

# understanding sexuality and sexual identity

Sexuality is about how you see and express yourself romantically and sexually. There are lots of ways to describe sexuality (and gender). Many of these are captured by the term LGBTIQA+.

## What does LGBTIQA+ mean?

- **L** – lesbian (someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to other people who identify as women)
- **G** – gay (someone who is attracted to people who identify as 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 chromosomes, reproductive organs or genitals that don't fit the narrow medical or social expectations for what it means to have a male or female body)
- **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)
- **+** – (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?

You might be unsure of your sexuality (questioning) or experience fluid sexuality (when someone's sexuality changes over time). Some prefer to identify as queer, as it's broader and doesn't place someone into a specific category.

Others might not like any of these terms or don't want to identify their sexuality at all and that's OK too. It's important to remember that your identity is yours; and the way you want to describe it, and who you share that with, is completely up to you. Your sexuality can change over time.

While they are sometimes talked about together, sexual identity is different to gender identity.

## Your sexuality and other people

Unfortunately, some people may have difficulty accepting others who are different to them. This means that some people exploring their sexuality are faced with challenges that may affect their mental health and wellbeing. If someone is making you feel badly about yourself, remember there is nothing wrong with you.

Some common challenges you might experience include:

- other people making you feel 'different'
- fear of rejection
- bullying (verbal, physical or online)
- discrimination such as homophobia and biphobia (note, this is illegal in Australia)
- feeling pressure to deny or change your 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.

Facing challenges like these may lead to a higher risk of things like depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol use, self harm and suicide.

It's important to remember that your sexual identity does not cause mental health difficulties; it's due to a higher rate of social exclusion, isolation and discrimination. There are many LGBTIQ+ young people who don't experience distress about their identity, living happy fulfilling lives.

### Coming out or inviting others in

The idea of coming out or sharing your sexuality might feel scary. Some prefer to think of the experience as inviting others in rather than coming out. When you're ready, it's for you to decide who you invite into this personal part of your life. It's OK if you change your mind later.

To feel comfortable, some feel it's important to share this part of themselves with everyone in their life, while others prefer to share their sexuality only with their closest friends and family – or just the people they love.

Some people, due to safety, might choose not to share their sexuality with certain people around them. This doesn't make their experience less valid or them 'less queer.' Everyone's journey of coming out or not coming out looks different.

Everyone wants to have a positive experience if they come out, but sometimes it doesn't happen like that.

There are times when your right to invite others in on your own terms can be taken away from you. It might be that someone reads a message you've sent to someone else, makes an assumption about you, or sees you with a partner when you didn't want them to. This can be hard.

In these situations, it's important to surround yourself with people you trust who can support you. It's also important to know that no matter how you identify with your sexuality, there are people out there who will accept you for exactly who you are. If you're finding this situation tricky, it's a good idea to take action.

For more information on what to consider when coming out visit [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au)

### Finding 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! Everyone deserves to be surrounded by people who understand them. We have more advice on how to find your own community on our website.<sup>1</sup>

### How can I get help?

There are many things you can do to look after your mental health and wellbeing.

See our tips for healthy headspace on our website at [headspace.org.au/tips](https://headspace.org.au/tips), and consider connecting with the LGBTIQ+ community through social groups and online communities.

If you're finding it hard to cope and your social, work or school life is being affected then it's a good idea to talk to someone. A trusted family member or friend, an Elder, teacher or coach can help support you or recommend someone to talk to.

If you ever feel unable to cope because of intense emotions or if you have thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately.

### For immediate help contact triple zero (000) if it is an emergency

#### National 24/7 crisis services:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467 or [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://suicidecallbackservice.org.au)
- **beyondblue:** 1300 224 636 or [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au)

#### Additional youth support services 12-25 years

- **headspace:** visit [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au) to find your nearest centre or contact eheadspace, our phone and online service (12-25 years)
- **Qheadspace:** Chat anonymously with other young people who identify as LGBTIQ+ and ask questions of our headspace queer peers
- **Qlife:** Chat to a volunteer LGBTIQ+ counsellor over the phone or through web-chat every day from 3pm to midnight (all ages)
- **ReachOut:** (under 25 years). Find a gender diverse support services or social network in your state
- **Minus18:** Have lots of resources about gender diversity for young people and their families



**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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