



## Respectful Language

Words shape and are shaped by human interaction. Some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, two-spirited, intersex, queer, questioning, and heterosexual persons raise children, live in houses or apartments, work hard, pay taxes and enjoy vacations.

**Of greatest importance is the concept of self-identity; that is, each person's right to decide for themselves what they want to be called, and whether or not others may describe them in that manner.**

Language is perpetually in flux, and should remain open to growth and new understandings.

**Ally:** refers to a person who is not a member of a specific group but supports that group, challenges discrimination and oppression of that group and explores his or her own biases.

**Asexual:** refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction. Many people who are asexual experience emotional or romantic attraction, but feel no need to express that attraction sexually.

**Bisexual:** refers to an individual with the potential to be emotionally and/or sexually attracted to members of male or female genders. Bisexuality is not a transition phase, nor is it an experience characterized by indecisiveness, selfishness or mixed feelings.

**Coming Out:** 1) the process of self-acknowledging one's sexual orientation or gender identity and integrating that awareness into one's life; 2) disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity to others.

**Cisgender:** refers to individuals who have a match between the genders they were assigned at birth, their bodies and their personal identity.

**Community:** as a direct reaction to long-established homophobic violence, hatred and persecution, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people formed a sub-culture commonly called the "gay community". Many people of sexual minorities value this community highly, feeling that within it, pride and diversity are celebrated and appreciated, and persons who have faced hatred in their past can feel embraced and free to explore their budding sexuality.

**Equity.** Equity refers to the right of the individual to a fair share of the goods and services in society.

**Fluid:** refers to a person who has romantic/sexual and/or emotional attraction and interest in people of many different gender(s) and/or sexual expressions. Some of them do not choose their partner based on their gender or sexual orientation (pansexual) and others have specific interests in both men and women (bisexual).

**Gay:** refers to an individual who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to the same gender. Gay usually refers to males and is often interchangeable with homosexual.

**Gender:** refers to a system of classification that assigns qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. Gender refers to social, cultural and emotional attributes, while sex refers to physical and biological characteristics.

**Gender Expression:** refers to the external ways in which an individual communicates their gender identity (e.g. through mannerisms, interests, attire, voice pitch etc.)

**Gender Identity:** one's private and subjective sense of being male, female or trans; a person's internal sense of self and identification as a man or woman, or both, or neither. Everyone has a gender identity.

**Gender Nonconforming:** refers to people whose gender identity and expression falls outside what is expected of people with their assigned sex. A similar phrase is "**gender variant**".

**Gender Normative:** Refers to people whose gender identity and expression matches their assigned sex at birth according to social expectations. A similar word is "**cisgender**".

**Genderqueer:** an umbrella word for people whose gender identity is outside the typical categories of man or woman. Similar words include "**bigender**", "**agender**", "**third-gender**" or "**gender fluid**".

**Heterosexism:** is the belief in the inherent superiority and "normality" of heterosexuality; assuming every person to be heterosexual and therefore marginalizing persons who do not identify as heterosexual; also believes heterosexuality to be superior to homosexuality and all other sexual orientations. It is the foundation for homophobia.

**Heterosexual:** refers to an individual who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to members of the opposite gender. A similar word is "**straight**".

**Homophobia:** is prejudice based on a belief that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual individuals are immoral and inferior to heterosexuals. It is experienced as irrational feelings of fear, discomfort, hatred and/or disgust. As with racism, people are *taught* to be homophobic.

**Homosexual:** refers to an individual who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

**Inclusivity.** The principles of inclusivity involve clear recognition that society is not homogeneous and the perception of diversity as enriching rather than a problem. It requires the recognition that ideas and practices based on or modeled after norms of the dominant culture or society can result in experiences of exclusion and discrimination for a number of people. Inclusivity within an organizational context is comprised of a strategic process to eliminating barriers and implementing change based on the acceptance that many people do not have access to services, jobs, and positions of leadership due to societal and systemic factors rather than personal deficiencies. This process includes the active and meaningful involvement of people who are reflective of the diverse groups within a community.

If an organization is inclusive, or practices inclusiveness, it means that it understands, accepts and respects diversity. Such involvement relates to the development and practice of policies, services and programming that are both appropriate and relevant to these different groups, as well as an organizational commitment to eliminating barriers for ongoing participation. An inclusive organization not only recognizes diversity, but also embodies it. This means acknowledging the worth of every individual and their value to their community and to society at large.

**Intersex:** refers to an individual who has a mixture of male and female gonads and/or genitals; a general word that refers to conditions where a person is born with a sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of female or male. These physical characteristics do not always appear at birth. Previously referred to as “hermaphrodite”.

**Lesbian:** refers to a female who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to the same gender. Lesbian is the preferred term for women in the community.

**LGBTTTIQQ:** common abbreviation for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, two-spirit, intersex, queer and questioning" implying community inclusiveness.

**Lifestyle:** an inaccurate and derogatory term sometimes used to describe gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans persons. There is no one gay lifestyle, just as there is no one straight lifestyle and reference to a "gay lifestyle" often implies negative and damaging stereotypes, such as promiscuity or pedophilia.

**Pansexual:** refers to someone who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to all genders and sexes.

**Queer:** is a term used in a number of different ways; for example, as an 'umbrella' term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other non-heterosexual identities. It is also used as a way of reclaiming and co-opting a once negative term; to remove queer as a term of abuse. However, not everyone finds the term empowering; some resist it because of its use among homophobic people.

**Questioning:** refers to individuals who are questioning their gender identity, sexual orientation or sexual identity, and who often choose to explore other options in terms of gender and sexual identification and presentation.

**Rainbow Flag:** a flag of six equal horizontal stripes (red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, blue for art, and violet for harmony) signifying pride in the community and its diversity.

**Sexual Orientation:** refers to an individual's emotional and/or sexual attraction to a person of the opposite gender, same gender, both genders or neither gender. Everyone has a sexual orientation.

**Transgender:** Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. It includes people who are crossdressers, transsexual, transgender, Two-Spirit, and intersex. “**Trans**” is a commonly used alternative.

**Transsexual:** refers to an individual who has an intuitive, life-long conviction that he or she is really of the opposite gender to that assigned at birth. The person experiences acute gender discomfort and thus, is driven to modify his or her body by means of "corrective" medical intervention. Transsexuals can be of any sexual orientation.

**Two-Spirit (2S):** derived from interpretations of Native languages used to describe individuals who displayed both characteristics of male and female. The two-spirit person has received a gift from the Creator, that gift being the privilege to house both male and female spirits in their bodies.

Sources: Ontario Human Rights Commission, Ontario Public Health Association, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Family Pride Canada.