



Game Plan for Educators:
**Creating Safe and
Inclusive Spaces
for LGBTQ+ Students**

glsen.org/ChangingTheGame

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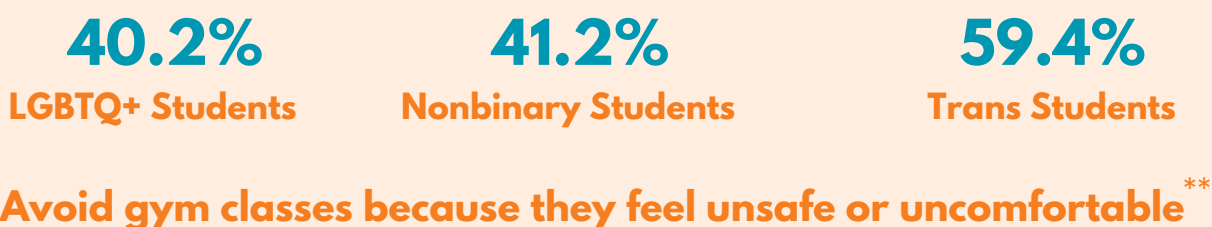
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Introduction

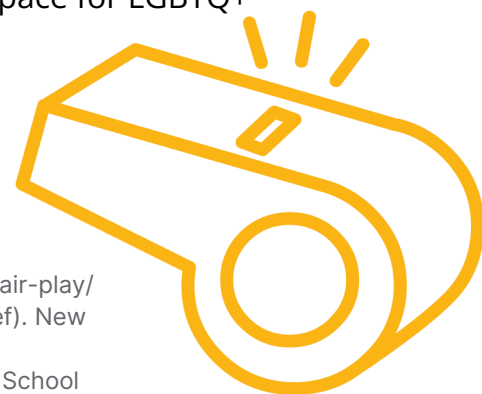
All students have a right to feel safe and included at school. Whether in physical education class or in competitive sports, all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have a right to play and feel like they belong.

LGBTQ+ affirming educators, coaches, and athletic policies can make a difference in students' lives. When LGBTQ+ students are able to play sports, and are accepted as classmates, teammates, and competitors, they gain access to the same physical, social, and emotional benefits extended to all who participate in sports. Participation in school sports also increases LGBTQ+ students' overall well-being and feeling of connection to their school.*



Despite the benefits of participation in sports, too many LGBTQ+, transgender, and nonbinary students may still be missing out on a critical aspect of their education because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable in their physical education classes.*** With regard to school staff and personnel, LGBTQ+ youth reported feeling the least comfortable talking to their physical education teacher or coach about LGBTQ+ issues.

As a teacher, you have the opportunity to make a significant impact on the LGBTQ+ students in your classes. This resource will provide you with some of the best practices and tools to ensure that your classroom is a safe and affirming space for LGBTQ+ students.



* <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2021/02/08/495502/fair-play/>

** GLSEN (2013). The Experiences of LGBT Students in School Athletics (Research Brief). New York: GLSEN

*** Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN

Inclusive Learning: A Game Changing Practice

GLSEN's research has demonstrated that LGBTQ+ students who attend schools with instruction that is inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, history, and events **experience a better school climate and improved academic outcomes**. We also know from the experiences of students, educators and advocates that learning outside of the classroom also has a tremendous impact on LGBTQ+ youth experiences in schools.

- **Include positive representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, and events related to the class.** LGBTQ+ athletes and activists have been working to make sports more inclusive for many years. By including positive representations of these athletes into your class modules or coaching operations, you can actively show you support LGBTQ+ athletes.
- **Avoid gender-segregated activities in P. E. Classes.** Gender-segregated activities can be harmful to students and reinforce gender stereotypes that have lasting effects on students' mental health. Many P.E. teachers have already stopped splitting up their classrooms by "boys" and "girls" and instead use co-ed neutral options like colors or mascots or organizing students by numbers.
- **Incorporate inclusive language.** Anytime you are addressing students, use inclusive and gender-neutral language such as, "Welcome, everyone" as an alternative to "Welcome, boys and girls" or, "ladies and gentlemen."
- **Always empower students with positive language.** Instead of "Suck it up" or "Man up", use phrases like, "Try your best" or, "You've got this!"
- **Eliminate Elimination Games in P.E.** Unfortunately, students who are less athletic are often first to be eliminated and miss out on exercise, skill development, and social connection. When possible avoid eliminating students. Instead establish tasks for re-entry allowing more opportunity for participation. Use routines like having students tag in and tag out, or play cooperative games that incentivized everyone on the team accomplishing a shared goal.
- **Provide gender-neutral clothing options.** All students should be given the option to wear the gym uniforms they feel most comfortable and safe in. Uniform choices (shirt color, shorts versus skirts, etc.) should not be limited based on a student's gender.

- **Avoid games/activities where students are targets.** In such games, students who struggle may be targeted more frequently, which can create feelings of embarrassment or isolation. Such games reinforce bullying, sometimes resulting in harm.
- **Allow for youth choice.** When possible, offer a diverse range of activities that cater to different interests and abilities, ensuring everyone can find something they enjoy and can participate in. Rotations or stations in P.E. are one way to accomplish diverse instructional objectives while also giving students choice.
- **Adapt instructions based on skill and ability.** Provide modifications and adaptations for activities to accommodate various skill levels and physical abilities, ensuring everyone can engage safely and effectively. Create routines in your classroom that create predictability and transparency so students know what to expect and are able and comfortable to meet the expectations.
- **Promote body positivity.** Foster a culture of body positivity by using inclusive language, promoting self-acceptance, and discussing the value of health and wellness over appearance. Avoid talking about students' physical characteristics, including height, weight, hair, or style choices.
- **Incorporate student voice.** When possible, involve students in decision-making about activities and assessments, allowing them to express their interests and preferences, which can lead to greater student engagement and lifelong fitness habits.
- **Include time for reflection.** Incorporating reflection time into physical education can significantly enhance students' understanding and personal growth. This can include journaling, group discussions, or mindfulness exercises.
- **Promote individualized goal setting and assessment.** Have students set personal fitness or skill goals. Use rubrics for students to evaluate their performance and participation. This helps them critically analyze their strengths and areas for improvement

For more information, check out [GLSEN's Inclusive Learning](#) issue brief to learn more about the wellbeing impacts of inclusive learning, curriculum and instruction. classes



Differentiate Activities to Support All Students

Provide your students with various ways to participate in the target activity. For example: When playing a game of tag, provide different ways that the students can move about the room (walking, skipping, running, etc.)

Create different roles within the activity to engage all abilities and comfort levels. For example, a student or team of students can be scorekeepers, or a group of students can be cheerleaders or morale boosters.

Include variations and adaptations to the skills you are teaching that day and unit. For example, if one of your exercises is jumping jacks, you can provide different ways for the students to do this exercise while still reaping the benefits (low impact version along with high impact version). If you are demoing the exercise/doing it along with them, spend time doing the modified version along with the students so that those who may be reluctant to do it don't feel alone or isolated in doing a different version.

Adequately scaffold a new activity you are introducing to your class. Explain any particular terms or vocabulary that go along with this activity so that all students can follow along. Use visuals, demonstrations, and supportive language.

Ensure Inclusive Facility Access

Nearly 60% of transgender students say that they avoided gym class. Almost 70% of transgender students said they avoided school locker rooms, and a staggering 82.1% said they avoid bathrooms at school due to safety concerns. ****

Creating a safe and inclusive gym or physical education class means ensuring that all students have access to the locker rooms and bathrooms they feel safest using. If you have transgender or nonbinary students in your class, ask them what they need to feel safe and comfortable. If any student requests privacy when changing, spaces should be made available to them.

Accessibility Considerations. Ensure that there are facilities accessible to individuals with disabilities. This includes having wide doors, accessible stalls, grab bars etc.

Education and Training: Train or get training for staff on inclusivity and the importance of respecting individuals' choices regarding restroom use. This includes understanding and respecting pronouns. Visit GLSEN's website or contact GLSEN at educators@glsen.org to learn more about our professional development for educators.

Inclusive Signage: For gender inclusive restrooms, use inclusive language and imagery on restroom signs. Avoid binary symbols, consider signage that simply indicates the facility such as, just a toilet, a shower, changing room. Ensure students have access to the restrooms they are comfortable using.

Safe Spaces: Ensure that restroom environments are safe and free from harassment. Implement clear policies and training to address any issues of discrimination or bullying. Prepare staff and students to adhere to policies.

Support Transgender and Nonbinary Athletes

As an educator, there are a number of ways you can support transgender and nonbinary students in your school and classroom. You can use these strategies to create psychological and physical safety for your LGBTQ+ students and make your classroom more inclusive.

Respect Your Students' Privacy

Maintaining your students' privacy is critical. A student's gender identity should not be disclosed to classmates, staff, or parents without their permission. Disclosing a student's gender identity could put them at risk and is a potential violation of [FERPA](#).

Respect Your Students' Names and Pronouns

Respect your students by using the name and pronouns they choose to go by at all times and ensure that all students do the same. The most inclusive practice is to ask ALL students which names and pronouns they use, not just those students you suspect might be trans or nonbinary. If you single out a particular student in front of the rest of the class, you could be putting them at risk. When collecting necessary information, make sure to leave a space on paperwork to ask ALL students what pronouns they use.

NOTE: Pronouns are not a preference. When someone shares with you the pronouns they want you to use for them, you must respect this. For more guidance on pronouns and how to use them, see [GLSEN's Pronoun Guide](#).

Use Correct Pronouns

Respect your student who you suspect might be trans or nonbinary. Give students space to share their name and pronouns and ensure all students use these correctly. If you single out a particular student in front of the rest of the class, you could potentially be putting them at risk for harassment from others. When collecting necessary information, make sure to leave a space on paperwork to ask ALL students what pronouns they use.

NOTE: Pronouns are not a "preference." When someone shares with you the pronouns they want you to use for them, you must respect this. For more information and support around how to use correct pronouns, see [GLSEN's Pronoun Guide](#).

Awareness of Gender Dysphoria

Some students experience gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is often described as the “discomfort, pain, and unhappiness that is experienced by many transgender people in relationship to the commonly gendered parts of their body (physical dysphoria), and/or to the way people interact with them (social dysphoria), and/ or to how they are legally required to fill out documentation (social dysphoria enforced by the legal system).”

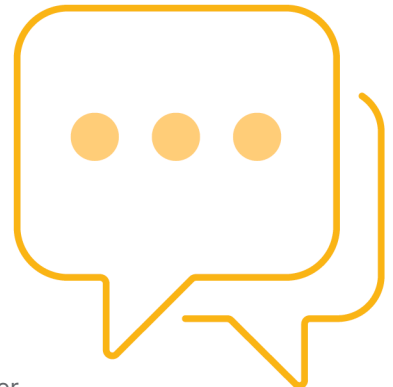
Not all transgender and nonbinary students have gender dysphoria, but some do. Students can experience gender dysphoria in physical education class in many ways. If a student has a menstruation cycle, the student could experience severe stress and anxiety.

While it is not appropriate to ask questions about a student’s body, a helpful way to support a student who may be experiencing gender dysphoria is to ask questions such as “Is there anything specific you are struggling with in this class?” or “How can I support you to do your best in this class?” Give the student time to answer, they may need to think about it or they may not be ready to converse directly about what they are going through.

Affirm Their Identity: Even if their identity or appearance changes over time, continue to affirm them as they explore who they are. Gender identity can be fluid, and that’s perfectly okay. Be patient as they figure out what feels right for them, and offer encouragement. Some may transition gradually, while others may do so more quickly.

Validate Their Feelings: Reassure them that it’s okay to be unsure or to change their mind over time about their gender expression or identity. Their feelings are valid and worthy of respect.

Keep Them Safe: Stand up against bullying or harassment. Help them feel safe in expressing themselves authentically. Some youth may face rejection or misunderstanding from family members or peers. Help them find a support network, whether through LGBTQ+ groups, trusted friends, or online communities where they can find understanding.



**** Kosciw, J.G., Clark, C.M., Truong, N.L., & Zongrone, A.D. (2020). The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation’s schools. New York: GLSEN.

Policy Considerations

Educators, Administrators, and Athletic Directors can make a significant impact on the experience of LGBTQ+ students and athletes. By advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and practices, you can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to participate in school athletics and physical education classes. This section provides information and guidance on how you can enact LGBTQ+ affirming policies, provide support for LGBTQ+ students and athletes, and ensure that your school physical education, athletics, and play programs are inclusive and comply with federal and state requirements.

Title IX

In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Education published a final rule that updates Title IX regulations to clarify legal protections for LGBTQ+ students, survivors of sexual assault, and pregnant and parenting students. These Title IX updates strengthen the legal rights of LGBTQ+ students to challenge discriminatory practices and encourage school districts to adopt more inclusive policies to ensure compliance with federal law. GLSEN supports updates to Title IX regulations that explicitly clarify protections for LGBTQ+ students. GLSEN urges that states and schools implement comprehensive and inclusive policies that support LGBTQ+ students in reporting harassment and discrimination, while also guaranteeing access to school-based programs, activities, and facilities. For additional resources and information see [GLSEN.org/title-ix](https://www.glsen.org/title-ix).

Know Your State and Local Policies

LGBTQ+ students have [rights](#). Discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity has been and is still prohibited under federal civil rights laws that ban sex discrimination.

Research has shown that LGBTQ+ students in schools with comprehensive bullying and harassment- prevention policies were more likely to report that staff intervened when hearing anti-LGBTQ+ remarks and experienced less anti-LGBTQ+ victimization, compared to those with a generic policy or no policy.

- Find out what states already have policies protecting LGBTQ+ students by checking [GLSEN Navigator](#).
- Keep up-to-date with your state's interscholastic athletic association for guidance around supporting transgender and nonbinary athletes. Participation in athletics at the interscholastic level is usually governed by state athletic associations.
- Get connected with your Local GLSEN Chapter for policy support. Adapted Instructions:

Implement LGBTQ+ Affirming Policies

LGBTQ+ students have [rights](#). Discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity has been, and is still, prohibited under federal civil rights laws that ban sex discrimination. To ensure fairness and equality in athletic participation for all students, schools, districts, and athletics associations should develop guidance that affirms and supports the right of trans and nonbinary students to participate. Guidance should include the following components:

- Where a student athlete has a transgender or nonbinary identity, the association or school will work in partnership with them to ensure participation and facility usage that is affirming and safe.
- Transgender and nonbinary student athletes can use the locker room, shower, and restroom facilities in accordance with their gender identity, or where they feel safest. Locker rooms and shower facilities will include private enclosed changing areas for use by any student who desires such privacy.
- Transgender and nonbinary student athletes may use a common name or gender pronouns that are inconsistent with school records or identity documents. Coaches, administrators, and officials will make every reasonable effort to honor a student's common use name and gender pronouns, and ensure that those are honored by teammates, opponents, fans, volunteers, announcers, etc.
- If there is a petition challenging a student's participation in a gender-segregated activity consistent with their gender identity, the school or athletic association will assemble an eligibility committee, which will include school administrators, staff members, experts in health, including transgender health and wellness, and/or gender-affirming advocates familiar with the issues affecting LGBTQ+ youth.
- In the case of an appeal, an athletic association or eligibility committee can review, but not require documentation of a student's consistent gender identity, including written statements from the student, parent/guardian, and/or health care provider.

A student's gender identity, gender affirming health related documentation, and other highly personal information, if consensually disclosed, will be kept confidential to the school administrators or associations in question. Where students or teams are competing against other schools, staff, athletic directors, and/or coaches should communicate with their counterparts, without violating the student's confidentiality. Athletic staff and/or coaches should clearly communicate with the student athlete in question, and seek their feedback about what information can be presented in communication with other schools/teams. These discussions can include expectations for treatment including the use of locker/shower facilities, names, pronouns, etc.

Take Action Against Anti-LGBTQ+ Behaviors



“Some of my students are apprehensive even coming into my gym because of past negative experiences, I try to make them feel safe.”

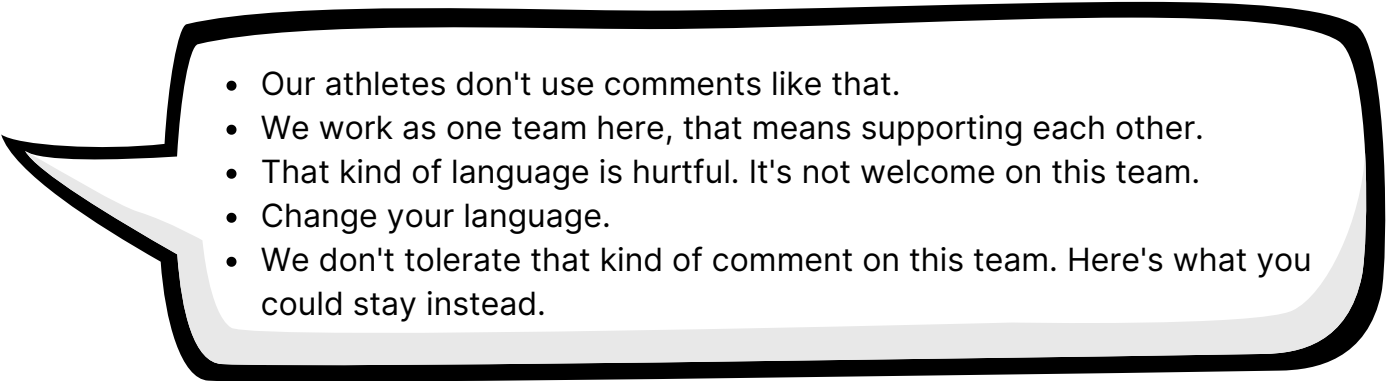
-Paula, teacher from Ohio

As a teacher, your job is to create a safe space for all students in your classroom. One of the most effective ways you can show solidarity is to respond to anti-LGBTQ+ behavior. By taking action and intervening when you hear anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment, you set the example for your students that this behavior will not be tolerated.

Address name-calling, bullying, or harassment immediately. Create a classroom culture that recognizes that each student is a valuable member of your learning community. This means that there is no place for name-calling, bullying, or harassment. Too often these forms of intimidation are excused as locker room behavior but such words and actions create an unsafe and unwelcoming environment for all students.

Concentrate on Stopping the Behavior in That Moment

- Sometimes all it takes is a simple response like, “That language is unacceptable in this class” when you hear a derogatory term.
- Make sure everyone in the immediate area can hear you.
- Even if it feels uncomfortable, it is important to interrupt the behavior.
- If you choose to overlook an incident, it implies that you are willing to accept hateful and harmful behavior in your classroom.

- 
- A large, stylized speech bubble with a black outline and a white background, containing a list of five bullet points.
- Our athletes don't use comments like that.
 - We work as one team here, that means supporting each other.
 - That kind of language is hurtful. It's not welcome on this team.
 - Change your language.
 - We don't tolerate that kind of comment on this team. Here's what you could say instead.

- **Name the Behavior.** Describe what you heard, saw, or what was reported to you. Let the person who said the slur or anti-LGBTQI+ phrase know that it is unacceptable and that it breaks the class rules.
- **Get to the Root of the Intention.** Meet with the person who caused the harm privately and ask them what their intentions were when they chose to cause harm. This conversation can help you determine whether there is a larger issue you need to address.
- **Support the Targeted Student.** Make sure disciplinary actions are progressive and focus on restoration while providing opportunities for all students to continue to learn, regardless of the type of name calling, bullying, and harassment.

Check out GLSEN's [Replacing Punitive Discipline with Restorative Policies and Practices](#) for further guidance.

Get Educated

As a P.E. teacher you can increase your knowledge and awareness of the experiences and challenges that LGBTQI+ students experience. Taking LGBTQI+ inclusion training and implementing an inclusive curriculum are two ways that you can create a supportive and inclusive classroom.

Commit to learning about the experiences and challenges that LGBTQI+ students experience. If you and your school staff haven't already participated in LGBTQI+ inclusion training, this is a great place to start. This type of training puts you and your staff in a better position to support your LGBTQI+ students throughout the school.

The ways you and your coaching staff can get educated are:

Seek out training: Equip yourself, your colleagues, and your students with resources and tools to better understand LGBTQI+ identities. Training can also help in diminishing and eliminating anti-LGBTQI+ bias. Ask your school administrators or your local GLSEN chapter for training. Visit GLSEN's website or contact GLSEN at educators@glSEN.org to learn more.

Resource yourself: You can also review resources, scenarios, and example protocols and policies online to help you create a more inclusive culture. To learn more about Title IX and see sample supportive policies by visiting [this policy section](#) of GLSEN's website.

Stay connected to current issues: Follow GLSEN and other LGBTQI+ supportive organizations on social media. [Join](#) GLSEN Chapter to get and stay connected to others in your community doing the work to support LGBTQI+ students. Connect with educators across the country in one of our educator networks. Learn more about [GLSEN's Educator Network](#).

Be a Game Changer

We are all at different stages of our inclusion journey. No matter where you are on the journey to greater LGBTQ+ inclusion, the important thing is that you are starting.

As an educator, you can create safe, affirming, and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ students. If your school doesn't already provide training or resources, you can connect with GLSEN or other community organizations for training and support. You don't have to do this work alone, you can also connect with other educators in your area, the GLSEN Chapter Network, and others who are already doing this work to share resources and best practices. Consider reaching out to supportive parents, caregivers, and families of LGBTQ+ students. They are some of the fiercest advocates and supporters, and can provide additional resources.

Your advocacy is powerful and necessary to ensure inclusive sports for LGBTQ+ students. Bring GLSEN's Changing the Game training and resources to your school and support students, physical education teachers, administrators, coaches, and families by becoming an Ambassador.

Ambassadors are committed to speaking out about anti-LGBTQ+ behavior and celebrating LGBTQ+ student athletes, and supporting inclusive LGBTQ+ policies. That's not all! Receive the Changing the Game newsletter, training and webinars, swag giveaways, and more!

To stay up to date on Changing the Game and to connect with other Educators and Coaches, join the [GLSEN Educator Spaces for Inclusion in Physical Education Sports & Play](#). GLSEN Educator Spaces are virtual forums for LGBTQ+ supportive educators to build community, share resources, and ask questions.

Key Terminology

Transgender and nonbinary students may use different terms to describe their lives and experiences of gender. Some trans youth prefer simply to be referred to as boys or girls except when their trans status is specifically relevant. These terms often mean different things or refer to different experiences of gender. Staff and educators should reflect and use the terms that students use to describe themselves, and avoid terms that make these students uncomfortable.

These definitions are provided not for the purpose of imposing labels, but rather to assist in understanding this guide. Students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves or their experiences.

Understanding the LGBTQ+ Acronym

At GLSEN, inclusivity and representation are central to our mission. The acronym LGBTQ+ is more than just a collection of letters—it's a powerful affirmation of the diverse identities within our community. While we primarily use LGBTQ+, it's crucial to recognize that this acronym is part of a broader spectrum, often represented as LGBTQIA2S+. The "+" symbol represents the ongoing expansion and inclusion of identities that challenge societal norms and binaries.

What Each Letter Represents

- **L: Lesbian** - A term used to describe women, non-binary individuals, and others who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to women or people of the same gender.
- **G: Gay** - Describes individuals who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. While often used by men, this term is also embraced by others who find resonance with its radical history and community.
- **B: Bisexual** - Describes individuals who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one gender. Bisexuality challenges binary thinking by acknowledging the fluidity of attraction and love.
- **T: Transgender** - An expansive term for individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender people resist and transcend the confines of rigid gender expectations in a constrictive society.
- **Q: Queer or Questioning**
 - **Queer** - A reclaimed term that embraces the radical defiance of societal norms around gender and sexuality. It is an umbrella term for those who reject conventional labels and embrace fluidity in their identity.
 - **Questioning** - Describes those who are in the process of exploring or understanding their sexual orientation or gender identity, acknowledging that identity is an evolving journey.
- **I: Intersex** - Refers to individuals whose bodies don't fit into traditional binary notions of male or female. Intersex people highlight the natural diversity of human bodies and challenge the medicalized narratives of binary gender.
- **A: Asexual and Aromantic**
 - **Asexual** - Describes those who do not experience sexual attraction, challenging the pervasive normativity of sexual attraction in society.
 - **Aromantic** - Describes individuals who do not experience romantic attraction, challenging traditional notions of romance and offering a broader understanding of relationships that transcend conventional romantic expectations.
- **2S: Two-Spirit** - A term used by some Indigenous North American cultures to describe a person who embodies both masculine and feminine spirits, or who holds a unique gender role within their community. Two-Spirit identities are deeply rooted in Indigenous traditions and resist colonial impositions of gender and sexuality.
- **+: Plus** - The "+" symbol represents the limitless possibilities of identities and experiences within our community, recognizing that the language we use must evolve to encompass all who challenge oppressive norms and binaries.

Our goal is to create a space where every person feels seen, heard, and valued. By understanding and using these additional terms, we can better support and uplift every member of our community.

Gender Identity: A person's deeply held knowledge of their own gender, which can include being a man, woman, another gender, or no gender. Gender identity is an innate part of a person's identity. One's gender identity may or may not align with society's expectations with the sex they were assigned at birth (male, female, or intersex).

Gender Expression: Expression of gender, whether through hair styles, makeup, or personal fashion, changes over the course of a person's lifetime.

Gender Nonconforming: A term sometimes used to describe people whose gender expression differs from social expectations, such as "feminine boys," "masculine girls," and people who are perceived as androgynous in some way. Being gender nonconforming is distinct from being transgender, though some trans people may consider themselves to be gender nonconforming. For example, a cisgender woman who has short hair and likes sports might consider herself gender nonconforming, but may not identify as transgender.

Nonbinary: A term used to refer to people whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female, including those who identify with a different gender, a combination of genders, or no gender. Nonbinary may be considered a subset of transgender or a distinct identity. Other similar or more specific terms may include genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, or Two-Spirit (for Native American students).

Cisgender: An adjective describing a person whose gender identity corresponds with the gender society typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. The majority of people are cisgender, while a minority are transgender. For example, a cisgender woman was assigned female at birth and identifies as female her gender as a woman.

Sexual Orientation: A person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to other people. This includes being straight, gay, bisexual, queer, asexual, or many other terms used to describe sexual orientation. This is different and distinct from gender identity. Transgender and nonbinary people may be straight, gay, lesbian, asexual, or any other sexual orientation.

Transition: The process in which a person begins to live according to their gender identity. Transition is a process that is different for everyone, and it may or may not involve specific medical treatments or changes to official documents. There is no one step or set of steps that an individual must undergo in order to have their gender identity affirmed and respected.

QTBIPOC: This is an acronym for Queer/Trans, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

