# The basics: overview and definitions

This section defines important terminology. Understanding these definitions will help you support the Two Spirit, Indigiqueer, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/questioning, (2SLGBTQ+) individuals you interact with—yourself, your friends, your relatives, or your patients.

Terminology may evolve over time to become more appropriate and accepted, so what you see here will likely change over time. Youth and adolescents are often leaders in adapting language and space to create or (re)member ways of being in relationship with community, the land, and each other. Individuals may also identify using multiple terms or unique terms not listed here, so this list of terms is not all-inclusive. It is always important to ask individuals how they self-identify.

## Terms related to identity (and/or role):

**2SLGBTQ+:** Inclusive abbreviation for Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/questioning (may also be seen as 2LGBTQ+). In an Indigenous context, Indigiqueer and pre-binary may be terms that are worth mentioning but may, for now, be represented within the "+." We place 2S first to acknowledge the continual presence of Indigenous people and expansive traditions regarding gender and sexual orientation on Turtle Island since time immemorial.

**Gender:** Gender is socially defined and tends to dictate an individual's place and role within the community. Gender is part of the way a society organizes and defines itself, and a culture/society may have any number of genders.

**Gender identity:** The gender that a person identifies with, or how they perceive themselves. Gender identity can be described as the sense of being male, female, both, or another gender(s). An individual's gender identity may be different from their assigned sex at birth and is separate from their sexual orientation. Gender identity may change over time. Gender identity is both personal and cultural, often simultaneously.

**Gender expression:** The manner in which an individual expresses their gender and/or gender identity, typically through clothing, body shape, body language, hairstyle, makeup, voice, etc. Gender expression may change over time and can be fluid. Gender is one important way that human beings express their unique personality and self-concept. In a cultural sense, gender expression can also be seen in the roles one outwardly participates in within ceremonial or cultural settings.

**Gender-expansive:** A wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically can be accounted for within a binary gender system (a culture that sees gender as exclusively male/female).

**Cisgender:** A term referring to people whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transgender:** A term that refers to someone whose gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth. (*Note: not all people whose gender identity is different from their sex assigned at birth may use this term to describe themselves*)

**Two Spirit:** A unifying term that describes an Indigenous individual who expresses their gender identity, spiritual identity, or social role in a traditional, non-Western way; a term that often encompasses spiritual, sexual, gender, and cultural identity. The term can also relate to an individual's role in their tribe and contribution to their community.

- The term itself originates in the early 1990s and was first coined by Myra Laramee (Fisher River Cree). Is sometimes seen as a unifier and stand-in for words denoting 2SLGBTQ+ ways of being in original tribal languages, but can also be used as a way to denote the inextricability of gender or orientation to one's experience of their Indigeneity. Hundreds or thousands of other conceptualizations have existed in Indigenous languages, and many are still used today. Two Spirit is thought of and used in many diverse ways.

**Non-binary:** An individual whose gender identity does not align with the male/female gender binary (see pre-binary for a more recent Indigenous version of this identity).

- Pre-binary: A non-binary individual who specifically rejects the gender binary and views it as an act of colonial genocide against Indigenous gender expansive traditions

**Sex:** Medical classification of individuals assigned at birth as male or female, based on genitalia as perceived by a clinician and documented at birth. Chromosomal identification also plays a role in this classification.

**Intersex:** The term "intersex" describes infants born with genitals that do not appear male or female, or those who have anatomy that doesn't match with chromosomal sex.

- Vocabulary such as "differences of sex development", "variations in sex development", "endosex", and "intersex" all serve as umbrella terms to describe individuals falling under this category.
- While the diagnostic category "disorders of sex development" (DSD) was previously used, there was significant stigma associated with this term.
- Some Intersex variations are not based solely on genital appearance or function, but also on variances in hormone distribution or other endocrine differences.

**Sexual orientation:** Describes who an individual is attracted to and makes intimate emotional and romantic attachments/relationships with. It is independent of a person's gender identity or expression of gender. Some associated common sexual orientations include:

- **Heterosexual/Straight:** A person who is physically, emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually attracted to people of the opposite gender.
- **Homosexual:** A person who is physically, emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually attracted to people of the same gender.
  - *Note: While "homosexual" may still appear as a technical term, it is commonly not preferred by individuals. Lesbian, Gay, Queer, etc. are more frequently used to by individuals to self-describe their sexual orientations.*
- **Lesbian:** Refers to a woman attracted to a woman in the characteristics described above. Some lesbian individuals may refer to themselves as gay or queer, or may not identify as such at all.
- **Gay:** Refers to a person attracted to a person of the same gender in the characteristics described above.
- **Bisexual**: A person who is physically, emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually attracted to both male and female identifying individuals.
- **Pansexual**: A person who is physically, emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually attracted to people of multiple genders' or who do not define their attractions on the basis of a person's gender
- **Questioning**: The process through which individuals question their gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. These individuals may be exploring their identity or may not want to conform or define themselves as one identity.
- **Queer**: A person whose identity challenges the notion that sex/gender/orientation can be defined binarily or linearly

- **Indigiqueer -** A person who associates their unique expression of queerness with their Indigeneity

Note: There is often variation in ways individuals express their attraction and orientation. For example, a bisexual male may only have sexual relationships with females, even though he is attracted to male individuals as well.

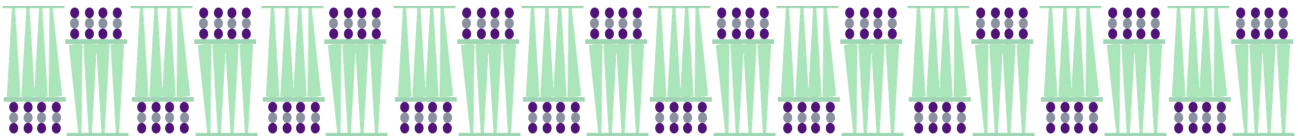
**Related terms, in alphabetical order:**

**Accomplice:** A person who does not identify as 2SLGBTQ+ but demonstrates support for 2SLGBTQ+ people; they may promote equality and advocate for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals in a variety of ways. Some may use the term "ally" but we prefer "accomplice" as it implies active rather than passive resistance to inequitable conditions.

**Coming out:** The process in which an individual acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and shares it with others. Some Indigenous folks call this process "coming in". This reflects sharing and celebrating one's true self rather than changing it.

- *Note: Some tribal cultures assigned multiple names to people over their lifespan because of a recognition that we evolve and our spirits are always in a state of growth and change. Therefore, individuals historically did not need to "come out" in so far as their roles and contributions naturally shifted as they grew and developed as a person in the community.*
- *Note: When gender expansive systems are truly (re)membered, the need for "coming out" will be obsolete.*

**Transition, gender transition, gender embodiment:** The process of working towards more closely aligning one's internal knowledge of gender identity with their outward appearance. Some people socially transition to another gender through changing how they dress and using new names and pronouns. Others may undergo physical transitions that involve body modification through medical intervention. The ultimate goal is to live more fully and authentically in one's gender as they understand it.



If you or a friend needs any mental health support or is having a mental health crisis and/or suicidal thoughts, the following resources are available. They are all 2SLBGTQ+ friendly!

Crisis Services:

- Trans lifeline: 877-565-8860
  - Crisis line staffed by transgender folks, for transgender folks; toll-free; no active rescue*
- The Trevor Project: 866-488-7386
  - Crisis intervention and suicide prevention available 24/7 from counselors trained in supporting LGBTQ youth
- Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741 any time to start texting with a crisis counselor
- 988 Suicide Crisis Line: If you need support, you can call, text, or chat with 988. Someone is available 24/7.
- Text NATIVE to 741741 for free, 24/7 support.
- SAGE ELDER CRISIS LINE: 877-360-LGBT (5428). Someone is available 24/7.

*NOTE: *Some of these services may engage in active rescue (communicating information about suicide risk to local law enforcement when they believe it necessary to ensure safety).*