

# understanding your sexuality and sexual identity

(The way you want to describe your sexuality, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.)

Sexuality is about how you see and express yourself romantically and sexually. There are lots of words people use to describe their sexuality, many of which are captured by the term LGBTIQA+.

## What does LGBTIQA+ mean?

- **L** – lesbian (a female who is attracted to females)
- **G** – gay (someone who is attracted to people of the same gender)
- **B** – bisexual (someone who is attracted to people of more than one gender)
- **T** – transgender or trans people (someone whose personal and gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth)
- **I** – intersex (someone who is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that falls outside the typical definitions of ‘male’ and ‘female’)
- **Q** – queer (this term has many different meanings, but it has been reclaimed by many as a proud term to describe sexuality or gender that is anything other than cisgender and/or heterosexual)
- **A** – asexual (someone who has low or no sexual attraction to any gender, but may have a romantic attraction towards another person)/aromantic (someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others)
- **+** – (this acknowledges there are many other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities).



The language around LGBTIQA+ has changed over time and will continue to evolve as society further develops understanding of people’s different experiences. This is why the ‘+’ is so important.

## What if I’m not sure of my sexuality?

It’s common for young people to be unsure of their sexuality (questioning) or to experience fluid sexuality (when someone’s sexuality changes over time). Many young people prefer to identify as queer, as it’s broader and does not place someone into a category.

Others might not like the idea of these terms and don’t want to identify their sexuality at all and that’s OK too. It’s important to remember that your identity is yours. The way you want to describe it, and who you share that with, is completely up to you.

## How do I explain it to others?

**Coming out or inviting others in.** The idea of coming out or sharing your sexuality with others can feel really scary.



Some people prefer to think of the experience as inviting others in rather than coming out.

Some people, due to safety, might choose not to share their sexuality with certain people around them. Everyone’s journey looks different.

It's hard to know what other people will think or how they'll react when you talk to them about your sexuality. Unfortunately, it's not something you can control.

Not all people will have a consistently positive experience if they come out. Here are some things to consider when discussing your sexuality with others.

- Have the conversation when you feel ready.
- It's up to you to choose who you want to tell and what you want to tell them.
- You may want to suss people out first – perhaps by asking them for their thoughts on an LGBTIQ+ topic, like a TV show with a queer character.
- Have the conversation when everyone is comfortable and relaxed.
- Expect a range of reactions. People might surprise you.
- Give it time. Some people might respond better when they've thought about it for a while.
- Try to keep calm, even if the other person is not.
- If you need to call a time-out, have a plan in place. You could say something like, 'I still want to talk more about this but we're too worked up at the moment'.
- Responses can range from tolerance, to acceptance, to celebration. There may be others who don't accept your sexual identity no matter how you share it or how much time goes by. This can be painful, especially if it's someone you love or respect. But remember, you don't need anyone's approval or permission to be yourself.

**Dealing with discrimination.** If you're being unfairly treated because of your sexuality, this is called discrimination. Although discrimination is illegal in Australia, many young people still experience unfair treatment. If you have been affected by discrimination or any of these negative experiences, it's important to reach out for support.

## Taking care of yourself

People exploring their sexuality may be faced with challenges that can affect their mental health and wellbeing, such as:

- other people making them feel 'different'
- fear of rejection
- bullying
- discrimination such as homophobia and biphobia (verbal or physical)
- feeling pressure to deny or change their sexuality
- worries about coming out to friends and family members
- feeling unsupported or misunderstood
- being excluded or left out at school, work or in the community
- a desire to suppress or avoid unwanted preferences.

If someone makes you feel badly about your sexuality, there are things you can do to take care of yourself.

## Find a supportive community

It's important to remember that there is a strong LGBTIQ+ community to embrace and support you. Finding these communities can be tough, but be assured that they're out there! A simple Google search can help you find local support groups. Everyone deserves to be surrounded by people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.

## Reach out for help

If you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life is being affected, then it's time to ask for help. A trusted family member or friend, teacher or coach can help or recommend someone to talk to.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing by:

- visiting the headspace website for tips for healthy headspace
- connecting with the LGBTIQ+ community through social groups and online communities
- checking out online support services, such as Qlife or ReachOut.



**If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)**



**If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.**

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