

# TIP SHEET

## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE: GENDER IDENTITY, GENDER EXPRESSION, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS

**Disclaimer:** Language is constantly evolving, and words concerning identity hold a specific importance for those that embrace a particular label. We encourage you to listen to and prioritize a person's self-understanding over standard definitions that often sacrifice complexity to be more concise.

### BEING INCLUSIVE

By using inclusive, unbiased, and affirming language, workplaces can show respect and dignity to people of different backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences. . How can you do this?

- Be mindful of the appropriate terms to use, e.g., LGBTQIA2S+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit, and the sign +. The + is meant to encompass the many different forms of gender and sexual diversity that are not captured within the acronym, like: pansexual, demisexual, non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer, agender, nonconforming, and more!
- Be willing to unlearn and relearn habitual ways of communicating through intentional practice. Something as seemingly innocuous like addressing a room with "ladies and gentlemen" ends up excluding anyone with a gender beyond the binary - a more inclusive alternative would be "distinguished guests" or "friends and colleagues."
- Gender and sexuality are fluid and can evolve over time. Try not to assume these dimensions of someone's personhood and leave space for discernment, change, and self-discovery as people determine what terms most resonate with who they are.



### DEFINITIONS

**Bi+:** An umbrella term encompassing the many different identities that refer to an experience of attraction to more than one gender or non-monosexuality: bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, polysexual, omnisexual, "no labels," and others. Though not the same, these identities face similar struggles and are vulnerable to biphobia.

**Cisgender:** Referring to a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. Often abbreviated as cis.

**Demisexual:** Referring to a person who only experiences sexual attraction after an emotional bond is formed.



**Gender:** “Gender refers to an individual’s personal and social identity as a man, woman or non-binary person ( a person who is not exclusively a man or a woman). A person’s gender may differ from their sex at birth, and from what is indicated on their current identification or legal documents such as their birth certificate, passport or driver’s licence. A person’s gender may change over time and some people may not identify with a specific gender.”(Statistics Canada, October 2021).

**Gender binary:** A social construction of gender in which there are two distinct and opposite genders determined by biological sex: male/masculine/men and female/feminine/women. The gender binary erases the experiences of intersex, non-binary, and Third Gender people.

**Gender expression:** How a person publicly presents or expresses their gender, including behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, voice, chosen name, and pronouns. Gender expression is generally made sense of on scales of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny which vary historically and by culture.

**Gender identity:** Each person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person’s sense of being a woman, a man, both or neither, or a gender beyond the gender binary (“The 519 Glossary of Terms – The 519”). This sense of self is separate from someone’s sex assigned at birth and is not the same as someone’s sexual orientation. Gender identity is how someone feels on the inside and is not always visible to others.

**Gender non-conforming:** Individuals who do not follow gender stereotypes based on the sex they were assigned at birth. They may identify and express themselves as “feminine men” or “masculine women”, or as androgynous, outside of the categories masculinity and femininity. People who are gender non-conforming may or may not identify as trans. (See Inclusive Language: Trans and gender-diverse people for the definition of each term).

**Genderqueer:** An identity term for a person who may not identify with and/or express themselves within the gender binary.

**Gender spectrum:** The representation of gender as a continuum, as opposed to a binary concept.

**LGBTQIA2S+:** “An acronym that represents many, but not all, groups specifically. The acronym refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and Two-Spirit people, and the “+” recognizes that there are many more identities as well.” (British Columbia Public Service, Words Matter: Guidelines on using inclusive language in the workplace, 2018, p.19.)

**Lesbian:** A woman who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to women.

**Gay:** A person who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of the same gender.



**Bisexual:** A person who is sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender.

**Trans:** An umbrella term referring to people who identify with a gender different than the sex they were assigned at birth. There are many communities that live under this umbrella and there is no single or universal experience or what it means to be trans.

**Queer:** A term for individuals whose gender identity/expression and/or sexuality does not conform to societal norms. This reclaimed term is increasingly being used as an inclusive umbrella term for the LGBTQIA2+ community.

**Questioning:** A period where a person explores and discerns their sexuality and/or gender. People of all ages may be questioning.

**Intersex:** Intersex is an umbrella term referring to people who carry variations in their reproductive and sexual anatomy that differ from what is traditionally considered “male” or “female.” These differences can be relating to external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, and other secondary sex characteristics that develop later in life. This is the preferred term to hermaphrodite.

**Asexual:** A term for people who either do not feel sexual attraction or do not feel desire for a sexual partner or partners. Unlike celibacy, which is a choice to abstain from sexual activity, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who asexual people are, just like other sexualities. Some asexual individuals may still have romantic attractions.

**Two-Spirit:** An umbrella term encompassing gender and sexual diversity in Indigenous communities. Two Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. There are many understandings of the term Two-Spirit and this English term does not resonate for everyone. Two Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous.

**“Lived” gender identity:** the gender a person internally feels (“gender identity” along the gender spectrum) and publicly expresses (“gender expression”) in their daily life, including at work, while shopping or accessing other services, in their housing environment, or in the broader community.

**Non-Binary:** Term referring to people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. There are several other terms used to describe gender identities outside of the man/woman binary such as genderqueer, non-conforming, gender expansive, agender, bigender, and more. Non-binary people may or may not identify as transgender.

**Out:** Out refers to a state of being after someone has publicly disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity. This process is usually known as “coming out.” Coming out is an ongoing process for LGBTQIA2S+ people who will make decisions throughout their life regarding which circles and spaces they feel comfortable sharing their identity in. “Outing” someone is when a group or individual shares the queer identity of another person without their consent, which is a violation of their privacy and can open them up to stigma, prejudice, and discrimination.

**Pansexual:** Describes a person who experiences enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to members of all gender identities/expressions: men, women, non-binary people, transgender individuals, and genderqueer folks.

**Sex Assigned at Birth:** The sex originally listed on someone’s birth certificate that is typically assigned at birth based on a medical examination of the body. Usually classified as either male or female, however more and more jurisdictions are recognizing intersex characteristics as well. This designation usually determines the gender a child will be raised as.

**Sexuality:** A person’s sexual, romantic, and emotional attractions, are not necessarily dependent on behaviour. Terms associated with sexuality include gay, lesbian, bisexual, fluid, pansexual, heterosexual, demisexual, asexual, and more!

**Transitioning:** Transitioning is the process of taking actions to live as one’s true gender identity. Transitioning is different for each individual, is not necessarily binary, and may or may not involve medical interventions like taking hormones or having surgery. Some people prefer the language “gender-affirming processes” to imply a less binary gender-related journey.

**Heterosexual:** A woman who only experiences sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to men or vice versa.

**TIP:** Avoid the term “sexual preference”, as the word “preference” suggests a choice and most people’s sexuality is not a choice; instead, use the phrase “sexual orientation” or the term “sexuality.”

## INSTEAD OF, PLEASE USE.....

Instead of...	Please use...
Bring your boyfriend or wife...	Bring your partner, significant other, or spouse...
Homosexual	Gay; gay man or lesbian; gay person/people
Homosexual couple	Couple or if necessary “gay/lesbian/queer/same-gender couple”
Hi Guys!	Hi Everyone, Hi You All, or Hi Folks
Gay community	LGBTQIA2S+ community

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## INSTEAD OF, PLEASE USE.....

Closeted	Someone who is “not out” about being LGBTQ2S+
Openly LGBTQIA2S+...	Out
Gay marriage or same-sex marriage	Marriage equality or marriage for same-sex couples
Gay lifestyle, homosexual lifestyle	LGBTQ2S+ people and their lives
Two-spirited	Two-Spirit
Transgendered, Transsexual, Transgenders	Transgender, transgender people, transgender community
Born a man/born a woman	Assigned male, female, or intersex at birth
Sex change/sex reassignment	Transition(ing)/Gender-Affirming processes
Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.	Mr., Ms., Mrs., Mx., etc.
His or her or his/her	Singular they or passive voice (e.g. Their responsibilities include... or Job responsibilities include...)
Females	Women
Men and Women, both genders	All genders
Ladies and gentlemen	Distinguished guests
Their preferred pronouns are...	Their pronouns are...
Women who breastfeed	People who breastfeed or chestfeed
Feminine hygiene product	Menstrual hygiene product
Mothers and fathers	Parents, guardians, and/or caregivers
Aunts and uncles	Aunts, uncles, and piblings
Nieces and nephews	Nieces, nephews, and niblings
Straight	Heterosexual



## GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

### Use of pronouns

Pronouns, like names, are a part of someone’s identity and getting them right matters in treating fellow team members with respect and dignity. Pronouns are one way we express gender and how others perceive our gender.

Research shows that people who are misgendered experience increased feelings of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and worse. Canadian courts have also ruled that misgendering is a human rights violation.



We cannot assume someone's pronouns based on their voice, name, or external appearance. These are never enough to tell us how someone truly feels inside. Encourage proactive pronoun sharing among leaders and teammates to allow people to share their pronouns on their terms. You can share your pronouns in introductions, on name tags, in email signatures, in website biographies, and other strategic locations.

Pronoun sharing should never be mandatory because some transgender or non-binary people may not be ready to share their gender or might fear discrimination if they do so. In place of mandates, embrace reciprocity - share your pronouns to proactively create space for others if they feel comfortable sharing too.

**TIP:** If you do not know someone's pronouns yet, refer to them exclusively by their chosen name or gender-inclusive pronouns like the singular they.

**Did you know?** Employees have a right to request an accommodation based on gender identity and/or gender expression.

In 2012, gender identity and gender expression were added as separate grounds in the Ontario Human Rights Code. An accommodation might include changing employment documents to reflect the gender of the person's choosing.

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