself boyflux. This term is relatively new at the time of writing this zine.

Demi: This prefix is applied to basically mean “partially,” not fully. If you identify with femininity to some extent, but not strongly enough to call yourself a woman, you may call yourself a demigirl.



THE LOWDOWN ON NONBINARY FOLKS

COMING OUT

“Coming out” is a process, not a single action. We have to eventually “come out” to every new person we meet. Lots of non-binary folks (and LGBTQIA+ folks in general) come out more than once throughout their lives. When someone finds they’ve outgrown a label, or the language has evolved to better describe them under some new label, it doesn’t make whatever they identified as before any less valid. We’re all just getting to know ourselves, and figuring out what makes us feel happy and authentic. It’s important to know that while coming out can be scary, being out is often joyous. Some of us have spent a long time feeling vaguely wrong, and having that defining moment where we figure out our gender can be totally life affirming. We’d love it if you were happy for us too.

MENTAL WELL-BEING

Existing under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella does not make you mentally ill. If anything, rates of mental illness among queer folks arise from the oppression, alienation and lack of support we sometimes face simply for being ourselves (or on the flip side, the emotional toll that is taken when we feel we have to repress or hide ourselves).

EXPRESSION

Nonbinary people have a vast array of gender expressions. Some of them may present fairly in line with what is expected from their AGAB, others may wear clothes and hairstyles that are as opposite their AGAB as possible. Some present as a mixture of masculine and feminine at the same time, or switch it up from

day to day. Others present androgynously. Gender expression is as varied as gender, and there's no such thing as "looking" nonbinary. Gender identity is how a person sees themselves, gender expression is what they show the world. For this reason, it's best not to assume a person's gender identity from their gender expression.

***O*RIENTATION**

Nonbinary folks have a variety of orientations, being non-binary does not dictate what genders you're attracted to. Things can get complicated when describing orientation, however, since a lot of orientations rely on binary gender as part of the description. Some nonbinary individuals label themselves as "queer" for simplicity, others may feel comfortable labeling themselves lesbian, gay, bi or pan. Nonbinary people may also use androsexual (or androromantic) to describe being attracted to masculinity, and gynosexual (or gynoromantic) to describe being attracted to femininity. Others still may identify as straight, asexual, aromantic, or any other orientation under the sun.

***T*RANSITION & DYSPHORIA**

Some non-binary folks change their names, within their community or legally, some don't. Some non-binary folks draw a hard line on the pronouns they'd like used to refer to them, others are more flexible, accept multiple pronouns, and/or prefer different pronouns depending on the setting. Some AFAB non-binary folks wear binders to make their chests appear flatter, others don't. Some AMAB folks may seek vocal feminization therapy, others don't. Changes of name, pronouns, and/or gender expression outlined here fall under the category of "social transition." Transition has a different meaning for everyone, not everyone chooses to undergo a significant transition.

Not all non-binary people experience dysphoria (when your body or the way others perceive you is at odds with the

way you view yourself/your internal sense of your gender), many do. Dysphoria is by no means a prerequisite for being non-binary/trans, however it is sometimes the catalyst for folks to realize they aren't cis. Examples of this include feeling like you're "bad at" being your AGAB, feeling disconnected from your body, hyperfocusing on features or body parts you feel misrepresent you or wishing you had body parts you don't possess, feeling little or no affinity for your prescribed gender role, indescribable weird feelings towards your AGAB, etc.

Dysphoria can vary vastly in intensity from one individual to the next, and more intense dysphoria can have an array of negative mental health implications. It can just sort of exist on its own as the result of having a body, or pop up in response to stimuli.

SOME THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE DYSPHORIA INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

- Being misgendered (when someone intentionally or unintentionally uses the wrong pronouns or gendered language to refer to you)
- Being deadnamed (when someone intentionally or unintentionally uses your birth name to refer to you)
- Being pressured to and/or rewarded for adhering to expectations of your AGAB at work, church, or elsewhere in your community
- Having to choose which gender bathroom or dressing room to go into (because you may face hostility for going into either one)
- Being split up along gender lines for activities or celebrations (sports teams, religious activities, baby showers, etc)
- Being treated as your AGAB, especially by folks who know you're non-binary

- Accessing medical services (many doctors are not non-binary/trans affirming)
- Menstruation or pregnancy (for AFAB folks, since periods are so linked to womanhood in our culture)

Some non-binary people decide to undergo HRT (hormone replacement therapy) in order to feel more comfortable with their bodies and alleviate dysphoria, some don't. Some non-binary folks seek out surgery in order to feel more comfortable with their bodies and alleviate dysphoria, some don't. Hormones and surgery are considered "medical transition." Common medical transitions for AFAB people include taking testosterone, getting top surgery, and/or hysterectomy. Some common medical transitions for AMAB people include taking estrogen, breast augmentation, hair removal, and/or facial feminization surgery.

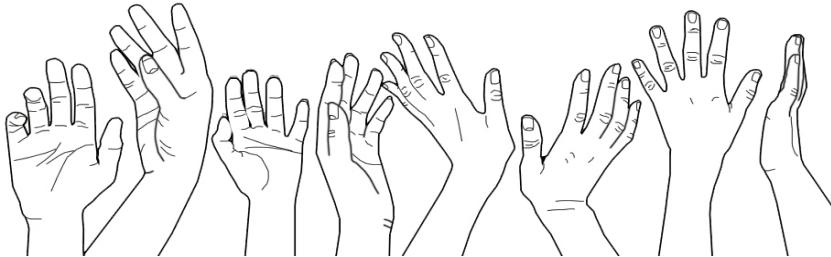
Gender euphoria (the opposite of dysphoria) can be just as significant an indicator as dysphoria on the journey to discovering one's gender. Say you don't totally feel estranged from your AGAB, but you feel absolute joy when expressing your gender androgynously. Other examples include trying on a new name or pronoun that just feels right, feeling more like yourself after socially or medically transitioning, lighting up when a stranger correctly genders you, etc.

Not all non-binary folks are at odds with their pre-transition selves, while others find it painful to look back on past iterations of themselves that don't feel representative of who they are.

All non-binary folks are just trying to survive, and live our best lives if we can help it.



SUPPORT



“Do you see me? Do you get me? Do you choose me?”
—Brian Scheffer

Now that you're nearly an expert, in this section we'll go over some specific things you can do to offer support. It's time to ask some questions. You can't offer support if you don't know what it looks like to your loved one.

LET'S TALK ABOUT BURNING QUESTIONS

Outlined here are some respectful questions to ask, as well as some intrusive questions to avoid. Before you ask a question, it's good form to ask yourself why exactly you wanna know, and if it's unnecessarily intrusive. Is it a question that only your loved one can answer, or can it just as easily be googled? Would you consider it a violation of your privacy if someone asked you a similar question? Curiosity is great, but self-reflect before asking.

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## **GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK**

“What pronouns should I use for you?”

“They/them” pronouns are common but not the only ones, so it’s important to ask.

“Are there any settings where I should refrain from using your chosen pronouns/name when referring to you?”

Make sure not to ‘out’ them to anyone without their consent, but do use their chosen/name pronouns openly in any instance where they haven’t asked you to withhold that info. Some nonbinary folks may not want to bother to be ‘out’ to people that will be hostile towards it (your conservative uncle, for instance).

“In what ways do you expect to transition, if you don’t mind my asking?”

This open-ended question is a respectful way to ask a bunch of other questions about hormones and surgeries that are potentially intrusive and inadvisable.

“What are some ways I can support you?”

You may get some very specific answers, like avoiding using certain gendered language when referring to them, using their name/pronouns, not asking them to “prove” their gender, learning about non-binary gender and educating others, sticking up for them when others don’t understand, etc. You may get vague answers like, “trust me,” “be there for me,” “be happy for me” or “listen to me.” Ask clarifying questions. And most importantly, follow up with that support!

“Will you please tell me when I mess up or say something hurtful?”

Stumbling in the learning process is understandable, and there's also a lot of hurtful terms out there that you may not even realize have an impact. Opening a dialogue with your loved one and being open to critique builds trust and shows them that you value them.

## ***QUESTIONS TO AVOID***

“Are you sure this isn’t a phase? I hear non-binary is the latest trendy label.”

If someone has come out to you, you can bet they've been over it about 100 times in their head, because it's a scary thing to do. Your disbelief won't sway them, and even if it were a “phase,” it deserves to be respected. Humans go through phases constantly. Just because something isn't permanent, doesn't mean it isn't important.

“Are you sure you’re not just gay?”

This question is pretty dismissive, even if it's well-meaning. The subtext is, “Okay, you told me how you identify- but I’m ignoring that because I’d prefer something else were true.”

“So does this mean you’re *not* gay?”

Maybe ask yourself why exactly you wanna know before asking this one- is it because you want to invalidate their orientation or gender identity since it changed over time? Or is it because you’re just genuinely trying to clarify their orientation? If it’s the

latter, just ask, “What is your orientation again?” but remember that it’s not technically any of your business.

“So who do you have sex with now? How do you have sex? Is this because you want to have sex with \_\_\_\_\_?”

The particulars of sexual preference are only important to share between consenting adults who intend to have sex. It's none of your business.

“Are you going to get ‘the surgery?’”

There is no singular universal surgery. You might try asking “How do you plan to transition, if at all?” instead.

“What’s so wrong with your AGAB/’real’ name?”

It doesn’t fit, clearly. Avoid using “real” as a descriptor for birth names or AGAB, it’s pretty universally frowned upon by non-binary/trans people, because it insinuates that they are being disingenuous when they are in fact trying their best to be authentic with themselves and the world.

“Where did I go wrong as a parent? What did I do to cause this?”

Short, universal answer: It’s not about you, or anything you did or didn’t do.

“Can’t you just *try* to be a [gender assigned at birth]?”

Some non-binary folks have been “trying” to be their AGAB their whole lives. Trying to be something you’re not is exhausting and unhealthy.

## **ACTIONABLE SUPPORT**

Unless there are certain people your loved one would rather not be ‘out’ to, make sure to use their chosen pronouns and/or name openly in conversation. If someone uses their old pronouns or name, politely correct them. Say something like, “Oh, So-and-so goes by Chosen Name now, they’re non-binary and would like to be referred to with x/y/z pronouns.” It’s important to use your loved one’s chosen name in all interactions (unless they tell you otherwise), and not just when they’re in earshot. If you only use their pronouns/name when in their presence, it sends the message that you’re ashamed of them, or can’t be bothered to advocate for them because it’d be too uncomfortable for you.

You may be thinking, “Jeez, that sounds like a lot of work, is it really that important?” It is indeed work, and it’s your responsibility so long as you want to offer actual support. When someone in your family comes out, you sort of end up coming out too, in a round-about way. When you’re lamenting the workload, just remember that it’s doubly exhausting for your loved one, because it’s their humanity (and sometimes safety) in question. When you advocate for them, you’re sharing the work and therefore lightening the load for your loved one. You’re also setting an example for people who may know nothing about non-binary/trans identity, and are perhaps more likely to listen to you explain these concepts than someone who is nonbinary/trans.

All this work is not without reward. It’s common to conflate acceptance with support, but I think there’s an important distinction between the two. Acceptance is passive, support is active. It’s easy to say that you support someone without doing things that are categorically supportive, but that’s just lip service. It is difficult and disheartening to hear family describe themselves as supportive while not honoring chosen pronouns/names (the most basic show of support). That would actually be simple acceptance, maybe tolerance at worst.

Support is work, and your loved one will notice your effort.

## **DON'T FORGET TO SCREAM:**

- A**ccept them as they are
- A**sk how you can support them
- A**ffirm with desired language
- A**pologize if you mess up
- A**cquire knowledge about gender
- A**dvocate for them to others

## **FAIRLY UNIVERSAL WAYS TO SHOW SUPPORT TO NON-BINARY/TRANS FOLKS:**

- Make a genuine effort to use any new pronouns and/or name that your loved one has shared with you
- Ask for feedback, and be open to corrections
- Work on removing unnecessarily gendered language from your vocabulary
- Introduce yourself to new people with your name and pronouns (this gives people who aren't cis an invitation to disclose their pronouns without having to make a big deal out of it)
- Add your pronouns to your email signature or social media bio to normalize stating pronouns
- Educate yourself about nonbinary/trans issues and advocate for us



# **DE-GENDERING YOUR LANGUAGE & ASSUMPTIONS**

As the old saying goes, “When you assume, you make an **ass** out of **u** & **me**.” In this section, we’ll work on replacing gendered language with more inclusive terms.

You’re gonna have trouble using the correct pronouns until you also unpack the way you see your loved one (and people in general for that matter). That takes time, effort and the pursuit of knowledge. In the meantime, humility is a valuable fallback; be on top of your language and accept critique when you mess up. No one is born knowing all of this stuff, we have to learn it. Non-binary and trans folks don’t get a welcome kit, they had to learn too.

“But learning new pronouns and watching my language is **HARD**.” Yep, it totally is. But lots of difficult things are necessary. Having a buddy to practice with (besides your loved one) can be really helpful while you’re getting the hang of it. Hearing someone else use this language will make it easier for you to get used to using it.

Gendered language is so built-in to our vocabulary that we may not even realize the extent of it until it’s time to unlearn it. So many careers have different descriptors split along gender lines, as if gender somehow alters the way the job is done. Is a fireman any different from a firefighter? A waitress different from a server? A stewardess different from a flight attendant? The distinctions are outdated and unnecessary. Those of us who work with the public often reflexively add, “Sir, ma’am, miss” etc while addressing others. This is also a very easy thing to drop. Instead of, “Can I help you with anything, ma’am?” Just say, “Hi, can I help you with anything?” Your question is no less confusing for lacking a gendered greeting.

When it comes to other people's gender, memorize this phrase:

## ***NEUTRAL TIL YOU KNOW.***

Always use singular they as a placeholder until you know someone's pronouns, and then once you know their pronouns, use them! It's not okay to continue using they/them pronouns to refer to someone who expressly doesn't use those pronouns.

Obviously you don't need to find out the pronouns of every person you come into contact with throughout your day (you can probably go without finding out your server's pronouns) but when you're going to be interacting with someone on a regular basis, it's good to know. Already been introduced, but never asked their pronouns? Why not say something like, "I've been learning about gender identity recently, I use x/y pronouns, do you mind if I ask yours?" You may get a "Thank you for asking, I use x/y pronouns," or you may get a confused or incredulous response. The latter is fine too, because that conversation might be their in-real-life introduction to pronouns, and maybe you opened the door for them to learn more.

You don't have to completely remove gendered terms from your vocabulary, you can still refer to your spouse as your wife if she's a woman, etc. The important takeaway here is to be aware of how unnecessarily gendered our language can be, and to not apply gendered language to folks who are nonbinary (or whose gender is as of yet unknown to us).

| Common gendered language          | Try this instead                           |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Ladies & gentlemen                | Distinguished guests                       |
| Hey guys, guys and gals, hey girl | Y'all, folks, friends, hey friend, hey bud |
| That guy/lady with the hat        | That person with the hat                   |
| Husband, wife                     | Spouse, partner                            |

| <b>Common gendered language</b>                  | <b>Try this instead</b>                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Girlfriend, boyfriend                            | Partner, significant other, date mate, sweetie                   |
| Mankind                                          | Humankind                                                        |
| Anything with man/woman as a suffix              | Change to “person”                                               |
| Women (in context of biology for healthcare etc) | People who menstruate, people with uteruses, people with breasts |
| Men (in context of biology for healthcare etc)   | People with penises                                              |

## Family-specific

| <b>Common gendered language</b> | <b>Try this instead</b>             |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Brother, sister                 | Sibling, sib, their name            |
| Daughter, son                   | Kid, child, offspring, their name   |
| Mom, dad                        | Parent, parental figure, their name |
| Grandmother, grandfather        | Grandparent, their name             |
| Aunt, uncle                     | Auncle, their name                  |
| Niece, nephew                   | Nibling, their name                 |
| Ms., Mrs., Miss, Mr.            | Mx. (pronounced “mix”)              |

These lists are far from exhaustive, and you can always collaborate to make up your own terms. Plenty of families have improvised words for grandparents especially, why not give it a whirl for other family members? The nonbinary person should have final say in how they’re referred to within the family.

# **USING PRONOUNS IN REAL TIME**

## **SINGULAR THEY PRONOUNS**

A lot of nonbinary folks use they/them pronouns, also known as “singular they” pronouns.

“Nice to meet you, my name is Alyssa and I use they/them pronouns.”

How to honor it? Use “they/them/theirs” as a stand-in for the third-person pronouns “he/him/his” or “she/her/hers.” You will have to alter a few other words in the sentence to accommodate (like for example, you may say “she is” but not “they is.” It’d be “they are” instead). Here’s an example of singular they pronouns used in a sentence:

“Alyssa said they were going on a hike, Kyle went with them. They almost forgot their trail mix.”

You probably already use singular they without even realizing it. If you find a wallet on the ground, you probably say, “Someone dropped their wallet” instead of, “Someone dropped his or her wallet.”

Some folks overthink it when using they/them pronouns, and try to use them when directly addressing a person instead of talking about them. This is a reminder that “you” is already neutral. My doctor’s receptionist once asked me, “Do they have insurance?” in an attempt to honor my pronouns. In that situation, it’d be correct to ask, “Do you have insurance?” instead.

The easiest way to approach they/them pronouns grammatically is to pretend you’re talking about multiple people, or someone of unknown gender.

## **NEOPRONOUNS**

Some nonbinary folks use other neutral third-person pronouns, known as “neopronouns,” that may be totally foreign to you. Some examples are ze/hir (pronounced “zee” and “here”), xe/xem (pronounced “ze” and “zem”) or ey/em (pronounced “ay” and “em,” like the letter). You can ask for reminders on how to pronounce these, or maybe make a voice memo for yourself.

“My name is Ash and I use ze/hir pronouns.”

How to honor it? “I was talking to Ash and ze mentioned you wrote a new song! If hir humming did the melody any justice, it’s super catchy!”

## **MULTIPLE PRONOUNS**

Sometimes nonbinary people use more than one pronoun, or accept all pronouns. Don’t just pick whichever pronoun you think is most in line with their AGAB based on their appearance, make sure to switch back and forth.

“My name is Jesse and I use she/they pronouns.”

How to honor it? Try flip-flopping back and forth each time you mention the person. “Jesse said they ran into you the other day. She was really glad to see you.”

“My name is Opal, any pronouns will do.”

How to honor it? Throw out a different pronoun each time you mention the person.

Practice makes perfect! Let this section be a framework that you can use when you encounter personal pronouns you’re unfamiliar with. It’s totally okay to politely ask clarifying questions about how to use someone’s pronouns if you’re unsure.

# CLOSING

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of the zine.  
Let's recap what you learned.

A nonbinary person is someone whose gender does not fit neatly under the heading of “man” or “woman.” There are a million different ways to be nonbinary. There’s no one way to “look” nonbinary.

You’re entitled to your reaction to your loved one’s coming out, but it’s also your responsibility to process your challenging feelings about it independently of your loved one. Feelings aren’t facts, and hurtful actions that are motivated by messy feelings may have consequences in your relationship. You may want to seek outside support for yourself if you’re experiencing a lot of challenging feelings regarding your loved one’s gender.

You can be respectful to non-binary folks by using their chosen name and pronouns, whether or not they’re in earshot, even if you don’t fully “get it.” I can’t stress this enough; it’s baseline respect. Make it a habit, practice with a friend. Refer to people neutrally (with singular they pronouns) until you ask their pronouns, and then use their pronouns.

Gender ≠ biological sex. Orientation ≠ gender. You cannot tell someone’s gender by looking at them. The only way to know someone’s pronouns for sure is to ask. It is imperative to unpack the ways you unconsciously conflate sex and gender in order to be able to see your loved one for who they truly are.

Acceptance is great, but support is the goal. Support is specific and actionable. In the most general sense, support includes altering your language, processing your challenging feelings as they come up, acquiring knowledge and being an

advocate, as well as whatever specific asks your nonbinary family member has for you. Make a commitment to be on their team, keep lines of communication open.

Thank you for reading! I hope you take this text to heart. If you're cis and you read this far but you're mad at me, please re-read.



*some discomfort required*

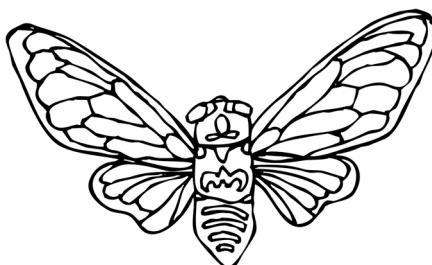
## **CAVEATS**

This writing comes from a combination of lived experience, independent research within the community, purposeful googling and feedback from folks of all different backgrounds and genders. I'm not an authority on gender, I'm simply a nonbinary person who wanted this resource to exist. Shout out to the "I non-binarily approve of this message" FB group for your invaluable participation in my research. A huge thank you to everyone who helped bring this zine to fruition via your feedback and encouragement.

When I refer to "society" in this zine, I am talking about American society specifically, in case that isn't clear.

I fully expect the language in this zine to be somewhat out of date by the time it is published, so please forgive me if anything seems off or out of touch. Language does not age gracefully. The way we understand gender is constantly evolving, as is the vocabulary we use to describe it.

I tried my best to be mindful of the vast range of nonbinary experiences throughout this zine, while also making it as digestible as possible for folks that don't have a wealth of knowledge about this stuff. Fellow nonbinary folks, please forgive me for any undue blanket statements or off-base assertions.



# **RESOURCES**

## ***EXPANDED LIST OF RESOURCES***

**<https://www.alyssagiannini.com/nonbinary101>**

The expanded list of resources available on my website includes links to helpful articles with URLs too long for you to sit there typing into your browser.

### ***GENERAL RESOURCES***

**My Pronouns**

**<https://www.mypronouns.org/>**

**Genderqueer.me**

**<https://genderqueer.me/>**

**The Trevor Project**

**<https://www.thetrevorproject.org>**

**Gender Spectrum**

**<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>**

**National Center for Transgender Equality**

**<https://transequality.org/>**

**The Gender Unicorn**

**<https://transstudent.org/gender/>**

**Transgender Dictionary**

**<https://www.transeatd.org/transgender-dictionary>**

## **SUPPORT FOR PARENTS & ALLIES**

**Genderqueer.me**  
<https://genderqueer.me/tag/parents/>

**Gender Spectrum: Online Discussions for Adults & Youth**  
[https://www.genderspectrum.org/articles/  
gender-spectrum-groups](https://www.genderspectrum.org/articles/gender-spectrum-groups)

**PFLAG: Find a chapter**  
<https://pflag.org/needsupport>

**Transgender Education & Discussion**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soundslikeTransEducation/>

**I non-binarily approve of this message**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/418494015283473/>

**A Better Understanding of Non-binary & Gender  
Non-conforming Individuals**  
<https://www.facebook.com/nonbinary.notinvisible/>

**Psychology Today:  
Search filtered for trans affirming therapists**  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/transgender/>

**Professional online counseling for the LGBTQ community**  
<https://www.pridecounseling.com/>

**Finding & Choosing an LGBTQ Therapist**  
<https://www.choosingtherapy.com/finding-an-lgbtq-therapist/>

# GLOSSARY

It's important to note that language around gender and sexuality is constantly changing and evolving. There's a link to a transgender dictionary in the resources section to stay up to date.

**AFAB** (sometimes ‘DFAB’ for ‘designated’, ‘CAFAB,’ C for ‘coercively’) Stands for assigned female at birth.

**Agender** An identity under the non-binary umbrella that describes feeling neutral or without gender.

**AMAB** (sometimes ‘DMAB’ for ‘designated’, sometimes ‘CAMAB,’ C for ‘coercively’) Stands for assigned male at birth.

**AGAB** Stands for “assigned gender at birth.”

**Androgyn**e An identity under the non-binary umbrella, associated with androgyny, that describes feeling both male and female, in between male and female, or neither male nor female.

**Aromantic** (shortened to ‘aro’) An umbrella term for individuals who do not experience romantic attraction, or only experience romantic attraction under narrow and specific circumstances.

**Asexual** (shortened to ‘ace’) An umbrella term for individuals who do not experience sexual attraction, or only experience sexual attraction under narrow and specific circumstances.

**Bigender** A gender identity under the non-binary umbrella; having two distinct gender identities, either simultaneously or fluctuating back and forth.

**Binder** A special undergarment designed for chest binding, considered to be the safest way to achieve the appearance of a flat chest.

**Biological sex** (shortened to ‘sex’) A label (usually “male” or “female”) assigned at birth, based on the genitals and chromosomes you were born with.

**Biromantic** Romantic attraction towards your own gender as well as other genders.

**Bisexual** Sexual attraction towards your own gender as well as other genders.

**Cisgender** (shorted to ‘cis’) When your gender identity matches the sex listed on your birth certificate.

**Deadname** (also “deadnaming”) Refers to a non-binary/trans person’s birth name which they no longer use.

**Demi** This prefix is applied to basically mean “partially,” not fully. If you identify with femininity to some extent, but not strongly enough to call yourself a woman, you may call yourself a demigirl.

**Dysphoria** (shortened from ‘gender dysphoria) Distressing feelings toward your body or how others perceive you based on your body when your gender identity doesn’t align with your AGAB.

**Flux** This suffix literally means “to fluctuate.” It can be applied to any gender, indicating that the intensity of the identity varies at any given time.

**Gay** Men who love men, but also used as a catch-all term for any orientation that is not hetero.

**Gender binary** A system that classifies gender into two distinct and opposite categories (man/woman).

**Gender euphoria** The opposite of gender dysphoria, it's pure joy experienced when one feels congruence with their gender identity. This feeling can be spurred by being gendered correctly, choosing a new name, changing one's gender expression, transitioning, etc.

**Genderqueer** This term was coined prior to the word “non-binary” and the two are sometimes used interchangeably. Genderqueer originated as an umbrella term for gender experiences that deviated from the norm.

**Genderfluid** An identity under the non-binary umbrella that describes having a gender identity that is not static and changes over time, identifying as any gender or combination of genders over a period of time.

**Gender identity** (shortened to ‘gender’) A person's internal sense of being a certain gender (or lack thereof). Gender also more generally refers to socially constructed behaviors, traits, appearance, roles etc.

**Gender expression/presentation** Outward expression of gender. What you wear, your hairstyle, how you act, etc. It is not necessarily indicative of gender identity or orientation.

**GNC** Stands for "gender non-conforming." An umbrella term for folks who don't fit the gender binary. Sometimes "gender diverse" is used interchangeably.

**HRT** Acronym for hormone replacement therapy.

**Intersex** Possessing chromosomes and/or sexual characteristics that do not fit the typical definitions of male and female bodies.

**Lesbian** Women who love women.

**LGBTQIA+** Stands for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, intersex, asexual + other gender and sexual minorities.

**Metagender** An umbrella term for identifying beyond binary gender, an alternative to the cis/trans binary. Some non-binary folks who don't identify as trans identify as metagender.

**Misgendering** When you refer to a person with pronouns or language that they do not identify with.

**Non-binary** (also ‘nonbinary,’ sometimes ‘enby’) An umbrella term for anyone who doesn’t fit neatly into the gender binary of woman/man.

**Orientation** (also ‘sexuality’) Who you are attracted to romantically, and/or sexually (I prefer the term “orientation” because “sexuality” excludes asexual people).

**Panromantic** Romantic attraction towards multiple genders.

**Pansexual** Sexual attraction towards multiple genders.

**Pronouns** In the context of this zine, pronouns refer specifically to third person pronouns, which in English are used to refer to someone other than the speaker or listener (examples include they/them/theirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his, ze/hir/hirs, etc).

**Queer** An umbrella term for folks who are not hetero and/or cis. Originally a slur, reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community (as with all reclaimed words, it’s important not to apply it to anyone who doesn’t explicitly apply it to themself).

**Top surgery** The accepted term used to describe a surgical procedure that removes a person’s breast tissue. Top surgery is sometimes sought by trans men and nonbinary people as a part of transition.

**Trans man** Someone who was assigned female at birth, but is a man and should be referred to as such.

**Trans woman** Someone who was assigned male at birth, but is a woman and should be referred to as such.

**Transfeminine** (shortened to ‘transfemme’) A descriptor sometimes used by AMAB (assigned male at birth) people of varying identities who relate more closely to femininity.

**Transgender** (shortened to ‘trans’) When someone does not identify with their AGAB, there are binary and non-binary trans people. Important note: The word “tranny” is a slur. “Transgendered” and “transexual” have largely fallen out of use. The respectful way to refer to trans people is by saying “trans people” or “transgender people.”

**Transition** Changes that trans/nonbinary folks make to feel more comfortable and authentic. Some but not all nonbinary people transition. Examples include: new names, pronouns, appearance, taking hormones, and/or gender affirming surgeries, etc.

**Transmasculine** (shortened to ‘transmasc’) A descriptor sometimes used by AFAB (assigned female at birth) people of varying identities who relate more closely to masculinity.

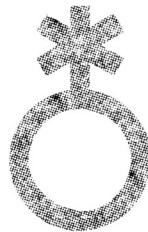
**Two-spirit** (label reserved for Indigenous folks only) An umbrella term used by some North American Indigenous groups to describe gender-variant tribal members who fulfill a distinct social role that is not male or female.

**Zine** (pronounced “zeen,” like magazine) A non-commercial, self-published work about any number of topics, typically produced in small batches.

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## STATEMENT OF INTENTION

This guide is meant to serve as an introduction to nonbinary gender and a model for what support looks like. After a lot of fruitless searching, I decided to make the resource I was seeking. The information here has been compiled through a combination of research and personal experience. I've gathered insight from parents, invited nonbinary people to share their coming out experiences with me, and received feedback on this text from parents and various nonbinary folks alike. It is my hope that providing this compassionate blueprint will empower families, especially parents, to offer the support their nonbinary loved ones deserve.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alyssa Giannini\* is a queer, nonbinary artist who resides in the Pacific Northwest, where they cobble together a living from various creative endeavors. Their work explores themes like activism, mental health, emotional intimacy, nature and DIY music. It bears mentioning that their writing normally has a lot more swearing in it! When they aren't working, you can find them tending to their ridiculous house plant collection, spending time in nature or enjoying music. You can visit [alyssagiannini.com](http://alyssagiannini.com) to learn more about them and their work.

\*Pronounced Uh-liss-uh Jee-uh-knee-knee.

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