



the facts:  
navigating life



headspace  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

# understanding your sexuality and diverse sexual identity

**Sexuality is about how you see your identity 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 **LGBTIQ+** (which also includes gender identity).**



## What does **LGBTIQ+** mean?



**Lesbian**  
Someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to other people who identify as women.



**Gay**  
Someone who is attracted to people who identify as the same gender.



**Bisexual**  
Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not necessarily assume there are only two genders.



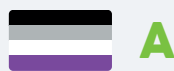
**Transgender or trans people**  
Someone whose personal and gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth.



**Intersex**  
Someone who is born with chromosomes, reproductive organs, or genitals that don't fit the narrow medical or social expectations of what it means to have a male or female body.



**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.



**Asexual**  
Someone who has low or no sexual attraction to any gender, but may have a romantic attraction towards another person.



**+**  
This acknowledges there are many other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

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

It's common for young people to be unsure of their sexuality (exploring) or to experience fluid sexuality (when someone's sexuality changes over time). Some 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 your right. 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 it as inviting others in rather than coming out. Some people, due to safety, might choose not to share their sexuality with certain people. Everyone's journey looks different, and everyone has the right to be treated with respect.

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 positive experience if they come out.

### Here are some things to consider when discussing your sexuality with others:

- Have the conversation when/if 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 LGBTIQA+ topic, like a TV show with a queer character.
- Have the conversation when everyone is comfortable and relaxed in a place that is safe for you.
- Expect a range of reactions. People might surprise you.
- Give it time. Some people might respond better after 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'
- rejection/fear of rejection
- bullying
- discrimination such as homophobia, biphobia and/or transphobia (verbal or physical)
- feeling pressure to deny or change their sexuality
- worries about coming out to others
- feeling unsupported or misunderstood
- being excluded or left out at school, uni, TAFE, 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 LGBTIQA+ 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 or online communities. Everyone deserves to have people who understand them, so it's useful to meet people with similar experiences to you.



## Getting support

If you're finding it hard to cope or your social, work or studies are being affected, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor or health service.

Look after your mental health and wellbeing by:

- visiting the headspace website for tips for healthy headspace ([headspace.org.au/tips](https://headspace.org.au/tips))
- connecting with the LGBTIQA+ community through social groups and online communities
- checking out online support services, such as Qlife or ReachOut
- connecting with qheadspace: chat anonymously with other young people who identify as LGBTIQA+ and ask questions of our headspace queer peers (12-25 years).



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE 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://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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