



# Health and Wellness for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth

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## Keywords

• LGBTQ • Gender nonconforming children • Health disparities • Sexual orientation  
• Gender identity • Intersex • Transgender

## Key points

- Every health provider needs a basic understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) health to provide the highest level of care to their patients.
- Health care disparities exist within LGBTQ communities and are explained largely by stigma and discrimination.
- Children raised by same sex couples have outcomes indistinguishable from children raised by heterosexual couples.
- Differences in sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex development have unique considerations for child health professionals to recognize.
- There are concrete steps that health providers can take to improve health and health care for LGBTQ youth.

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## INTRODUCTION

Openness and some basic knowledge regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) health may actually save a life. It is not necessary to be a trauma surgeon or intensivist to make a profound impact on the health of a young person. When pediatric professionals provide appropriate, nonjudgmental care to LGBTQ youth, they help to diminish the risk of depression, suicidal ideation, or despair that arises when youth face the daunting reality that who they love, or who they know themselves to be, can generate disdain and discrimination.

Each of us has contact with sexual and gender minority individuals. They are our patients, their parents, and our colleagues. Every day we encounter family members of someone who is LGBTQ; whether we are aware of it or not. Furthermore, professional organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics [1], The Joint Commission [2], and the American Association of Medical Colleges [3] call for nondiscrimination and proactive cultural competence as markers of appropriate patient care, quality, and key content for provider education. Healthy People 2020, which provides a science-based plan for improving the health of all Americans, includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health among its listed objectives [4].

## TERMINOLOGY

There are at least 3 distinct concepts to discuss within the context of sexual and gender minority health. These dimensions are *sexual orientation*, *gender identity*, and *intersex* conditions. There may be some similarities in terms of bias in the medical setting, and the need for advocacy, but it is important not to conflate these individual human attributes. In addition, sex, gender and sexual orientation are more complex than just a binary option. They can be considered part of a spectrum or continuum (Fig. 1).

### Glossary of terms

- *Sexual Orientation*: emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Identity, attraction, and behavior are not always concordant.
- *LGBTQ*: This abbreviation is often used as a stand-alone term to include all sexual and gender minorities. Literally it stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.
- *Lesbian*: a woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women.
- *Gay*: a person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Lesbian or gay may not be the terms used by many younger people or racial/ethnic minorities.
- *Bisexual/Pansexual*: a person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender, or gender identity, although not necessarily simultaneously or to the same degree.
- *Queer*: often used interchangeably with "LGBTQ," sometimes used to express fluid identities and orientations.

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