



Sexual Orientations and Gender Diversities

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to assist those wanting to better understand and support members of the rainbow community.

One of the first ways to support members of the rainbow community is to begin using inclusive language. This guide will provide an overview of what inclusive language is and why its use is important in demonstrating respect for a person's individual expression and identity.

The document will cover the differences and definitions of sexual orientation, intersex, and gender diversity. We will explore ways in which we can show respect and support for our non-binary siblings

We will also cover the current pronouns used by many members of the rainbow community. Pronouns continue to be a fluid means for self-identification and expression therefore this may or may not be an entire list of pronouns used in the future.

Lastly we will become familiar with common terms used by the rainbow community to identify, express and better define how we present to the world in which we live.

Note: This document is a living document in draft form and will become part of Melbourne Inclusive Church's resource library.

Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is a way of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of bodies, genders and relationships. People express their gender and sexuality in different ways. People can have different biological sex characteristics.

Inclusive language ensures that no one is left out of our conversations. This includes both when we are communicating directly with someone, and when describing someone who isn't present. Inclusive language acknowledges the diversity of people.

Inclusive language defined

Nelson Mandela the former president of South Africa who led the country out of apartheid, once said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

Words matter, Mandela was essentially saying. More specifically, the nuanced way we use language—with a mindfulness for the perspectives and feelings of others—shows respect and understanding or a lack thereof.

The idea of inclusive language is rooted in these ideas. It embraces language that is free from stereotypes, subtle discrimination, and negative messages.

Inclusive language is therefore defined as language that "acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities." (Linguistic Society of America, 2022)

Do not make assumptions

Do not assume that everyone you meet is heterosexual. Avoid using hetero-normal language such as "wife" or "husband". Choose instead words and phrases such as "partner", "parents", "relationship". These are examples of inclusive language.

Sex, Gender, Sexuality, what is the difference?

Sex defined

Sex refers to a person's biological sex characteristics. This has historically been understood as either female or male. However, we now know that some people are born with natural variations to sex characteristics.

Gender defined

Gender is part of how you understand who you are and how you interact with other people. Many people understand their gender as being female or male. Some people understand their gender as a combination of these or neither. Gender can be expressed in different ways, such as through behaviour or physical appearance.

Sexuality or sexual orientation defined

A person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to others. A person's gender does not necessarily mean they have particular sex characteristics or a particular sexuality, or vice versa.

Sexual Orientations

Lesbian

This refers to a woman who is romantically and, or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay

This refers to someone who is romantically and, or sexually attracted to people of the same gender identity as themselves. This term is often used to describe men who are attracted to other men, but some women and gender diverse people may describe themselves as gay.

Bisexual

This refers to a person who is romantically and, or sexually attracted to people of their own gender and other genders.

Asexual

This refers to someone who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience romantic attraction towards others.

Pansexual

This refers a person who is romantically and, or sexually attracted to individuals of all genders, including non-binary genders.

Queer

Queer is often used as an umbrella term for diverse genders or sexualities. Some people use queer to describe their own gender and, or sexuality if other terms do not fit.

Intersex

Intersex

Intersex people are born with physical or biological sex characteristics (such as sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns and/or chromosomal patterns) that are more diverse than stereotypical definitions for male or female bodies. For some people these traits are apparent prenatally or at birth, while for others they emerge later in life, often at puberty (see [UN definition^{\[6\]}](#)).

It is estimated that 1.7% of children born in Australia are born with an intersex variation. There are many different intersex variations, which may or may not be evident at birth, and which have their own terms.

For more information about intersex variations and to view the Darlington Statement click here: <https://darlington.org.au/statement>

Gender Diversity

Transgender

Trans (transgender)

A trans (short for transgender) person is someone whose gender does not exclusively align with the one they were assigned at birth. Trans can be used as an umbrella term, but not everyone uses it to describe themselves. For example, a man who was assigned female at birth might refer to himself as 'a trans man', 'a man with a trans history' or just 'a man'. It is important to use the terms someone uses to describe themselves. Transition or affirmation refers to the process where a trans or gender diverse person takes steps to socially and, or physically feel more aligned with their gender. This process differs between people. Some people may change how they interact with others. Other people may change their appearance or seek medical assistance to better express their gender.

Non-Binary

Non-Binary Defined

Most people – including most transgender people – are either male or female. But some people don't neatly fit into the categories of "man" or "woman," or "male" or "female." For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female. Some people don't identify with any gender. Some people's gender changes over time.

People whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with **non-binary** being one of the most common. Other terms include **genderqueer**, **agender**, **bigender**, and more. None of these terms mean exactly the same thing – but all speak to an experience of gender that is not simply male or female.

Why "Non-Binary"?

Some societies – like ours – tend to recognize just two genders, male and female. The idea that there are only two genders is sometimes called a "gender binary," because binary means "having two parts" (male and female). Therefore, "non-binary" is one term people use to describe genders that don't fall into one of these two categories, male or female.

Basic Facts about Non-Binary People

Non-binary people are nothing new. Non-binary people aren't confused about their gender identity or following a new fad – non-binary identities have been recognized for millennia by cultures and societies around the world.

Some, but not all, non-binary people undergo medical procedures to make their bodies more congruent with their gender identity. While not all non-binary people need medical care to live a fulfilling life, it's critical and even life-saving for many.

Most transgender people are not non-binary. While some transgender people are non-binary, most transgender people have a gender identity that is either male or female, and should be treated like any other man or woman.

Being non-binary is not the same thing as being intersex. Intersex people have anatomy or genes that don't fit typical definitions of male and female. Most intersex people identify as either men or women. Non-binary people are usually not intersex: they're usually born with bodies that may fit typical definitions of male and female, but their innate gender identity is something other than male or female.

How to Be Respectful and Supportive of Non-Binary People

It isn't as hard as you might think to be supportive and respectful of non-binary people, even if you have just started to learn about them.

You don't have to understand what it means for someone to be non-binary to respect them. Some people haven't heard a lot about non-binary genders or have trouble understanding them, and that's okay. But identities that some people don't understand still deserve respect.

Use the name a person asks you to use. This is one of the most critical aspects of being respectful of a non-binary person, as the name you may have been using may not reflect their gender identity. Don't ask someone what their old name was.

Try not to make any assumptions about people's gender. You can't tell if someone is non-binary simply by looking at them, just like how you can't tell if someone is transgender just by how they look.

If you're not sure what pronouns someone uses, ask. Different non-binary people may use different pronouns. Many non-binary people use "they" while others use "he" or "she," and still others use other pronouns. Asking whether someone should be referred to as "he," "she," "they," or another pronoun may feel awkward at first, but is one of the simplest and most important ways to show respect for someone's identity.

Advocate for non-binary friendly policies. It's important for non-binary people to be able to live, dress and have their gender respected at work, at school and in public spaces.

Understand that, for many non-binary people, figuring out which bathroom to use can be challenging. For many non-binary people, using either the women's or the men's room might feel unsafe, because others may verbally harass them or even physically attack them. Non-binary people should be supported by being able to use the restroom that they believe they will be safest in.

Talk to non-binary people to learn more about who they are. There's no one way to be non-binary. The best way to understand what it's like to be non-binary is to talk with non-binary people and listen to their stories.

Pronouns

Pronouns are commonly used to describe a person's gender identity. We often do this without really thinking about it, replacing a person's name with a gendered pronoun. For example: "Lexi has got gig tonight. She is amazing!"

Some pronouns are non-gendered such as they/them/theirs. Non-binary people often, although not always, use these pronouns. Some people use other terms or simply prefer us to use their name. For example: "Max is a genius gamer. They want to become a professional." Or "Max is a genius gamer. Max wants to become a professional."

For trans, gender diverse and non-binary people, it's really important that we use the name and pronoun that reflects who they are. We know from research that young people who have their names and pronouns respected have better health and wellbeing outcomes if their family and community adopt their name, pronoun and gender identity. Mistakes will happen, but sincere effort is always appreciated.

Here are some great resources on pronouns and why they are important.

The Pronoun Lowdown by Nevo Zisin | What Are Pronouns And Why Are They So Important?

Minus18 | International Pronouns Day

Additional Terminology

Gender Identity

A person's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Expression

The external presentation of one's gender as expressed through one's name, clothing, behaviour, hairstyle or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics typically being associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Gender Diverse

A term to describe people who do not conform to their society or culture's expectations for males and females. Being transgender is one way of being gender diverse, but not all gender diverse people are transgender.

Assigned male at birth

A person who was thought to be male when born and initially raised as a boy.

Assigned female at birth

A person who was thought to be female when born and initially raised as a girl.

Trans or transgender

A term for someone whose gender identity is not congruent with their sex assigned at birth.

Cisgender

A term for someone whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

Trans boy/male/man

A term to describe someone who was assigned female at birth who identifies as a boy/male/man.

Trans girl/female/woman

A term to describe someone who was assigned male at birth who identifies as a girl/female/woman.

Non-binary

A term to describe someone who doesn't identify exclusively as male or female.

Gender fluid

A person whose gender identity varies over time.

Agender

A term to describe someone who does not identify with any gender.

Brotherboy and Sistergirl

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may use these terms in a number of different contexts, however they can be used to refer to trans and gender diverse people. Brotherboy typically refers to masculine spirited people who were assigned female at birth. Sistergirl typically refers to feminine spirited people who were assigned male at birth.

Gender Dysphoria

A term that describes the distress experienced by a person due to incongruence between their gender identity and their sex assigned at birth.

Gender | Social Transition

The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which a person changes their physical sex characteristics via hormonal intervention and/or surgery to more closely align with their gender identity.

Misgender(ing)

To misgender is to refer to a person using a pronoun that does not reflect that person's gender identity. To purposefully or persistently misgender someone is a sign of great disrespect and can do terrible harm to that person.

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