



Positive
OUTLOOK
Developing

Glossary of Sexuality Education Terms



Glossary of terms

Introduction

This glossary serves as an essential reference within the “Positive Outlook Developing: Sexual Identity and Education” project. It is intended to support educators and other relevant stakeholders in navigating the dynamic language of sexual identity and education. However, it is important to note that language evolves and interpretations of certain terms may vary regionally.

Terms

Abstinence

A choice to refrain from engaging in sexual activity, often promoted as a form of birth control. Some people define sexual abstinence as not having vaginal intercourse, while others define it as not engaging in any sexual activity.

Adolescence

A transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (age of majority). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person ages 10 to 19. This age range falls within WHO’s definition of young people, which refers to individuals ages 10 to 24.

Age appropriate

The age-level at which it is suitable to teach concepts, information, and skills based on the social, cognitive, emotional, and experience level of most students in that age range.

Age of consent

The age a person is legally able to consent to sexual activity that varies

from country to country, but usually ranges from 14 to 18 years of age.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

A collection of symptoms that results from a person’s immune system being severely weakened, making them susceptible to other infections and illnesses. AIDS is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and may occur if HIV is untreated. People do not die from AIDS but from an infection their body acquires as a result of their weakened immune system.

Asexual

A sexual orientation that refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual and/or emotional). Asexual people may also identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, heterosexual, or many more sexual orientations.

Barrier methods

Contraceptive methods, such as condoms, that create a physical barrier to prevent the exchange of bodily fluids

during sexual activity. These barriers serve as a preventive measure against the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and function as an effective means of contraception by blocking the passage of sperm.

Bigender

A gender identity in which an individual identifies with two distinct genders, either simultaneously or at different times.

Biological sex

The sex of an individual as determined by chromosomes (such as XX or XY), hormones, and internal and external anatomy, such as genitalia, gonads, hormone levels, hormone receptors, and genes. Typically, individuals are assigned the sex of male or female at birth. Biological Sex is also known as natal sex or the preferred terminology “sex assigned at birth.” Those who present with ambiguous genitalia at birth and who are generally later confirmed with genetic testing to have chromosomes different from XX or XY at birth are often referred to as intersex.

Bisexual

A sexual orientation that refers to a person who has the capacity for emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction to more than one gender. A bisexual orientation speaks to the potential for, but not requirement of, involvement with more than one gender. This is different from being attracted to only men or only women.

Body image

How people physically experience or feel in their own body, including beliefs about their appearance, which is developed through life experiences, media representations, stereotypes, assumptions, and generalizations. This

may or may not match a person’s actual appearance.

Cisgender

Refers to an individual whose gender identity is aligned with their biological sex or sex assigned at birth.

Comprehensive sex education

Sex education programs that build a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. Ideally, comprehensive sex education should start in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade. At each developmental stage, these programs teach age-appropriate, medically accurate, and culturally responsive information that builds on the knowledge and skills that were taught in the previous stage.

Consent

An agreement between people to engage in an activity. One example is an agreement that occurs between sexual partners about the behaviors that will occur in a sexual encounter. For example, consenting to sex is when a person agrees to engage in sexual behaviors with another person.

Contraception

Any means used to prevent pregnancy, including, but not limited to, abstinence, barrier methods (e.g., external condoms and internal condoms), hormonal methods (e.g., pill, patch, injection, implant, IUD, and ring), and other nonhormonal methods (e.g., sterilization and nonhormonal IUDs). Contraceptive methods are also known as birth control methods.

Emergency contraception

A safe, legal, and effective way to reduce

the risk of pregnancy up to five days after unprotected sex and/or failed contraception. Commonly referred to as “the morning- after pill,” emergency contraception can be sold over the counter in pharmacies.

Gay

A sexual orientation that refers to a person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of their same gender. Gay often refers to a self-identified man who is romantically, emotionally, and/or physically attracted to other men.

Gender identity

How an individual identifies based on their internal understanding of their gender. Gender identities may include male, female, agender, androgynous, transgender, genderqueer, and many others, or a combination thereof.

Gender nonbinary

A continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions, often based on the rejection of the gender binary’s assumption that gender is strictly an either/or option based on sex assigned at birth.

Gender pronouns

The pronoun or set of pronouns a person uses to refer to themselves when they are not being addressed by name (e.g., she/her/hers; he/him/his; and, they/them/theirs).

Gender-based violence

Violence against someone based on gender discrimination, gender role expectations, and/or gender stereotypes; or based on the differential power status linked to gender that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering.

Genderqueer

Commonly used to describe a person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.

He/him

Pronouns used for individuals who identify as male, reflecting their unique and valid gender identity.

Heterosexual

A sexual orientation that refers to a person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people of a gender different from their own.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)

A virus that weakens a person’s immune system so that the person cannot fight off many everyday infections. HIV is transmitted through exposure to an infected person’s blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or breast milk. HIV, if left untreated, may lead to AIDS.

Homophobia

Prejudice against individuals who are or are perceived to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or queer.

Induced abortion

A surgical or medicinal procedure that ends a pregnancy. Medicinal abortion, also called medical abortion, most often involves the use of a prescription medication called Mifepristone, which is also known as RU-486, and is used in combination with misoprostol. These medications are often called “the abortion pill.” Abortion medication should not be confused with Emergency Contraception, a medication that reduces the risk of pregnancy when taken shortly after unprotected sex. The legal and regulatory framework surrounding induced abortion varies

across European countries, each having its own set of laws and regulations governing the procedure.

Intersex

Refers to a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive and/or sexual anatomy, chromosomes, and/or hormones that do not fit with the medical definitions of female or male.

Lesbian

A sexual orientation that refers to a self-identified woman who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other women.

Menstrual cycle

The monthly physiological cycle that involves the shedding of the uterine lining in the absence of pregnancy.

Miscarriage

The spontaneous or natural loss of a fetus before the 20th week of pregnancy. (Spontaneous or natural occurring pregnancy loss after the 20th week is often called a stillbirth.) Miscarriage, which may also be called a spontaneous abortion, is a naturally occurring event, unlike induced abortion, which is also known as medical or surgical abortions.

Pansexual

A sexual orientation that refers to a person who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to people, regardless of their gender identity.

Puberty

A time when the pituitary gland triggers production of testosterone, estrogen, and/or progesterone resulting in physical and emotional changes. Physical changes may include hair growth around the genitals, menstruation, sperm production, breast growth, and much more.

Queer

An umbrella term used to describe sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression for individuals who do not conform to dominant societal norms. While often used as a neutral or even a positive term among many LGBT people today, “queer” was historically used as a derogatory slur.

Rape

A type of sexual assault that involves vaginal, anal, or oral sex using a body part or an object without consent. Rape is a form of sexual assault, but not all sexual assault is rape.

Reproductive anatomy

The biological structures involved in human reproduction, including the genitals, reproductive organs, and associated systems.

Reproductive health

A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system, and not merely the absence of reproductive disease or infirmity. Reproductive health deals with the reproductive processes, functions, and systems at all stages of life, and implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capacity to reproduce, and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so.

Sexual abuse

Any sort of unwanted sexual contact, including but not limited to, force, threats, or taking advantage of an individual, often over a period of time. A single act of sexual abuse is usually referred to as a “sexual assault.”

Sexual activity

Sexual behaviors that include, but are not limited to, vaginal sex, oral sex, anal

sex, mutual masturbation, genital rubbing, or masturbation.

Sexual assault

Any unwanted sex act committed by a person or people against another person. Examples include, but are not limited to, nonconsensual kissing, groping or fondling; attempted rape; forcing someone to perform a sexual act; and rape.

Sexual harassment

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Sexual identity

A person's feelings and ideas about themselves in relation to their sexual orientation and/or sexual behaviors. No one else can determine what a person's sexual identity is; only the individual can decide what identity is right for them.

Sexual orientation

A person's romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to other people. Sexual orientations include, but are not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, queer, pansexual and asexual.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

Common infections caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites that are transmitted from one person who has the infection to

another during sexual contact that involves exchange of fluids or skin-to-skin contact. STDs are often referred to as sexually transmitted infections or STIs in an effort to clarify that not all sexually transmitted infections turn into a disease.

She/her

Pronouns used for individuals who identify as female, respecting and honoring their unique gender identity.

They/them

Singular pronouns used for individuals who identify as nonbinary or genderqueer. For example, "They are bringing their laptop."

Transgender

Refers to a person whose gender identity and/or expression is not aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender is often used as an umbrella term encompassing a large number of identities related to gender nonconformity.

Ze/zir

Gender-neutral pronouns that some individuals use instead of he/she and him/her, promoting inclusivity and respect. For example, "Ze is going to the party; I'll meet zir there."



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