

Made in God's Image: Gender Diversity and Our Communal Role

Common LGBTQ+ Terminology

Sex assigned at birth is a person's assignment at birth, based upon a medical provider's perception of one's bodily characteristics (genitalia, chromosomes, hormones, etc.) as male, female, or intersex.

Gender identity is person's inner understanding of the gender(s) with which they identify. This is each person's unique knowing or feeling and is separate from a person's physical body or appearance (although often related).

Gender expression is the manner in which one outwardly expresses, signals, or performs their gender. Gender expression can encompass appearance (clothing, haircut, makeup, etc.), behavior, mannerisms, and more.

Orientation is a pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions. It is a sense of one's personal and social identity based on attractions and behaviors expressing them, oftentimes linked to the gender(s) of the person one feels these attractions towards.

Gender-expansive is an umbrella term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender.

LGBTQ+ is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The plus can stand for nonbinary, gender-expansive, asexual, pansexual, questioning, and additional terms.

Transgender is an umbrella term for anyone who knows themselves to be a gender that is different from the gender they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people may have a gender identity that is neither man nor woman, and for some people their gender identity may vary at different points in their lives. Transgender has its origin in the Latin-derived prefix *trans*, meaning "across" or "beyond." Transgender is generally preferred over the antiquated "transsexual" to shift focus from body parts to internal sense of self. Some (often older) people self-identify as transsexual.

Gender binary is a system of thinking in which there are only two genders (man and woman). The gender binary posits these two genders as opposites and mutually exclusive and forces all people in one of these two options. The gender binary is not universal and is not upheld by many cultures today and historically, including Talmudic Judaism.

Nonbinary is a gender identity that specifically rejects the notion of binary gender. It can sometimes be used interchangeably with genderqueer.

For more information on common LGBTQ+ terminology, visit <https://www.keshetonline.org/resources/lgbtq-terminology/>. Please note that terminology is always evolving, and no term is perfect. LGBTQ+ people are not a monolith and use a variety of terms to describe themselves. As vocabulary continues to change, it is best to use terminology with which individuals self-identify.

Why Inclusivity is Important

Jewish tradition teaches that all humans are created *b'tzelem Elohim* (in God's image) and are obligated to respect human dignity (*kavod habriyot*). Members of the transgender and gender-expansive communities have an important perspective that adds richness to our communal tapestry.

At the same time, these communities face ongoing legal and cultural bigotry and discrimination. Transphobia, which is the fear of gender variance in society, impacts all parts of life.

75 percent of transgender students feel unsafe in their school and often experience physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Oftentimes, this results in youth being kicked out of or running away from home. Around 37 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+. Transgender adults face discrimination in many places, including employment, health care, and social services. Our Reform Jewish community has made great efforts to be more inclusive toward the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, but there is still more work to be done to make our Movement and our society fully inclusive of transgender and gender-expansive people. Please keep in mind that people with multiple marginalized identities, especially Trans People of Color, often experience disproportionately high rates of violence.

How To Make Your Congregation More Inclusive for Transgender and Gender-Expansive Individuals

Education and Programming

Educate yourself, congregational staff, and congregants to create a welcoming and safe environment for everyone.

- Learn more about the ongoing struggles for LGBTQ+ rights, especially those specific to the transgender and gender-expansive community. Find legislative advocacy opportunities at <https://www.keshetonline.org> and <https://www.rac.org/LGBTQ>.
- Add your congregation to Keshet's national Equality Directory at <https://www.keshetonline.org/resources-and-events/equality-directory/>
- Partner with a local LGBTQ+ organization to establish your congregation as an ally and join the work happening in your community.
- Dedicate religious school and youth program time to discussions and sensitivity trainings related to gender identity and transgender inclusion.
- Invite transgender and gender-expansive Jewish speakers to your synagogue.
- Include affirming Jewish sources in text study and teaching. For some ideas, visit Keshet's Resource Library at <https://www.keshetonline.org/resources-and-events/>
- Affirm support for the transgender and gender-expansive communities from the bimah or in a newsletter.
- Publicly mark Trans Day of Remembrance on November 20 and Trans Day of Visibility on March 31 and include additions of special prayers and readings into your Shabbat services.

Affirm Identities

Recognize that due to transphobia, trans people's identities are sometimes treated as less legitimate or real, leading to discrimination and marginalization. Respecting congregant and staff genders, pronouns, and names in all public and private communication is an important part of being an ally.

- Notice how often your congregation asks people to identify their gender, and how often knowing that information is truly necessary. If you don't need it, don't ask for it!
- Update registration and membership forms to use gender-affirming language. For more information on how to do this, see <https://www.keshetonline.org/resources/a-guide-to-creating-lgbtq-inclusive-forms/>.
- Share your pronouns and make space for others to do the same if they wish.

Gendered Spaces

- Ensure that gender-expansive language is available and celebrated for ritual moments such as taking aliyot, reaching the age of mitzvah, etc.
- Avoid defaulting to gendered spaces for the sake of convenience. Use alternatives like birth month, first letter of first name, or other tools to create groupings. When the intention of programming is to create affinity space around gender, ensure that ALL people who share that gender identity are explicitly made welcome, and that non-gender-specific affinity spaces are also available.
- Talk to your congregational Women of Reform Judaism and Men of Reform Judaism chapters to set policy that is inclusive of transgender and gender-expansive people.
- Ensure that your congregation has at least one all-gender restroom and that it is marked appropriately. An all-gender restroom can be used by anyone.

For More Information

To learn how Keshet can support your congregation to be more inclusive for transgender and gender-expansive members, contact Rabbi Micah Buck (he/him or they/them), Director of Education and Training at 617-524-9227 or micah.buck@keshetonline.org or email education@keshetonline.org.

For information about the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's work on LGBTQ+ advocacy, contact the RAC at rac@rac.org or 202-387-2800.

This document was last updated in July 2021.