Being an Ally to a LGBTQ+ Adolescent

WHAT IS LGBTQ+?

Talking about sexual orientation and gender identity can feel awkward if you aren't familiar with some of the words or are worried about using them incorrectly. An important part of being an ally is learning the correct words to use.

The letters LGBTQ stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning. The plus sign is used to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of the LGBTQ+ community.

UNDERSTAND THE TERMS:

Lesbian - term for a woman emotionally, sexually or romantically attracted to other women

Gay - sometimes used to refer to a man who is emotionally, sexually and romantically attracted to men; also can be used as a generic term to refer to any person attracted to members of the same gender

Bisexual - term for persons who are emotionally, sexually or romantically attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity

Transgender (Trans) - an inclusive term for anyone whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth

Queer - catch-all term used to refer to many people whose identities and orientations are counter to the mainstream, including persons who do not identify as exclusively heterosexual, and persons who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities

Questioning - people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Definitions adapted from those included in the Human Rights Campaign's *Glossary of Terms* which can be found at www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms

COMING OUT is the process of telling one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to others.

WHAT IS HETERO-NORMATIVITY?

This is a big word that refers to the assumption in our culture that heterosexuality is the preferred sexual orientation, and a that relationship between a man and a woman is "normal" and all other relationships are not.

LANGUAGE EVOLVES

It is always good to remember that language is constantly evolving and changing. Words can mean different things to different people or at different points in history. To avoid misunderstanding, it is helpful to ask your loved one what they mean by certain terms and identities to best understand and support them

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MORE TERMS TO KNOW:

Ally - a term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people

Agender - a person who does not identify as any gender

Asexual - a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction or who experiences attraction but doesn't feel the need to act on that attraction sexually

Cisgender - a person whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth

Demigender - a person who has only partial identification or connection to a particular gender

Gender-fluid - a person who moves between genders or has a gender that changes over time

Genderqueer - someone whose gender can't be categorized as exclusively man or woman, or exclusively masculine or feminine

Graygender - someone without a gender identity who feels a sense of loss or lack due to its absence

Intersex - someone who, due to a variety of factors, has reproductive or sexual anatomy that do not seem to fit the typical definitions for the female or male sex

Non-binary - a person whose gender identity does not conform to the gender binary, which is erroneous idea that only two distinct and opposite genders exist, male and female.

Pansexual - someone who has potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any or all genders

Polyamorous - open to having multiple consensual romantic or sexual relationships at one time

Sapiosexual - a person who is attracted to intelligence regardless of the individual's gender identity

Two-spirit - a gender role believed to be a common, acknowledged, accepted, and praised gender classification among most First Nation communities, dating back centuries

Definitions adapted from those included in the *LGBTQ+ Glossary of Terms* found at itgetsbetter.org/glossary/, the *Guide to Gender Identity Terms* found at www.npr.org/2021/06/02/996319297/gender-identity-pronouns-expression-guide-lgbtq, and at www.healthline.com/health/differentgenders

TIPS FOR PARENTS:

It is important to provide an environment in which a child can feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings related to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Generally it is better to wait until the child is ready to come to you rather than to confront your child about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

If you are curious about whether your child has a significant other, instead of asking if they have a boyfriend or girlfriend, some safer ways to ask include:

- Is there someone you are interested in?
- Is there someone you have a crush on?

TRUSTED ADULTS:

Young people who are questioning or exploring their identity or orientation benefit from having an adult in whom they can confide. Trusted adults may include parents, teachers, coaches, mentors or other members of the family.

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