

Coming Out As

YOU!

TheTrevorProject.org/YOU

THE **TREVOR** PROJECT

THE TREVOR PROJECT is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth.

OUR MISSION: The Trevor Project is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources including our nationwide, 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline, digital community and advocacy/educational programs that create a safe, supportive and positive environment for everyone.

OUR VISION: A future where the possibilities, opportunities and dreams are the same for all youth, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN®

This is a project of The Trevor Project, generously funded by The Human Rights Campaign.

The Human Rights Campaign is America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender equality. By inspiring and engaging all Americans, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a nation that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. Visit www.hrc.org for more information.

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“The hardest thing I have ever had to deal with was accepting my sexuality. But it’s who I am. In fact, it is something that I would never want to change.” - Ruby, 18, (Hawaii)

Quotes are shared with permission from individual TrevorSpace users. Some names and locations have been changed to protect identities. Quotes do not reflect the opinions of photographed youth in this guide.

6 WELCOME

Sharing a big part of who you are with other people can be exciting and tough. There are so many things to think about: Who do I tell? When should I tell them? What will they say? What if I'm not sure? ... Should I come out?

“Coming Out” means sharing your sexual orientation and/or your gender identity with people in your life. Everyone’s coming out process is unique, shaped by their comfort level, the safety of their environment and how ready they feel. After thinking it through you may decide not to come out – and that’s ok too. Many people choose not to for different reasons.

The Trevor Project’s **Coming Out As You** guide can help you through your own process. Inside you will find questions that many young people think about and blank spaces to brainstorm how you might answer them. **The Spectrum (pg. 10)** and **The Coming Out Constellation (pg. 31)** can also help

you explore important parts of who you are.

It doesn’t matter if you read this guide cover-to-cover or one section at a time. This resource is for YOU, YOUR choices, and YOUR feelings.

**WHAT DOES
THAT MEAN?
DEFINITIONS ON
PAGE 22!**

THE BASICS 7

Recognizing, understanding and accepting your sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a very important part of coming out. If you aren’t sure, that’s ok. You might question your gender identity, your sexual orientation, or even both at the same time.

No one knows for sure what makes a person lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) or straight. There are many theories (biology, environment, personal experiences, etc.) but there isn’t just one cause. No matter the reason, all orientations and identities are normal. It’s part of who we are!

SEXUAL ORIENTATION describes the types of people we are physically, emotionally and romantically attracted to. You can know how you feel at any age, even if you haven’t been physical with anyone. Not everyone is straight, lesbian, gay or bi. There are many other sexual orientations, like queer and asexual.

- *Who do you have crushes on or imagine being with?*
- *How do people of the same sex or gender make you feel?*
- *How do people of a different sex or gender make you feel?*
- *When you imagine your future, who are you with?*

GENDER IDENTITY describes our personal feelings about being a man, woman, both, neither or any other gender across the spectrum. Realizing that your actual gender is different from the gender you were given at birth can take time and can happen at any age.

- *How do you feel about your birth gender?*
- *What gender do you wish people saw you as?*
- *How would you like to express your gender?*
- *When you imagine your future, what gender are you?*

TALKING TRANS Just like some people come out as lesbian, gay or bi, you might come out as transgender, genderqueer, bi-gender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, MTF (male to female), FTM (female to male), two-spirit, boi, grrl, or another gender. In this guide, we use the word “trans” with an asterisk (*) to talk about these diverse identities.

As a part of coming out as trans* you might go through a process called transitioning. This can last a long or a short time, depending on the person. Transitioning includes medical (surgery, hormones, etc.), legal (name changes, etc.), and/or social (preferred gender pronouns, clothing, etc.). Not all trans* people choose to medically transition because of cost or other personal reasons.

NEED HELP?

If you need help finding a specific resource or have questions, the Trevor Lifeline (1.866.488.7386) is here for you 24/7.

THE SPECTRUM Our sexuality and gender identity aren't set in stone. In fact, people's identities can be fluid. THE SPECTRUM can help you visualize how you feel at any given time. Mark how you identify today on each line, but don't feel limited - it's ok to mark something different tomorrow!



Download and print this page at [TheTrevorProject.org/YOU](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/you)

Deciding to come out is a brave decision to make and there's no right or wrong way to do it. It's completely up to you, your personal style, and your relationship with who you're telling.

People who support and encourage you, help you feel less alone and build your confidence can make a big difference if you choose to come out, even if they live miles away.

There are lots of ways to come out!



Think about who would support you no matter what:

- Family, caretakers, siblings, cousins
- Friends, team members, school clubs
- Teachers, counselors, doctors, co-workers
- Religious or spiritual leaders

“

How I came out may not have been perfect, but it got the job done, and I couldn't be happier with the outcome.” - Rachael, 16 (Michigan)

12 SUPPORT

THINKING AHEAD Before you come out, get ready for the reactions people may have, including the good ones the bad ones, and the really tough ones.

Keep in mind that other people's reactions are more about them than you. You've had time to think about your feelings, but they are learning something new for the first time. When you come out they begin their own acceptance process. It may take some time for them to fully understand your news.

TESTING THE WATERS Figuring out how people feel about LGBTQ topics can give you a good idea about out how others might react:

- *Ask how they feel about an LGBTQ celebrity.*
- *Ask how they feel about things like marriage equality.*
- *Listen to their words: Do they put down LGBTQ people? Do they use LGBTQ stereotypes?*
- *Notice how they handle emotional events: This can help you guess what reactions to be ready for.*

You might decide to do some research too. People like to ask questions, and knowing your stuff before you come out can help you answer them in a smart way. Practicing with supportive people can also help you figure out what to say and how to say it.

SUPPORT 13

FILLING IN YOUR FAMILY The idea of sharing something you think your family may disapprove of can be scary, to say the least. Some people tell a family member who they think might be supportive, first. It might also make you feel safer to have a back-up plan for housing, food, school and transportation in case your family is very unsupportive.

LOCAL RESOURCES

Check out the resources in the back of this guide and online at [TheTrevorProject.org/localresources](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/localresources) for local resources about coming out to your family.

Why do I want to come out to this person right now?

What are some of the good responses you may hear?

What are some of the bad responses you may hear?

*What can you do to help deal with really tough responses?
(See Safety Plans)*



TIMING There is no perfect time to come out. In fact, the best time will probably change depending on who you want to tell. Sometimes it's best to wait until the person you are telling is feeling relaxed, open, and willing to listen. This can play a big part in how they handle your news. Keep these things in mind as you decide when to come out:

- *Time of day (before school, after work, during dinner)*
- *Time of year (school season, summer, holidays, etc.)*
Consider that holidays might be a more stressful time for some family members.

LOCATION Like with timing, there is also no perfect place to come out. Some places might be safer or more comfortable for you than others.

- *Would you rather be in a public or private space?*
- *Is there a safe place to talk at home?*
- *Is the location special to you and the person you're talking with?*
- *Are you both comfortable at this place?*

Where you live, go to school or work can also affect your decision to come out:

- *Is there a shelter or an LGBTQ-friendly program you can go to if you ever need it?*
- *Are there LGBTQ groups in your community or school?*
- *Is it safe to come out at work?*

“

I've slowly been figuring out who I really am, and every step of the way I like who I find more and more.” - Hayley, 16 (Virginia)

16 ENVIRONMENT

SCHOOL Coming out at school can be a great way to connect with other LGBTQ classmates, start a group, and live more openly.

However, bullying, harassment and discrimination are all real things to be aware of. When you think about coming out at school make sure to keep your safety and wellbeing in mind. You may want to make a safety plan for school if you feel like you might face some tough times.

- *Is there a Gay-Straight Alliance or similar club?*
- *Are there anti-bullying rules that protect LGBTQ students?*
- *Are there supportive faculty members, counselors, teachers or adults to help me if you need it?*
- *How would being out at school make you feel?*
- *Will coming out put your safety at risk? If so, what steps can you take to stay safe?*

TALKING TRANS If you're trans*, paying attention to your environment and safety is especially important. Consider things like using public restrooms safely, how to prepare for people who don't understand diverse gender identities, and how to access trans* affirming medical and mental health services. Remember, you're the only one who can tell when the right time is for you to come out to others.

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When you're thinking about coming out, it can be easy to forget that gender and sexual orientation are just two parts of a bigger picture.

That's why taking a step back, looking at your other interests and learning to embrace your quirks can be a great way to build your confidence - because no matter what, you are a valuable person with your own unique personality.

- *What are your interests, or favorite things to do?*
- *What are your strengths?*
- *What are you passionate about?*
- *What are your goals for the future?*



I started a GSA group. Our first meeting had 60 people and it made me feel a little safer in my school.” - Michelle, 19 (New York)

18 SELF-CARE

Coming out and learning more about yourself can sometimes be like a roller coaster – full of emotional ups and downs. To stay healthy, it's important to discover what keeps you relaxed and positive. This is called “self-care” and it's about taking care of YOU. As a part of your self-care, you might want to make a Safety Plan to help you get through any tough times.

A Safety Plan might be:

1. Tell a trusted adult (like a family member or a teacher) if you're feeling sad or unsafe.
2. Call a friend who lives close by if you need to get away from a stressful situation.
3. Call the Trevor Lifeline, get on TrevorChat, write an Ask Trevor letter, or visit **TrevorSpace.org**.
4. Focus on your **INTERESTS**: Do something you enjoy. Write your thoughts out in your journal.
5. Create an art project to express your feelings.
6. Get active: Run, hike, or do yoga.
7. Put on headphones and blast music.
8. Watch your favorite TV show and relax.
9. Remind yourself that you are a strong, valuable person.



Most of the time, I relieve my stress by writing. Also, I make sure to laugh and have fun, despite my difficult situations.” - Brad, 18 (California)

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Nothing is more heroic in life than being able to say to another human being, ‘I’m scared, I need help.’” - Daniel Radcliffe

.....
What helps me stay healthy, relaxed and positive?

What could I add to my own Safety Plan?

Who could I call if I need help or support?

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WARNING SIGNS Feeling sad or alone can seem overwhelming, especially if your family isn't supportive. While some of these feelings can be normal, it's important to keep an eye out for warning signs of bigger problems.

TREVOR
IS HERE
24/7

If you answer yes to any of these questions, consider calling the Trevor Lifeline (1.866.488.7386) – it's here for you 24/7.

HAVE YOU FELT...?

*Unimportant • Trapped • Hopeless • Overwhelmed •
Unmotivated • Alone • Angry • Irritable • Impulsive • Suicidal*

HAVE YOU BEEN...?

*Using drugs or alcohol more than usual
Acting differently than usual
Giving away your most valuable possessions
Losing interest in your favorite things to do
Planning for death by writing a will or letter
Eating or sleeping more or less than usual
Feeling more sick, tired, or achy than usual*

DO YOU...?

*Not care about the future
Put yourself down (and think you deserve it)
Plan to say goodbye to important people
Have a specific plan for suicide*



LEARN MORE @
THE TREVOR PROJECT.ORG

To learn more about warning signs and risk factors for suicide, visit [TheTrevorProject.org/WarningSigns](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/warningsigns).

Visit [TheTrevorProject.org/YCARE](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/YCARE) to learn how you can help someone with these warning signs.

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Take some time to figure out which words you relate to. Remember, the only person who has the power to label you, is YOU. Also, there are many ways to define these common terms!

Asexual: Asexual people (or aces) feel little or no sexual attraction. Most aces want close emotional relationships, but they are not drawn to sex as a way to express that closeness.

Binary: Something with only two parts.

Binary System: Something created by people to break complicated things into only two parts. Gender (man/woman) and sex (male/female) are examples of binary systems.

Bisexual (Bi): An umbrella term that describes people who are physically, emotionally and romantically attracted to men and women, or more than one gender.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity and expression “match” the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gay: Describes men who are physically, emotionally and romantically attracted to other men.

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Gender Expression: How we purposefully express our gender on the outside, like the way we talk, dress, walk and behave.

Gender Non-Conforming: Describes a person whose gender expression is (or appears to be) different from what others may expect.

Gender Presentation: How the world sees our gender.

Genderqueer: A gender identity or expression that is not only man or woman (can be both or neither).

Intersex: An umbrella term that describes a person whose biological sex is ambiguous due to genetic, hormonal or anatomical differences. Intersex people may identify as male/female, man/woman, genderqueer, etc

Lesbian: A woman who is physically, emotionally and romantically attracted to other women.

Non-Binary/Gender Non-Binary: A gender identity or expression that falls outside of being male/female or a man/woman.

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Pansexual: Describes people who are physically, emotionally and romantically attracted to others regardless of gender identity or biological sex.

Preferred Gender Pronouns (PGPs): Words that replace someone's name while sharing their gender (like she, her, him and his). Some people use different pronouns in different situations

Trans*: An umbrella term that includes gender identities that fall outside of the gender binary system.

Transgender (Trans): An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. There are many identities that fall under the transgender umbrella. However, not all genderqueer, non-binary and non-conforming people identify as transgender.

Transitioning: The social, legal and/or medical processes a trans* person might go through to make their gender identity fit with their gender expression, presentation or sex.

Queer: An umbrella broad term that describes people who are not straight and/or cisgender. In

DEFINITIONS 25

the past, this word was used to put-down LGBTQ people. Today the word can be used in a positive way within the LGBTQ community.

Questioning: Describes someone who isn't sure about their sexual orientation or gender identity, or is learning more, before identifying as LGB, trans*, queer, straight or any other identity.

26 RESOURCES

Family Acceptance Project familyproject.sfsu.edu

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
GLSEN.org

Gender Spectrum genderspectrum.org

GLBT Near Me glbtnearme.org

GSA Network gsanetwork.org

HelpPRO - Therapist Finder helppro.com

Human Rights Campaign hrc.org

Jewish Mosaic jewishmosaic.org

Lambda Legal lambdalegal.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1.800.273.8255

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
PFLAG.org

SoulForce soulforce.org

The Institute for Welcoming Resources
welcomingresources.org

Trans Youth Family Allies imatyfa.org





THE **TREVOR** *lifeline*

A crisis intervention and suicide prevention lifeline available 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386. [TheTrevorProject.org/Lifelinechat](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/Lifelinechat)

TREVOR *chat*

A free, confidential, secure instant messaging support service. [TheTrevorProject.org/Chat](https://www.TheTrevorProject.org/Chat)

TREVOR *education*

A suite of LGBTQ suicide prevention education workshops, trainings and resources for youth and adult. [TheTrevorProject.org/Resources](https://www.TheTrevorProject.org/Resources)

ask **TREVOR**

A question submission site with answers from trained Trevor volunteers. [TheTrevorProject.org/AskTrevor](https://www.TheTrevorProject.org/AskTrevor)

TREVOR *space*

An online community for LGBTQ young people and allies. [TrevorSpace.org](https://www.TrevorSpace.org)

TREVOR *youth advisory council*

YAC is a group of young leaders, ages 16-24, from across the U.S. trained to help deliver Trevor's programs and advise future services. [TheTrevorProject.org/YAC](https://www.TheTrevorProject.org/YAC)

30 COMING OUT AS YOU - ONLINE!



Want more info about COMING OUT AS YOU?

Check out our bonus materials
online at [TheTrevorProject.org/YOU](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/you)

The Coming Out Constellation



In that back pocket you'll find The Coming Out Constellation. Each arm of the constellation's star matches up with a chapter in this guide. To organize your thoughts, use the answers you wrote throughout the book to fill in the star or come up with new things to add. You can also write out the pros and cons you might be feeling about coming out.

Download The Spectrum and
The Coming Out Constellation at
[TheTrevorProject.org/YOU](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/you) and
check out Trevor's other resources!



THE **TREVOR** PROJECT

TheTrevorProject.org



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Coming Out As Bisexual

Bisexuality is a valid sexual orientation, and bisexual (bi) people are important and valuable members of the LGBTQ community. Historically, bisexuality has meant an attraction to both men and women however, one bisexual person's experience can be very different from another's.

It is normal to be attracted to someone of the same gender as well as another gender, but not identify as bisexual. It is equally as normal to identify as bisexual and be attracted to not only male and female identified people but also people whose gender identity is different from those two categories (transgender, genderqueer, gender-non conforming, etc.). Though this is commonly referred to as "pansexuality" only you can decide what feels comfortable to you. There is not just one definition for either identity!

You may feel equally attracted to someone of the same gender as well as another gender, or you may feel more attracted to one gender over the other. These feelings can shift over time. It's important to know that you don't necessarily have to identify as "more straight than bi," or "more gay/lesbian than bi," or feel pressured to identify as straight or gay/lesbian depending on who you like.

It is also very normal to be attracted to both men and women, or people with other gender identities, but not identify as bisexual. Only you know what those feelings mean for you at any given time. Sexuality, and bisexuality in particular, can be very fluid.

Being bisexual can be exciting and empowering, but can also come with a special set of obstacles. People might assume that you can choose one gender over others, or assume that you can never be totally happy romantically.

Some people may think that if you are bi you are also promiscuous, or that if a bi person settles down or gets married, they become straight or gay/lesbian. Another challenge you might face as a bisexual person is that people may make assumptions about your sexuality based on your behavior rather than how you feel or identify: these are all stereotypes about bisexual people that are not necessarily true.

It can be extremely frustrating to hear these things. Keep in mind that you're the only one who knows what your feelings mean at any given time. Check out biresource.net or bisexual.org for more resources and information.

If you need help finding a specific resource or have more questions, The Trevor Lifeline (866-488-7386) is here for you 24/7.



Coming Out As a Straight Ally

“I want to help all the LGTBQ teens out there. They need to know that they are not alone in this world. There is always someone to help them through it.”

- Dan, 19 (New Mexico)

If you're straight, coming out may sound like a strange thing for you to do. In reality, many straight people do choose to come out to their family, friends, and community as a straight ally.

There is no right way to be an ally. Still, there is one thing all allies share – support for the LGBTQ community in some way. Allies have the unique ability to let others around them know that being LGBTQ isn't something that is only accepted by LGBTQ people.

Coming out as a straight ally can be tough, especially if others around you aren't supportive of LGBTQ people. But deciding to come out as a straight ally can be an important step in helping to create inclusive and accepting environments. There are countless ways to show your support, like standing up for an LGBTQ student being bullied at school, joining your school's Gay-Straight Alliance, or marching in a Pride parade.



Understanding Gender

You have the right to define your own gender identity, and decide what feels most comfortable and safe when exploring coming out, even if others don't understand how you identify at first.

When it comes to gender, a diverse spectrum of identities exists. In fact, the number of ways a person might identify is infinite. Gender identity and gender expression can be very fluid for some people. Some may feel like they were given one sex or gender at birth but actually identify as another, while others feel limited and boxed in by labels. Others may embrace identities beyond being just male or female, man or woman, masculine or feminine.

Everyone deserves the right to make choices about their own bodies and genders. Unfortunately, many trans*, non-binary and gender diverse individuals experience forms of oppression that try to take away this right. Society pressures individuals to be either men or women and trans* identities are often not recognized as real genders or sexes. Most of the time, trans* people have to obtain approval from officials in order to transition.

Not everyone in society recognizes that there are more than two genders. Fortunately, people all over the world are challenging society's norms and stereotypes about sexuality, gender identity and gender expression.



Labels Are for You to Determine

It's pretty hard to go through a day without using labels. We label our feelings, the reactions of others, the pets we take care of, and the classes we take. We even label the people around us because of what we think their sexual orientation and gender identity are. Usually, people in our society expect others to be straight and cisgender (someone who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth) – but as we know, there are many more label out there. In fact, some people prefer not to use labels at all!

So how do we find the label that fits us best? A great way to start is by exploring the common terms listed in the “Definitions” section of COMING OUT AS YOU. You may find one you like right away, or decide to take some more time to figure out which word really matches how you feel. It is important to keep in mind that different people in the LGBT community choose different labels for themselves for many different reasons.

In addition to the common phrases, there are also many more that are used in the LGBT community to describe certain parts of an identity. Phrases like “Same Gender Loving” or the “Down Low”/ “DL” often replace “lesbian,” “gay,” or “bi” in cultural communities with strong homophobic beliefs. Terms such as “Butch” and “Femme” can be used to describe lesbians who express their gender in a more masculine or feminine way.

“Queer” is used as an umbrella term to describe someone’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Some people use the label queer when they do not strictly identify as straight or cisgender. It is sometimes used as a bigger term to refer to all LGBTIQ people. It can also be a political identity, which challenges binary thinking and embraces both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid. Even though “queer” has been used in the past to put down members of the LGBT community, it has been reclaimed as a positive word by many LGBT people. Unfortunately, some people still use this word in a hurtful way.

But how can someone find out what label, if any, you use? They can simply ask you, or you can choose to tell them. The most supportive action you can take to validate and affirm a person’s identity is to accept it. Embrace diversity and empower one another to feel good about being a unique individual. You might want to try practicing asking the question: “What gender pronouns do you go by?” Or, “How do you like to be referred to (i.e. gender pronoun or name, etc.)?” It also might help to practice having a supportive response to a person’s answer. You just might be the first or only person who understands and accepts them for who they truly are.

Remember, you always have the chance to choose the label that is best for you; even if that means you choose no label at all. No one – not even a parent, your best friend, or a stranger – can tell you who you are based on how you look, talk, walk, behave, who you spend time with, date or love.

COMING OUT CONSTELLATION

Fill in the arms of the star with your answers. Then write down your personal pros and cons of coming out.

SELF CARE

INTERESTS

YOU!

RESOURCES

ENVIRONMENT

CONS

PROS

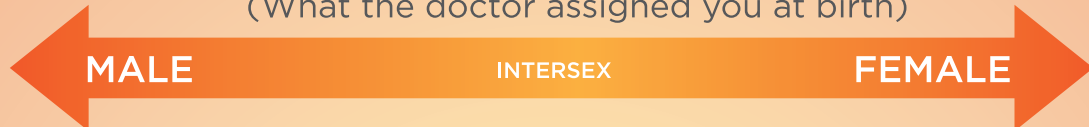
SUPPORT

THE SPECTRUM

Our sexuality and gender identity aren't set in stone. In fact, people's identities can be fluid. THE SPECTRUM can help you visualize how you feel at any given time. Mark how you identify today on each line, but don't feel limited - it's ok to mark something different tomorrow!

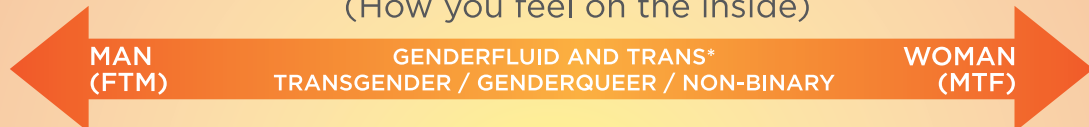
BIOLOGICAL SEX

(What the doctor assigned you at birth)



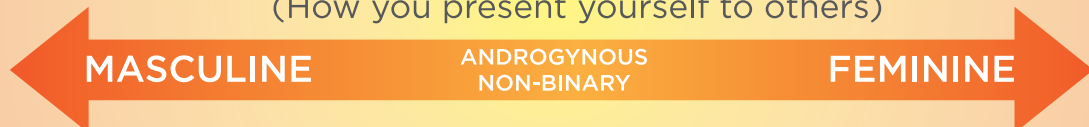
GENDER IDENTITY

(How you feel on the inside)



GENDER EXPRESSION

(How you present yourself to others)



GENDER PRESENTATION

(How the world sees you)



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

(Who you like)

