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Welcome!

We are so glad that you are here and that you have found this toolkit. We want you to know that we see you, we support you, and we affirm you. No matter how you ended up here or where you are in this journey, God loves you!

This is a toolkit. At Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), we want you to have as many resources and tools to turn to as possible. All of these tools are to affirm, support, and love you.

Not everything in the toolkit will be relevant to where you are right now. Feel free to skip over the sections you don't find helpful right now. You can always come back to them later!

This is not a how-to-guide. These are tools for you to explore your identity, ask questions about yourself and faith, and ultimately become more confident in your own skin. There might be things that you need, but we haven't added them yet. Do not hesitate to reach out through social media or email to ask us for help. We're here to support you.

We wholeheartedly believe that you are created in the beloved image of God. You are not separated from God because of your identity. Your identity is on purpose!

As you move forward we want to remind you of a few things:

- Be patient with yourself.
- Everyone needs something different at different stages of self-acceptance.
- There's no right time or right way to be yourself. This is a guide, not a rulebook.



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What does it mean to be LGBTQ+?

Do you think you might be LGBTQ+? That's great! Processing who you are is a part of growing up and living. We know it can feel like a big task to know who you are, so we're here to help. Below are some resources for you.

As you go, remember: **there's no right way or right time to be yourself.** There's only knowing who you are today and being open to waking up and knowing more about yourself tomorrow!

Let's begin by reminding ourselves that our identities are more complex than we might realize. You are so much more than any one label, and that's worth celebrating.

Key things to remember:

- You do not have to claim a specific label to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community
- Your chosen label might change as you discover more of who you are
- Your labels don't define or describe the fullness of your identity. They are simply one beautiful part of what makes you amazing!

RESOURCES

[Why knowing yourself matters!](#) by Beloved Arise

START HERE

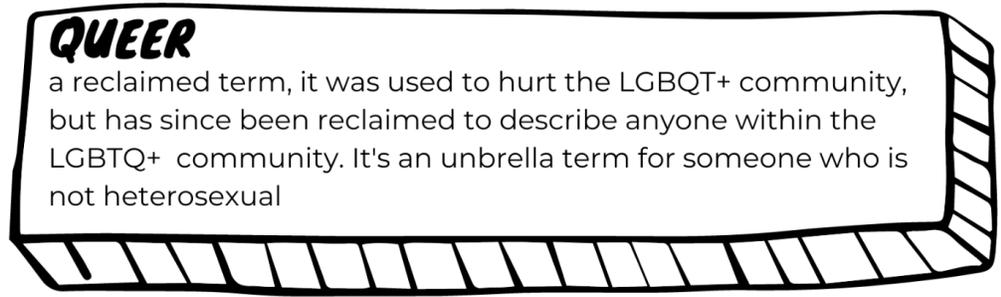
You do not have to know, use, or take on any particular label to be loved and a part of the LGBTQ+ community. But having a common language helps. So, let's get on the same page of what we mean when we say LGBTQ+ community.

First off, it's a community! It's a group of people with common experiences. Each person is uniquely different and still just as beloved! The beautiful thing about a community is that it means there are others who understand what you're navigating and experiencing. You're not alone!

LGBTQAI2S+ STANDS FOR

L - Lesbian
G - Gay
B - Bisexual
T - Transgender
Q - Queer
I - Intersex
A - Asexual or Agender
2S - Two-Spirit
+ - The wider range of expansive identities

In this section, you'll find a lot of terms. Some may be familiar and some may be new to you. The main point is that these are some ways that some LGBTQ+ people describe themselves, and how you identify is your choice.



You are a complex individual! We know that it can all be a lot, but remember that you don't have to have all the answers right now. You might choose to never really verbalize how you identify, and that is also okay. God still knows who you are and loves you.

Understanding ourselves can feel overwhelming, but it's an exploration: not a race. We want to ask you some questions about sex and gender, but before we get there, let's get on the same page about what those terms mean.

Understanding what we mean when we use certain terms helps us all be more supportive. Two terms that are mixed up often and can cause a lot of confusion are sex and gender. Understanding these two terms and what they mean can help us to better understand the LGBTQ+ community.

When we use the term **sex**, we're talking about a medical term that refers to genetic, biological, hormonal, and/or physical characteristics. This includes genitalia. All of these are used to assign someone as male, female, or intersex at birth.

When we use the term **gender**, we're talking about a socially constructed way to categorize people in an effort to explain the world around us. Think of the idea that girls should wear pink and boys should wear blue. Society built and reinforces those ideas. Other examples you might find are based around what chores or jobs women or men are expected to do. As we learn about gender identity, it's important to know that our gender is not determined by our sex.

And now for the questions:

- How do you feel about the gender you were assigned at birth?
- Do the clothes you wear align with how you want the world to see you?
- Are there clothes, accessories, or hairstyles that are "only for boys" or "only for girls" but that you want to try?

- When someone addresses you with a gendered term like “son” or “daughter,” how does that make you feel?
- If you imagine your future in a romantic relationship with someone else, what gender are they?
- Do you have the desire to be in a romantic relationship someday?

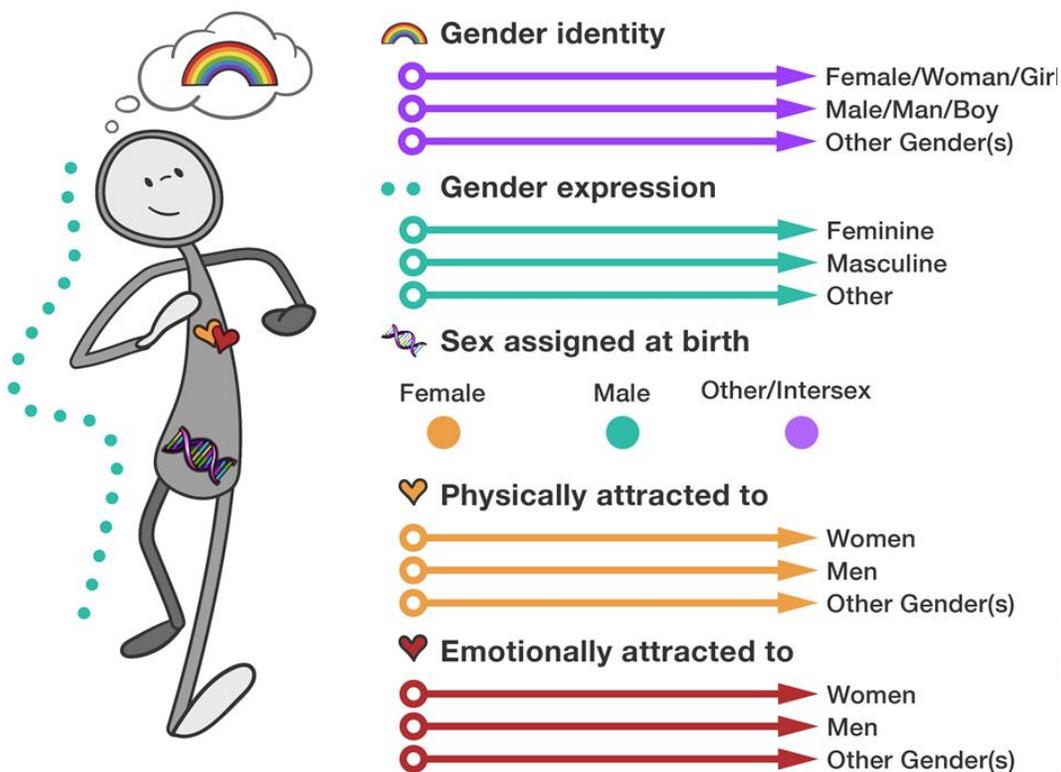
You may not know all the answers to these questions yet, but they can be a helpful starting point to explore who you really are.

You are a beautifully complex individual. There are countless things that make up the bigger picture of who you are. Some of those factors are your gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth,

physical attraction, and emotional attraction. They act as a lens through which we might explore the world around us.

On the left is an illustration that helps to explain gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, physical attraction, and emotional attraction.

There are as many ways to identify yourself as there are points along these rays:



that is, an infinite number! Most of us have been taught that our identities are binary, or belonging to one of two groups. We get taught that we’re male or female, queer or straight. But your **gender identity** can be outside of that binary. Some people are nonbinary, for example. Your **gender expression** can be feminine while your **sex assigned at birth** can be male. Your identity doesn’t have to fit into certain or corresponding categories.

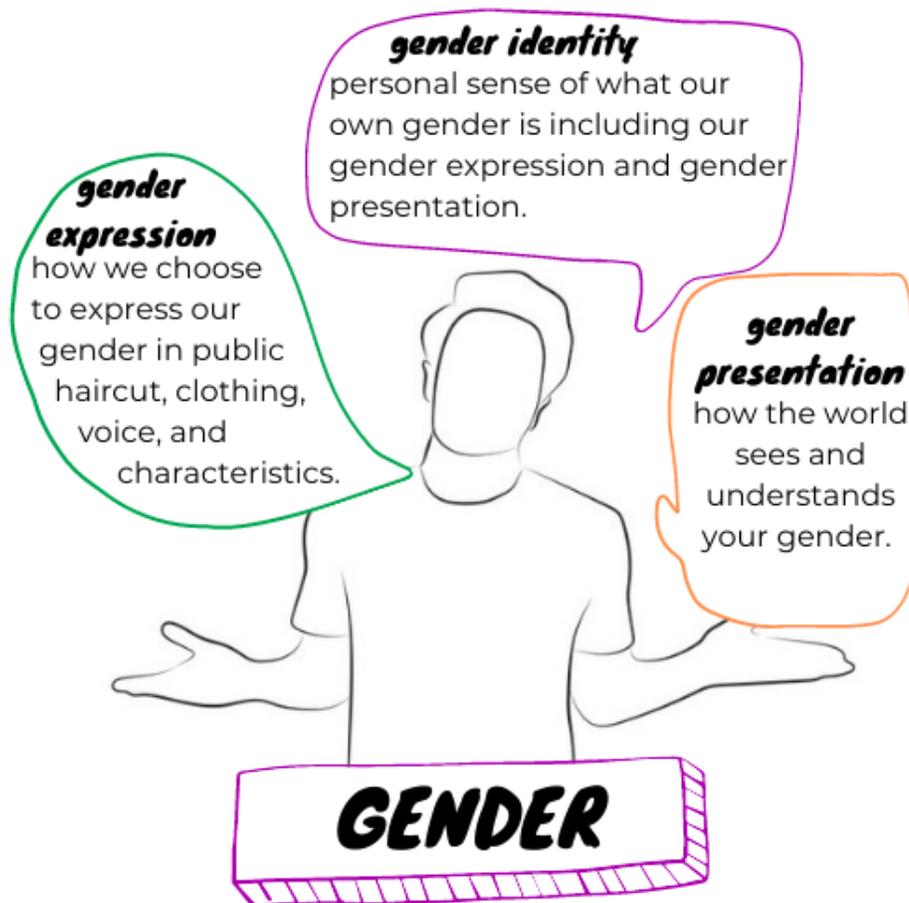
No matter the labels or no labels at all, you are loved, celebrated, and created in the image of a loving Creator. You are enough and worthy of love!

If you want to explore a little more about gender and sex, keep reading. If that's enough for you at the moment, feel free to check out some other sections.

GENDER

Gender may seem like a simple concept, but it's important to know that "gender" is an idea created in a society. It's the way that we've categorized people and the world around us. There is a difference between gender and sex. Someone's "sex" does not determine their gender.

So what is gender?



Gender identity: our personal sense of what our own gender is, including our gender expression and gender presentation.

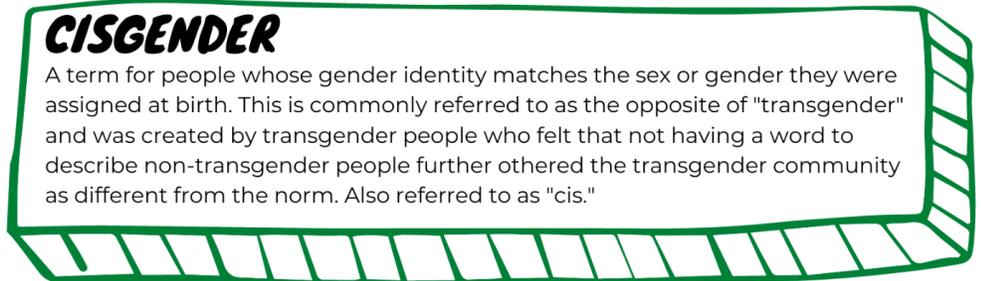
Gender expression: how we choose to express our gender in public such as with a haircut, clothing, voice, and characteristics.

Gender presentation: how the world sees and understands your gender.

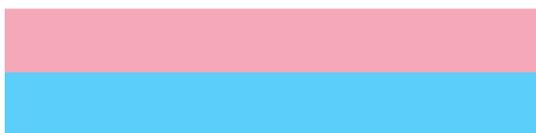
Exploring your gender might seem a little intimidating, but remember that you don't have to have all the answers right this moment in life.

So, how do you know what your gender identity is? Remember the questions from earlier? Ask yourself how you feel about your gender presentation and how the world sees you. Does your gender presentation align with how you view yourself? Does your gender identity match the sex you were assigned at birth? If it does, you might consider yourself **cisgender**. If it doesn't match, then you might consider yourself **transgender**. Either way, you are a reflection of divine love.

There is a wide range of gender identities. Keep reading to learn more.



Transgender (T) - An adjective that describes people whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. "Transgender" can be both a standalone identity or an umbrella term that encompasses many different gender identities, including nonbinary and gender-expansive identities. "**Trans**" is often used as a shorthand for transgender.



[I think I might be transgender.](#)



Nonbinary - An adjective that describes people who fall outside the constructed gender binary (male vs. female). Some nonbinary people may also call themselves genderqueer, and some intersex people may also identify as nonbinary (though some do not). "Nonbinary" can be used as a standalone gender identity, or it can be an umbrella term. Some people who are nonbinary may also identify as transgender, while some may not. "**Enby**" is



often used as shorthand for nonbinary.

[How do I know I'm non-binary?](#)



Two-spirit (2S) - A pan-tribal, pan-ethnic term created by First Nations, Native American, and Indigenous peoples to describe people of nonbinary gender and/or sex. This term should not be appropriated to describe people who are not First Nations members, Native Americans, or Indigenous.

[What Does Two-spirit mean? \(video\)](#)

If you've still got questions about gender, that's great! Check out [Trevor Project - Understanding Gender](#) for more helpful information.



Now that we know more about gender, let's learn a little more about what often gets confused for gender: biological sex. Gender and sex are frequently mistaken as the same thing and dependent on one another. The reality is that they are separate aspects of our identity.

When we talk about "biological" sex, we are specifically talking about the medical term referring to our genetic, biological, hormonal, and/or physical characteristics, which include our genitalia. Together, these are used to assign someone at birth as male, female, or intersex.

But humans have a complex biology. The possibilities for a person's biological sex are not limited to just male or female. The "I" in LGBTQIA+ stands for intersex.



Intersex (I) - An adjective used to describe someone born with internal and/or external sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical expectations of the male/female binary.

[What is Intersex?](#)

Intersex persons are far more common than you might realize. It's estimated that being intersex is as common as having naturally red hair! Intersex persons are both statistically significant and normative, not anomalous. At least 1 in 1600 people are NOT exclusively XX or XY, chromosomally. There are additional chromosomal configurations, like XXY, that can produce an intersex human. Lots of genetic, environmental, or biological factors can give rise to a spectrum of intersex persons.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Now that we better understand gender and sex, let's explore sexual orientation. This is the concept most people are familiar with when talking about the LGBTQ+ community.

Sexual orientation: an individual's enduring physical, romantic, and emotional attraction to members of the same and/or different sex and/or gender.

When exploring your sexual orientation, know that your past relationships or crushes don't inherently "prove" your orientation. For example, if you identify as a boy but have only dated girls, that is not "proof" that you are heterosexual. Your identity belongs to you, even if you're not dating anyone! The beautiful thing is that you are dearly loved, no matter what labels you use in life.

Read through the following descriptions below. See if any of these parts of the LGBTQ+ community sound similar to how you feel.

Queer (Q) - an umbrella term used to describe people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. "Queer" has been reclaimed by LGBTQ+ communities since its historical used as a slur against LGBTQ+ people and is now widely used among LGBTQ+ people and in institutional and formal settings. Queer can be used as a term to include everyone in the LGBTQ+ community, without listing letters of the acronym (LGBTQIA2S+).



Gay (G) - an adjective that describes people who are physically, romantically, emotionally and/or spiritually attracted to other people of the same gender. In the past, "gay" specifically referred to men who are attracted to men. Now, it is common for "gay" to be used by anyone who is attracted to people of their same gender.

[I think I might be gay](#)



Lesbian (L) - an adjective or noun that describes people who identify as women or feminine of center and whose attractions are to some other women. Some nonbinary people who were assigned female at birth use this term to describe their attraction to women despite not identifying or solely identifying as women.

[I think I might Be lesbian](#)



Asexual (A) - an adjective used to describe someone who experiences little to no sexual attraction. Some people on the asexual spectrum desire some level of sexual or romantic intimacy, while other do not. Also referred to as **“Ace.”**



[I think I might be asexual](#)



Bisexual (B) - An adjective that describes an individual who is attracted to more than one gender. These people need not have had equal sexual or romantic experience with multiple genders. Historically framed as being attracted to “both” genders, bisexuality now refers to people who are attracted to one’s own and other genders, including those outside the gender binary.

[I Think I Might Be Bisexual](#)



Pansexual - Commonly used to describe someone who is attracted to people regardless of gender or to all or many genders.

[I Think I Might Be Pansexual](#)

Remember to be easy on yourself as you explore new terminology for your sexual orientation. You might have moments in life where a certain label makes sense, and you might have other seasons where you don't fit how you feel. That's great! If any of the above communities don't describe you, know that new language is being formed all the time to try and encapsulate the magic and mystery of being you. We promise: you belong.

PRONOUNS

God created people who use all kinds of pronouns.

Pronouns are another aspect of identity and how we move through the world. You get to decide how people call you: name and pronouns! It's

okay if you need to try some things out before deciding what best allows you to express your unique self. It's completely fine if your pronouns change.

Remember: each of us is on a journey. It's important to find language that authentically represents you to the world – language that's comfortable and makes you feel understood. It might be helpful to try things out with a small and trusted group of people before sharing it with the world, but you do you!

You can use phrases like:

"I'm trying out using they/them pronouns and I would appreciate it if you'd use them for me moving forward."

"I now go by (name). Could you please make that change on our class roster?"

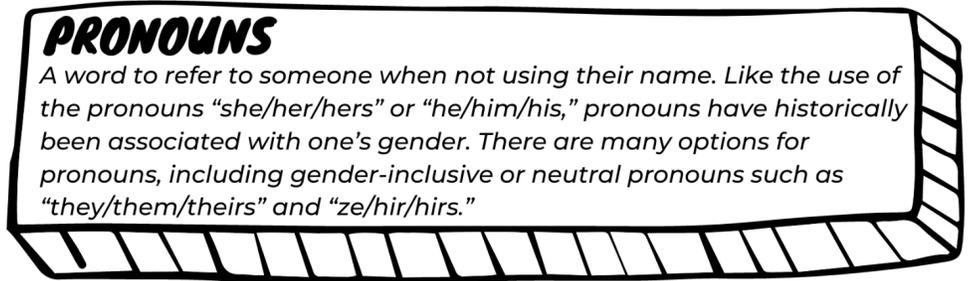
It's acceptable to correct the people around you if they use the wrong pronouns for you if you feel safe doing so. If you want more support or want to learn more about pronouns, check out the links below.

RESOURCES

[Learn more about pronouns](#) by MyPronouns
[Inclusive language](#) by MyPronouns
[How to They/Them](#) (book) by Stuart Getty

VIDEOS TO WATCH

[Why are pronouns important?](#) by Getty
[Why my pronouns matter](#) by CBC News



Can I Be LGBTQ+ and Christian?

God rejoices in who you are, exactly as you are! You can claim that you are a beloved child of God. We believe that God is love (John 4:16), and that you are a reflection of God's love. God is at work making unique, beautiful things in the world, and that is evident through you and your life.

Even if we know that God is love, it can sometimes be difficult to feel like God loves us. So much of Christianity has claimed that LGBTQ+ people are living in sin or not living as God would want them. So, what do we do with all of that noise?

Well, the short answer is: **YES, you can be both LGBTQ+ and Christian!** In fact, there are countless people around the world who are both LGBTQ+ and Christian. They include leaders in The United Methodist Church like Bishop Karen Oliveto; pastors serving in local churches; youth ministers, choir directors, lay leaders, and everything else. LGBTQ+ people have always been a part of the Christian story and have had a massive impact on our faith.

You're not a contradiction. You're a complete and multifaceted person, just like everyone else. Living out faith and identity can look very different for everyone. Sometimes we need affirmation over and over and to hear it from a lot of different people. Many LGBTQ+ Christians have a life's worth of negative messaging to overcome, so that makes sense. We're here to be one of those voices of affirmation.

For a brief primer if you're still unsure whether you can be LGBTQ+ and Christian, check out this article by Matthew Vines: [A Biblical Case for LGBTQ Inclusion](#).

Or, if you want to watch a video, here are two:

VIDEOS TO WATCH

[Can You be Gay and Christian?](#) by Kevin Garcia

[Is it ok to be gay? What the Bible says](#) by Queer Theology

ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Checkout these online communities that were created just for queer teens of faith.

[Beloved Arise](#)

[Affirming Youth Ministries](#)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT BEING LGBTQ+?

The Bible actually doesn't say much about being queer. It certainly doesn't mention opposition to same-sex marriages or being a transgender person. In fact, it also doesn't say much about heterosexual marriages or being cisgender, the way we understand these concepts today.

The Church has not been a loving place to the LGBTQ+ community for most of its modern existence, and this has been backed by misinterpretation of scripture. There are six phrases from scripture often cherry-picked to try and prove God's disapproval of LGBTQ+ people, and these are called the "clobber passages."

It can be hard to focus on your Christian journey and on your growth as an LGBTQ+ person when Christian communities misinterpret God to be discriminatory and displeased. We know these voices can be really loud.

But we also want you to know that you aren't alone. There are also really loud voices fighting back, co-creating a more loving and Christ-like world where LGBTQ+ people can flourish. RMN is one of these voices. Some others include Justin Lee, who wrote [The Bible and Homosexuality](#) and Colby Martin, who wrote [Is Homosexuality a Sin](#). These are just two of many people working to reclaim Christianity and share a God who really is love.

If these scriptures are in the Bible, what do we do with them?

Like all scripture, the "clobber passages" have to be read in context. A lot of scripture can be taken out of context to say something that God never meant. The clobber passages have been misinterpreted, read through our contemporary lens and not from the perspective of the people living 2,000 years ago. When you look at the historical contexts and social cultures of scripture, the clobber passages didn't describe what same-sex relationships and identities are today. The cultural context tells us that these scriptures were about wielding abusive power over others: a theme that keeps popping up in scripture.

The anti-LGBTQ+ interpretations of these scriptures have only been popularized since 1946 with the release of a new Bible translation, where "homosexual" entered the Bible for the first time. This new interpretation has been divisive and painful for many people for 80 years now, but God's enduring message of love is eternal.

RESOURCES

[Clobbering “Biblical” Gay Bashing](#) by Believe Out Loud
[Beloved Arise: Clobber Passages Part 1](#) (Instagram post)
[Beloved Arise: Clobber Passages Part 2](#) (Instagram post)
[Beloved Arise: Clobber Passages Part 3](#) (Instagram post)
[Beloved Arise: Clobber Passages Part 4](#) (Instagram post)

VIDEOS TO WATCH

[The Bible Says... \[Queer + Christian\]](#) by PARITY
[What does Genesis say about gay relationship?](#) by Queer Theology
[Letter to Transgender Christians](#) by Queer Theology
[What Happens If You're Transgender In The Church](#) by Refinery29

HOW CAN I BE LGBTQ+ AND METHODIST?

All our relationships can be complicated sometimes, and that includes our relationship with our church and denomination. For a long time, The UMC has struggled to support a diverse theological understanding and practice, especially around LGBTQ+ inclusion. Restrictive language in the Book of Discipline (our governing book of doctrine and polity) currently prohibits LGBTQ+ persons from becoming ordained and serving in the Church, and it prevents clergy from officiating a same-sex wedding. The denomination’s disagreement about LGBTQ+ inclusion is one of the reasons why some anti-LGBTQ+ churches are splintering away from The UMC. The details and effects of this separation continue to unfold, but there are many in our denomination hoping and working for the Book of Discipline language to change so that all God’s people have full inclusion in every aspect of the Church.

To learn more about the history of The UMC on LGBTQ+ inclusion, check out [this article](#) from United Methodist News Service. Or, you can read about it in a [comic sketch](#).

LGBTQ+ Mental Health

You are an important part of God’s story of love. But it can be hard to believe that God treasures you if your community doesn’t feel loving. We know that the Church and world are not perfect. There is no excuse for bigotry. There is no religious justification for legislation that

harms LGBTQ+ youth. We are deeply sorry for how the Church and the world are not yet ready for you. Our hope is that we can create a more loving and just world for all people, including you!

In the United States, the season we now know as Pride commemorates the start of a movement: a riot over injustices facing the queer and trans communities of New York City. It is part of our history to fight for each other, to stand with each other, and to speak up. Fighting injustice is hard work. Just living with injustice is hard work. Sometimes it can seem overwhelming.

No matter where you are in this journey, your mental health is important. It's vital to take care of yourself because you matter.

There are tons of resources online to help you navigate any season. You are worthy to be seen, heard, and unconditionally loved, and sometimes we need extra support to make that happen. Sometimes that just means reaching out to a friend or adult who you can trust and having time to talk, but sometimes we need to reach out to a professional. A counselor or therapist could be a great guide on your journey of healing.

- Make sure that your counselor or therapist is LGBTQ+ affirming before you start working with them.
- Tele-health can help you reach out to counselors online who live far from you. Find a tele-health counselor [here](#).

You can also seek help without parental involvement.

Some people aren't comfortable with a parent being involved with their mental health needs, especially if they're just beginning to explore their LGBTQ+ identities. Hopefully, you can find a loving adult to share with, but you do have rights to patient privacy. If you're in the United States, you can read about your privacy rights under [U.S. healthcare law here](#).

It can be really hard to talk about mental health. If you are thinking about suicide, we strongly encourage you to reach out to one of the resources below. There are people there ready to help you.

Here are some quick numbers to call or text

- Dial "988" - U.S. National Suicide Prevention Line
- [Trevor Project Hotline](#) (phone & text - more information below)
- [Translifeline](#) (phone)
- [Human Rights Campaign Resources for Youth](#): (phone and online services)

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is one of the first organizations to offer a lifeline specifically for LGBTQ+ youth. They specialize in young LGBTQ+ people's mental health, and they're available 24/7. They're a great resource if you need help or even if you just want to talk about your life.

There are a few ways to connect with The Trevor Project:

Connect Through Text

Services are 24/7/365, nationwide, free, and confidential.

1. Text "Start" to 678-678

2. You'll be connected to a Trevor counselor. All Trevor counselors understand LGBTQ+ issues, and they'll listen and affirm you. All your messages are anonymous, and you can share as much or as little as you like
3. If you end up waiting to connect with someone, try a [calming exercise](#) to help you breathe and focus. Or check out Trevor's [LGBTQ Resource Center](#) for helpful articles and information.

Find a Counselor

Talking to a professional about what's going on in your life is a loving, wonderful thing to do. [Click here](#) to begin looking for a counselor through The Trevor Project who is supportive and loving



[Mental Health Toolkit](#) - It Gets Better Project
[Caring For Your Mental Health - Beloved Arise](#)

Coming Out

No matter where you are in your journey, your story is yours. **There is no one else that you are required to tell.** You do not have to share anything you do not want to share, even if someone has made it clear that they will accept you. Your journey is still yours to share and tell when and if you want.

So, what does it mean to “come out”? Coming out refers to the process that people who are LGBTQ+ go through as they share their identity openly with other people. Coming out is extremely personal, and it looks different for everyone. Some people come out to some people and not others. Not coming out doesn't mean you're living a less brave or authentic life. But, if you are interested in sharing who you are with others, [here's a guide that may help you](#).

If you do decide to come out to someone, it's natural to be nervous. Some very normal questions include: *Will they still love me? Will they kick me out? Will they make me talk with someone? Will they think I'm wrong or “confused”? Will things change between us?*

While we hope the only thing you receive from your loved ones is unconditional support, even our loved ones are only human. Sometimes they disappoint us, even if they have “good intentions.”

What you deserve to hear is: *Great! Tell me more. I love you! I'm excited for you! How can I support you? What do you need from me?*

But, they may not be there yet. So, it's important for you to make a plan.

Here are some resources to help you consider what you might want and need. Remember it should be your choice about when and what to share with your parent/s.

MORE RESOURCES ON COMING OUT

[Coming Out to Your Parents](#) by Strong Family Alliance

[The Coming Out Handbook](#) by The Trevor Project

Resources to Share with Your Loved Ones

Loving ourselves can be a difficult task sometimes. We know there are spaces that do not always show us the love and acceptance that we crave and deserve. You are doing amazing things to love and advocate for yourself. The small steps always add up, and looking through this guide is one of those steps. Exploring your identity on your own can feel overwhelming. If you are in a space where you feel like no one else understands, remember that there are others out there who do. Remember that there are online affirming communities created with you in mind. Remember that there will be a day where you will be able to fully choose who you are and how you choose to live. There are groups and organizations like [The Trevor Project](#) and [It Gets Better Project](#) who are here to support you. You are not alone.

If you are in space to share more with those you love and support you, take a look at some of these resources listed below. These are materials that can help people find ways to learn more, better understand you, and help create a supportive environment for all LGBTQ+ individuals. Remember, you are not alone and we are here to support you.

Good materials to share with those who want to journey with you:

- [Parent Reconciling Ministries Network](#) - a group for parents of LGBTQ+ individuals within the United Methodist Church
- [Conversation with Sara Cunningham of Free Mom Hugs](#) - Parents Reconciling Network
- [You Wanted to Know About Trans \(But Were Afraid to Ask\)](#) by Brynn Tannehill
- [The Gender Identity Guide for Parents: Compassionate Advice to Help Your Child Be Their Most Authentic Self](#) by Tavi Hawn, LCSW
- [Queer Virtue: What LGBTQ People Know About Life and Love and How It Can Revitalize Christianity](#) by Rev. Elizabeth Edman
- [Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians](#) by Austen Hartke

Connect Further

Reconciling Ministries Network shares the information in this toolkit as a resource to guide you as we all learn and grow together. We have included resources we believe to be helpful for our journey together.

This is a working document. We'll add resources as they're developed. Stay tuned for more youth toolkits, too. If you want to receive updates and communications from Reconciling Ministries Network [sign up here](#).

If you have additional questions or you're looking for something that isn't here, let us know! Email Emily at emily@rmnetwork.org or Tiffany at tiffany@rmnetwork.org.