

Yarning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ Young People about Sexuality and Gender

A young person's sexuality and gender is a large part of their social emotional wellbeing (SEWB). Friends and family members play an important role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to explore and discuss their sexuality and gender identity. You might feel shame, unprepared, or worried about saying the wrong thing but approaching the topic with young people can help normalise LGBTQA+ people in your community and takes the pressure off of young people to start the yarn themselves, (which can be a very scary task). No matter how much you know about LGBTQA+ identities, showing that you are open to talking about sexuality and gender identity with your friends and/or family members can help young LGBTQA+ mob feel accepted and validated in their identity.

The purpose of this resource is to provide parents, family members and friends of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ Young People with tips on how to talk about sexual and gender diversity. The information included in this resource was adapted from the 'Yarning Quiet Ways' resource developed by the WA Department of Health in partnership with Aboriginal parents (<https://gdhr.wa.gov.au/web/yarning-quiet-ways>), as well as findings from the Walkern Katatdjin: Rainbow Knowledge project (www.rainbowknowledge.org) and Trans Pathways project (<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/projects/trans-pathways/>).



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Sexuality VS Gender

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man, woman, somewhere in between or something else altogether. Gender identity comes from within and is a reflection of how a person sees themselves within their mind, heart and spirit.

Sex assigned at birth (Also known as biological sex) is different to gender identity. Sex refers to the classification of a person as male, female or intersex based on a combination of anatomy (private parts), hormones (Estragon, testosterone) and DNA. The term "Sex assigned at birth" is used in place of "biological sex" to acknowledge some people's 'biological sex' doesn't always align with their gender identity.

Sexuality is a person's identity in relation to the gender or genders they are romantically, emotionally or sexually attracted to. A young person doesn't need to have experience of being attracted to certain gender identities in order to identify what their sexuality is. Like gender identity, sexual identity comes from how a person feels within their mind, heart and spirit.

In summary, gender is who you go to bed **as** and sexuality is who you go to bed **with**.

"It was just a part of me, if you wanna say - I don't know. It sounds a bit cheesy but I suppose so. There was never one event that triggered it..."(Walkern Katatdjin study participant).

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Things to know when yarning about sexuality and gender with young mob.

- Talking about sexuality doesn't always mean talking about sex. Sexuality is about who a young person is attracted to romantically and sexually, not necessarily who they have sex with.
- Similar to yarning about sexuality and gender development with heterosexual and cisgender young people, it is important to “yarn early and yarn often” (<https://gdhr.wa.gov.au/web/yarning-quiet-ways>) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people about gender and sexuality.
- Talking about gender and sexual diversity can have a positive impact on a young person's SEWB (e.g., feeling like they are being their true self). It can also help young people feel comfortable and proud expressing their gender and sexual identities. While it might appear to make some people feel a bit shame, showing that you are open to having a chat about sexuality and gender is a positive thing.
- Using the word 'queer' can be offensive to some LGBTQA+ people and their family members, as this word has historically been used as an insult and is linked to feelings of hurt. However, some members of the LGBTQA+ community have reclaimed this word and use it to describe themselves. Only use the word queer when it is how a person prefers to describe themselves.
- Other aspects of talking about sexuality include: healthy relationships with friends, family and romantic partners, 'coming out', how sexuality can change over time, and how comfortable a young person might feel in their family and community.
- Some people experience romantic attraction without any sexual attraction (sometimes referred to as asexual) or never experience romantic attraction (sometimes referred to as aromantic) (<https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/learn/health-topics/sexual-health/sexuality/>). This is part of natural spectrum of sexuality.

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What to do when a young person shares with you that they are LGBTQA+

There are several things you can do if a young person 'comes out' to you or brings up questions about their sexual or gender identity.

These include:

- Thank them for sharing this with you.
- Reassure them they have agency over who they choose to share this information with and if they would like it to remain confidential, that is something that you will respect.
- If someone comes out as trans, check what name/pronouns feel right to them and try your best to use these when referring to them. It's also good to check who they are comfortable with you using these around, especially if there are people they have not yet come out to.

Check in with how things are going and ask:

- How are they feeling about themselves? Do they feel strong in their sense of self?
- Can they express themselves the way they want to?
- Are other people's response to their sexuality/gender impacting their relationship with them?
- Do they have accepting friends?
- How things are going at school?

Explore what support they need.

- Offer to go to LGBTQIA+ events with them or watch movies and TV shows that include LGBTQIA+ characters together.
- Do they need help coming out to other members of the family/ their friends group?
- Remind the young person that you are there to support them.

"I think family, number one, number one, absolutely... it's really important that family is there to support you, and it's just sad that some people don't understand what that person is going through and they want support from family. And with work and your health and that, that will fall into play once you have the support of family... at the end of the day, my family accepts me, I'm happy." (Walkern Katatdjin study participant).

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What to do when a young person shares with you that they are LGBTQA+

General tips.

- Reflect the language they use to talk about themselves, e.g., if they say that they are gay, continue to use the word 'gay' when talking about them, instead of substituting in other words to like 'homosexual', 'queer', or 'LGBT'.
- It is helpful to discuss things that are specific to being LGBTQA+, but young people do not want you to treat them differently when you find out that they are LGBTQA+. Be aware of your attitude towards the young person, to make sure that it does not change after they come out to you.

How to start conversations about sexuality and gender

You don't need to know a young person's sexual or gender identity to be able to show signs of acceptance. You can show your support by watching TV shows, videos, and articles that feature Aboriginal LGBTQA+ people or LGBTQA+ issues. You can also use these videos and resources as an ice-breaker to start yarning about sexuality and gender with your mob.

Some content you might want to watch include:

(These videos can be found on YouTube)

- Supporting our LGBTIQ Youth - Young Deadly Free
- Brotherboys Yarnin' Up - Trans Health Australia
- Brotherboy: - Multiculture Vic
- Taz's Story - Headspace Headspace Australia
- Taz's Story: LGBTIQ+ and Aboriginal Communities - Headspace Australia
- Simone and Rosalina's story - Beyond Blue Official
- Open Doors: Perspectives on Working with LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl & Brotherboy Young People - Dovetail QLD

Articles and webpages:

- ATSI Rainbow Archive: <https://indigblackgold.wordpress.com/>
- Journey of love, acceptance: The Kimberley Echo



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Starting conversations about sexuality and gender

You might feel worried about saying the wrong thing and causing offense – it's ok to make mistakes sometimes! It helps if your intention is good, and you take a generally curious and non-judgemental stance.

“When I grew up this wasn't something that people talked about so I feel like I have a lot to learn.” (Yarning Quiet Ways, p.33).

- If you are going to talk about gender differences, keep an open mind as to what gender identity means to the individual young person you are talking to.
- Pay attention to what your non-verbal responses are showing. Are you unconsciously reacting negatively to hearing about diverse gender or sexuality?
- Gender and sexuality are fluid across the lifespan. It is okay if young people identify a certain way at one point in time and then change their 'label' (how they identify). This does not take away from the legitimacy of how they identified then or now.
- Some young people know they are LGBTQA+ from a very young age and others might not know they are LGBTQA+ until they are much older. It is okay to give young people time to explore their sexual or gender identity. This is not the same as thinking that being LGBTQA+ is 'just a phase'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people in the Walkern Katatdjin study told us that they want to be accepted for their true and authentic self at any point in time.

