

# Managing LGBT+ Questions from Young People

It is important to create space for young people to be able to ask questions about LGBT+ identities at school. They will undoubtedly be exposed to information from other sources and schools can provide accurate and fair information about these topics, ensuring everyone is respected and valued. The key aspects to responding to questions that young people ask is to:

- Be open – this means not shutting down conversations as this gives the impression that there is something ‘bad’ about these topics. Ensuring respect is at the heart of all your answers is vital, which means discussing these topics neutrally and without judgement.
- Be honest – if you are unsure, admit this and suggest how they can find more information either by proposing you will check, guiding them to seek answers from professional services or directing them to resources such as storybooks or real-life examples to enhance their understanding.
- Be age-appropriate – this means working with the language and maturity of the person/group, and not overloading or complicating the topic before they can understand it. For early learners, keeping answers short and simple is best. For older students who can handle more complex and abstract ideas more detail can be given, though using concrete examples is best.
- Listen – ensure you are listening to what they are really asking and be aware that they may be asking for information because they are personally being impacted or bullied. Following through with safeguarding procedures is necessary in such situations.

Below are sample suggested scripts that can be used to answer some of the most common questions primary aged pupils may ask in an accurate, age-appropriate way:

## Sexual Orientation

What does ‘gay’ mean?

It is worth using enquiry questions to clarify the context of the question and where they heard this word to determine if they have heard it being used in a negative way, so you could start by asking:

*Where did you hear that word?*

*Being gay means when a man is attracted to and loves another man, or a woman is attracted to and loves another woman.*

*Being gay means when a man is attracted to another man, or a woman is attracted to another woman.*

*Being gay means when one person is attracted to someone of the same gender (if they understand gender).*

*Another word that is sometimes used for a woman who is attracted to and loves another woman is 'lesbian'.*

Can two men / women get married?

*Yes, (in this country) if two men or two women are in love and are adults, they can get married.*

What are Civil Partnerships?

*Sometimes people who love each other may not want to get married. But they still want to be legally recognised as a couple, so they can have something called 'a civil partnership'. It's very similar to a marriage.*

Why does Jay have two dads/mums?

*All families are different. Some families have a mum and a dad, some have one parent, some have adoptive parents, and some have two mums or two dads. But they are all still families and love and care for each other.*

Who is the real mum? (In a family with same sex parents/carers)

It is important not to speculate about members of the school community, nor to ask young people who have same sex parents/carers to explain their family (unless they want to). Instead, the focus should be on educating young people on the diversity of families that exist.

*They both are. They both take care of their child.*

*It doesn't matter who the biological mother is as they are both mothers. They both love and care for their family, just like all families do. Lots of families are made up of people who are biological linked and people who are not, for example step mums and dads, adoptive parents, and that doesn't make them any less of a family,*

How can two men have a baby?

*Children come into families in many ways, and all different types of families are important and special.*

*Sometimes people have a surrogate mother. This is a woman who gets pregnant and carries the baby for a couple, who parent it after it is born. Sometimes a family with a mother and father can't have children, so they also use a surrogate. Sometimes couples adopt children.*

What is the difference between homosexual and heterosexual?

It is best to avoid using the term homosexual as it has a history of being used negatively and to connect being gay with a as there is a clinical history to the word, which has been used by anti-gay campaigners to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically and emotionally disordered. Gay is a better word to use.

*Being heterosexual is when a man is attracted to and loves a woman, or a woman is attracted to and loves a man. This is different to being homosexual, or 'gay' which is the best word to use, which is when a man is attracted to and loves another man, or a woman is attracted to and loves another woman.*

*Being heterosexual is when a person is attracted to someone of the opposite gender, such as a mum and dad. Being gay (which is better than saying homosexual) is when a person is attracted to someone of the same gender, such as two dads or two mums.*

What does bisexual mean?

*This is when a person can love a man or a woman.*

*Being bisexual is when a person is attracted to men and women.*

'That's so gay!'

It is important to help students understand that this is not an accurate use of the word gay, and that it is hurtful to use it in this way.

*Do you know what that word means?*

*Were you talking about relationships or love when you said it/heard it?*

*It means when one person is attracted to someone of the same gender.*

*The word gay means when a man is attracted to and loves another man, or a woman is attracted to and loves another woman.*

*There is nothing bad about being gay, so it is hurtful to use it as a way to say something is bad or rubbish. It's better to say 'that's so rubbish' or another word that matches the meaning.*

*At this school, we don't use the word gay in this way. Gay is the word used to describe when a man is attracted to and loves another man, or when a woman is attracted to and loves another woman.*

How do people become gay?

*A person does not become gay. They are born gay, but they maybe don't realise for a while. Some people realise when they are very young, sometimes in primary school. Some people realise when they are in secondary school, and some people don't realise till they are adults. It doesn't matter when a person realises though. What is important is that we treat everyone kindly and respect different types of people.*

My religion says being gay is wrong.

*Some people believe that their religion says it is wrong to be gay. Everyone can believe what they want, and following your religion is important. But it is not okay to treat other people badly. No religion teaches that it's ok to be unkind to people. In our society we respect and value all different people and families.*

## Gender

When discussing gender, it is useful to challenge gender stereotypes and use concrete examples where possible.

Liam likes pink! That's a girl's colour!

Used to make fun of a boy because he likes a colour that is perceived to be a girl's colour.

*Everyone is unique and can like any colour they like. There are no 'boy' colours or 'girl' colours; colours are for everyone. Plus, imagine how boring the world would be if all boys liked the same colour and all girls liked the same colour! So, it is not fair to laugh at anyone for their colour choice.*

Dolls are for girls.

*Toys are for everyone and anyone can play with any toy they like. There are no 'boys' toys or 'girls' toys. Imagine how boring and limited the world would be if all boys liked the same toys and all girls liked the same toys! So, it is not fair to laugh at anyone for their choice of toys. Play with whatever makes you happy!*

Boys are better at sports than girls.

*Lots of girls do sports and are amazing at it. Look at these examples:*

*Jasmin Paris, a 35-year old woman who smashed the record for the brutal, gruelling 283-mile Mountain Spine race in the Scotland (whilst stopping to express (pump milk) / nurse for her baby).*

*Or Sarah Thomas, who is the first person to ever swim the Atlantic Ocean four times non-stop, and this was a year after being treated for breast cancer!*

*And the women's England football team has won more matches than the men's England football team.*

*Men and women have different bodies, so their body weight and muscle tends to be different. But for their bodies, both male and female athletes are amazing! And before the age of 11 or 12, there is actually very little difference in strength or size between girls and boys.*

Why does Josie have short hair? She looks like a boy!

*People are free to choose whatever hairstyle they like (within the school rules). It doesn't matter if boys have long hair or girls have short hair. Many people like to change their hairstyles and try different things which is great!*

What are gender stereotypes?

*Gender stereotypes are an unfair idea that all boys or all girls will like or do the same thing. One example is to say that 'all girls like pink' or 'all boys are good at maths.'*

*You know how, nowadays, many people think pink is a girl's colour and blue is a boy's colour? Well, in Victorian times it was the opposite - people believed pink was for boys and blue was for girls. These are all gender stereotypes, which is when people or a society decides what is right for boys and what is right for girls. They are all false, though many people believe them. We are free to choose what we like and what we don't like, and it doesn't matter what gender you are.*

What does non-binary mean?

*Being non-binary is when a person does not feel like they are a boy or a girl.*

What does gender-fluid mean?

*Being gender-fluid means a person sometimes feels like a boy, sometimes feels like a girl and sometimes neither.*

## Sex

What is the difference between sex and gender?

*Sex is used to describe the body you are born with. Some people are born with male body parts, so they are a boy. Some people are born with female body parts, so they are a girl. (Some people are born with both, so they are intersex).*

*Gender is about the way people are expected to dress, play and act, based on whether they are a girl or a boy. For example, when people think that pink is for girls, and blue is for boys. Or that only dolls are for girls and football is for boys. This is not true, of course, but people often make judgements about other people based on their gender, and that's unfair.*

What is intersex?

*Being intersex is when a person is born with a mix of male and female hormones / chromosomes / body parts. There is nothing wrong with this, it's just the way some people are born.*

## Gender Identity

What does trans/transgender mean?

*This is when a person is (biologically) born as a boy but knows that they are a girl, or when a person is born as a girl but knows that they are a boy.*

*If someone is born a girl and knows that they are a girl, or if someone is born a boy and knows that they are a boy, they can use the word cisgender to describe themselves.*

*Transgender people are people whose biology does not match who they know they are.*

Can a boy become a girl?

It is worth asking enquiry questions to clarify the context of the question and where they heard about this to determine if they are only seeking to know about gender stereotypes rather than gender identity (e.g. a boy can have long hair but that doesn't mean he is a girl).

*Sometimes a person can be born as a boy but they know they are a girl. They may want to change their clothes and their name so that other people see them as a girl. Sometimes people also take hormones or have surgery to change their bodies (they need to wait until they are an adult to have surgery).*

*If a person identifies in this way, they can use the word transgender to describe themselves.*

Is it bad to be transgender?

*No, it isn't.*

*Sometimes people make fun or bully transgender people because they don't understand. It is unkind to bully someone and against the school rules, so anyone who does this will be in trouble. Our school should be a place where everyone feels safe and happy.*

What's the difference between transgender and transsexual?

*Transgender is a word used to describe people whose biology does not match who they know they are. So, for example, when a person is born a boy but knows they are a girl, or when a person is born a girl but knows they are a boy. It can also mean people who do not feel like a boy or a girl, which is called non-binary.*

*Transsexual is used to describe people who have medically transitioned (had surgery and/or taken hormones) from being male to being female or from being female to male). It isn't a word that includes non-binary people, so it is better to use the word transgender so we include everyone.*

What does cis/cisgender mean?

*Being cis or cisgender is when a person is born a girl and knows that they are a girl, or if someone is born a boy and knows that they are a boy.*

*Their biology matches their gender identity.*

I want to become a girl/boy. Can I?

In such a case it is important to investigate why this young person is saying this and seek support for yourself and the young person. The young person might be asking about how to dress up as a girl/boy or role play. If the young person is questioning their gender identity or is trans, the school should support the young person and fully accommodate their needs. It is important to remember that someone could be questioning their gender identity for a whole range of reasons and this may not mean that the young person is transgender or will go on to transition.

For help with supporting trans students in schools, see Trans Inclusion Toolkits:

<https://www.theproudtrust.org/resources/research-and-guidance-by-other-organisations/trans-inclusion-schools-toolkit/>

<https://www.allsortsyouth.org.uk/resources/toolkits-booklets-guides>

<https://new.brighton-hove.gov.uk/news/2018/trans-guidance-schools-helps-tackle-stereotyping-and-keep-children-safe>

## General LGBT+

What does LGBT / LGBT+ stand for?

It would probably be necessary to explain the individual terms in addition to the following:

*It is used to describe people's relationships and their identity. There are four key words here: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. There are more words to describe people, but if we included them all the acronym/word would get very long, so we put a plus to show that there are more.*

*This is used to describe people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.*

What does queer mean?

*Queer was a word that was used to hurt people who are gay. It is sometimes now used by people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender to describe their identity, but unless you would like to describe yourself in that way, you shouldn't use it as it can be hurtful.*