

Rainbow Community 101

Key Terms

- **Sex:** Category assigned at birth (female, male, or *intersex)
 - * Intersex: People born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads, and chromosome patterns) “that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies” (UN 2016). 1 in 1000 people (estimated)
- **Gender Identity:** Person's internal sense of self (male, female, a blend of both, or neither)
- **Gender Expression:** The way people communicate their gender within a given culture (socially constructed: feminine, masculine, and/or other)
- **Sexual Orientation:** Sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction

Sexual Orientations

- **Lesbian:** A female who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to other females
- **Gay:** A male who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to other males
- **Bisexual:** An individual who is emotionally, physically and/or sexually attracted to multiple sexes/genders
- **Asexual:** A term for those who do not feel physical or sexual attraction toward others (but are still able to create emotional bonds)
- **Pansexual:** A term for those with the capacity to be attracted to people of all genders (regardless of sex, gender identity, or expression)

Identities

- **Transgender:** A term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth (Transgender people sometimes change their names, pronouns, take hormones, and/or surgically alter their bodies - but none of these steps are required to be considered transgender)
- **Queer:** An umbrella term used to describe anyone who is not straight, or the community as a whole (not every member of the Rainbow Community uses this word)
- **Two-spirit:** umbrella term used by some Indigenous North Americans to describe Native people in their communities who fulfill a traditional third-gender (or other gender-variant) ceremonial role in their cultures
- **Cisgender:** A term for people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth
- **Gender NonConforming:** A term used for people whose gender expression differs from their gender identity
- **Nonbinary, genderfluid, or genderqueer:** terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside of the categories of male or female

Top Four Strategies to Support Members of the Rainbow Community

1. Value & Respect identities

- ✳ Be open, curious, & kind
- ✳ Use affirmed names (learn the correct pronunciation) and pronouns (avoid using the term “preferred”)
- ✳ Believe people when they tell you who they are - listen and validate their identities and/or experiences
- ✳ Don’t make assumptions about people’s identities (don’t assume people are straight and/or cisgender)
- ✳ Recognize that families are diverse in structure by using inclusive, non-gendered terms (i.e, parents, guardians, caregivers, etc.)

2. Educate Yourself

- ✳ Have a base understanding of terminology (it’s OK if you are not an expert because terms frequently change)
- ✳ Know that there are more than two sexes, more than two genders, and more than two sexual orientations - and that those are all different categories
- ✳ Engage in media that includes members of the Rainbow Community
- ✳ Own and eradicate your implicit and explicit biases
- ✳ Be aware of how intersecting identities can impact individuals (i.e, the role of intersectionality)
 - Intersectionality refers to the different ways people “show up” in spaces and how that informs power and privilege. It is a theory that was developed by civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989.
- ✳ Know that it is OK to not be perfect, but also own your mistakes and then move on (i.e., don’t expect the person you harmed to take care of your feelings)
- ✳ Don’t expect people from the Rainbow Community to have to educate you - this is a cultural tax that can be draining, and not everyone from the Rainbow Community has the skill, capacity and/or desire to to educate others about this topic

3. Create Safe Spaces

- ✳ Share your pronouns when you introduce yourself (if you feel comfortable)
- ✳ Use gender inclusive language (e.g., folks, humans, learners, etc.)
- ✳ Display posters and art that demonstrate support for members of the Rainbow Community
- ✳ Have safe restroom access (e.g., gender neutral bathrooms, single stall/private bathrooms) - support folks to use whichever bathroom make them feel safe
- ✳ Celebrate vulnerability and the sharing of authentic selves & identities,
- ✳ Eliminate perspective gaps - ask questions if you don’t understand something
- ✳ Be patient and compassionate toward yourself and toward others (you learn by making mistakes)
- ✳ Normalize (don’t pathologize) Rainbow Community identities, relationships, and experiences (be aware of how and what you are communicating in your interactions, stories you share, your curriculum, etc.)

4. Be an Advocate

- ✳ Speak out against bullying and harassment
- ✳ Support laws and policies that support members of the Rainbow Community
- ✳ Break down systems that are creating barriers for members of the Rainbow Community
- ✳ Engage in courageous conversations to challenge prejudice, discriminatory acts, assumptions, and stereotypes connected to sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression