

# Language Matters: LGBTQ+ Terminology

Presented by Congregation Shaare Emeth's Keshet Committee

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# Shaare Emeth's Keshet Committee

*Keshet* means rainbow or קשת in Hebrew. In 2019, Congregation Shaare Emeth convened a group of community members to focus on affirming and welcoming members of the LGBTQ+ community. This group – our Keshet Team – is working to ensure that all congregants and prospective members feel truly at home at Shaare Emeth.

The Keshet team hosts programming to support and celebrate LGBTQ+ inclusion within our congregation, provides information in every edition of Shaare Mail, has created a web tab on the SE website, and acts as a queer resource to staff. For instance, the team recently provided suggestions on how to make our Membership Form more LGBTQ+ friendly.

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Reform Judaism believes:  
All are created “*B’Tzelem Elohim*”  
in God’s Image.



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The LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ Jews, and their families are welcome in all Reform congregations and communities.

The Reform movement is imbued with respectful inclusion. Our Reform tradition compels us to meet people where, when, and for whom they are. Reform Judaism works to include all, as their true, authentic selves to fully participate in communal worship.

-LGBTQ+ Jews may be ordained as rabbis and cantors and serve throughout the Reform Movement.

-Reform rabbis and cantors officiate at same-sex ceremonies.



-2015: the Reform Jewish Movement led the religious community in affirming the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people.

-More than 10% of North American Jews openly identify as LGBTQ+, and up to 20% of those 18-29.

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# Shaare Emeth's Keshet Committee activities:

- **Worship:**
  - Member-led PRIDE and Transgender Day of Remembrance Shabbat services
  - Suggestions on inclusive language, songs, and prayers during worship
- **Programming:** January and June Shabbaton (2022 and 2023), St. Charles Pride and PrideFest Grand parade participation
- **Website:** Provides local and national resources
- **Shaare Mail (weekly newsletter):** updates on upcoming events and resources
- **Language Matters:** Training with board, staff, clergy, camp counselors, religious school and preschool staff, other groups within and outside the congregation
- **Staff Resource:**
  - Review/provide suggestions for preschool website, membership form, and more
  - Suggestions on how to lead pronoun discussions with religious school students
  - Renaming the B'nei Mitzvah program to B'Mitzvah program, revamping all supporting materials
  - Name/Pronoun use within the building and in communication
  - Directional signage



# Why does terminology matter?

Using preferred terminology tells people:

- You are listening.
- You respect and are considering their feelings.
- You do not want to cause further trauma to them by using words that hurt, scar, and damage.

There are many terms used by the LGBTQ+ community, with more preferred terms available every day. It is always best to ask individuals and communities what terms they use, and what those terms mean to them.



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# Terminology



## Some preferred terminology regarding sexual orientation

*Lesbian* (n/adj): often describes a **woman who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually attracted primarily to women**. Some nonbinary people also identify as lesbians if they feel connected to womanhood and are primarily attracted to women.

*Gay* (adj): describes a person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually **attracted primarily to members of the same gender**. (Often used by people who identify as men, though others in the LGBTQ+ community may also identify as gay.)

*Bisexual* (adj): describes an individual who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually **attracted to more than one gender**. Can sometimes be used interchangeably with pansexual.



# Some preferred terminology regarding sexual orientation

*Pansexual* (adj): describes a person who is emotionally, spiritually, physically, and/or sexually **attracted toward persons of all gender identities**. Can sometimes be used interchangeably with bisexual.

*Asexual* (adj): an umbrella category describing **those who experience little or no sexual attraction**. Identifying as asexual does not preclude any behavior, including dating and sex. Often abbreviated as Ace, asexual can also refer to the Asexuality Spectrum, which describes the range of experiences related to attraction. Demisexual (describing a person who feels sexual attraction only to someone with whom they have an emotional bond) and aromantic, (someone who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others) fall under the umbrella category of asexual.

# LGBTQ or LGBTQ+? What is nonbinary? What does genderqueer mean?

- Both! The “+” includes all other identities that may have been left out of the acronym. It’s up to you.
- A **nonbinary** person identifies with or expresses a gender identity that is neither entirely male nor entirely female.
- **Genderqueer** is an umbrella term that can apply to anyone who identifies on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Identity and sexual orientation are not the same thing.

# Is it okay to use the word *queer*?

- Depends
- Historically derogatory
- *Queer* has been reclaimed by many members of LGBTQ+ community.
- Refer to someone as queer or genderqueer only when they identify as such.

## What words can I use to be more inclusive?

- Not every family uses the same language. So when in doubt, use gender-neutral words.
- Inclusive of same-sex couples and nonbinary people — but also important for families with remarriages, divorce, adoptions, etc.

# Examples

- Mother and father → Parents
- Husband or wife → Spouse
- Brothers and sisters → Family/siblings
- Forefathers and mothers → Ancestors or those who came before us
- To avoid having to say *he or she* or using the potentially confusing singular they, try pluralizing your sentence.
  - “Each student should practice Hebrew in his or her free time.” → “All students should practice Hebrew in their free time.”

# What does *transgender* mean?

- Physical characteristics = sex
- Social aspects like identity and behavior = gender
- Transgender = an umbrella term for anyone who **knows themselves to be** a gender that is **different than the gender they were assigned at birth.**
- Some trans people may have a gender identity that is neither man nor woman, and for some people their gender identity may vary at different points in their lives.

## What's the most respectful way to talk to/about transgender people?

- *Transgender* or *trans*.
- Not *transgendered*. This implies gender is something that has happened to someone, rather than an identity.
- *Assigned male/female at birth, not used to be a man/woman*.
- The gender someone was assigned at birth is private information. A trans person may choose to tell people that they are trans. Otherwise, it is not information you should share.



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# Deadnaming and Pronoun Use





# What is deadnaming?

- When someone comes out as trans, they often choose a new name.
- The name they were given at birth is then called their *deadname*.
- Using someone's old name is called *deadnaming*, and it should be **avoided**.
- For many people, hearing their deadname can be traumatic.
- When you use someone's chosen name, that's one way to tell them: "I'm listening to you when you tell me who you are, I accept you, and I love you."

## How do I remember to use someone's new name and pronouns?

- Most important thing is to make an effort.
- Try practicing in a safe space, like on your morning commute.
- “Rachel is coming to Shabbat dinner. She is bringing the kugel. Rachel is bringing her kugel to dinner. I will thank her for her delicious kugel. Rachel makes kugel with raisins.”

## What do I do if I accidentally use the wrong pronouns/name?

- **Correct yourself** by saying the correct name/pronoun, and **move on** with what you were saying.
- If you don't notice, someone might correct you. The best way to handle being corrected is to say a quick **"thank you,"** use the correct pronoun/name, and move on.
- Don't make the conversation about you or put the trans or nonbinary person in the position of forgiving/accommodating you.
- Use their preferred name even when telling stories about them before they came out.

# Example

“When Aaron lost his first tooth-”

“Her name is Sarah.”

“Thank you. When Sarah lost her first tooth...”

## Help combat gender stereotypes and show support for nonbinary people by using their correct pronouns

- Most-used pronouns:
  - she/her
  - she/they
  - they/them
  - he/him
  - he/they
- Some people don't use pronouns at all. They prefer that you use their name only.
- Some people will use another set of pronouns not listed above.

# About the singular, nonbinary *they*

As of 2019: the Associated Press, the Chicago Manual of Style, the MLA style manual, and the APA style manual—accept the usage of the singular *they*.

From Merriam Webster Dictionary:

- The complaint: the use of *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun is ungrammatical because *they* is a plural pronoun. This is not accurate.
- In an 1881 letter, Emily Dickinson used *they* singularly. And Shakespeare used it in his work. People have used singular *they* to describe someone whose gender is unknown since the late 1300s, but the nonbinary use of *they* is relatively new.
- The development of singular *they* mirrors the development of the singular *you* from the plural *you*, yet we don't complain that singular *you* is ungrammatical.

**Bottom line:** refer to people the way they want to be referred. Otherwise, you're discounting them and their identity. And, it's officially incorrect to refuse to use *they* singularly when referring to someone who uses those pronouns.

# How can I show my inclusion of people of all genders?

- Add your pronouns to your signature and social accounts.
- Provide your pronouns when you introduce yourself.
  - Hi, I'm Leah and I use she/they pronouns.
- Don't assume someone uses certain pronouns because of the way they present themselves. If you're not sure which pronouns they use, ask what their preferred pronouns are. They might not even use pronouns at all.

## Main takeaways:

- Respectful language is essential to creating a safe community.
- Perfection isn't the goal.
- Making the effort is the most important thing.





# Questions?

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For resources and more information:  
visit the Keshet tab on Shaare Emeth's website:

(<https://sestl.org/belong/keshet-lgbtq/>)

Thank you!

Congregation Shaare Emeth's Keshet Committee