



Glossary of Terms

It may be important for families to have an open discussion with their trans family member about which terms they prefer to use to describe their gender identity and which words and pronouns they would like family members to use. Please review the 'Gender identity basics' module for further information.

KEY TERMS

It is important to clarify the distinctions between sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

Sex: The designation of a person at birth as male or female based on their anatomy (genitalia and/or reproductive organs) or biology (chromosomes and/or hormones). *The phrase "sex assigned at birth" (replacing "biological sex") is a more accurate and respectful way to acknowledge the process of sex assignation that occurs at birth through a perfunctory look at external anatomy. It might not be possible in all cases (e.g. intersex) to identify an individual as male or female at birth. For trans people, assigned sex may differ considerably from gender identity (see definitions of Transgender and Intersex).*

Gender Identity: Refers to a person's deeply-felt identification as male, female, or some other gender. This may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: The external manifestation of a person's gender identity. Gender can be expressed through mannerisms, grooming, physical characteristics, social interactions and speech patterns.

LGBT: An acronym representing 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender'. Different variations include LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) or LGBTQ+.

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation refers to a person's physical, emotional or romantic attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is distinct from sex, gender identity and gender expression. Transgender people may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, queer or asexual (see definition of Transgender).

MAIN GLOSSARY

Gender identity related terms

Cisgender: A non-trans person (i.e. a person whose gender identity and gender expression is aligned with the sex assigned at birth).

The term cisgender acknowledges that everyone has a gender identity (i.e. a non-trans identity is not presented as normal or natural which stigmatises a trans identity as abnormal or unnatural).

Crossdresser: In North America, the preferred term for transvestite is crossdresser. It is intended to sound less medicalised. It refers to a broad spectrum of experiences and there are numerous motivations for crossdressing such as a need to express femininity/masculinity, artistic expression, performance (e.g. drag queen/king), or erotic enjoyment (See also 'Transvestite').

Disorder of Sex Development (DSD): A generic definition encompassing any issue noted at birth where the genitalia are atypical in relation to the chromosomes or gonads. Since 2006, this is the preferred term for intersex by some, but not all, medical practitioners in the area.

DSD has been contested because it presumes an underlying 'disorder' and that there is something intrinsically wrong with the intersexed body requiring it to be fixed as either male or female (see definition of Intersex and Variation of Sex Development).

Gender Identity Disorder (GID): In DSM-IV[2], GID is the psychiatric diagnosis used when a person has (1) a strong and persistent cross-gender identification and (2) persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex, and the disturbance (3) is not concurrent with physical intersex condition and (4) causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning. *This diagnosis was removed from the DSM-V and replaced with Gender Dysphoria. In the current Irish context, in practice a diagnosis of GID or Gender Dysphoria is required to access hormones or surgery through the public healthcare system.*

Gender non-binary: An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female or between or beyond genders. Similar to the usage of transgender, people under the non-binary umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms (See definition of Androgynous, Gender Fluid, Genderqueer, Gender variant).

- **Androgynous or androgyne:** A person whose gender identity is both male and female, or neither male nor female. They might present as a combination of male and female or as sometimes male and sometimes female.
- **Bigender:** A gender identity which can be literally translated as 'two genders' or 'double gender'. These two gender identities could be male and female, but could also include non-binary identities.
- **Demigender:** A gender identity that involves feeling a partial, but not a full, connection to a particular gender identity. Demigender people often identify as non-binary. Examples of demigender identities include demigirl, demiboy, and demiandrogyne.
- **Gender fluid:** Is a non-binary gender identity. Gender fluid individuals experience different gender identities at different times. A gender fluid person's gender identity can be multiple genders at once, then switch to none at all, or move between single gender identities. Some gender fluid people regularly move between only a few specific genders, perhaps as few as two.
- **Genderqueer:** A person whose gender varies from the traditional 'norm'; or who feels their gender identity is neither female nor male, both female and male, or a different gender identity altogether.
- **Gender variant or gender non-conforming:** People whose gender identity and/or gender expression is different from traditional or stereotypical expectations of how a man or woman 'should' appear or behave.
- **Multigender:** Refers to individuals who experiences more than one gender identity. It can be used as a gender identity in its own right, or can be an umbrella term for other identities which fit this description. Multigender identities include bigender (two genders), trigender (three genders), quadgender (four genders), quintgender (five genders), polygender (many genders), pangender (all genders) and genderfluid (variable gender).
- **Neutrois:** A non-binary gender identity which is considered to be a neutral or null gender. It may also be used to mean genderless, and has considerable overlap with agender - some people who consider themselves neutrally gendered or genderless may identify as both, while others prefer one term or the other.

Intersex: Refers to individuals who are born with sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, genitals, and/or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time.

A person with an intersex variation may have elements of both male and female anatomy, have different internal organs than external organs, or have anatomy that is inconsistent with chromosomal sex. These variations can be identified at birth (where there is obviously ambiguous genitalia), at puberty (when the person either fails to develop certain expected secondary sex characteristics, or develops characteristics that were not expected), later in adulthood (when fertility difficulties present) or on autopsy. Most individuals who are intersex do not identify as transgender or do not consider themselves covered by the transgender umbrella.

- **Hermaphrodite:** Generally considered derogatory; has been replaced by the term intersex (see definition of Intersex).

Pronouns: The description to refer to a person, includes she/her; he/him; or they/them their (which are neutral pronouns often preferred by those with a nonbinary or nonconforming gender identity)

Tranny: A slang term for many different trans identities. Some find this term highly offensive, while others may be comfortable with it as a self-reference, but consider the term derogatory if used by outsiders. It is recommended to avoid using this term.

Transgender: Refers to a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities. TENI advocates the use of transgender or trans as an umbrella term as it is currently the most inclusive and respectful term to describe diverse identities. However, they also acknowledge and respect each individual's right to self-identify as they choose.

Not all individuals with identities that are considered part of the transgender umbrella will refer to themselves as transgender. For some, this may be because they identify with a particular term (such as transsexual or genderqueer) which they feel more precisely describes their identity. Others may feel that their experience is a medical or temporary condition and not an identity (for example they feel they have gender identity disorder but are not transgender).

Trans or trans*: Commonly used shorthand for transgender. Avoid using this term as a noun: a person is not 'a trans'; they may be a trans person.

Transvestite: A person who wears clothing, accessories, jewellery or make-up not traditionally or stereotypically associated with their assigned sex. This generally refers to a male to female transgender person who does not wish to transition or change their assigned sex but prefers to live "dual role".

Transsexual: A person whose gender identity is 'opposite' to the sex assigned to them at birth. The term connotes a binary view of gender, moving from one polar identity to the other. Transsexual people may or may not take hormones or have surgery.

Use of the term 'transsexual' remains strong in the medical community because of the DSM's prior use of the diagnosis 'Transsexualism' (changed to "Gender Identity Disorder" in DSM- IV). The term 'transsexual' is hotly debated in trans communities with some people strongly identifying with the term while others strongly rejecting it. Moreover, for some, 'transsexual' is considered to be a misnomer inasmuch as the underlying medical condition is related to gender identity and not sexuality.

Trans man or FTM (female-to-male) or F2M: A person who was assigned female at birth but who lives as a man or identifies as male. Some trans men make physical changes through hormones or surgery; others do not.

Trans man is sometimes used interchangeably with FTM (female-to-male). However, some trans men don't think of themselves as having transitioned from female to male (i.e. because they always felt male). Some people prefer to be referred to as men rather than trans men while others will refer to themselves as men of transgender experience.

Trans woman or MTF (male-to-female) or M2F: A person who was assigned male at birth but who lives as a woman or identifies as female. Some trans women make physical changes through hormones or surgery; others do not.

Trans woman is sometimes used interchangeably with MTF (male-to-female). However, some trans women don't think of themselves as having transitioned from male to female (i.e. because they always felt female). Some people prefer to be referred to as women rather than transwomen while others may refer to themselves as women of transgender experience. Variation of Sex Development (VSD): Another term for 'intersex' preferred by some medical practitioners and intersex people in place of DSD as it removes the stigma of 'disorder' from the nomenclature (see definition of Intersex and Disorder of Sex Development).

Sexual orientation related terms

Heterosexual or 'straight': A term used to describe the sexual orientation of people who are attracted to people of the opposite gender.

Lesbian or gay: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of people who are attracted to people of the same gender.

Bisexual: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of people who are attracted to people of their own gender and other gender identities.

Pansexual: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of people who are attracted to people of various gender identities or gender expressions.

Asexual: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of people who may not have a physical, emotional or romantic attraction to other people.

Health and wellbeing related terms

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or Hormones: The use of hormones to alter secondary sex characteristics. Some trans people take hormones to align their bodies with their gender identities. Other trans people do not take hormones for many different reasons (see definition of Transition).

'Sex Change: Generally considered derogatory; has been replaced by the terms 'transition' or 'surgery' (see definition of Transition and Surgery).

Surgery: A set of surgical procedures that alter a person's physical appearance or the functioning of their existing sexual characteristics. Other terms include Gender Confirmation Surgery, Gender Reassignment Surgery, Sex Reassignment Surgery, Genital Reconstruction Surgery, Sex Affirmation Surgery and so on.

Some trans people undergo surgery to align their bodies with their gender identities. Other trans people do not undergo any surgery for many different reasons. Some trans people define themselves by their surgical status such as post-operative (post-op), pre-operative (pre-op) or non-operative (non-op). However, these terms place emphasis on genitals as a marker for gender identity and may be rejected by people who do not see their gender as related to surgical status.

Transition: A process through which some transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

Legal and administrative related-terms

Deed Poll: A legal document which allows someone to officially change their name. A Deed Poll provides evidence that a person has legally changed their name. This evidence, along with their birth certificate is accepted as proof of name for most administrative procedures in Ireland.

Gender Recognition Certificate: A certificate that allows for a person to have their preferred gender recognised by the state. It also allows for a person to obtain a new birth certificate reflecting their preferred gender.

Social transitioning related terms

Cissexism: The assumption that a cisgender identity is more authentic or natural than a trans identity. The belief that a person's sex assigned at birth always remains their real gender (e.g. suggesting that a trans woman is 'really a man' or a trans man is 'really a woman').

Coming out: The process of accepting and telling others about one's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Many trans people will 'come out' as a different gender to the sex assigned at birth and may begin a social or physical transition (see definition of Transition).

Some trans people choose to 'come out' or be 'out' about their trans identities to raise visibility or acknowledge their experiences. Others do not want to 'come out' as they feel this implies that their gender identity is not valid or authentic (e.g. a trans woman who comes out as trans may be perceived to be less of a woman). It is important to never out someone as trans without their permission. Forced outing – whether intentional or unintentional – is a form of transphobia (see definition of Transphobia).

Transition: A process through which some transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

Transphobia: The fear, dislike or hatred of people who are trans or are perceived to challenge conventional gender categories or 'norms' of male or female. Transphobia can result in individual and institutional discrimination, prejudice and violence against trans or gender variant people.

Sources:

Copied with permission from Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI). 'Trans Terms'. Available at: <http://www.teni.ie/page.aspx?contentid=139>. TENI adapted these definitions from:

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