

AN INTRODUCTION TO LGBTIQ+

We are often taught that everyone is either born a girl or a boy, and then expected to act and identify based on what is between your legs. This might be fine for some, but doesn't actually work for everyone.

This tip sheet will help you understand the difference between sex, our bodies, sexuality, gender and assigned gender at birth. It is important to keep in mind that everyone has the right to identify using the language that fits for them.

Sexuality

Sexuality is how people experience and express themselves as sexual or asexual beings.

- Sexual orientation is who a person is attracted to romantic (who you love) or sexually desire (who you want to kiss or be physical with).
- Sexual behaviour is how a person chooses to enact their sexual attraction (dating, hooking up or having a relationship). You should always have consent before enacting and participating in sexual behaviours with another person.
- Sexual identity is the personalised language used for to describe themselves, (lesbian, gay, bisexual). People can often have a different identity publicly to what they do privately.

“These parts of ourselves sometimes take time to figure out and can also change, though that doesn't make any part of you less valid”

Gender

Gender refers to a person's innate identity of self. How a person expresses themselves is described as their gender expression. A person's gender identity and how they express themselves, may change over the course of their life.

- Gender identity is the personalised language used to describe themselves (Transgender, non-binary, gender fluid). Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex at birth or can differ from it.
- Gender expression is how a person chooses to express their masculinity, femininity, a combination of the two or neither (how we dress, our pronouns and act). Gender expression can reflect a person's gender identity, but this is not always the case. It is best to never assume a person's gender identity, based on how they express themselves.

Jason is a person with a disability, seeking assistance from an advocacy organisation. He is seeking help because the doctor he usually sees refused to give him a HIV rapid test. The Doctor has stated that Jason, a wheelchair user, couldn't possibly have had unprotected sex with another man and shouldn't worry about getting tested. Jason informs you that he is transgender and doesn't know much about safe sex.

What should you consider when assisting Jason?

Sex

Sex is often defined legally (birth certificates, passports), institutionally (intake forms, documentation eg Medicare/centrelink) and our understanding of a person's physical body (physical appearance, tone of voice). But often, we have limited access to change legal documentation, address institutional discrimination and often guess what other people's bodies or physical characteristics are and assume their sex as a result.

As a population, we are hugely diverse, with some individuals (intersex people) are born with sex characteristics that do not fit the medical norms for female or male bodies. These variations can sometimes only become apparent at many different life stages, including prenatal, at birth, early childhood, at puberty, and later in life – for example when trying to conceive a child.

Remember that sex and gender are different. That there is no wrong or right way for a person to express their gender, regardless of what body they have.

I have to choose between two different services, either one that meets my LGBTIQ needs and identity or disability services, and I can not find services who include, respect and respond to the whole of me

Thinking about Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the way we all are made up of diverse yet interlinked identities. Discussing intersectionality encourages us to think about our experiences of discrimination and oppression due to social attitudes, systems and structures in the communities around us. Attitudes and unconscious bias based on sexism, racism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersexism or ableism can lead to further experiences of inequality and exclusion. How does your intake processes and assessment forms recognise and address intersectionality?

Jessica is a young queer deaf woman, she has approach you seeking assistance from a advocacy organisation. Jessica lives in rural Victoria and has informed you that she is feeling isolated. Jessica is also having difficulties coming out to her family and friends, as she was never taught sign language to describe her relationship and sexuality, and her family might not understand her. She has also indicated that this difficulty is starting to impact the way she communicates and navigates issues with her doctor and NDIS provider.

What should you consider when assisting Jessica?

Language

Language in the LGBTIQ+ communities is constantly changing. The following terms are not an exhaustive list to describe the whole LGBTIQ+ community. It is important to understand that language around identity is personal and there is no right or wrong way for a person to self identify.

- Lesbian: A woman who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other women. Both transgender and cisgender women may identify as lesbians.
- Gay: A person who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people of the same gender. Traditionally this term was used for men, however it is now widely used by women who are sexually and romantically attracted to other women. Both cisgender and transgender people may identify as gay.
- Bisexual: A person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to individuals of their own and other genders.
- Transgender: A person whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth.
- Intersex: People who are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features don't wholly fit within the sex binary.