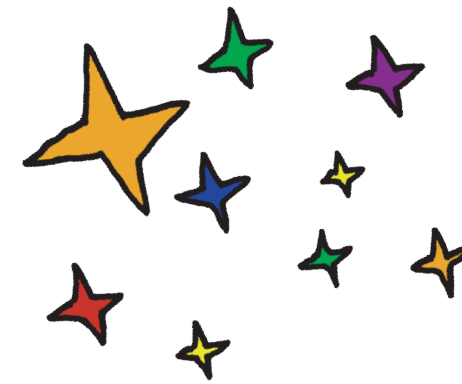


Welcoming the Rainbow

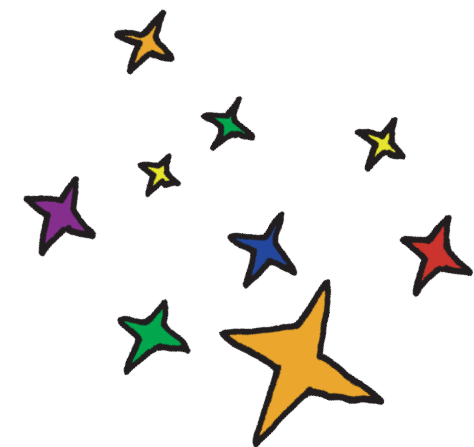


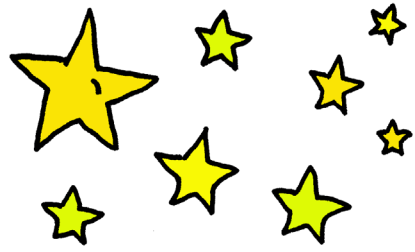
**A Guide to
LGBTQIA+ Inclusion for Buddhists**



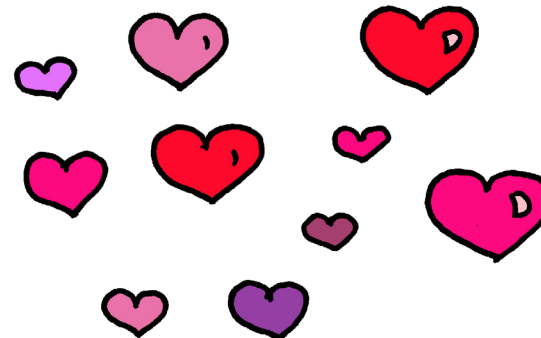
Welcoming the Rainbow

A Guide to LGBTQIA+ Inclusion
for Buddhists





May all beings be happy.



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Welcoming the Rainbow

Together, we can make our Buddhist centres safer and more inclusive places for our rainbow community.



Rainbodhi LGBTQIA+ Buddhist Community has produced this booklet to give some practical tips to help make Buddhist temples, monasteries and organisations safe and welcoming for LGBTQIA+ Buddhists.

The Rainbow Acronym

The acronym 'LGBTQIA+' stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual. The '+' sign indicates other possible identities. We call this the rainbow acronym because our community is made up of many diverse groups, just as a rainbow is made up of many colours.

LGBTQIA+ covers a wide range of identities, including physical characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identities. These groups are quite different from each other, but they sometimes overlap. For example, lesbian, gay and bisexual refer to sexual orientation; transgender refers to gender identity; queer can refer to either gender identity or sexuality; intersex refers to people born with both female and male physical characteristics; and asexual refers to an absence of sexuality. People can also have combinations of these various aspects.

Although LGBTQIA+ identities are different, these groups all share common challenges, including prejudice, discrimination, legal barriers and violence—just for being themselves.

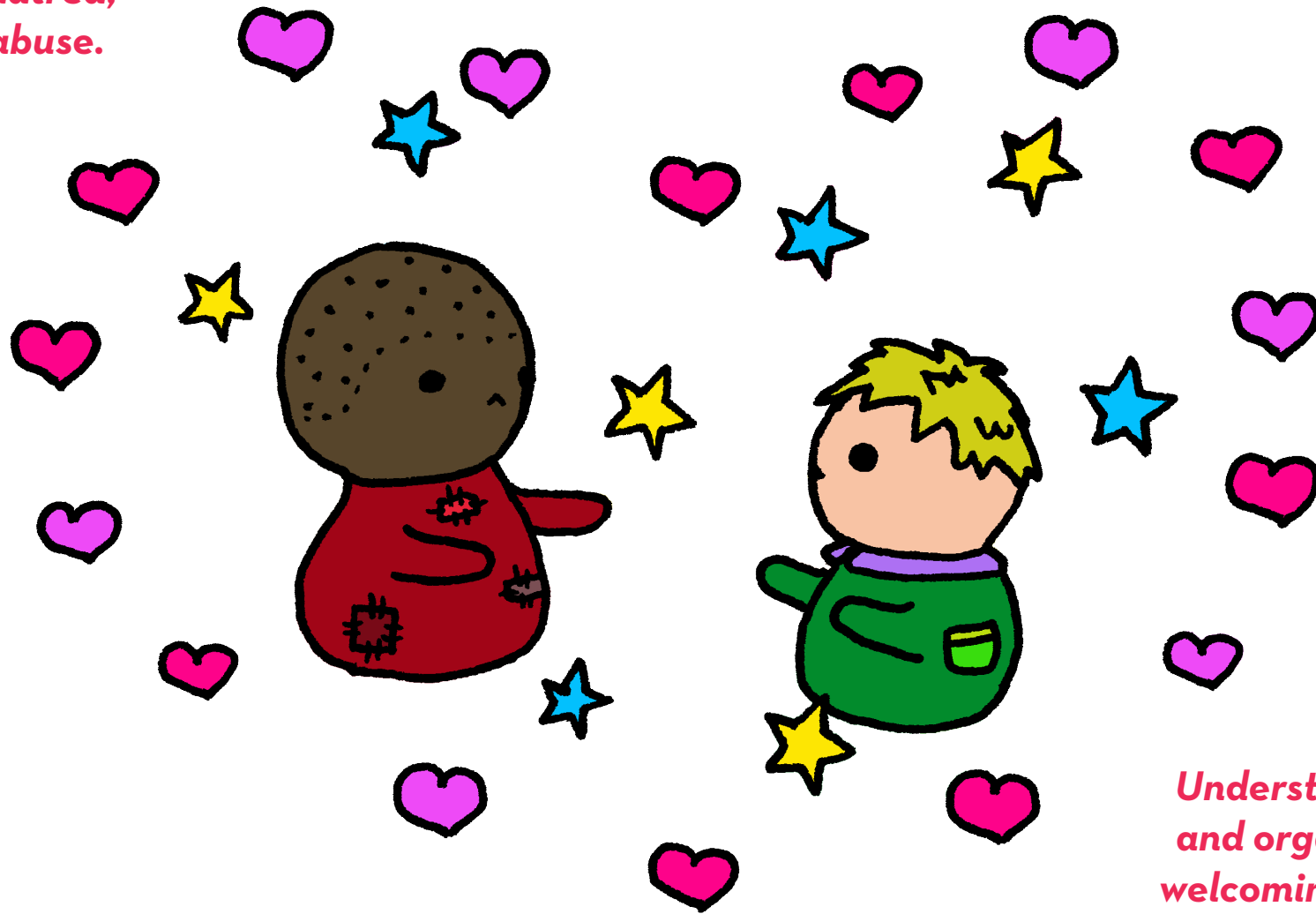
Creating Change Together

LGBTQIA+ people frequently face rejection and oppression by society and religious communities. The Buddha often spoke against discrimination and said that all living beings deserve love without distinction. Since all people are capable of achieving enlightenment, we need to make sure we don't exclude anyone from our Buddhist communities.

We may not realise that our Buddhist organisations, temples and retreat centres are sometimes unwelcoming places for the LGBTQIA+ community. Individuals might not understand that their actions and speech can cause harm to LGBTQIA+ people. Organisations may not see the ways in which they exclude LGBTQIA+ people.

The good news is that this is changing, and we can be part of the change.

If individuals or Buddhist organisations are perpetrating homophobia, biphobia, transphobia or interphobia then they are perpetuating hatred, violence and abuse.



Understanding how individuals and organisations can be more welcoming and inclusive towards LGBTQIA+ Buddhists will help us truly practise loving-kindness and compassion towards everyone in our community.

Listening to Our Community

It's important to listen to the voices of LGBTQIA+ Buddhists to understand their experiences. Recent research sponsored by Rainbodhi, undertaken by Dr Stephen Kerry from Charles Darwin University, found that Australian Buddhist communities can be challenging places for LGBTQIA+ Buddhists.* Speaking about their own Buddhist centres, respondents reported:

- 61% felt that Buddhist centres silence or ignore LGBTQIA+ people and issues
- 55% were at times reluctant to disclose their LGBTQIA+ identities
- 54% had seen or heard sexism
- 37% had seen or heard homophobia
- 26% had seen or heard transphobia or misgendering
- 26% had seen or heard racism
- 16% had been told their LGBTQIA+ identity is inconsistent with Buddhist teachings.

These results show that Buddhist centres are not always safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ Buddhists. Acknowledging the existence of prejudice and discrimination is an important first step in making the necessary changes to create safer and more inclusive Buddhist communities.

Buddhism has a LGBTQIA+ History (and Future)

There have always been queer, trans and intersex people in human history. LGBTQIA+ people are also spiritual people, so it's not surprising to find that Buddhism has a LGBTQIA+ history.

Early Buddhist texts discuss same-sex attraction and sexuality without any sense of moral judgement or negativity. There are also accounts of laypeople and monastics who transitioned across genders. Ancient Indian society recognised a category of people who were regarded as neither male nor female, who we might call transgender or third gender today, and another category of people who had both male and female sex characteristics, who we might refer to as intersex. Some of these groups experienced stigma and social disadvantages throughout Buddhism's history, and for some groups, this discrimination continues today.

* Dr Stephen Kerry, *LGBTQIA+ Buddhist Research Project*, Charles Darwin University, Darwin 2020.



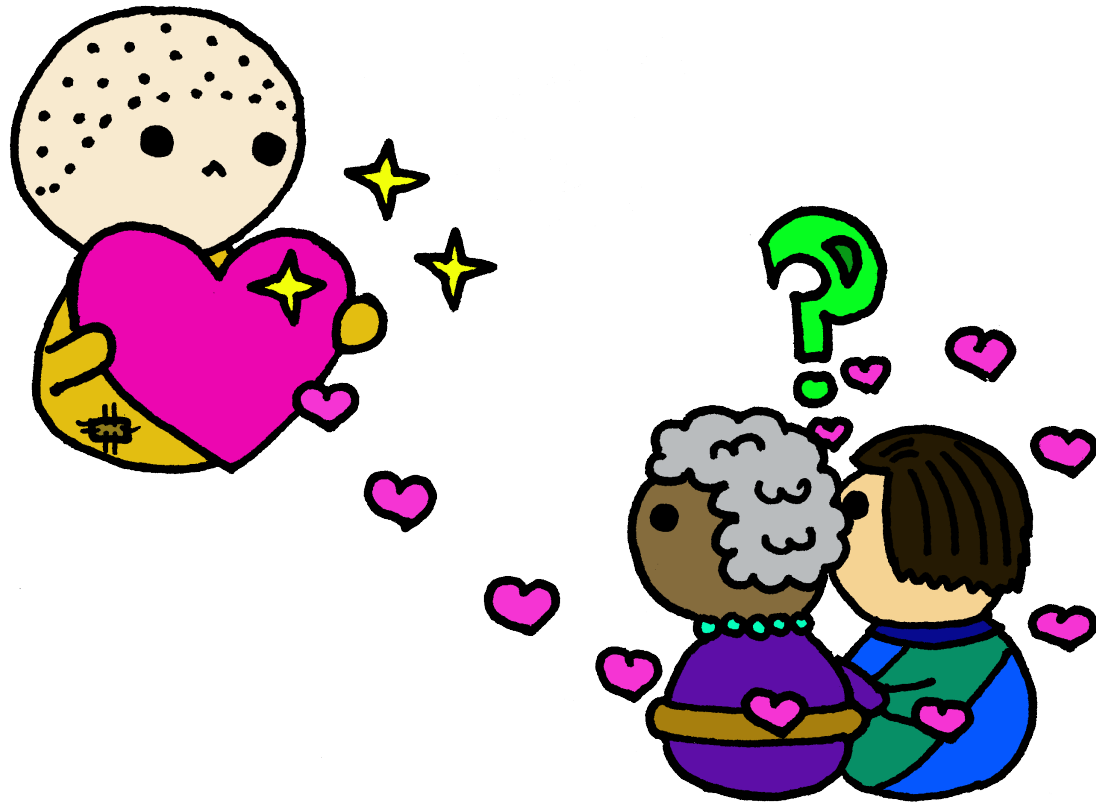
Pride in Buddhism

LGBTQIA+ people have contributed to the flourishing of Buddhism as monastics, lay followers, teachers and scholars. However, their stories are often forgotten or their experiences are ignored. As today's society becomes more accepting and understanding of LGBTQIA+ people generally, the time is right for Buddhist individuals and organisations to celebrate our rainbow community and show support in meaningful ways. This will ensure that LGBTQIA+ people are included as valued members of the Buddhist community in the future.

Everyone, regardless of gender or sexuality, deserves to live their life free from fear of rejection and be proud of who they are.



Being a Spiritual Friend to LGBTQIA+ Buddhists



Good friendship is the whole of the spiritual path.

Be an Ally

Being a spiritual friend is an important part of being Buddhist. You can help others feel safe and welcome by advocating for inclusion and by being an LGBTQIA+ ally.

An ally is someone who supports LGBTQIA+ civil rights and who actively challenges homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and interphobia. Allies are often heterosexual and/or cisgender (people who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth). Allies acknowledge that they are privileged to not experience the same social disadvantages that LGBTQIA+ people face and so they use this position of privilege to counter discrimination against these communities. An ally can also be someone who identifies within the LGBTQIA+ community and supports a group they don't identify as. For example, a cisgender gay man can be an ally to transgender people, or an intersex person might support rights for same-sex-attracted people.

Allies help LGBTQIA+ people do the work of explaining the issues they experience in the world. To be a good ally, it's firstly important to listen to LGBTQIA+ people and to educate yourself about their diverse experiences. This means knowing basic things like what the letters in the rainbow acronym mean, the difference between sexuality and gender, how issues that affect trans people are different to issues that affect LGB people, or what human rights intersex people are fighting for. Anyone can be an ally to others regardless of sexuality or gender.

Being an ally is an act of friendship and compassion.



Promote Inclusion

It's good to remember that there are already LGBTQIA+ people in Buddhist communities. We should never assume that everyone is straight, or that we can tell someone's gender or pronouns just by looking at them. Acknowledging that LGBTQIA+ people attend temples, retreats and centres is the first step to becoming more inclusive.

LGBTQIA+ people have often been made to feel invisible in Buddhist communities and their specific needs have not been acknowledged or catered for. Sometimes they can't be open about their identities because they fear rejection and may be uncomfortable speaking up about issues that affect them. They might be unsure if Buddhist communities are safe because of a past bad experience with another Buddhist centre or with religion generally. Letting LGBTQIA+ Buddhists know that they are welcome in our communities shows goodwill and spiritual friendship. Inclusion lets rainbow Buddhists know they belong and are valued.



Inclusion Means Making Changes

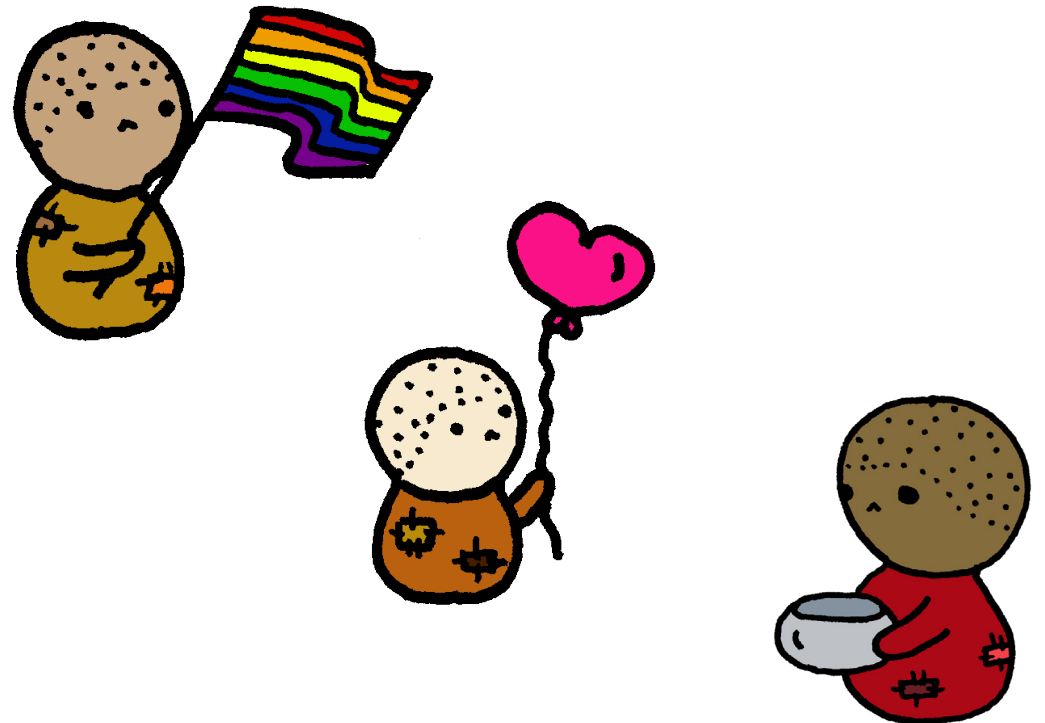
Welcoming LGBTQIA+ people to your community is a great start, but true inclusion means removing the barriers that currently exclude them. Inclusion requires an understanding of the perspective of LGBTQIA+ people, recognising the things that cause them harm and making the necessary changes to avoid it. This might involve altering administrative practices, such as membership and registration forms that only have male or female options. Or making physical changes, such as providing all-gender toilets and accommodation choices. It could mean change at a personal level, like being more aware of the words we use or the types of questions we ask so that we don't make LGBTQIA+ people feel that they don't belong.

Buddhist centres should have policies on inclusion to let everyone know that they are welcome. Publicly available safeguarding procedures are needed to support these inclusion policies, to make sure that everyone welcomed into a space is safe while there and so they know that they have resolution pathways if something goes wrong.

Celebrate Diversity

There are many ways Buddhist individuals and organisations can show support for the rainbow community. Celebrating diversity provides many opportunities for empathetic joy to arise in the happiness of others.

- Undertake LGBTQIA+ diversity and inclusion training for yourself and your whole organisation. Encourage other Buddhist organisations to do the same.
- Use posters or stickers to let your community know that you support inclusion for LGBTQIA+ people in your centre and include a 'safe space' rainbow symbol on your website and publicity materials. Mention that your organisation welcomes and supports LGBTQIA+ people at talks and events.
- Have a Pride event for LGBTQIA+ people and allies in your community.
- Invite LGBTQIA+ people to participate in all aspects of your organisation, including teaching, administration and volunteering.
- Create publicly available safeguarding processes that allow people to raise issues and concerns about discrimination or prejudice and ensure that there will be follow-up and resolution.





Barriers to LGBTQIA+ Inclusion



Unless Buddhist individuals and organisations are actively being inclusive, LGBTQIA+ people will still be excluded.

The way Buddhist organisations are set up and operated can have a big impact on excluding people from participating in a community. An analogy: physical barriers, such as steps, can exclude people who use wheelchairs, so buildings have ramps and lifts to include them. In the same way, there are administrative, physical and conceptual barriers that exclude LGBTQIA+ people. We might not even be aware of these barriers, but they exist and have real-life consequences.

We can help remove barriers that exclude LGBTQIA+ people and create safer, more inclusive Buddhist communities.

Administrative Barriers that Exclude

Registration forms, membership forms and online databases often have only male or female options to choose from. This excludes many transgender people, non-binary people and also some intersex people who prefer to identify as neither male or female. Having only binary options signals to these people that they are not understood or welcomed even before they have signed up to a retreat or joined your e-newsletter.

To be more inclusive, add an 'Other' option to your forms that ask about gender and have an option such as 'Mx' or 'No title' in addition to Ms, Mrs or Mr. The name and gender that some people use in daily life might be different to what appears on their official ID documents, so add options for people's preferred name and ask what pronouns they use. Also consider whether gender and titles need to be included on some forms at all if this information has no purpose.



Physical Barriers that Exclude

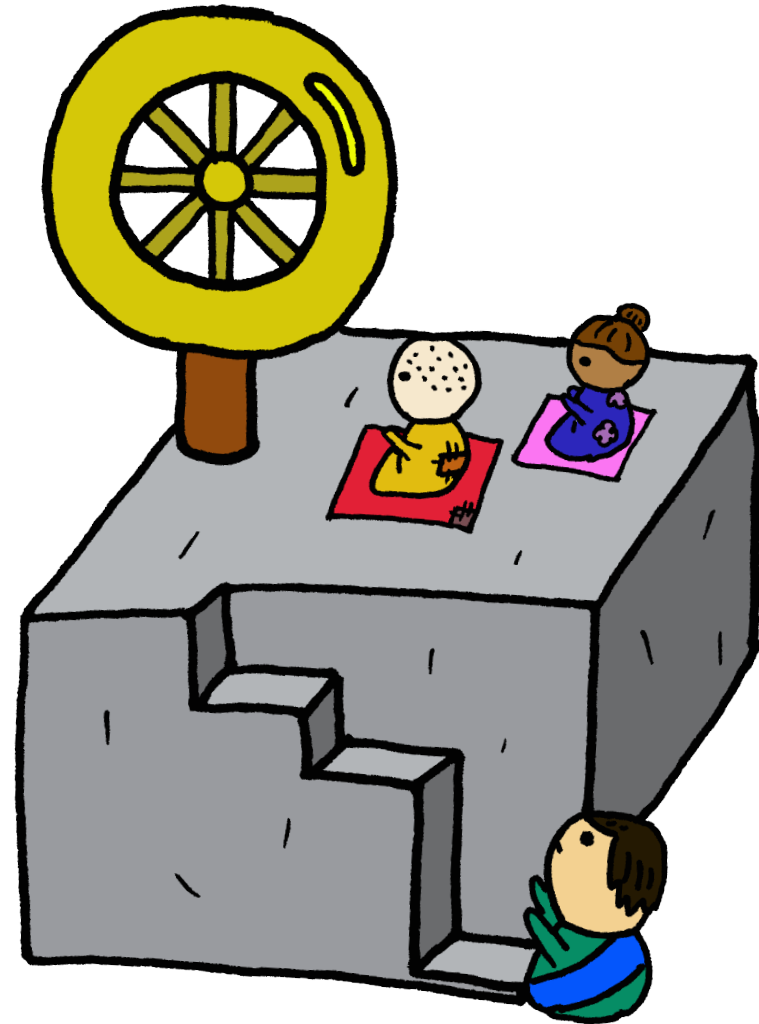
Gender-segregated Seating

Some Buddhist centres have gendered seating areas in meditation halls, dining rooms and other spaces. Sometimes this can even be a 'hierarchical' arrangement, with women sitting behind men. Gender-segregated public areas simply do not work for everyone in our community and can exclude people from feeling safe or belonging.

For some trans people, gendered spaces bring unwanted attention and fear of rejection. For non-binary people, being forced to make a decision about where to sit can be distressing when their gender is not recognised. Other people don't like gender segregation because it seems old-fashioned and unnecessary.

Toilets

People should feel comfortable to use the toilet that matches their gender identity. Some transgender and non-binary people prefer to use an all-gender toilet rather than having to choose between male and female toilets. Ensuring that there are dedicated all-gender toilets in your centre and at retreats helps make gender-diverse people feel safe and included.



Retreat Accommodation

Everyone should feel welcome and safe on a retreat, but for many LGBTQIA+ people, accommodation issues can be a source of distress. They may worry about rejection because of their sexuality, or being excluded due to their gender, or feel that their needs are simply not considered.

All people, whether they are cisgender or transgender or non-binary, should have the right to choose the accommodation that best suits their gender identity. As many retreat centres divide accommodation facilities into male and female accommodation, it's important that organisations are aware of their legal obligations regarding unlawful discrimination against trans people using these spaces.

While there will always be a need for single-sex accommodation, for some trans and non-binary people, single-sex accommodation does not acknowledge that there are more gender identities, or that some people do not identify with being male or female. To be more inclusive and offer safe alternatives, retreat organisations can provide a choice of dormitories: female, male and all-gender. Registration forms listing these options allow people to nominate the one that suits them best.

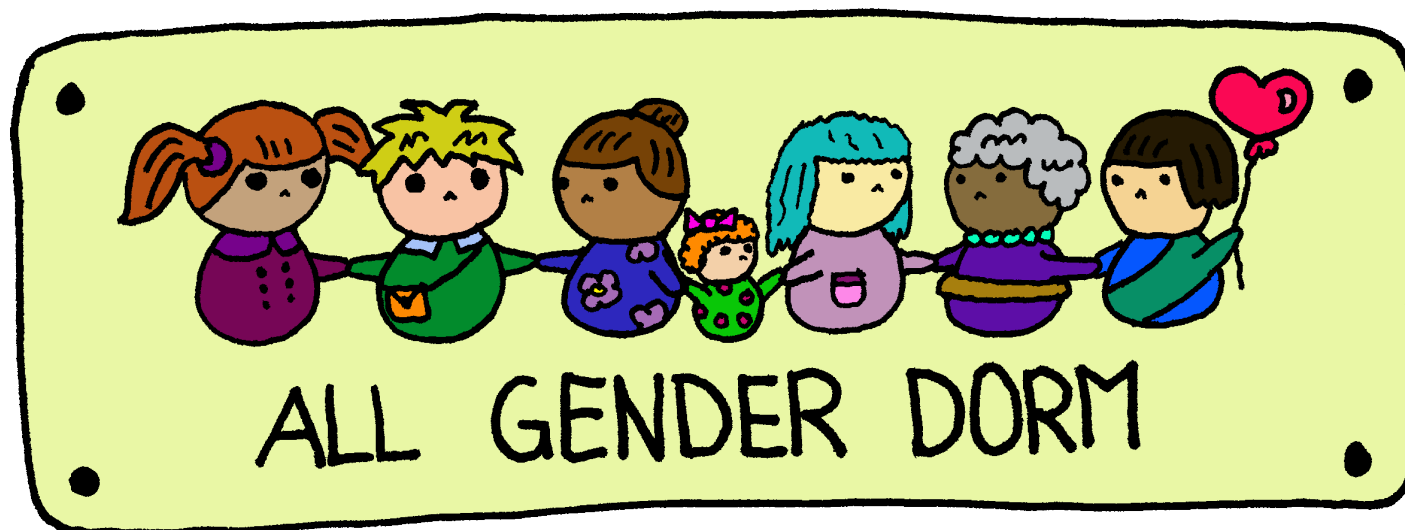
Some same-sex-attracted people may wish to stay in an all-gender dorm because staying in a single-sex dorm can be a challenging experience; other people in their room might make them feel unwelcome for being queer, or desire may become a distraction.

For these reasons an all-gender dorm provides an additional choice so that trans, non-binary and same-sex-attracted people can make a choice that works for them. Another possibility is to offer LGBTQIA+ people the opportunity to nominate their preference for a single room, to help make their retreat experience as comfortable as possible.

Welcoming LGBTQIA+ people to a retreat starts long before they arrive.

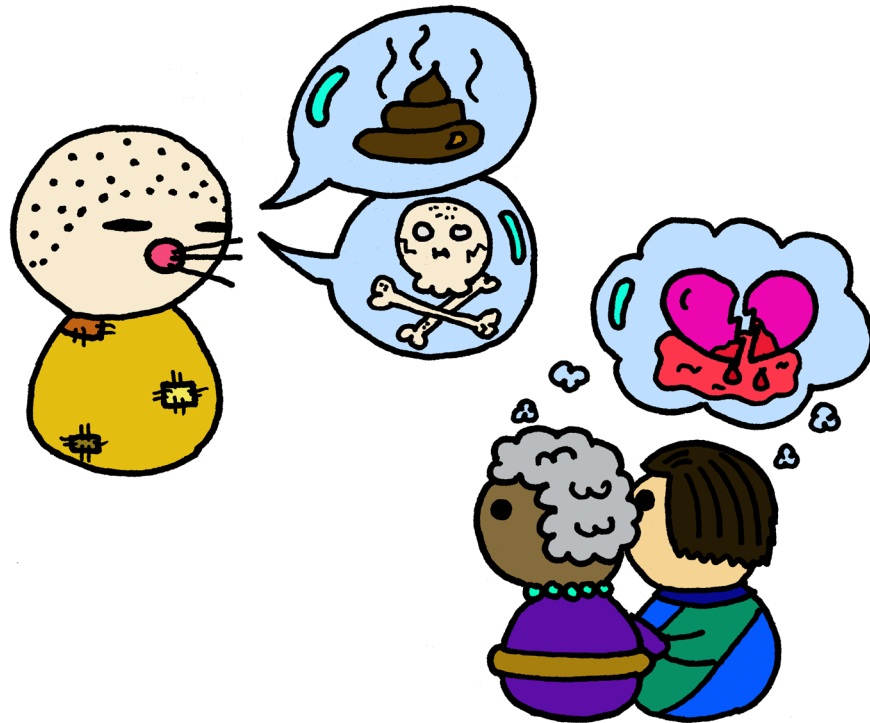
Here are some things you can do:

- Make sure publicity indicates that it is a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQIA+ people.
- Create registration forms with options for different genders, pronouns and accommodation preferences.
- Ensure that retreat managers and volunteers have an awareness of inclusive practices for LGBTQIA+ people.
- Use signage to create all-gender toilets and accommodation options.
- During the orientation session at the start of the retreat, remind people that it is an inclusive and welcoming space for everyone, including LGBTQIA+ people.





Speech that Harms



Our words can make people feel safe, respected and included. Words can also make people upset, offended and excluded.

Words that Hurt

Right speech is an important Buddhist concept. Our words have consequences. Speech that is kind doesn't cause harm and shows respect for people in our community. Words can also hurt people and make them feel unwelcome. Disrespectful language, ignorant jokes and invasive questions are not right speech and make it hard for LGBTQIA+ people to participate in our Buddhist communities.

Here are some important things to be aware of when speaking with LGBTQIA+ people.

Disrespectful Language

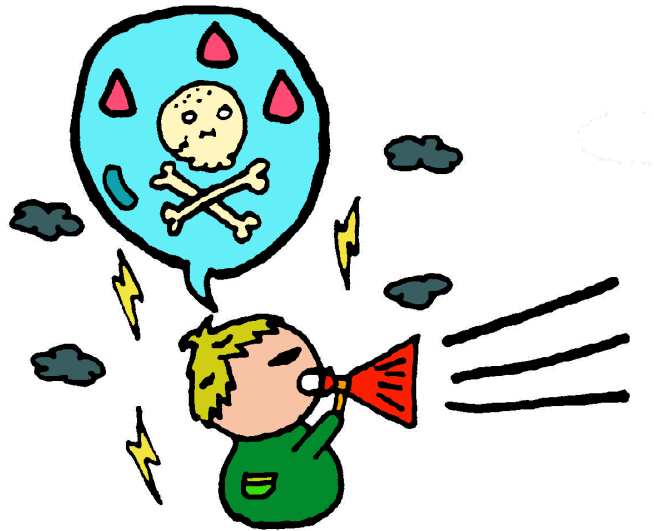
Always be kind and conscious of words that could hurt others. Offensive speech can also have serious legal consequences.

- Avoid using outdated language like 'homosexual', 'transsexual', 'transvestite' and 'hermaphrodite'. These have medical connotations that stigmatise LGBTQIA+ people.
- Don't use offensive words such as 'homo', 'tranny', 'sissy', 'lady-boy', 'he-she', 'shemale' or 'it'.
- Avoid phrases that denigrate LGBTQIA+ people, such as 'that's so gay' or 'no homo'.

Language that Excludes

Being aware of our language is a good way to make our Buddhist communities places where everyone feels they belong. Here are some tips:

- Avoid binary language that excludes trans and non-binary people. Instead of 'ladies and gentlemen' or 'brothers and sisters', just say, 'Hello, everyone.'
- Avoid gender-exclusive language. Instead of 'the average man on the street', try 'the average person on the street'. Instead of 'guys', say 'folks'.
- Be aware of excluding same-sex-attracted people. Instead of 'husbands and wives', talk about 'partners'. Rather than 'attraction to the opposite sex', just talk about 'attraction'.
- Never reduce a person to their body parts or sexual orientation. Instead, remember that they are a whole person and much more than these things. Don't describe someone based on their sexuality ('that gay guy over there') or by their medical history ('she's a male-to-female' or 'he's pre-op').



***Inclusive language makes everyone feel welcome.
Exclusionary language leaves people out.***



Inappropriate Questions

Invasive questions about people's personal lives are always inappropriate in a community space. Questioning someone about their genitals, surgical procedures, sexual orientation or sex life is unwelcome, because these things are very private for everyone. Inappropriate questions include:

- Are you a boy or a girl?
- Have you had surgery done?
- What was your name before you transitioned?
- Who's the man in your relationship?
- What position do you like in bed?
- Have you ever slept with the opposite sex?
- But if you're bisexual, why are you married?

Backhanded Compliments

Complimenting someone for seeming straight or cisgender is offensive, because it sounds like it's somehow better than being LGBTQIA+. These ideas are also based on stereotypes rather than recognising the true diversity of our community. Backhanded compliments include:

- You don't seem gay to me!
- I would never have guessed you were trans.
- You are quite masculine for a gay guy.
- You don't look like a lesbian.

Inappropriate Jokes

Things that are funny to one person might be very hurtful to another. Jokes about gender, sexuality or bodies are usually not funny for LGBTQIA+ people because these jokes are often used to exclude, bully and make fun of them.

Sexual Innuendo

Making physical gestures and sexual comments about people's gender, sexuality or bodies is always inappropriate in community spaces.

Stereotyping

Being stereotyped makes people feel like they are not seen as an individual. Remember that the LGBTQIA+ communities are highly diverse groups and that people within these are not the same; they don't all like the same things or have the same interests.

Outing

Don't reveal (or 'out') people's sexuality or gender history without their permission. Gossiping about these things can hurt people and is wrong speech.



The Importance of Pronouns

We all like to be recognised and respected for who we are.

Pronouns are words that refer to people, such as 'you', 'we' or 'they'. Pronouns also help describe someone's gender, such as 'she', 'her' and 'hers'. Using pronouns correctly is always important and shows respect. We all want people to use the pronouns that are right for us. This is also true for trans and gender-diverse people. Pronouns are part of a person's identity, just like a name is.

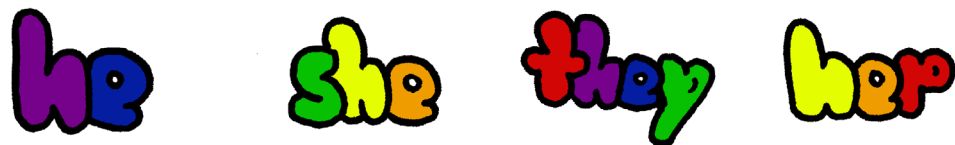
The pronoun a person uses to describe themselves generally reflects their gender identity. Gender is a spectrum. Some people might not look or sound the way they identify, so we shouldn't assume someone's pronoun is based on their appearance or speech alone. Instead we should ask them discreetly and then use their pronoun around them and with other people.

Types of Pronouns

Conventional pronouns are she/her/hers and he/him/his. Some people have an identity that is outside the male/female binary and use gender-neutral pronouns, such as they/them/their. Other people might use 'she' and 'he' interchangeably to signal that their gender is fluid. Some people prefer to be described using only their first name.

They/Them/Their Pronouns

These gender-neutral singular pronouns have a history of use going back to 1375. We often use 'they' to refer to a singular person whose gender pronouns are unknown, such as: 'Someone left *their* umbrella here. How can we find out who *they* are?' or 'I'm not sure what *their* pronouns are. I should ask *them* next time.'



Using Pronouns Correctly

We can model inclusive language in our Buddhist centres to show that we understand the importance of using pronouns. This helps make trans and gender-diverse people feel more welcome, understood and included.

- Introduce yourself with your pronouns: ‘Hi, I’m Bodhi. I use she/her pronouns.’
- If it’s appropriate, politely and discreetly ask what pronouns others use: ‘Hi, my name is Lotus. I use they/them pronouns. How should I refer to you?’
- Always use the name and pronoun they use now, even when talking about them in the past.
- Correct others in your community if they misgender or misname someone and help them understand the importance of correct pronoun and name usage.
- Add your pronouns to your email signature, business card, teacher profile or biography: e.g. Mitra Lovegood (she/her), Accounts Department.

Remember that not everyone will want to share their pronouns and no-one should be forced to do so.

Misgendering

Misgendering is describing or addressing someone using language that does not match how that person identifies their own gender or body. It’s basic politeness to refer to someone as they wish to be known. Being misgendered makes people feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed and hurt. It makes people feel that they don’t belong.

Asking and correctly using someone’s pronouns is a simple way to show respect for their gender identity. If you’re not sure about someone’s pronouns, use the gender-neutral pronoun they/them until you know their gender, and then use their pronouns. If someone identifies as being female or male, don’t use neutral pronouns—use the correct pronouns for their gender when referring to them.

If you make a mistake, it’s okay! Everyone slips up from time to time. If you use the wrong pronoun, simply apologise right away, use the correct pronoun and move on without making a big deal about it. If you realise your mistake later, apologise in private and move forward.

Misnaming

Names are important for all of us. Using someone’s name correctly is a simple courtesy. Misnaming (sometimes known as ‘dead-naming’) is referring to a trans person by the name they used before they transitioned. This can be hurtful and upsetting for trans people. Never ask a person to reveal their old name. When someone has decided to affirm their identity with a new name, we should use it to show that we respect and support them.

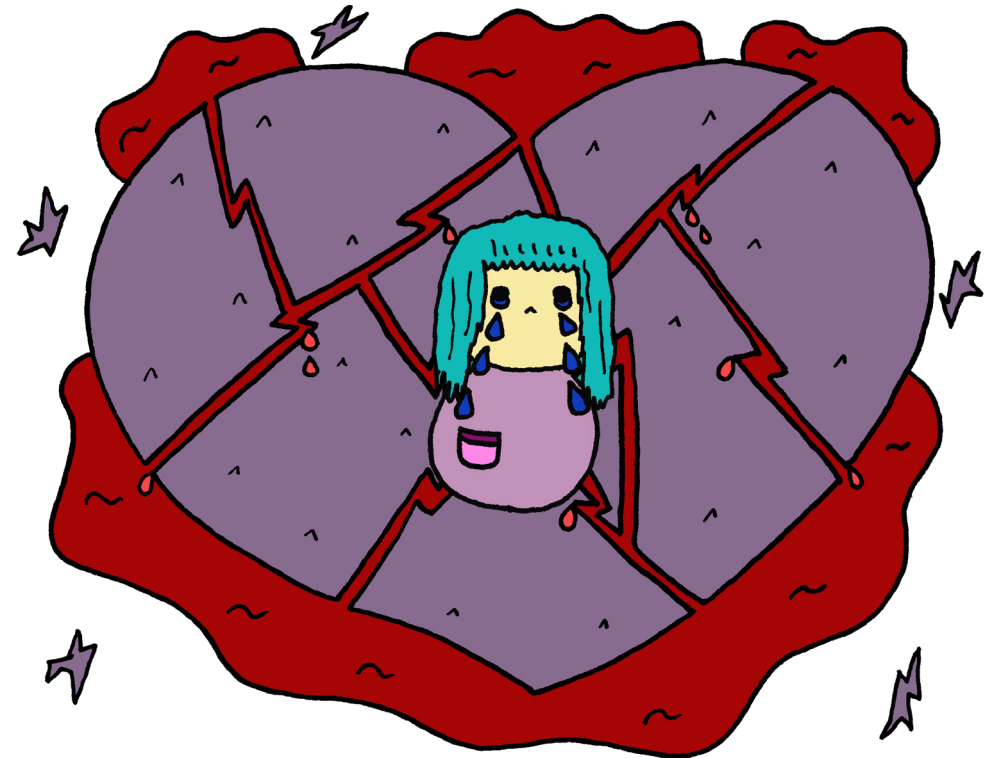


Uncomfortable Instructions

Meditation teachers should be aware that some trans people struggle with discomfort about their bodies. This is sometimes called 'gender dysphoria', a feeling of distress that results from the incongruence between the sex they were assigned at birth and their gender identity. If a meditator is affected by gender dysphoria, use meditation techniques that don't focus on difficult areas of the body. If someone is struggling with chest dysphoria, suggest walking meditation, or loving-kindness meditation, or anything that doesn't draw attention to the chest.

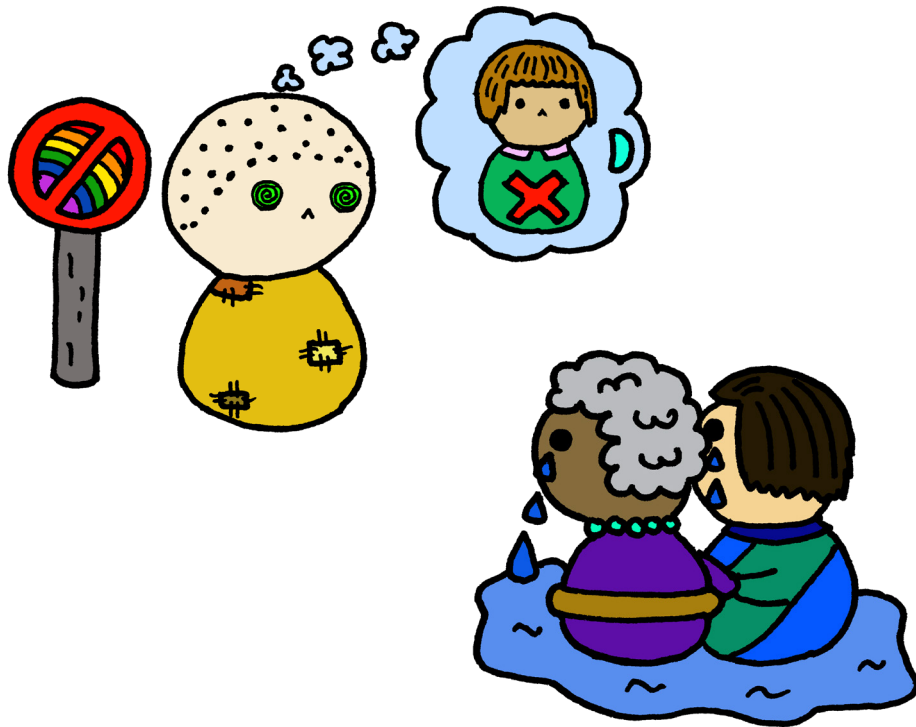
In a group sitting, it can help to offer a choice of techniques. This is especially important if people are new to meditation and not skilled at managing unpleasant sensations or emotions.

Teachers should also remember to use language that includes people of different bodies, gender identity and sexual orientation and not just assume that everyone on the retreat is straight or cisgender.





Views that Harm



People's views can create prejudice and intolerance, discrimination and oppression, as well as hatred and violence towards LGBTQIA+ communities.

The Harmful Reality of Discrimination

Although most LGBTQIA+ people live healthy and happy lives, research shows that a disproportionate number experience poorer mental health outcomes and have higher risk of suicidal behaviours. This is directly related to experiences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and abuse for being LGBTQIA+.

LGBTQIA+ people also face bullying, verbal abuse and violent attacks in countries all over the world. It's for real and urgent reasons like these that we need to keep talking about discrimination and prejudice, to understand the challenges LGBTQIA+ people face, so that we can create spaces that are safe and welcoming to all.

Discrimination Against LGBTQIA+ People

- 72 countries criminalise consensual sexual activity between men.
- 44 countries criminalise consensual sexual activity between women.
- 11 countries have the death penalty for consensual same-sex sexual activity.
- 15 countries criminalise the gender identity of transgender people, using 'cross-dressing', 'impersonation' and 'disguise' laws.
- Around the world, intersex people suffer forced medical interventions that violate their human rights and bodily integrity.

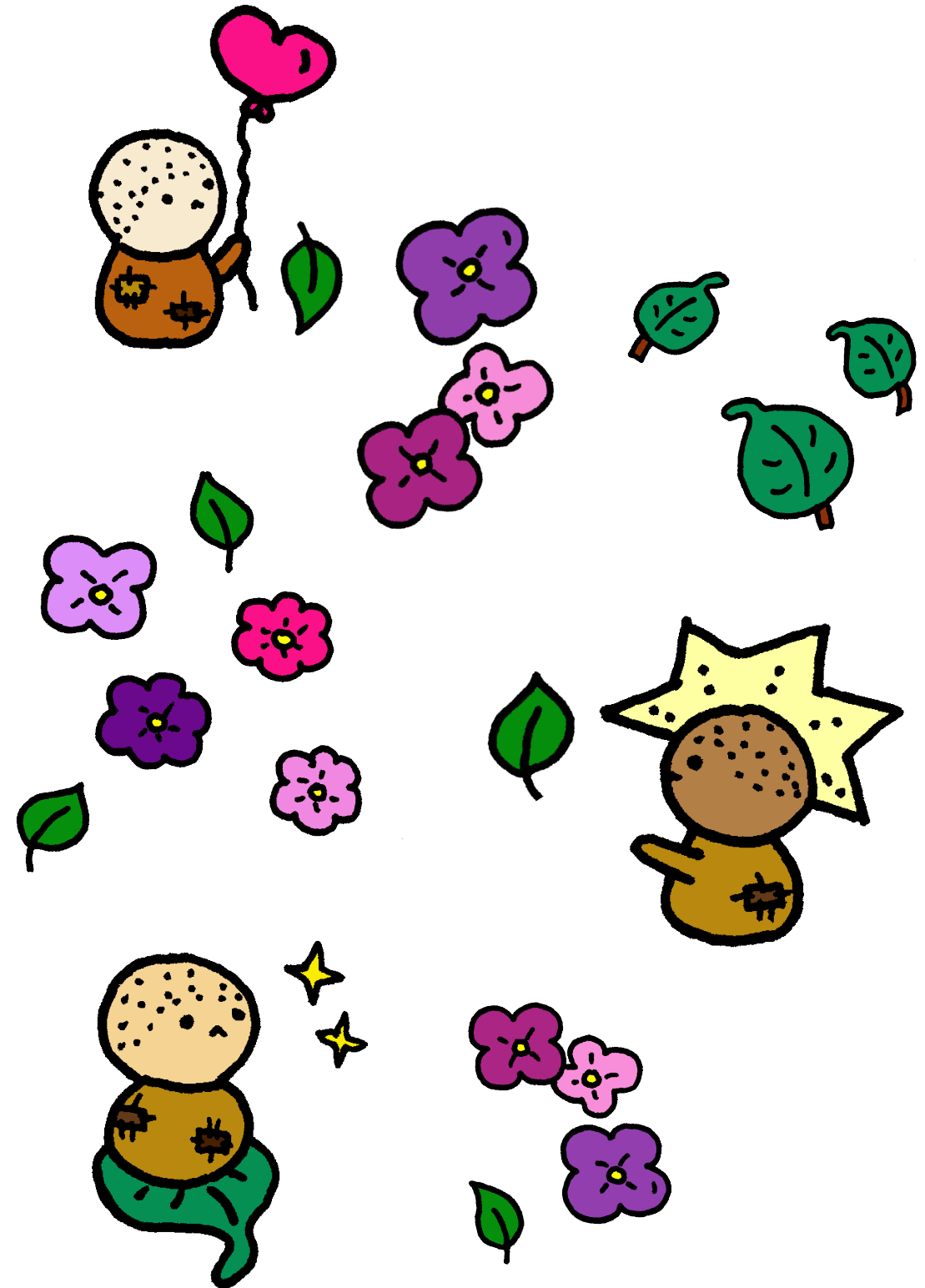
A Note About Not-Self

Some Buddhists unfairly accuse LGBTQIA+ people of being 'obsessed' with their identities or 'clinging' to an idea of self. They point to the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (not-self) and insist that these identities are merely illusory and don't actually exist. Or they claim that focusing on an identity is contrary to Buddhist teaching and this is why LGBTQIA+ people suffer.

However, it's important to remember that being queer, trans or intersex is a fundamental part of being human. Suggesting that these aspects of a person are somehow not real, or are unimportant, is a mistaken view and misuse of doctrine. It denies the reality of people's lived experience and erases important parts of their life, like relationships, community or work. Such an approach is also harmful because it minimises the very real discrimination, prejudice and violence that LGBTQIA+ people experience every day.

Some Buddhists use the concept of not-self to shut down LGBTQIA+ people talking about issues that affect them, or the very real suffering that they experience. LGBTQIA+ people suffer mostly because of *other* people's attitudes to their identity, but being LGBTQIA+ is not itself a cause of suffering any more than being cisgender or straight is. LGBTQIA+ people talk about identity because they are often socially impacted by discriminatory attitudes and want changes to aspects of society that cause harm. Gender and sexuality matter to people and society. Instead of ignoring or erasing these aspects, our diversity should be celebrated.

For these reasons, it's important that Buddhists think carefully about how they talk about not-self to people who experience oppression as a result of their identity. Otherwise, instead of being a useful tool for personal growth, not-self can become a weapon that harms others. This 'weaponised *anatta*' can feel like just another unfair attack on LGBTQIA+ people.



Who are You?

LGBTQIA+ people are sometimes criticised for talking about issues that affect them and told that they are obsessed by identity. When talking about not-self, it's important to remember that cisgender and straight people also have a gender and sexual identity. Perhaps it is more difficult to see this because these groups often think of themselves as 'normal' and society strongly reinforces their identity in ways that they might not even notice.

We can all ask ourselves:

- Do I always tick the same box for my gender on forms?
- Would I be upset if someone referred to me by the wrong gender?
- Would I correct someone if they called me by the wrong name or title?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, does this mean that you are obsessed with your identity?

Or we can develop empathy by thinking about:

- How would I feel if my relationship was criminalised by the state?
- What if I could lose my job because of my sexuality or gender?
- Have I ever feared being attacked for showing affection in public?
- Would I stand up for equal rights if I was treated in this way?

Regardless of our view on self or not-self, the reality is that LGBTQIA+ people continue to experience oppression and discrimination around the world. These issues are personal, social and also spiritual. Let's make sure we don't perpetuate oppression by shutting down discussions about LGBTQIA+ issues in our Buddhist communities.

Also remember that there are aspects of self that Buddhists are encouraged to associate with, such as generosity, ethical conduct, kindness, compassion and wisdom. LGBTQIA+ people have these qualities too.

Intersectional Identities: Race, Gender and Sexuality

LGBTQIA+ people experience racism, classism, ableism and other types of prejudice. The word 'intersectional' refers to a framework for understanding how various identities combine to create discrimination and privilege in societies. This includes identities such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, wealth, education, location and other factors. For example, a Black trans woman at a western Buddhist centre might have a very different experience compared to a straight white cisgender man. Or an Asian gay cis male at a monastery might have a different experience to a white straight cis woman at the same place.

Seeing how identities overlap makes us aware of how discrimination and privilege intersect to create vastly different experiences, even for people who share some of those identities. Understanding these differences is critical because it shows us that people's experiences of society are not all alike and that diverse approaches are required to promote inclusion and equity for various groups in our communities.

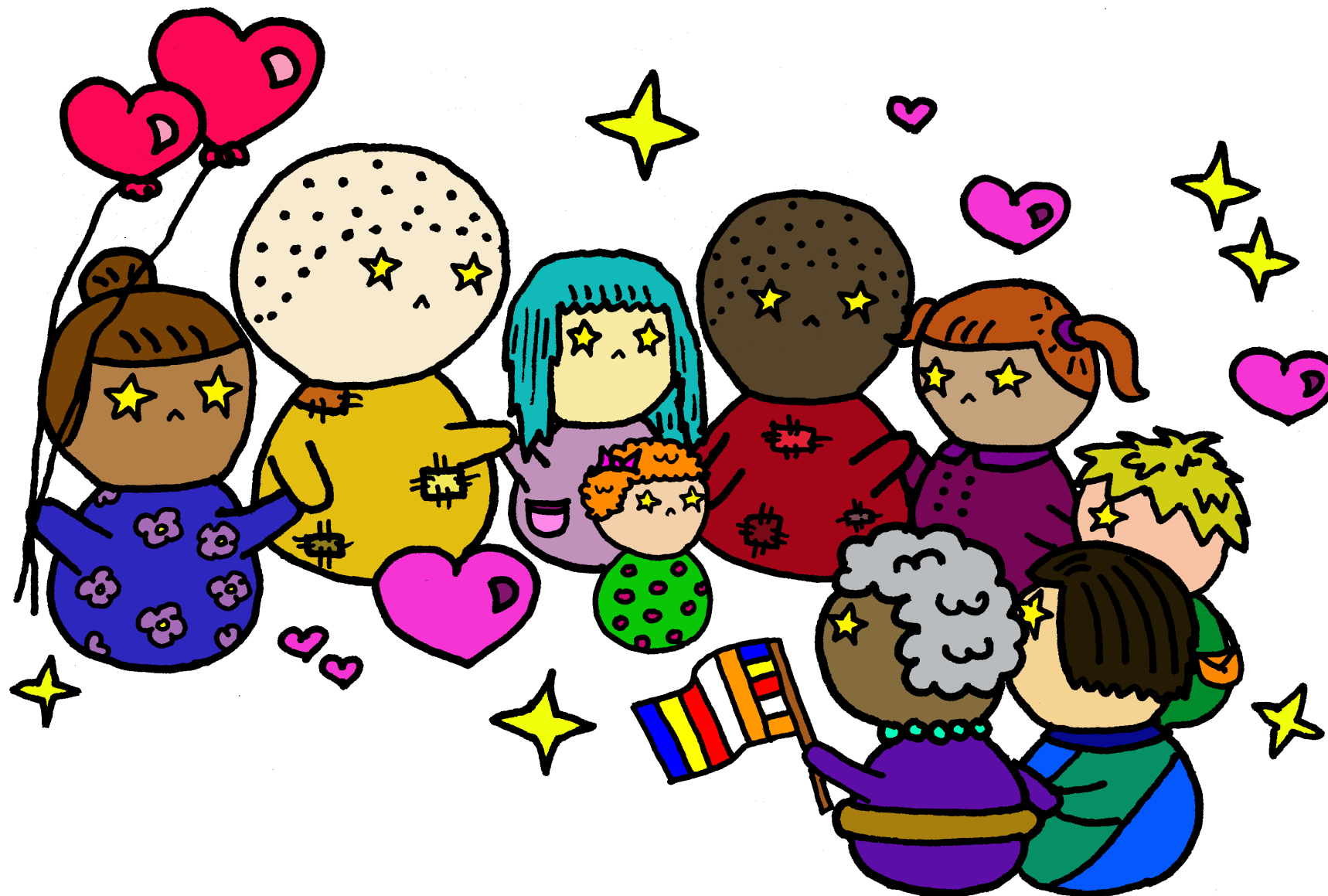
It's important to recognise that we are not all the same and to understand that our differences matter.





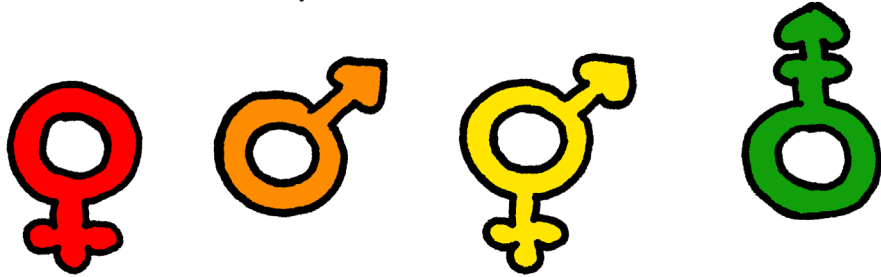
A Guide to LGBTQIA+ People

*LGBTQIA+ communities are highly diverse.
They include individuals, relationships, families,
friendships, subcultures and much, much more!*



Bodies, Gender Identity and Sexuality are All Different Things

Everyone has a body, gender identity and sexuality. It's important to have some knowledge of these basic concepts and terminology to understand issues that affect the LGBTQIA+ community.



Bodies and Sex Characteristics

All bodies are different. We come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and features. Bodies also have a variety of different sex characteristics, that is, physical aspects related to body development, hormone regulation and reproductive systems. Primary sex characteristics are gonads, chromosomes, genitals and hormones. Secondary sex characteristics emerge at puberty and can include breast tissue, voice pitch, and facial and pubic hair.

'Sex characteristics' is more accurate than talking about 'biological sex', or terms like 'biologically male' or 'biologically female', because body parts alone are not what makes someone male or female. We might have been taught that there are only two types of bodies—male or female—but actually, bodies come in many different types.

Bodies and Gender

Bodies and gender are totally different things. Having a certain body type doesn't mean you must be a certain gender. A person of any gender can have any body parts.

Gender identity is part of our *internal* sense of self. Gender can be female, male, neither, a combination of the two, or something else entirely. A person's relationship with their gender can change over time as well.

Assigned Gender

Most of us are assigned a gender when we're born which is reinforced by the people around us as we grow up. Many people agree with the gender they were assigned at birth but some people do not.

Cisgender

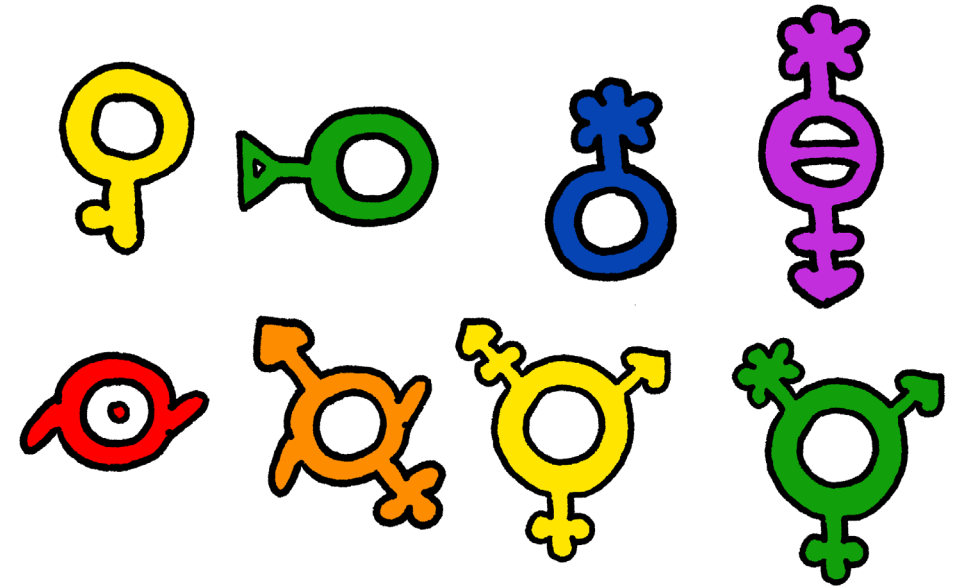
Cisgender (cis for short) refers to people who exclusively identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. For example, someone assigned male at birth and who identifies as a man is a cis male. 'Cis' is a Latin term meaning 'on the same side as'.

Transgender

Transgender (trans for short) or gender diverse describes people who don't exclusively identify as the gender they were assigned at birth. Being trans is about gender identity and who we are, not who we are attracted to.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation or sexuality refers to who we are attracted to and who we are not attracted to. Sexual orientation has nothing to do with a body type or sex characteristics and it also has nothing to do with gender or gender identity. Sexuality is a spectrum, and many people's sexuality changes over time.

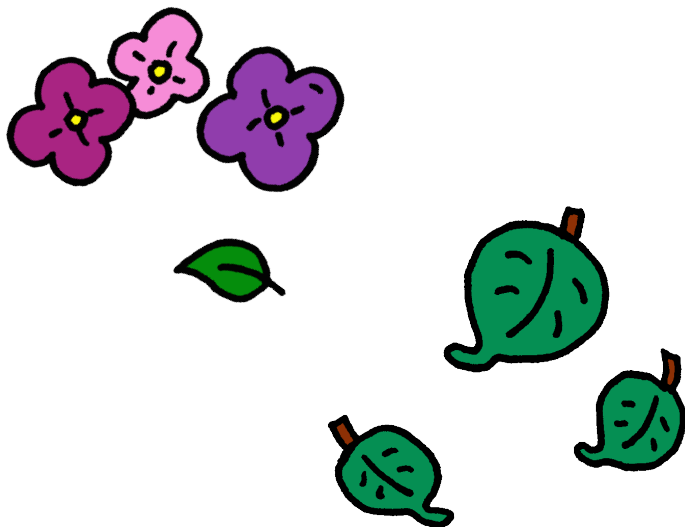


Intersex

Intersex is an umbrella term that describes people who have natural variations that differ from conventional ideas about 'female' or 'male' bodies. Around 1.7% of people are born with intersex traits that include a wide range of genital, chromosomal, hormonal and other physical characteristics. These characteristics might be apparent prenatally, at birth, or become known during puberty or later in life, such as when trying to conceive a child. Each trait has its own characteristics and differing degrees of expression.

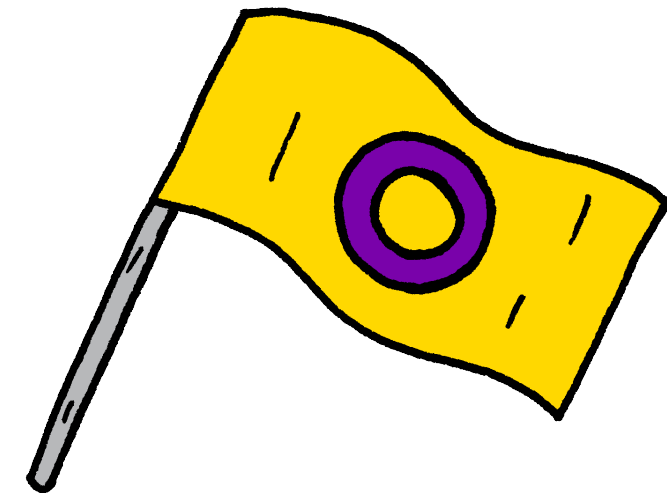
Many intersex people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth—simply as women or men—while some may identify as 'other'. Some intersex people reject the sex they were assigned at birth but do not consider themselves transgender. Others may identify as transgender or gender diverse.

Intersex people have the same range of identities as non-intersex people. Some identify with being part of the rainbow community but many do not. Being intersex is not about gender identity and is different to being trans or non-binary. Intersex also has nothing to do with sexual orientation: intersex people might be lesbian, gay, bi or straight, just like anyone else.



Attitudes that Harm Intersex People

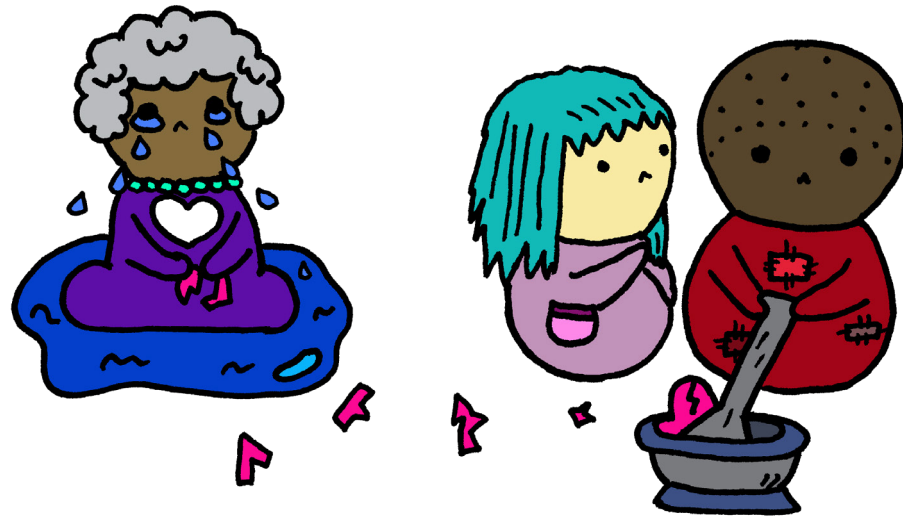
- Living in a world that doesn't fully recognise intersex people's bodily autonomy or human rights.
- Erasure through non-consensual genital surgery in infancy and hormones to make intersex children appear more male or female.
- Social shaming and stigma about bodies in education, healthcare, sport, work and other settings.
- Incorrect and outdated language, such as 'hermaphrodite', which is misleading and pejorative, or calling intersex variation a 'disorder', which it is not.



Trans and Gender Diverse

Trans and gender diverse are umbrella terms that describe people who identify differently to the gender that was assigned to them at birth. Trans people may view being transgender as a history or experience, rather than an identity in itself, and consider their gender identity as simply being female, male or non-binary. Or they might identify specifically as trans, a trans woman, or a trans man.

The term 'gender diverse' includes all the different ways gender can be experienced. It can include people who identify as transgender as well as those questioning their gender. Gender diverse also includes people who don't identify either as male or female, such as non-binary folks, as well as those whose gender is more of a spectrum. Terms some people use to describe the spectrum of their gender include genderfluid, genderqueer and gender non-conforming.



Transitioning or Gender Affirmation

Transitioning or gender affirmation is when someone takes steps to socially or physically feel more aligned with their gender identity. This is a personal process that feels right for them in order to live in society as their gender. Transition may involve social, medical, surgical and legal steps that affirm a person's gender. Transition does not mean someone is 'changing gender' or 'having a sex change' or 'becoming' a man or a woman; rather, they are *affirming* the gender they have always been. Every trans person's journey is different; there is no such thing as 'fully transitioned', and everyone's transition is complete in its own way regardless of appearance, documents, hormones or surgery.

The process of transitioning isn't the same as identifying as trans. Some people who transition might always identify as trans, but others will identify simply as male or female.

Social Transitioning

This is the process by which a person changes their gender expression to better match their gender identity. This may include coming out as trans, or changing their name and pronouns, or altering their appearance. People might also change the way they interact in gendered spaces, such as changing the bathroom they use. Social transitioning might also include altering their gender on a passport, birth certificate and other documents.

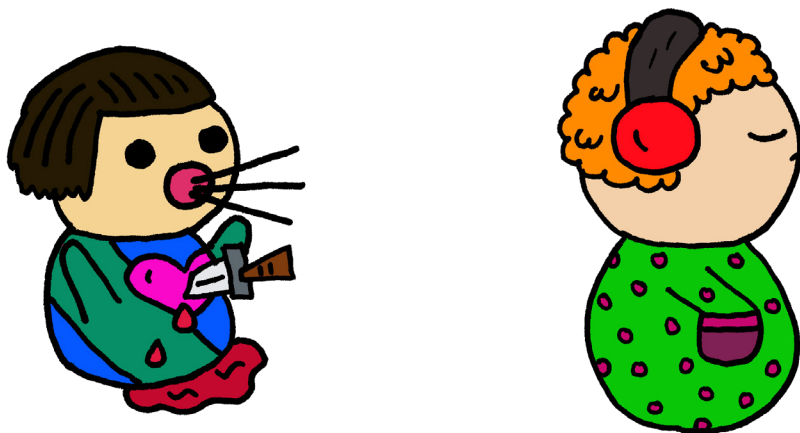
Physical Transitioning

This involves altering bodily appearance such as clothes, makeup and hair to match their gender identity, or seeking medical treatment such as hormones or surgery.

Non-binary

'Non-binary', 'NB' or 'enby' is part of the trans umbrella. Non-binary is a term used to describe the gender of people who do not identify as either male or female. They may feel that they embody elements of both, or that they are somewhere in between, or that they are something different. Non-binary people can still have a strong sense of gender. It can be very distressing to be told that they must identify themselves either as male or female. A person might identify solely as non-binary or relate to non-binary as an umbrella term that covers diverse experience of non-binary gender. Terms under this umbrella include genderfluid, genderqueer (experiencing a spectrum of gender), trans-masculine and trans-feminine (being non-binary but more on the side of one gender), agender (having no gender), and bigender (identifying as both a man and a woman). These and other words describe how NB folks feel about their gender and how it is expressed. Many non-binary people also identify as transgender.

Being non-binary is different from being intersex. Most non-binary people are born with bodies that look conventionally male or female but grow up feeling different. Being non-binary has nothing to do with sexual orientation: non-binary people have the same range of orientations as other people. Some non-binary people choose to have surgery or take hormones to alter their bodies and help them feel more comfortable. Others don't want this and are happy with their bodies as they are. Some non-binary people present themselves androgynously, while others look conventionally male or female but are still non-binary.



Attitudes that Harm Trans, Gender Diverse and Non-binary People

Cissexism/cisgenderism is a discriminatory social view that claims trans experience does not exist. This harmful view holds that only binary (male or female) identities are valid or real, and that gender identity is fixed at birth and is solely based on sex characteristics.

Misgendering is describing or addressing a person using language that does not match their gender identity. This includes incorrect use of pronouns (she, he, they), familial titles (father, sister, uncle) and other words that traditionally have gendered applications, such as handsome, pretty etc.

Transphobia refers to negative prejudices and stereotypes about trans and gender-diverse people. Transphobia includes disrespectful or insulting language as well as restricting the ways that people are allowed to express their gender through clothes, choices of bathroom or accommodation. Transphobia also includes abusive threats, physical violence, sexual harassment and excluding someone because of their gender identity.

Sexual Orientation

Gender and sexuality are two different things. Gender is how we relate to ourselves, and this can be female, male, a mix of both, or something else entirely. Sexuality is who we are attracted to. A cisgender person might be gay, straight, bisexual or asexual. A trans person can also be straight, bisexual, asexual, gay or any other sexuality.

Lesbian

Someone who identifies as a woman and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as women.

Gay

Someone who identifies as a man and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as men. The word gay is also used by women who are sexually and romantically attracted to other women.

Queer

Describes a range of sexual orientations and also gender identities. Once used as a derogatory term, queer was reclaimed and now is often used as an umbrella term to describe the full range of LGBTQIA+ identities.

Bisexual

Someone who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not necessarily assume there are only two genders and the term pansexual has developed to specifically include an attraction not restricted by gender, including attraction to trans and non-binary people.

Heterosexual (Straight)

Someone who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to the opposite gender.

Romantic Orientation

Describes who we are romantically attracted to. This can be separate from our sexual orientation. Romantic orientations work in much the same way as sexual ones and describe the gender/s the person is romantically interested in.

Asexual/Ace

A sexual orientation defined by a lack of sexual attraction, either within or outside relationships. Asexuals can still experience romantic attraction across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum and might still engage in sexual activity despite not experiencing sexual attraction.

Attitudes that Harm Same-sex-attracted People

Biphobia: A harmful attitude towards someone who is attracted to more than one gender. This can include telling someone that their sexuality is 'just a phase' or to 'pick a side'. Labelling bisexuals as gay or straight if they are in a certain relationship erases their true bisexual identity.

Heteronormativity: The view that heterosexual relationships are the only natural, normal and legitimate expressions of sexuality and relationships, and that other sexualities or gender identities are unnatural and a threat to society.

Homophobia: Negative beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes about non-heterosexual people. Verbal homophobia is a common form, including name-calling, rumours and abusive words ('fag' or 'dyke') or phrases like 'that's so gay'. Homophobia also includes abusive threats, physical violence, sexual harassment, discriminatory legislation and deliberately excluding someone because of their sexuality.

More Resources

<https://rainbodhi.org/resources/>



Acknowledgement of Country

Rainbodhi acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and also extend this respect to all First Nations people around the world.



This booklet was produced by LGBTQIA+ Buddhists.

All identity groups in the rainbow acronym were consulted for input and feedback.

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Rainbodhi
LGBTQIA+ BUDDHIST COMMUNITY

Rainbodhi is a spiritual friendship group for LGBTQIA+ Buddhists and an advocate for more inclusion and diversity in the broader Buddhist community. We offer meditation, dhamma discussion and social events in a safe, supportive environment. We welcome everyone regardless of race, gender, sexuality or ability. Rainbodhi is a non-sectarian group, embracing all Buddhist traditions and open to people of other faiths and beliefs. All our events are free.

Our name combines two words: rainbow, representing our diverse community, and bodhi, the Buddhist concept of enlightenment. We believe in inclusion, compassion and wisdom.

rainbodhi.org

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