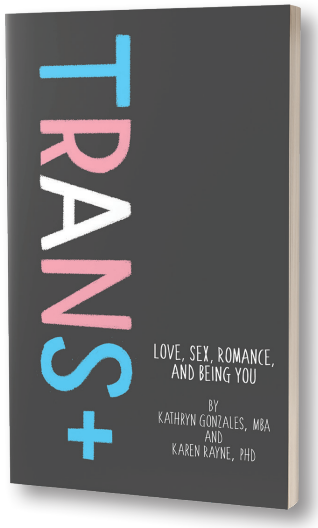
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Words Matter: Respectful and Accurate Vocabulary for Discussing Gender Identity With Your Teen



Understanding gender identity requires having the words to accurately describe it. Kathryn Gonzales and Dr. Karen Rayne included a comprehensive dictionary in their Magination Press book, *TRANS+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You,* a comprehensive, uncensored guide for teens who are transgender, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, gender-fluid, or questioning their gender identity, and for cis-allies.

This excerpt from the book's dictionary provides some of the language you and your teen will need to understand and talk about gender.

Advocate—A person who is cisgender and works and campaigns for the rights of trans, gender nonconforming, and genderqueer people and others who identify as a gender minority.

Agender—A person who identifies as not having a gender; or, being without a gender.

Ally—A person who is cisgender and who works with and campaigns in alliance (note the connection to the word ally) with people who are in the gender minority.

Androgynous—A balance of the feminine and the masculine that includes aspects of both.

Bigender—A person who identifies as having two genders.

Biological Sex—A complex group of physical factors that are assigned to male, female, and intersex. The preferred term for this is "sex assigned at birth" because many people consider "biological sex" to be an offensive term at this point.

Cisgender—A person whose sex assigned at birth (typically "female" or "male") is in alignment with their gender identity.

Cissexism—Treating cisgender people as though they have more rights and moral authority compared to people who are gender minorities.

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Cis normative—The assumption that cisgender people are normal and those who are gender minorities are not.

Coming out—Commonly understood as the first time someone discloses their gender identity or sexual orientation, coming out is actually something that gender and sexual minorities do throughout their lifetimes.

Gender—A social construct that is often assumed to be aligned with aspects of biological sex, but that is far broader than biological sex. Different cultures have understood gender in dramatically different ways, with some incorporating an understanding of three or more genders.

Gender binary—A categorization of gender as being either male or female rather than a spectrum. This is a harmful understanding of gender for all people because it categorizes them in ways that they might not feel comfortable with.

Gender confirmation surgery—A group of medical procedures that changes a person's body to bring it into alignment with their gender identity. Also called gender reassignment surgery; most people prefer the language gender confirmation surgery.

Gender dysphoria—When a person's gender identity is in direct conflict with their physical body, causing mild to extreme psychological distress. "Gender dysphoria" is a classification of mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM IV).

Gender expression—The way(s) that a person shares information about their gender through their hair, makeup, clothes, and other external aspects of their appearance that they have control over.

Gender fluid—A person who is able to incorporate all genders into their identity and to flow easily between them.

Gender identity—A person's internal sense of how they relate or do not to relate to the social constructs that their culture aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender nonconforming—When a person's identity does not readily fall into their culture's understanding of what it should be given their sex assigned at birth.

Gender normative—When someone or something falls into the categories that a culture assigns to a specific sex assigned at birth.

Gender norms—The indicators that a culture assigns to specific sex-related biology, primarily including aspects of a person that are unrelated to biology, such as hobbies, personality traits, and academic models of success.

Genderqueer—A gender identity that describes a person who falls outside the stereotypical "woman" or "man" binary system. This is also an umbrella term that describes many gender identities outside of the gender binary. Genderqueer is sometimes shortened to queer. This term has historically been used in negative contexts, but has been reclaimed by many who feel that it is more descriptive of them and their communities and experiences than LGBTQ+ or GSRD.

Gender, Sexuality, and Relationship Diversity (GSRD)—This describes the wide range of identities that are referred to with LGBTQ+, but is far more inclusive of genders and sexualties. By describing the range of identities broadly, it does not leave any identity out accidentally. It also includes relationship diversity, which refers to, for example, people who identify as polyamorous.

Hermaphrodite—An organism that has fully developed male and female reproductive tracts. While this term was historically used to describe intersex individuals, hermaphroditism does not occur in humans and use of this term to describe people is inaccurate and usually considered offensive.

Intersex—A sex assigned at birth, and sometimes discovered after birth, that indicates the presence of attributes associated with both typical males and females. Historically, some people used the word hermaphrodite to describe people who were intersex, but this is not an appropriate term and is considered offensive by many.

Misgender—Using pronouns or other words that label a person's gender incorrectly. This is often a painful experience for people including trans and gender nonconforming people, especially when done by someone who is aware of their gender identity.

Name change—When a person is transitioning, they often choose a new name for themselves. This can be an important part of the transitioning process and should be respected. Asking a transgender person for their "real" name (referring to the name they were given at birth) is offensive.

Non-binary—A gender identification outside the two-gender, binary system that many cultures recognize. Some people prefer to spell the word "non-binary" and others prefer "non binary."

Outing—When a person discloses another person's gender identity (or sexual orientation) without their permission. Sometimes it is done accidentally and sometimes it is done intentionally. It is never okay to out someone.

Primary sexual characteristics—Parts of the body directly related to reproduction.

Questioning—The experience of considering one's own gender identity as potentially different from the one associated with one's sex assigned at birth.

Secondary sexual characteristics—Nonreproductive-related biological differences between females and males.

Sex assigned at birth—The female or male markers that are bestowed upon a baby at the time of birth. Sex assigned at birth is usually determined based on an infant's external genitalia without taking into consideration additional aspects of the infant's biology or eventual gender identity.

Third gender—A gender identity that is neither woman nor man. In cultures with more that two culturally accepted gender identities, this term would describe those genders.

Transgender—A person whose gender identity does not match the culturally assumed gender identity associated with their sex assigned at birth. Sometimes called transsexual, although this term is not in common use and some may find it offensive.

Transitioning—A series of steps that transgender people may or may not choose to take toward shaping their physical bodies to be more in alignment with the culturual expectation associated with their gender identity. Hormone therapy and surgery are examples of steps that some people have access to during transitioning. Some people may choose to transition without incorporating either surgery or hormones into their biology. Rather, they shift their gender expression so that it is in alignment with their gender identity.

This Article's Author

Kathryn Gonzales, MBA, is the Operations & Programs Director at Out Youth, a co-chair of the steering committee for the Central Texas Transgender Health Coalition, the chair of the board of directors at HavenCon, and a commissioner on the City of Austin's LGBTQ Quality of Life Commission. She has been working in the nonprofit sector, specifically youth advocacy and organizing, for 15 years. She has facilitated state-wide youth lobby days, organized state-wide conferences on LGBTQIA+ youth leadership and empowerment, and created the Queer Youth Media Project during her time at the Austin Gay & Lesbian International Film Festival.

Karen Rayne, PhD, is the Executive Director of UN|HUSHED. She writes comprehensive sexuality education curricula, books for children, teenagers, and parents, and trains professionals internationally. She can be found on Facebook and Instagram @karenrayne. Visit the Dr. Karen Rayne and UN|HUSHED websites to learn more.

TRANS+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You

Trans+: Love, Sex, Romance, and Being You is an all-inclusive, uncensored guide for teens who are transgender, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, or gender-fluid. *TRANS+* answers all your questions, easy and hard, about gender and covers mental health, physical health and reproduction, transitioning, relationships, sex, and life as a trans or nonbinary individual. It's full of essential information you need — and want — to know and includes real-life stories from teens like you!