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Your Teen's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

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British Columbia Specific Information

Gender identity is your internal and psychological sense of yourself. Only you can determine your gender identity.

Sexual orientation is a term used to describe your pattern of emotional, romantic or sexual attraction.

For more information about gender identity and sexual orientation, including how to find support services in your area, visit [Qmunity: BC's Queer Resource Centre](#) or contact [Trans Care BC](#) by calling **604-675-3647** or toll free **1-866-999-1514**.

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Overview

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation means how you are attracted romantically and sexually to other people. There are different kinds of sexual orientation. For example, a person may be:

- Heterosexual (straight)—describes a person who is attracted only or almost only to the "other" gender. "Binary" is the idea that there are only two genders, male and female.
- Homosexual (gay, lesbian, queer)—describes a person attracted only or almost only to those of the same gender.
- Bisexual—describes a person attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily equal or at the same time.
- Pansexual (or omnisexual)—describes a person attracted to those of any gender.
- Asexual—describes someone not sexually attracted to any gender. This is different from deciding not to have sex with anyone (abstinence or celibacy).

Gender identity

Gender identity is your inner sense of being male, female, both, neither, or some other gender. And for some people, gender identity can shift or be flexible. There are a variety of terms that people may use to describe their gender identity. For example, people whose gender identity expands beyond the categories of male or female may use the term "gender-diverse."

For some people, their gender identity doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth. Many go through a process of coming to know, accept, and express their gender identity. This is called gender affirmation. There are many ways to affirm your gender. There are medical and non-medical options.

Supporting your teen who is LGBTQ+

LGBTQ2S+ teens sometimes don't reveal their [sexual orientation](#) or [gender identity](#) for a long time. They may be afraid of what their friends, family, and others will say and do. They can feel relief when they come out to their family and friends and find love, support, and acceptance. Here are some ways you can support your LGBTQ2S+ teen.

- **Show unconditional love.** You may think it's obvious to your child that nothing could change how much you love them. But be sure to tell them (and show it) anyway. Coming out can be a difficult and uncertain time, and reminding your child that you're always there for them can be very reassuring.
- **Let your teen decide who they come out to, and when.** Support whatever they decide, and offer your child help planning how to come out to people if they need it.
- **Use the language your teen uses to describe their sexual orientation or gender identity.** Some terms may not be familiar to you. That's okay. Do your best to learn about them, and do your best to use them.
- **Use your teen's correct pronouns.** Once other friends and family members know what your child's pronouns are, insist that they use the correct pronouns, too. You might make a mistake now and then. That's okay. Correct your mistake, and move on.
- **Be your teen's advocate.** Stand up for your child if they aren't being treated equally, kindly, or in an inclusive way. That might mean talking to the school about their policies, or stepping in when family members or acquaintances are critical. Show your child that you're on their side.
- **Show your teen you're interested in who they are.** For example, start a conversation about who their LGBTQ2S+ mentors are. Find out if there are famous people who are LGBTQ2S+ that they look up to, and ask your child to tell you what they like about those people. Ask whether your child is interested in dating anyone, and talk about dating guidelines or rules.
- **Watch for signs of depression or bullying.** LGBTQ2S+ youth are at higher risk for these things. So if your teen starts acting withdrawn or anxious, avoiding school or friends, or is behaving in a way that seems unusual or concerning to you, do your best to find out what's going on. If they're being bullied, talk to the school or their teachers. If you suspect your child is depressed, get help from a counsellor.
- **Learn more and get involved.** Organizations such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are a good place to start. Visit the PFLAG Canada website at www.pflagcanada.ca to find a list of other useful groups.

Related Information

- [Depression in Children and Teens](#)
- [Family Life Cycle](#)
- [Gender Identity Issues: Getting Support](#)
- [Generalized Anxiety Disorder](#)
- [Growth and Development, Ages 11 to 14 Years](#)
- [Growth and Development, Ages 15 to 18 Years](#)
- [Growth and Development, Ages 6 to 10 Years](#)

Adaptation Date: 9/11/2023

Adapted By: HealthLink BC

Adaptation Reviewed By: HealthLink BC



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