

Medical problem? Call 1800 022 222. If you need urgent medical help, call triple zero immediately

healthdirect Australia is a free service where you can talk to a nurse or doctor who can help you know what to do.

LGBTIQA+ Mental Health

9-minute read



If you, or someone you know, is having suicidal thoughts and is in immediate danger, call triple zero (000). For help and support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Key facts

- Sex, sexual orientation and gender identity are deeply personal and are complex.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQA+) Australians have higher rates of mental illness and distress than their peers.
- This is often due to stigma, discrimination and abuse.

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What is sex?

Sex, sexual orientation and gender identity are deeply personal and often complex. It's important to remember that you're not defined by your sex or gender.

Sex is assigned to you at birth, based on your body's appearance (external genitals). That is, whether you appear to have a penis or vagina. Most people will be identified as male or female. People with more ambiguous genitals may be labelled [intersex](#).

What is gender?

Gender is not based on your biology but how you feel about yourself. You may feel:

- male
- female
- non-binary
- agender — you don't feel that any gender identities fit you
- gender fluid — a person whose gender changes
- genderqueer — a person whose gender identity does not conform to traditional gender norms

The most common genders are male and female, which are binary genders. However, many cultures have a broader, non-binary view of gender.

Non-binary refers to genders that are not exclusively male or female.

Your gender might be the same or different to the sex you were assigned at birth. Cisgender (cis) is a term used to describe people whose gender corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transgender (trans) and gender diverse people have [gender incongruence](#). This means that their gender is different to their sex assigned at birth.

What is sexuality?

Sexuality refers to your sexual and romantic attraction to others. There are many ways you can describe your sexuality.

Some common examples of sexuality are:

- **Heterosexual (straight):** you are attracted to people of the opposite sex or gender.
- **Homosexual (gay):** you are attracted to people of the same sex or gender.
- **Lesbian:** you are a female who is sexually or romantically attracted to other females.
- **Bisexual:** you are attracted to more than one gender or sex.
- **Pansexual (queer):** you can be attracted to anyone, regardless of their sex or gender.
- **Aromantic (aro):** you experience little or no romantic attraction to people.
- **Asexual (ace):** you experience little or no sexual attraction to people.

The term queer describes a range of sexual orientations and gender identities. It's often used as an umbrella term to describe the full range of LGBTIQ+ identities.

The label you use to identify your sexuality is up to you. You don't have to label yourself at all. There are endless ways to experience gender and sexuality, and that may change over time.

What if I'm questioning my sexuality or gender identity?

It's normal to question your sexuality and gender.

Some people are quite clear about how they identify early on in life. Others don't think about it until adulthood. And for other people it can change over time.

It can take a long time to fully understand yourself, your gender and your sexual preferences. It's ok if you're not sure or if how you feel changes.

Feelings of uncertainty, confusion, and curiosity are a normal part of trying to understand who you are. You may feel excited about the possibilities ahead. Or you may feel confused about what your sexual identity means for your future. This confusion may be created by your culture, religion or beliefs.

It's important to remember that you don't have to rush the process of defining your sexuality or gender. You can take as much time as you need.

If you are feeling distressed or need support, ask for help from someone you trust. There are many places you can find information and support.

How can I tell people about my sexual orientation and gender identity?

Our gender identity and sexuality are an important part of who we are. It's up to you whether you share your sexuality and gender identities.

Many people have positive experiences of sharing their sexuality and gender. It can lead to:

- acceptance and support
- closer connections
- joy in being able to be your whole authentic self

Unfortunately, many people also fear being open about their gender and sexuality. This is due to the possibility of negative reactions, discrimination, bullying or violence. This can happen, and it's important to make sure you are safe to share that part of yourself.

It may have taken you time (perhaps years) to accept your gender and sexuality yourself. If someone rejects you because of your sexuality or gender, consider whether the relationship is worthwhile.

If you're having doubts, experience negative reactions, or are feeling distressed, get support.

LGBTIQ+ communities and common mental health issues

If you are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) community and are struggling with your mental health, you're not alone.

Research has shown that LGBTIQ+ Australians experience higher rates of mental illness and distress than their peers. This is often related to the stigma, discrimination and abuse faced by people in the LGBTIQ+ community.

Stress from feeling different can lead you to feel on guard the whole time. You may also be alienated from your friends and family and experience your own internalised homophobia or transphobia.

Being LGBTIQ+ itself does not cause [mental illness](#).

Compared to their peers, LGBTIQ+ people are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health problem, such as:

- [depression](#)
- [anxiety](#)
- engaging in [self-harm](#)
- [suicidal thoughts](#)

If you are struggling with your mental health, get help as soon as possible. There are also some great organisations supporting the health and wellbeing of the LGBTIQ+ communities.

How can I look after my mental health?

It's important to look after both your physical and mental wellbeing.

Building strong connections can help protect your wellbeing. You may:

- have supportive friends and family
- find and connect with peers in the LGBTIQ+ community

Practising [mindfulness](#) can help you look after your mental health. Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment.

It's important to remember that you are not alone, and there are many people in the LGBTIQ+ community in Australia.

Resources and support

If you're given a hard time about your identity, help is on hand.

You may wish to reach out to safe friends and family members. Talking to your doctor or mental health professional is also a great idea. Below is a list of organisations that can also give you further information and support.

Crisis support

- [Lifeline](#) — support for anyone having a personal crisis: call [13 11 14](#), 24/7, text or chat online.
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) — for anyone thinking about suicide: call [1300 659 467](#).

Mental health support

- [Beyond Blue](#) — for anyone feeling depressed or anxious: call [1300 22 4636](#), email or chat online.
- [Medicare Mental Health](#) — for advice and to get connected to local mental health services, you can call [1800 595 212](#). Check the [operating times](#).

LGBTIQA+ support

- [QLife](#) — counselling and referral service for LGBTIQA+ individuals: call [1800 184 527](#) or chat online.
- [ACON](#) — LGBTIQA+ health and HIV prevention and support.
- [TransHub](#) — ACON's digital trans and gender diverse platform.

Support for young people

- [Headspace](#) — mental health space for ages 12-25 years.
- [Kids Helpline](#) — mental health support for young people aged 5-25 years — call [1800 55 1800](#).
- [ReachOut](#) — mental health resources for young people.

Support for parents and friends

- [PFLAG](#) — Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

You can also call the healthdirect helpline on [1800 022 222](#) (known as NURSE-ON-CALL in Victoria). A registered nurse is available to speak with 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Sources:

[ReachOut \(The difference between gender, sex and sexuality\)](#), [ReachOut \(How to get support if you're feeling anxious about your sexuality\)](#), [ReachOut \(Understanding your sexuality\)](#), [ReachOut \(Mindfulness - is it for you\)](#), Australian Institute of Family Studies ([LGBTIQA+ Glossary of common terms](#)), Head to Health ([Support for LGBTIQA+ people](#)), Kids Help Line ([Sexual Identity](#)), Relationships Australia ([Are You Questioning Your Sexuality?](#)), LGBTIQ+ Australia ([Snapshot of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Statistics for LGBTIQ+ People](#)).

Learn more here about the [development and quality assurance of healthdirect content](#).

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24 hour health advice you can count on ☎ 1800 022 222



We are a government-funded service, providing quality, approved health information and advice



Healthdirect Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners and to Elders both past and present.

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