

# Gender identity and sexual orientation



This information sheet is about biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation.



*Financial contribution from*

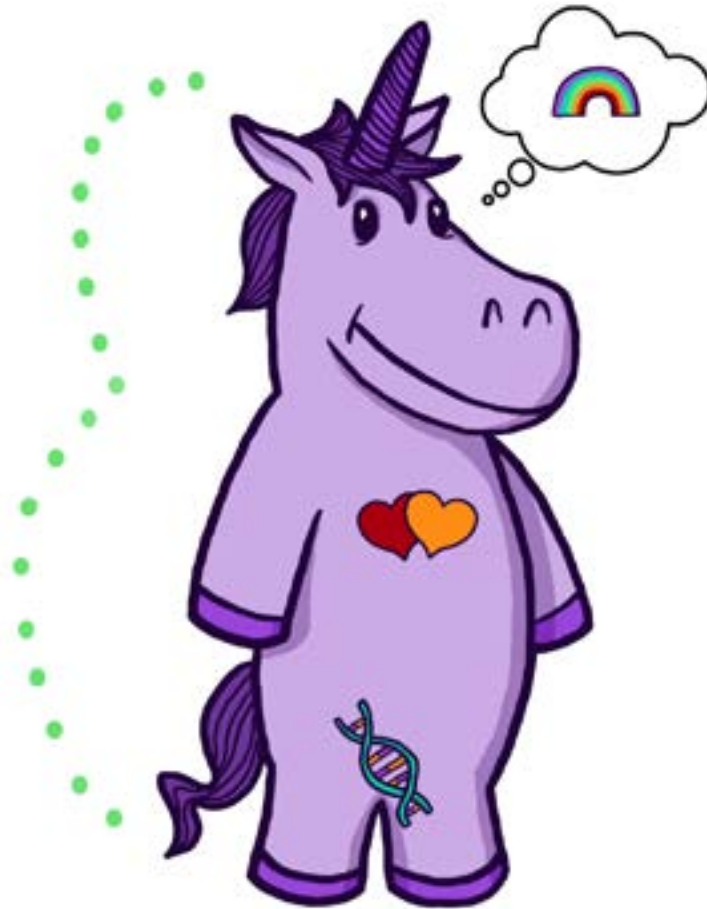


Health Canada Santé Canada

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

**sieccan**  
Sex Information & Education Council of Canada  
Conseil d'information & d'éducation sexuelles du Canada

## Important words to know



**Biological sex:** When you were born, the doctor checked to see what body parts you have and then decided if you are male or female or intersex. Your sex is what you are because of the body parts you have.



**Gender identity:** Your gender is your feeling of being a girl or a woman, a boy or a man, or gender queer. Gender identity is who you are because of how you feel.



**Sexual orientation:** Sexual orientation is about the gender of people you are attracted to sexually and emotionally. It is also possible to not like anyone sexually or emotionally.

Adapted from Trans Student Education Resources, 2015. “The Gender Unicorn.” <http://www.transstudent.org/gender>

There are different words you can use to talk about different gender identities and sexual orientations (2SLGBTQINA+). Here are some examples:

<b>Gender identity</b>	
	<b>Agender:</b> When a person does not have a gender.
	<b>Cisgender:</b> When a person's gender is the same as their sex assigned at birth.  For example, when a person identifies as a man and their sex assigned at birth was male.
	<b>Genderfluid:</b> When a person's gender shifts over time.
	<b>Genderqueer or gender nonconforming:</b> When a person's gender is both man and woman, neither man nor woman, or something completely outside of the man and woman categories.
	<b>Man or boy</b>
	<b>Nonbinary:</b> When a person's gender is not man nor woman.
	<b>Transgender:</b> When a person's gender is different from their sex assigned at birth.  For example, when a person identifies as a woman and their sex assigned at birth was male.
	<b>Two-Spirit:</b> An Indigenous word for people who are a mix of man and woman spirits. This word comes from Indigenous people and should only be used by Indigenous people.
	<b>Woman or girl</b>

## Sexual orientation



**Asexual (Ace):** When a person is not attracted to anyone sexually. Some asexual people want romantic relationships.



**Aromantic (Aro):** When a person is not attracted to anyone emotionally. Some aromantic people want sexual experiences.



**Bisexual:** When a person is attracted to two or more genders.



**Demisexual:** When a person is only attracted to someone sexually after they feel close to the person emotionally.



**Gay:** When a person is attracted to someone of the same gender. The word “gay” is often used to talk about men who are attracted to other men.



**Heterosexual:** When a man is attracted to women or a woman is attracted to men.



**Lesbian:** When a woman is attracted to women.



**Pansexual:** When a person is attracted to people of any gender.



**Queer:** When a person is not heterosexual.

# What are pronouns?

Pronouns are short words that can be used to talk about people, that says something about their gender. Everyone uses pronouns.

Here are some examples of pronouns: they, them, she, her, he, him.

## How to use pronouns:



You can decide what your pronouns are and ask other people to use your pronouns when they talk about you.



If you do not know someone's pronouns, you can ask them for their pronouns. For example, you can say "I use the pronouns she/her. What are your pronouns?"



Not everyone will want to share their pronouns. If someone is not comfortable telling you their pronouns, do not pressure them to tell you.

If you want to talk about a person, but do not know their pronouns, you can:

1. Use their name when you are talking about them.
2. Use a gender-neutral pronoun like "they/them" when you are talking about them.

## Figuring out your gender identity or sexual orientation

Some people know right away what their gender identity or sexual orientation is. Other people need time to figure these things out. That is okay!

It is also okay to feel one way right now and feel a different way later.

### If you are not sure what your gender identity or sexual orientation is, you can try new things to help you figure it out:



You can try new clothing or hairstyles.



You could try using a different name.



You could try using different pronouns.



You could try going on dates with different kinds of people.



You could try learning more about different gender identities and sexual orientations.



You can watch TV shows with positive 2SLGBTQINA+ representation to see which characters you identify with.

**If you are going to try these things, it is important to think about your safety. It is safer to try out these things around people who are more accepting of different gender identities and sexual orientations.**

**In the section below, you will find information about how to tell if a person will be accepting of different gender identities and sexual orientations.**



Figuring out your identity can be difficult. It can help to talk to other people going through the same thing. At the end of this information sheet, you will find some resources that can be helpful.

# Telling other people about your gender identity or sexual orientation

It can sometimes be difficult to tell other people your gender identity or sexual orientation. Sometimes we call this “coming out.”

## It is up to you to choose:



If you want to tell other people



When you want to tell other people



Who you want to tell

**It is safe to tell people you know will be accepting of different gender identities and sexual orientations.**



## Some ways to tell if a person will be accepting:



The person has a gender identity or sexual orientation that is like yours.



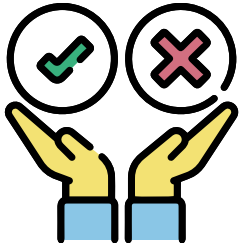
The person says they are accepting of different gender identities and sexual orientations.



The person has friends who have different gender identities and sexual orientations.



The person says positive things about people with different gender identities and sexual orientations.



If you are not sure if the person you want to tell will be accepting of you, it is important to think about what can happen if you tell them about your gender identity or sexual orientation. What are the good things that can happen and what are the possible bad things that might happen? This will help you choose if you want to tell them or not.

Here are some examples of good things and possible bad things:

Good things	Possible bad things
 <p>You can be open about who you like and how you feel.</p>	<p>Someone you thought was a friend will stop talking to you.</p> 
 <p>It can help you feel good about who you are.</p>	<p>People who are not accepting of you might treat you badly, like bully you or harass you.</p> 
 <p>You can meet other people with the same gender identity or sexual orientation as you.</p>	<p>If your parents or family are not accepting, they may stop helping you or paying for you.</p> 

## Resources

**Here are some websites to find more information about different gender identities and sexual orientations:**

Resources in French by GRIS Québec: <https://grisquebec.org/>

Read or listen to the *Becoming You: Exploring sexuality and disability for pre-teens* book: <https://hollandbloorview.ca/sexuality-books>

Information about sexual orientation, gender identity and expression for disabled youth by TASCC: <https://tascc.ca/for-youth-with-disabilities/sexual-orientation-gender-identity-and-expression/>

Resources for 2SLGBTQINA+ Autistic people by Twainbow: <https://www.twainbow.org/resources/>

*Proud and Support Series* by Autistic Self Advocacy Network: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/proud/>