

Creating Inclusive Schools for NYS LGBT Youth Definition of Terms

A common understanding of LGBT terms is important in providing a safe and supportive school culture and environment. Although the terms below are those most commonly used to describe LGBT individuals they can differ based on region, language, race or ethnicity, age, culture, and many other factors. Generally speaking, it is best practice for administrators and school staff ask LGBT students their preference, and use the terms that students use to identify themselves.

- **Assigned Sex at Birth:** The sex designation, usually “male” or “female,” assigned to a person when they are born.
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity corresponds to their assigned sex at birth.
- **Gender** A person’s actual or perceived sex and includes a person’s gender identity or expression
- **Gender Expression:** The manner in which a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, activities, voice, or mannerisms.
- **Gender Identity:** A person’s gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person’s physiology or assigned sex at birth. Everyone has a gender identity. *Since gender identity is internal, it is not necessarily visible to others.*
- **Gender Expansive:** A term used to describe people whose gender expression differs from stereotypic expectations. The terms “gender variant” or “gender atypical” are also used. A person may identify as male, female, some combination of both, or neither. Students may face harassment or bullying because they are “gender non-conforming,” meaning they express their gender in a way that does not conform to society’s expectations, regardless of their sexual orientation.
- **LGBT:** Is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. Q is sometimes used for questioning, however, queer, when used by those outside the LGBT community is considered insulting. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual are terms used to describe a person’s sexual orientation; people of all different orientations can identify and express their gender in many different ways.
- **Outing** - Sharing someone’s secrets or embarrassing information
- **Sex** – Sex is the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. Sex is different than gender, and people may have gender identities or gender expressions that differ from their sex. Sex and gender discrimination and harassment may also overlap, particularly when a student is gender-non-conforming or expansive, meaning he or she expresses his or her gender in a way that does not conform to society’s expectations. Harassment directed toward that student may take the form of both sexual harassment and gender harassment.
- **Sexual Orientation:** Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction that one feels toward men, toward women, or toward both. Although sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, it is generally discussed in terms of heterosexual—attraction to the other sex—homosexual—attraction to the same sex—and bisexual—attraction to both sexes. Sexual orientation has not been conclusively found to be determined by any particular factor or factors, and the timing of the emergence, recognition, and expression of one’s sexual orientation varies among individuals.
- **Transgender:** An adjective describing a person whose gender identity does not correspond to their assigned sex at birth. This includes people who have undergone medical procedures to change their sex and those who have not. A person who is transgender can be gay, straight, or bisexual.
- **Transition:** The process by which a person socially and/or physically aligns their gender expression more closely to their actual gender identity and away from that associated with their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people can “transition,” meaning they can begin to express their gender identity differently than what is expected of them, at any time in their lives, including childhood.

Resources for Definitions

- [GLSEN Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth](#)
- [NYSED Updated Resource and Promising Practices Guide for School Administrators & Faculty \(Revised 12/17\)](#)
[NYSED Guidance to School Districts for Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment For Transgender and Gender Expansive Students \(July 2015\)](#)

