

# QUEER

Journeys through care

# and

being young and LGBTQIA+

# in care



University of Groningen Press



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**Written with love by** (in alphabetical order): Gaby Gallardo Lastra, Javiera Garcia-Meneses, Erin García Gutiérrez, Rodrigo González Álvarez, Daniel Herrero Eguino, Emi Howard, Elyse Jackson, Mónica López López, Gary P. Mallon, Gaby Martínez-Jothar, Yanira Muñoz Lopes, Rory P. O'Brien, Samar Orwa, Luis A. Parra, Gab Castro Siqueira, Melvin Sturing-Bakker, Mijntje ten Brummelaar, Selena Torsius, Kevin R. O. van Mierlo Amezcua, Eli Verdugo, Daylano Verwer, Skye Wijkstra, Ale Yañez Cancino.

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# Kintsukuroi: Beautiful, Having Been Broken

I have made jewels out of my past, while pride  
breaks gold to stitch each shard to the broken other.

Balancing on others I dropped me and shattered.

More sharp scattered, calcified scars.  
More loss to be added to my oyster.

Then, through pain, I pulled pearls out. Puked out  
the salt, the guts, but never the memories of the break.  
Until the voids filled with clay, sediments  
of spring days, slipping in my shoes.

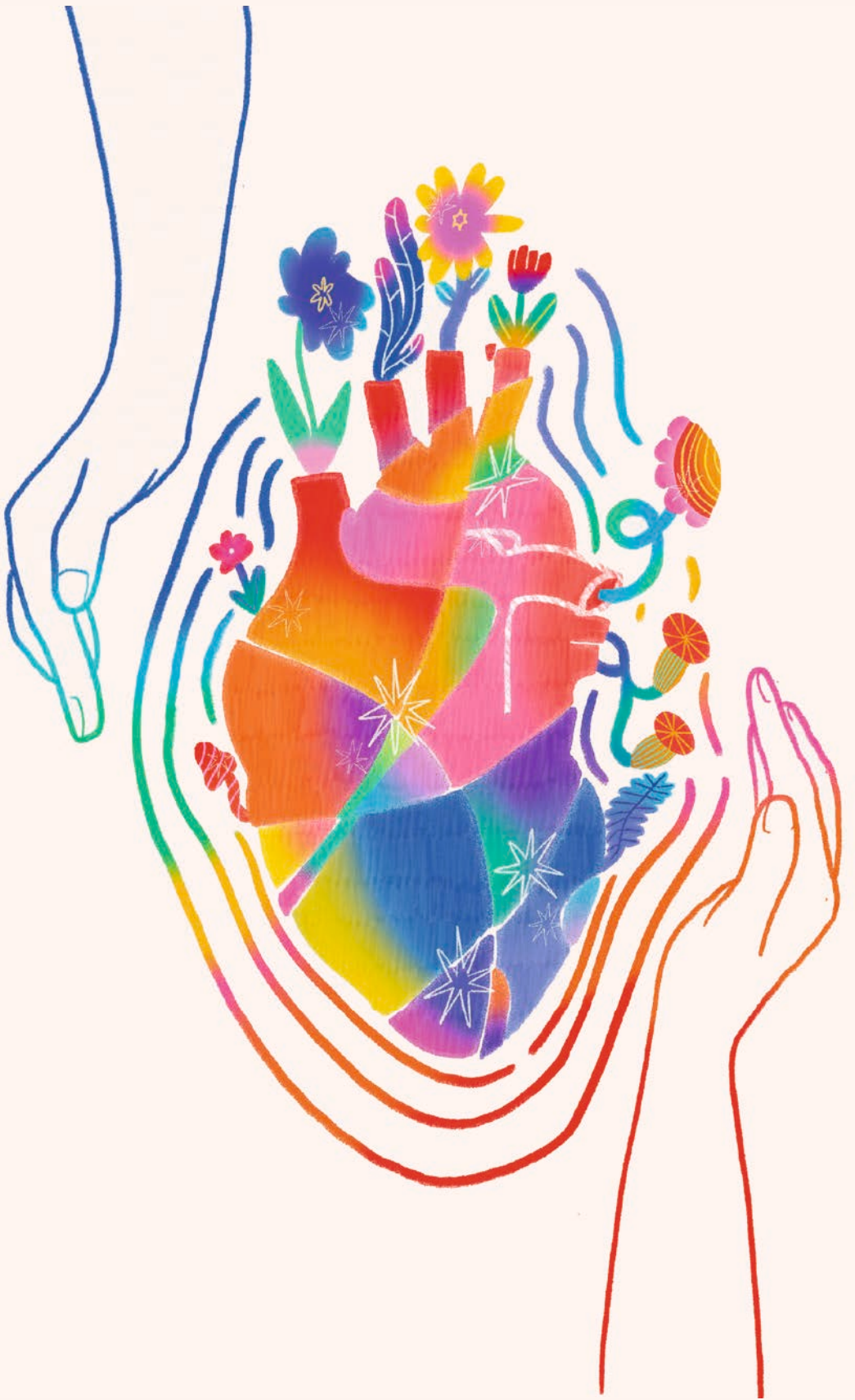
But, I still hate the thoughts from then;  
Hate the hurt that these scattered scars held on to.

Was this hate for them? Is this hate and pain still me?

Clay cracks washed clean by rain-made rivers,  
Remember that through repair it's only gold that glitters.

Kevin van Mierlo Amezcua

04/02/2019, Toronto.



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# What is this book about?



This book is about what it's like to be young, in care, and queer. Being queer and in care can be a unique experience. You are unique. But sometimes, that uniqueness can also make you feel alone, and that's why we wrote this book. It's about finding your way in the care system, understanding the people who are supposed to care for you (even when they don't always get it right), and managing your relationships with friends and people who matter to you. It's also about finding the places and spaces where you can connect with your community through solidarity and support. We hope that by reading and engaging with this book, you'll feel less alone, find comfort in who you are, and strengthen the connections you build. This book is also about connecting with your inner power to stand up for yourself and finding communities of support, because you deserve to be stood up for.

This book was created by a diverse group of people across the spectrum of sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Some of us have experienced life in care, some are students, some work or have worked in care organisations, and others are researchers. Many of us have a combination of these identities. Despite our different backgrounds, we are united in our commitment to challenging social inequalities and creating a fairer and more inclusive world for everyone.




We are a group of people who come from all sorts of backgrounds and places across the globe. We have put our experiences into this book. We wrote this book for you (and also a bit for ourselves). We think our role is to try to change the world for the better, build community, and stand up to systems that are oppressive and keep up social inequalities.

We know there's still a long way to go in making all spaces truly inclusive and free, where you can be whoever you are and love who you want (including yourself!). We also recognize that there's always more to learn about sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Your thoughts, ideas, wishes, and feedback are always welcome! Feel free to reach out to us via our Instagram account [@queering.care](https://www.instagram.com/queering.care)



### **The team (in alphabetical order):**

Gaby Gallardo-Lastra, Javiera Garcia-Meneses, Erin García Gutiérrez, Rodrigo González Álvarez, Daniel Herrero Eguino, Emi Howard, Elyse Jackson, Mónica López López, Gary Mallon, Gaby Martínez-Jothar, Yanira Muñoz Lopes, Rory P. O'Brien, Samar Orwa, Luis A. Parra, Gab Castro Siqueira, Melvin Sturing-Bakker Mijntje ten Brummelaar, Selena Torsius, Kevin R. O. van Mierlo Amezcua, Eli Verdugo, Daylano Verwer, Skye Wijkstra, Ale Yañez Cancino.

Do you want to know more about the team? Head to the back of the book, where we've included their background stories. Enjoy! 

The amazing artwork in this book was created by Eli Verdugo. Want to know more about the Eli's work? Check out their Instagram account:



[@golpedecolor](https://www.instagram.com/golpedecolor)

This book was reviewed for sensitivity and proofread by Emi Howard.


## When you read this book

Feel free to read the entire book or just focus on the parts that you connect with most. Some parts might remind you of things from your own life. It's totally okay to take a break and come back to it when you're ready. You could also read with a friend or someone you trust, so you have support as you go through the book together.




# What do we mean by....



Words are basic tools we use to define and describe the world around us. Some words describe sexuality and gender, common experiences shared by LGBTQIA+ people, and how society **privileges** (benefits) hetero and cis-gender people and **oppresses** (disadvantages) LGBTQIA+<sup>1</sup> people. The terms and definitions in this glossary are borrowed from the University of California, Davis, LGBTQIA<sup>2</sup> Resource Center Glossary. We also added a bunch of stuff to this and rewrote some parts to make it more accessible. This glossary does not include all terms. The words we use also change over time and depend greatly on the context you live in, so you may use words that are not listed here! New terms and ways of being in the world are constantly emerging. 

It is important to know that you do not have to choose any of these terms to “label” yourself or feel pressured to come out. This is entirely up to you! It’s about being yourself and living how you want to live.


## Aromantic (aro)

Aromantic people do not feel romantic attraction to people at all (or feel very low levels). They may, however, feel sexual attraction toward other people. Aromantic is shortened to “aro”. And people who 

- 
- 1 Read this interesting piece about why the L is first in the acronym! Heads up: it’s about solidarity, tackling structural barriers and activism
  - 2 LGBTQIA+ Resource Center Glossary. (2021). UC Davis, <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary> “Language is dynamic and ever changing, especially the words we use to describe ourselves; this glossary was finalized in August 2021, and terminology may have shifted.”

rarely, but sometimes, feel romantic attraction are called demi-romantic. Aromantic people may still identify as hetero, lesbian, gay, bi, pan, or any other orientation.

### **Asexual (ace)**

Asexual people, “ace” for short, do not feel any sexual attraction to anyone (or feel very low sexual attraction levels). Generally speaking, asexual people have limited to no sex drive. Asexual people can be men, women, cis or trans, or non-binary. They may feel left out of common culture due to our emphasis on sex and sex appeal. Ace people may still identify as hetero or lesbian, gay, bi, pan, or any other orientation. 

### **Bisexual/Biromantic**

“Bi” people feel sexually and/or romantically attracted towards people of their own gender and other genders, or don’t care about gender when it comes to feeling attracted to someone. Sometimes, “bisexual” and “pansexual” mean the same thing, but not always (see “pansexual” later on in the glossary). Like other identities, a person who is bi may experience erasure of their identity. This means being dismissed, not believed, or over-



looked. The worldwide bi visibility day focuses on raising awareness of bisexuality and biromance.

### **Care and Caring**



“Care” is a broad concept that can mean many things. It may be considered an activity (e.g., care work) or an emotion (e.g., I care for you) and it can be paid (e.g., when a social worker works in a residential care institution) or unpaid (e.g. when we take care of a friend who is sick, or a younger

sibling). Overall, “care” aims to ensure the well-being of people, especially people who are financially or physically dependent on other people due to things like their age, health conditions, or personal circumstances.

Care is about more than simply meeting basic needs. Caring involves emotionally connecting with others. It requires warmth, attention, and a deep connection to the daily lives and quality of life of the people receiving care. Care not only includes caring for others but also involves, for example, time for self-care and caring for the environment. Care is essential for sustaining life and it involves recognizing the rights of both the person being cared for and the person giving the care.



### **Cisgender/Cissexual**

“Cis-” comes from Latin and means “on this side of”. When paired with the word “gender”, this means your gender matches the sex you were given by doctors or adults when you were born – in other words, someone who is not transgender. Being cis comes with a lot of privilege in nearly all societies around the world.

### **Cissexism/Cisgenderism/Genderism**

This is when people are treated unequally and unfairly because others think there are only two genders or sexes and that everyone should act according to their sex designated at birth. This makes things harder for people who don't fit into these strict ideas. In this system, cisgender people have more privilege, while trans, non-binary intersex, and gender non-conforming people face more challenges and oppressions.



## Consent

This means asking another person if they are comfortable and agree to something. This can be something sexual, but does not have to be. You need consent from someone to touch their body or possessions.



## Coming Out

Coming out is when someone tells others about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It's a personal choice and there's no right or wrong way to do it. **"Being out"** means living openly as your true self, while **"outing"** is when someone else reveals this information about another person without their consent. And remember... do not feel pressured to come out. This is entirely up to you! It's about being yourself and living how you want to live.

## Gay

This refers to a person who feels sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same gender.

The word **"gay"** can also mean **"happy."**



## Gender Expression

This is how you show your gender through things like clothes and behavior. People and our societies often label these expressions as **"masculine," "feminine,"** or **"androgynous."**

But you can show your gender in many different ways beyond these labels.



We sometimes mention “**gender performance**” alongside gender expression in this book. How we express our gender can be playful, and even theatrical, like drag, and this playfulness or performance can help us to explore our identities and, sometimes, question and poke fun at heteronormative and cissexist beliefs.

## Gender Identity

This is how you experience yourself in terms of gender, like as a girl, boy, non-binary person, cis, trans, or genderqueer person, or something else. It is also possible to not feel related to a gender at all. The gender you feel related to might be the same as the sex or gender you were given at birth, or it might not.



## Gender queer/Genderqueer

This idea can be used in different ways and can mean a lot of things. Some people use it to push back against society’s gender labels. It’s also seen as a broad term that includes identities and expressions that don’t fit into the traditional categories of female/male, woman/man. It can also be connected to the idea of **gender fluidity**, meaning that you don’t have to commit to fixed roles, expectations, or labels.



## Heteronormativity

This is the stubborn expectation that persists in society that there are only two genders, which are assigned at birth and should always align with a person’s biological sex. In addition, it is the expectation that everyone should be heterosexual and follow traditional gender roles. For example, someone assigned “female” at birth is expected to look and act “feminine” and like boys.

## Heterosexism

The expectation that everyone is or should be heterosexual, or that heterosexuality is better than any other form of sexual orientation. This social attitude ignores and excludes the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people and gives unfair advantages to heterosexual people.




## Heterosexuality

A person who is primarily sexually or romantically attracted to people of a different gender than their own. This involves being attracted to what is thought of as the “opposite” gender.

## Homosexuality

This is an old-fashioned term for being sexually or romantically attracted to people of the same gender. It’s not used much anymore in some languages and cultures because it was often used negatively against gay and lesbian people.

## Intersectionality

 This is a term to describe how multiple types of oppression, like **heterosexism, cissexism, patriarchy, classism, colonialism, and racism**, interact with each other to create inequalities. Sexism looks different and has different outcomes for white women than it does for women of colour. And racism looks different and has different outcomes for people of colour who have different social classes, nationalities, and sexual orientations. For example, a transgender person with enough money to access gender-affirming care may experience greater health and safety than a transgender person who doesn’t have enough money to access the same type of care. As individuals, we experience these intersections daily, as they produce differences in how systems and individuals treat us.

## Intersex

This is a term for people whose bodies don't fit typical (binary) definitions of male or female. This can involve differences in chromosomes, hormones, and physical traits. In the past (and this is still happening today!), with or without the consent of parents or caretakers, doctors surgically change children's bodies, to make intersex people conform to society's idea of how someone should look like. Many intersex people feel that they were mutilated by these actions. Intersex people are common, but their existence is often ignored by society. "Hermaphrodite" is an old and incorrect term for intersex people.



## Lesbian

Traditionally, this term refers to a girl or woman who feels attracted to others from the same gender. Today, it is also used as an identity for queer people more generally who are attracted to women and feminine-presenting people and who identify with lesbian culture (see also "[sapphic](#)"). Why is the "L" for Lesbian put first in "LGBT"? Well, during the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and 90s, there was a lot of violence against men who love other men due to the fear of HIV, which causes AIDS. Lesbians banded together to help and protect



their gay brothers, providing care and challenging injustice. "Blood sisters" would donate blood, as many people in society refused to help gay men. Hetero medical professionals often refused to treat what they saw as "dirty" sufferers of AIDS. Many of our rainbow elders died in this period of government neglect. "[Dykes on bikes](#)" would chaperone gay men to protect them from the attacks from people in public.





## LGBTQIA+

This stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and all other identities. It's a term used to talk about the community. In Canada **2SLGBTQIA+** is used to include **Two-Spirit people** as well. The '+' indicates the inclusion of other identities.

## Masking

Sometimes people feel like they can't truly be themselves around others or in particular situations. In these cases, people might cover up or "mask" their authentic selves or parts of themselves when they feel uncomfortable or as a response to particular environments. A lot of times people mask to hide certain behaviors that they feel may not be accepted by others.

## Non-binary/Non binary/Nonbinary

This is a gender identity that doesn't fit within the traditional binary categories of boy or girl. It can be a way to resist or go beyond typical gender expectations. For some people, the term may overlap with other identities, such as gender expansive and gender non-conforming.



## Pansexuality

Pansexuality means being attracted to people regardless of their gender. A pansexual person can be attracted to someone whether they are male, female, non-binary, or another gender identity. It's about being open to love or attraction to a person based on who they are, rather than focusing on their gender.

## Polyamory

Polyamory, also called ethical non-monogamy, is the ability, space and openness to love more than one person romantically, often at the same

time. It is based on the principle that you do not own your partner and the love they give to you and/or other people. What connects partners is more than monogamy, such as shared goals in life, commitment in long-term plans, envisioning a life together, caring for each other, or wanting children together. People who identify as polyamorous, or “poly” for short, are able to form romantic and sexual bonds with multiple people. There are different ways of organising such arrangements. A group of poly people who are dating each other is called a “polycule”. And your partner’s other lover is called a “metamor”. Everybody in an open or polyamorous arrangement has to consent to it: lying and cheating are still not allowed. As long as everyone has consented and boundaries are discussed, this can be a really enriching experience for all involved. There still is social stigma surrounding polyamory. It is often confused with polygamy, which is when a man marries multiple women, and “swingers,” who are couples who engage with other couples for only sexual but not romantic reasons.

## Queer

This term is most commonly used to mean “not straight”. Originally, “queer” meant “strange” or “different”. It was used as an insult against LGBTQIA+ people, but it has been reclaimed by some as a positive identity. Not everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community uses this term because it can still be hurtful when used by others outside of the community. For many of us, when we say “queer,” we don’t just mean identities like lesbian, gay, or transgender. We also mean anything that questions heteronormativity. We think “queer” is about challenging traditional ideas with the goal of changing things for everyone’s freedom.

## Sapphic

This is a cultural identity for any woman or non-binary person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to women and generally feminine-presenting people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, or who identifies with sapphic culture. Cis or trans, nonbinary, lesbian, bi, pan, ace, and aro people may all identify as sapphic. The term comes from the well-known ancient **Greek poet Sappho**, who famously wrote about her attraction to other women.

## Sexual Orientation

This is about who you're attracted to emotionally, romantically, or sexually. It can change over time, and people use different labels to describe their orientation.

## SOGIE

This is an acronym for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression. It's similar to LGBTQIA+.

## SOGIESC



This stands for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and **Sex Characteristics**. It's more inclusive than SOGIE by including different ways sex characteristics can show in our bodies.

## Transgender

This is an umbrella term often shortened to “**trans.**” It means a person's gender identity is different from what is typically expected, based on their assigned sex at birth. It includes people who identify as a different gender than they were assigned at birth, which may be binary (man/woman), but may also be nonbinary, genderqueer, agender, or another identity.

## Transition

This refers to the process of changing in order to live as your true gender identity. This is different for everyone and might include a **medical transition**, by taking hormones or having surgery, but not always. It also might include a **social transition**, like changing your name, style, or appearance. Everyone's journey is valid, no matter what steps they take.

## Two-Spirit (2S) and Third Genders

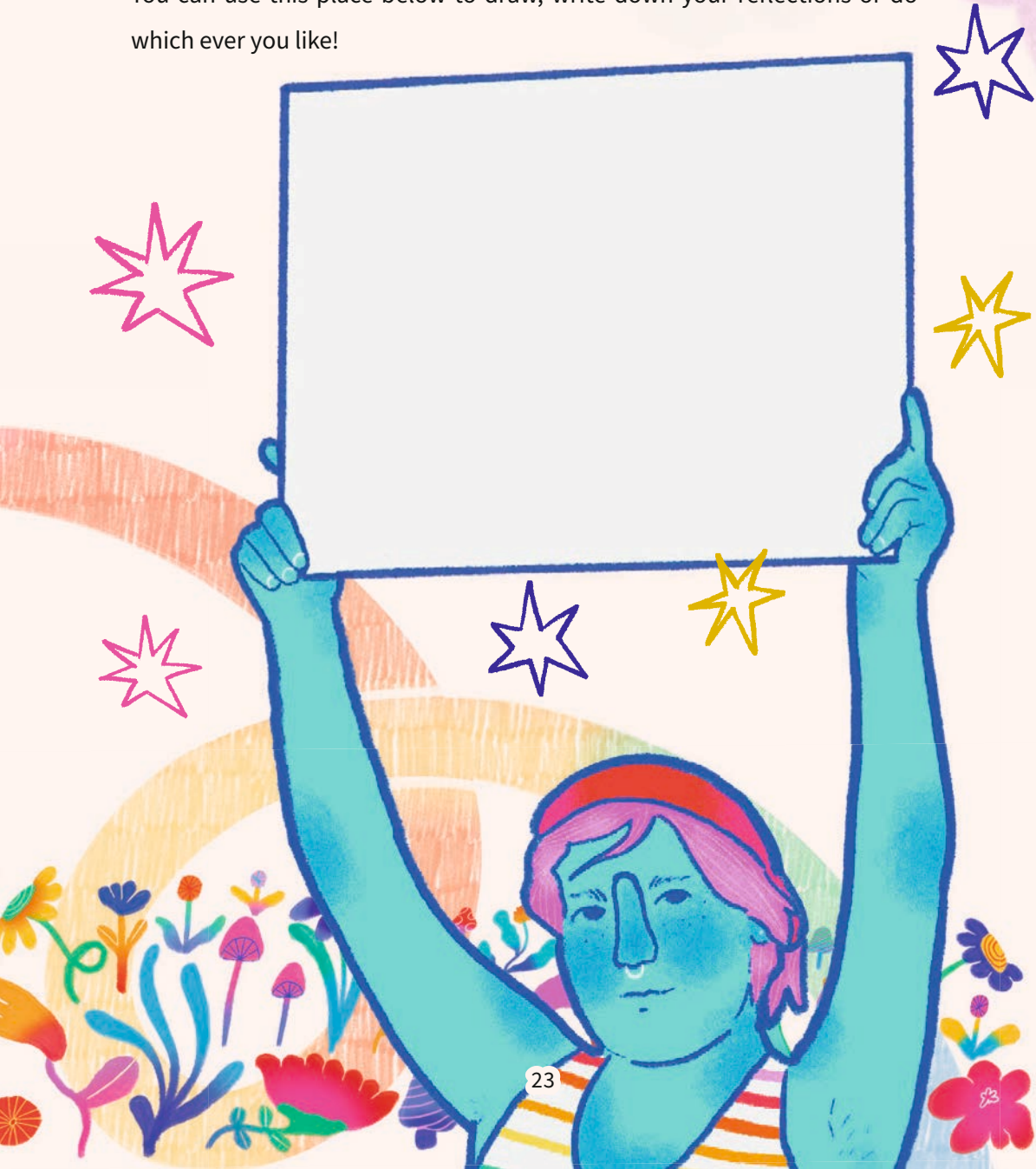
Two-Spirit is an umbrella term for the various queer identities of the indigenous, native, First Nation, Metis, and Inuit people who are the original and current inhabitants of what we call the Americas. The term “**two-spirit**” is *only* used for and by the queer people in these cultures. Two-Spirit people hold special roles in their communities, but have been oppressed by colonization. In particular, the Catholic Church tried to eradicate this identity by taking away indigenous children and sending them to residential schools, the last of which closed in 1996. The scars of this cultural and literal genocide are still felt to this day.

Many other cultures, both now and before Christianization, also recognized and accepted third genders. An example is the **Anishinaabemowin** word **niizh manidoowag**, which refers to a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit. Anishinaabemowin or Ojibwe is the language of the Ojibwe or Anishinaabeg people around the Great Lakes area in what we call North America. Another example comes from the **Zapotec cultures of Oaxaca** in what is now southern Mexico, where a **muxe** is a person assigned male at birth, but who socially and sometimes physically transitions to live as a wom-



an or third gender. The **Native Hawaiians and Tahitians** also have a third gender called **māhū**, while the **pacific islanders of Samoa** have **fa'afafine**, “those in the manner of a woman”. In the Indian subcontinent, there is a third gender known as **hijra, or khawaja sira in Pakistan.**

You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!





# Discovering who you are

As a young person in care, you have the fundamental right to be treated with respect and to have your basic needs met. Those needs include internationally recognized human rights to education, housing, and identity. As an LGBTQIA+ young person in care, you have the right to live in a home where you feel safe and supported, to identify however feels right to you, to live your life according to your gender identity, and to love people of any gender without fear of discrimination. You also have the right to privacy—no one can require you to come out to anyone against your will or before you are ready or want to, and the people in your life should respect your wishes to come out in your own time and in your own way. Remember, **it's not your responsibility to “come out” or to “label” yourself**. No one except you should make this choice and no one has the right to choose this for you.

### **Discovering who you are when you are in care**

We're always discovering new things about ourselves throughout our lives. Some LGBTQIA+ people realize their identities as children, others as teens, and some later on. Everyone's journey of self-discovery is different, and it's important to take the time you need to understand who you are and what you want. This might also change over time. You might have picked up this book already knowing you're LGBTQIA+, or you might be unsure. Either way, that's perfectly okay.



Whether or not you are certain that you are LGBTQIA+, you may have doubts or concerns about not belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community or not being lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer “enough.” If you look online (maybe you already have), you will find all sorts of tests and quizzes – mainly built on stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ people – that claim to help you find out if you are LGBTQIA+. You may even know people who have strict ideas about what makes a person LGBTQIA+. There is no rulebook to being LGBTQIA+. There is no right or wrong way to be you.



**But am I LGBTQIA+?** Only you can know what feels right about your gender and sexuality. Some people find the answer quick and easy, and some people take their time to reflect, sometimes for years, on this question. These questions may also be an open journey through life, as you may see yourself differently over time, or you may find that you do not need to answer this question for you to feel comfortable in your skin. You do not have to rush to get to know yourself.

When thinking about your identity, it’s natural to worry about negative beliefs and stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ people and how being LGBTQIA+ could affect your relationships. These thoughts can feel overwhelming, but remember, you are not alone. There are millions of LGBTQIA+ people and allies around the world—including the authors of this book—who want you to be happy and live your life in a way that feels right to you.



**Here are some questions you could think about while exploring your sexual orientation and gender identity and/or expression:**

- \* How do I want to use this book to help me follow my personal journey of self-discovery?
- ? \* What resources do I need in my sexual and gender diversity journey?
- \* Who in my life, such as friends, teachers, parents, family, neighbors, or social workers, can I speak with to learn more about LGBTQIA+ people?
- \* What LGBTQIA+ organizations are in my area? Do they have youth groups I can join?
- \* Do I believe in negative things about LGBTQIA+ people? Where did I learn those negative beliefs? ✌️
- \* Can I imagine wonderful things about being openly LGBTQIA+?
- \* What life can I imagine living if I were openly LGBTQIA+?

If you need someone to talk to about questioning your gender identity or sexual orientation, check out teen hotlines and LGBTQIA+ organizations in the resources section.

Even if you know you're LGBTQIA+, you might still be unsure about which specific identity fits you—whether that's lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, trans, non-binary, gender-fluid, queer, or something else. Figuring this out can feel like a huge challenge, so remember that these terms are just tools to help describe who you are at a particular moment. One term might feel right immediately, or you might need to try different ones to see what fits best. Give yourself the freedom to explore and discover what feels right for you!



## Coming out

Remember: You have the right to privacy and you have the right to tell people you are LGBTQIA+ when you are ready or want to (it is also totally okay if you do not come out or “label” yourself at all!).

Being openly yourself can be empowering, but you might also feel the need to keep your gender identity and sexual orientation private. If you think the people close to you might reject you or cause you harm if you come out, it’s important to prioritize your safety. Remember, there is no rush to come out—you can wait until you’re ready and feel comfortable doing so.

Hiding parts of ourselves can sometimes make us feel sad or like we’re not being true to who we are. These feelings are totally normal, and can be hard to deal with. There are many reasons why people choose to wait before coming out. We might not feel sure about ourselves yet, or we might be worried about how others will react to us being LGBTQIA+.

As a young person in care, you have the right to a safe home and social workers who will support your rights to identify as LGBTQIA+, have privacy, and live in a secure environment. If you’re placed in a home with anti-LGBTQIA+ parents or social workers, you may have the option to move to a more supportive home. You can talk to your social worker—they should support you. But if they don’t, check the resources list for ombudspersons<sup>1</sup> in your area who can help provide the support you need.

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1 An ombudsperson’s job is to respond to complaints about the practices of government workers, which include most social workers and care workers. By receiving and responding to complaints, ombudspersons protect the rights of particular groups, such as youth in care. The ombuds office is independent from the government; you can say things to them and not be worried about getting in trouble. Ombudspersons can help you understand your rights as youth in care and connect you with people and resources to tackle problems in your life, and especially to act when your human rights are not being respected, protected, or fulfilled. Depending on where you live, you may have an ombudsperson focused specifically on foster care or more generally on child welfare, social services, or human rights, or they may just be called the Ombudsperson/Ombudsman/Ombudswoman, with no specified focus.

Coming out is a process that can have its ups and downs. You might decide to come out to one person but not another. As a young person in care, you may have different groups of people in your life—friends, foster parents, birth parents, siblings, or social workers—and you might feel more comfortable coming out to some before others. You might also face disruptions, like moving to a new placement, and needing to come out again. This can feel tiring and overwhelming at times.

If you do decide to come out, the following questions could help you plan and manage your coming out process:

- \* Who do I trust to come out to right now?
- \* Where and when do I want to tell this person/people?
- \* How do I want to tell this person that I am **LGBTQIA+**?
- \* How do I expect to feel once I come out?
- \* Who can I turn to if my coming out is not responded to well?
- \* Do I want to ask the person/people to keep the information private?  
If so, do I trust them to keep this information private?
- \* Will I feel better telling this person by myself or with other trusted people present?
- \* What spaces are safe for me to try opening up? Are there spaces that might not be safe to open up, or might feel less safe?



Coming out is a way of telling the people around us who we are. The act of coming out also signals that you trust that person and that you want them to know you better. Coming out may be an opportunity to deepen relationships with yourself and the people around you.

Some people prefer not to use the term “coming out”, and prefer to refer to this process of sharing their SOGIE with others as “embracing their queer identity”. Either way, it is important that you know that you should

be able to decide when and how you do this. After all, **you are inviting others to see another part of yourself!**

Some people, however, take this vulnerable moment as an opportunity to ask invasive questions that you may not feel ready to answer. You may be asked questions about your body, your sexual desires, or your crushes. You do not have to answer these questions unless you feel comfortable doing so. If people interpret you not answering as you being unsure about your identity, just tell them your truth, for example, “I have thought about this for a long time and I feel sure about it.”



### Being outed

Sometimes, people tell others information about us without our permission. When this happens in relation to someone’s SOGIE, we often refer to this experience as “being outed” or, less often, “forcible disclosure.” For LGBTQIA+ youth who want privacy or do not feel ready yet to share that information about themselves, this can be really stressful. We all deserve the time for self-reflection and self-discovery, and, if and when we are ready to come out as LGBTQIA+, we deserve the opportunity to choose who we come out to and how we come out to them. It’s important to remember that, because if someone is outed without their consent, the information shared might be inaccurate. A person outed as gay may actually identify as a different LGBTQIA+ identity, or they may not even identify as LGBTQIA+ at all!

If someone outs you as LGBTQIA+, you still have options. You don’t have to answer if people ask you questions; just because someone else has shared information about you does not mean that you have to provide



more information. You can tell people, “I did not share this information and I would rather not have this conversation,” or “Please respect my privacy,” or, if you want to be super direct and set a strong boundary, you can say “Mind your own business.” If a care professional, teacher, or school administrator outs you to peers, other professionals, or family, this is a form of discrimination and you may be able to report their behavior to their supervisors at the social service agency or school.

No one should out another person; we should always have consent before talking about another person’s private information. While many people experience anxiety, fear, or discomfort after being outed, some people who are outed experience relief and even joy. People who are outed may even experience all of these emotions, negative and positive, alike. Coming out is stressful, and some people find that being outed takes the personal responsibility off their shoulders and “rips off the band-aid.” This does not mean that it is okay to out another person – it simply demonstrates that coming out is an extremely challenging experience and that there is no right or wrong way to feel when you come out or if someone outs you.



### **Our identities are dynamic, complex, and intersectional**

As you go through your journey of standing up for yourself, activism, or building community, it is worth remembering that, just like everything in life, attraction, desire, and gender performance and expression are in constant movement. Life is a journey of discovery and people are constantly experiencing new situations, encounters, and emotions.

We, the many authors of this book, have seen how people transform in terms of gender and sexuality, regardless of their age or stage in life. For instance, one of us has transformed from first identifying as gay, then as a trans woman, and now as a non-binary person. Both in our personal lives and in the lives of our friends, families, co-workers, and so forth, we have seen how people flourish in different stages, exploring the infinite possibilities of gender performance, sexuality, and desire.

Sometimes, people see queer people as “others” or outsiders, and this can be hurtful. LGBTQIA+ youth are never just defined by their SOGIE, but also identify in terms of race, ethnicity, ability, nationality, class, and religion. Our multiple identities intersect, and so do different types of oppression. If we are “othered” for more than one aspect of our being, such as being Black and a woman, this can be even more difficult. Sometimes, our intersecting identities and experiences can expose us to situations where we feel discriminated against or uncomfortable. In other times, we may find people who share our intersecting identities, with whom we feel a strong sense of belonging and understand each other. Always remember that you are not alone and that there are communities of people who, even if they do not have your exact experiences or specific intersections of identity, can empathize with you and provide support.



## Self-discovery and centering exercises

We all need and deserve time to reflect on who we are, what is important to us, and how we want to live our lives. There are many ways to do this, on our own and with support.

Consider these options as exercises in self-discovery.

\* **Therapy** is a great way to talk about your feelings and experiences. Therapy is for everyone. Despite negative stereotypes that something “must be wrong” psychologically with a person to go to therapy, going to therapy can be helpful to learn about yourself, your values, how you experience and participate in relationships, your goals in life and – yes – your mental health as well.

\* **Meditation** is an important skill for self-care. There are many ways to meditate; some people may believe that there is one right way to meditate, making it scary to even try. But there are a few simple things you can do to start meditating, and you’ll find it easier to do every time you try: just find a quiet space, sit still, pay attention to your breathing, and notice how your mind wanders. Doing this can help us process difficult emotions, calm our thoughts, and understand our feelings toward ourselves and others.

\* **Journaling** helps us to process strong emotions, explore our values, and practice the words to describe ourselves, our feelings, and the world as we experience it. Let yourself write and/or draw whatever comes to mind, with no real concern for spelling, grammar, or punctuation – your journal is just for you and does not need to be perfect for anyone. You can journal on paper, on a notes app, or a computer – whatever feels easiest and most comfortable. If you don’t know what you want to write about, you can start by trying to answer some of the questions in this book! If you are



scared of people finding or taking your journal, you can tear up or delete what you write when you finish, or if you use a computer or an app, you may be able to protect your journal with a password.



You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!





# Our connections to the world

Social connections are key to living a long and fulfilling life.

Monica Holmes, the creator of the trans flag, once advised to make as many friends as you need. For her, friends were a vital part of her transition. However, in many places, the situation is still far from perfect. Bullying, exclusion, violence, and verbal abuse are all too common in public spaces. In this chapter, we'll take a closer look at social connections and discuss the importance of support and the different types of relationships we can form, like those with caregivers, extended relatives, chosen family, and friends.



### **What does family mean to you?**

The meaning of family can be different for each person. Your parents and caregivers, your siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, are all examples of relatives. However, family can take many different shapes. Sometimes extended family members take important roles in your life. Two guys, a seven-year younger brother, two dogs can make a family! Some families have one caregiver, some have several, some have none. All forms of family are valid. What matters isn't the setting itself, but an environment where you feel safe, respected, and cared for and where all members, including you, support each other.



"A FAMILY IS A FAMILY  
WHEN TWO OR MORE PEOPLE  
CHOOSE TO CALL  
THEMSELVES A FAMILY"

Ann Hartman

There is also something called a **chosen family**. These are people who choose to take on the roles of family members. They don't have to assign themselves specific roles, like parent or sibling etc., but simply feel like

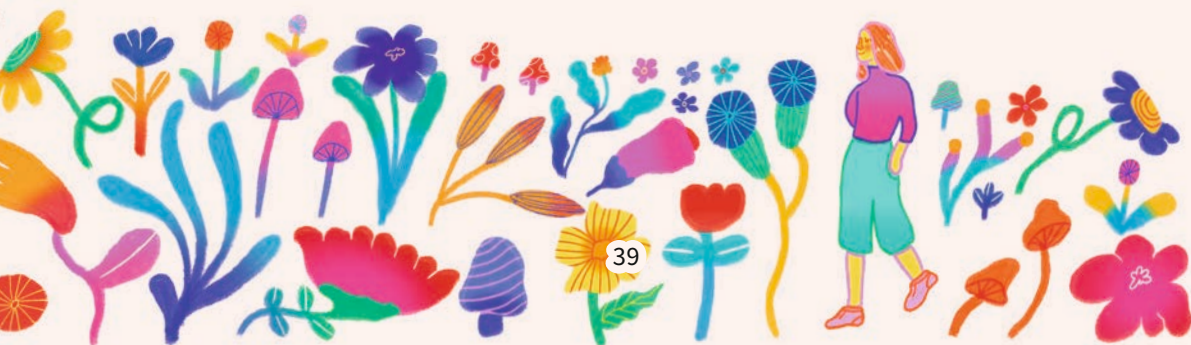
family with one another. These can be friends who are your age. But they can also be from different generations. They can be a teacher or a neighbor who helps you stay safe in a dangerous time. Sometimes, chosen family can be distant relatives, such as great aunts and uncles or distant cousins. Any of these people may or may not be part of the LGBTQIA+ community. What is important is that they are queer allies and willing to care for and support you for the wonderful person they know you are!

### Safe communications and acceptance



How can you grow if you have to keep hiding or cutting away the parts of you that you love the most? Chosen family can help you with self-love, especially if you feel emotionally isolated from the family you were born into.

It can be really painful if your family doesn't accept you for who you are. **Religion, generation, traditions, patriarchy**, and other stuff can negatively influence the acceptance of queer people by their families or by society. One way to create a safe environment is to understand that communication is a relational process: it is something we create together, a



two-way street. It may take patience, perseverance, and empathy, as we need to take into account that different people process ideas differently.

Communication is a two-way process that involves everyone, not just you. It is about when, how, and to whom you communicate your thoughts. When people want to create a safe environment with you, you may have to work on this again and again, because gender and sexuality-related themes are more complex and unfamiliar to some people than others. For instance, when you learn something new, you might say, “I don’t get it, can you explain it again?”. This can also happen when you are communicating something that might be new to others.

Decide for yourself if you want to have these conversations, and remember—you don’t need to convince anyone of who you are for them to love or accept you. If a conversation starts to feel unsafe or uncomfortable, it’s okay to step away. You can say something like, “We don’t seem to agree right now, maybe we can talk about this later,” or “I don’t want to continue

discussing this right now, let’s revisit it another time.”

Prioritize your well-being in these moments.



Sometimes, emotions can get the best of us. If things start to feel too heated, let the other person know you’d like to take at least a 30-minute break. After that time, if you still feel like neither of you are ready to have a calm conversation, suggest picking it up again on a different day.



## Seeking support

Social connections can be a big source of support during tough times and can also make your life more enjoyable. When things get hard, you might want to reach out to people you trust to talk about what's bothering you, and when you have good news, it feels exciting to share it with someone.



Maybe you need to share something important about yourself or simply pour your heart out. Safe and supportive relationships offer a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and sometimes helpful advice. Other times, you just need to vent your thoughts, and a trusted friend can help you make sense of it all.

It is great when we have at least one person we can fully trust. However, at times, you may feel that you do not have anyone to rely on. So, what options do you have? Well, we can trust different people with different subjects, at specific moments in our lives.



For instance, you may find it easier to share your newly realized gender identity with someone who has a similar gender expression than with a friend you have known for years. It is also about evaluating what makes sense to you at that moment.

What's more, building a support network and trust is an ongoing process. Trust may take time to build. As we go through life, we may want to reflect on how we go about connecting to people, who the people we want to keep in our lives are, and how we respect and support one another within these relationships.

## Love and affection in relationships

Healthy relationships are based on care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust. These feelings may make you feel safe in a relationship and may lead you to love someone. But “what is love?” We often hear that question even in song lyrics. We can certainly agree on one essential element to define it: Love is the opposite of abuse and neglect, as bell hooks reminds us in her book “All About Love”:



“WILL ALSO IMPLIES CHOICE. WE DO NOT HAVE TO LOVE. WE CHOOSE TO LOVE... WHEN WE UNDERSTAND LOVE AS THE WILL TO NURTURE OUR OWN AND ANOTHER'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT WE CANNOT CLAIM TO LOVE IF WE ARE HURTFUL AND ABUSIVE. LOVE AND ABUSE CANNOT COEXIST.”

bell hooks, All About Love



Love comes from different places: you may love your friends, your family, your caregivers, and your pets, and we all define love as we feel it. While it may not be obvious or come easily, love can also mean self-love: loving yourself for the amazing person you are.



Love can also be defined as the place where you feel safe and supported. Love not only reflects how much we care about someone; it also reflects the place where people care for and respect you. Love is something we build: love cannot be taken for granted in relationships. We constantly choose to love.

Love in communication is a two-way process: it does not only depend on you, but it takes effort and perseverance from everyone involved in the relationship.

"LOVE AS 'THE WILL TO EXTEND ONE'S SELF FOR THE PURPOSE OF NURTURING ONE'S OWN OR ANOTHER'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH.' LOVE IS AS LOVE DOES. LOVE IS AN ACT OF WILL - NAMELY, BOTH AN INTENTION AND AN ACTION."

bell hooks, All About Love



Sometimes, to love means to be apart from the person you love. When, for instance, someone you care for acts towards you in harmful ways, it is more than okay to step away to take care of yourself. This does not mean that you do not love them, it means that the best way to love them is by creating space. This also does not mean you will never talk to them again. To lovingly make space for yourself when someone who is close to you hurts you repeatedly means that you will take a step back to heal and grow. When you feel you have regained strength, you may want to try to reconnect, but it is also okay to go your own way.

### **Queerness, loneliness, and friendships**

Unfortunately, **queerness** and loneliness often go hand in hand. Queer people have been deeply discriminated against. This exclusion can lead to feelings of isolation, whether you're in a small town or a big city. We were

taught not to love ourselves, not to trust our feelings, not even our love. This loneliness can lead

us to lower our standards of self-care and let in

people who may not be supportive. Loneliness is harmful to both our physical and mental health.

Sometimes, people may not understand your needs,



and in some cases, people might be actively unkind or fail to protect you. This can be very frightening. That is why building healthy relationships or safe spaces are ongoing processes that can help you go through difficult times.

### Queer-on-queer friendships

**Heteronormative** and **cissexist spaces** can lead you to hide yourself and present yourself differently in order to be accepted. If you form friendships or relationships with other queer people, you may see your own experiences reflected in theirs. This can create a space where you feel acknowledged, validated, and understood. All of a sudden, there are people who just get you! This does not mean that you must be friends with every queer person: heterosexual and cisgender people are also not friends with all other heterosexual and cisgender people, after all! But if you find people in the LGBTQIA+ community who you vibe with, then this is a great chance to gain a deeper understanding of who you are!



## Intersectionality (check the glossary for more info!)



Remember that our identities can give us strength, connecting us to the history of our ancestors, communities, and groups we feel proud to belong to. Many of us have intersecting identities, with strong local and even international communities of support. For example, there are so many trans Latinx people in the world, for whom organisations, like the **Trans-Latin@ Coalition in Los Angeles**, exist just to serve and support community-building for that specific intersection of identities; and there are similar examples all through the world for other intersecting identities. You can look at the resources page for more examples.

Sadly, sometimes members of our communities, including LGBTQIA+ people, reject us on the basis of our other intersecting identities. Negative beliefs about people based on identities and social conditions – racism, sexism, ableism, and other -isms – exist worldwide, and even people who experience oppression sometimes take on these negative belief systems. Sharing an identity with someone is not the same as supporting someone. Sometimes, being hurt by our own community members can make us feel like we do not belong. We encourage you to look for friends and communities who respect and honor the many parts that make you who you are.

If you ever feel that somebody is acting mean toward you because of your experiences and identities, this is not your fault. It hurts, but it is not a reflection of your worth! Make sure you talk to your friends and loved ones when you are in doubt. You deserve love, kindness, and respect.

## Intimate relationships and consent

Sometimes, friendships can develop into intimate and/or sexual relationships. It is important that everyone involved consents to any (sexual) acts. This can be through asking each other for permission or by saying affirma-

tive words, such as “yes” or “continue”, or actions that are understood by everyone involved. It’s important to make sure that these actions are also agreed by everyone involved. Otherwise, someone might understand an action as consent, while the other person does not. If you do not want to engage in any sexual acts with a person, you are free to say no. People should listen to that and respect your boundaries.

### **Some questions to reflect on queer connections**

Use this space to reflect on the following questions. You can use drawings, pictures, poetry, or songs to answer these questions. Remember: this is very personal! You can also check out [Chapter 10, which is about resistance, advocacy, and self-care](#).

- \* What is your favorite song that makes you feel good about yourself? Do you also have a favorite song you like listening to when other people are around you?
- \* Who are the people, animals, places, or spaces that are important to you?
- \* Is there a particular person in your life who you would like to (re)connect with?
- \* Who do you feel safe around and trust?
- \* Who are people you can go to to discuss certain health questions?
- \* Are there ways you can make other people feel safe and heard when they are around you?



You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!





# Looking after your physical health and mental health

Health means that your body, mind, and social connections feel good and are in sync. It's important to keep your mind, body, and social connections healthy to manage life's many challenges. Learning about yourself can be a challenge sometimes. For many young people, it can be confusing, exciting, or even stressful to explore their identities. This may take a toll on your mental and/or physical health, especially if you do not have the support that you need.



### Mental health care

Being LGBTQIA+ doesn't mean you have a mental health problem or that you will have mental health problems in the future. However, some people treat LGBTQIA+ youth badly or unfairly because of who they are, and this unfair treatment makes it harder to stay physically and mentally healthy.



Besides the challenges of understanding your own identity and how others treat you, other factors related to being in care can impact your mental health. These can include experiencing trauma, such as abuse or neglect in your family home, or dealing with frequent changes in placements or caregivers.

Moreover, LGBTQIA+ youth who are also part of other groups that face discrimination (like people of different races, those from low-income backgrounds, or those with disabilities) might experience what we call **intersectional stress**. They can face discrimination in multiple ways at the same time, which can make mental health struggles worse. For instance, a Black transgender person might deal with both racism and cissexism, which can make them feel even more isolated and excluded. Experiencing discrimination can be really tough and impact our health and feelings. It can make us more likely to have **mental health symptoms**, like anxiety, nervousness,



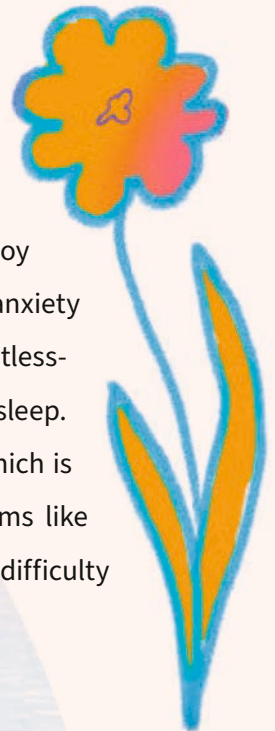
sadness, or stress. We might also feel **physical symptoms** related to these negative emotions, such as headaches, an upset stomach, or trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. We might also engage in **coping behaviors** to deal with these feelings, such as overeating or not eating enough, all which further contribute to us not feeling mentally or physically healthy.

Remember, your experiences are valid, even if they are different from the experiences of other people around you! That being said, it is important to take care of yourself mentally and physically, to make sure that your body and mind are as healthy as possible and able to go through the immense changes you may be experiencing. Unfortunately, some LGBTQIA+ youth in care do not have access to a safe and comfortable environment where they can talk to doctors or mental health professionals to help with these mental and physical health symptoms. However, there are still many tools you can use when you are not feeling mentally or physically well.



### **What mental health struggles do we experience sometimes?**

- \* **Anxiety** is when you feel really worried or scared about something. Sometimes, these feelings can be so strong that they make it hard to concentrate or enjoy things you usually like. Some physical symptoms of anxiety include sweaty palms, an upset stomach, nausea, restlessness (tapping, fidgeting), and difficulty falling asleep. Sometimes, people may experience panic attacks, which is a strong anxious response that can involve symptoms like chest pain, a racing heart, and hyperventilation (difficulty breathing).



- \* **Depression** is when you feel very sad or down for a long time, even when things around you seem okay. It's more than just having a bad day; it can make you feel tired, lose interest in things you usually enjoy, stop eating properly, or have trouble sleeping. You might also feel very lonely and hopeless, making you think that things won't get better in the future.
- \* **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is when someone has very strong and scary feelings after something very upsetting or frightening has happened to them. These feelings might include being really worried or afraid, having bad dreams, or remembering the scary event over and over again. People with PTSD might also feel jumpy or easily startled.
- \* **Self-harm** is when someone hurts themselves on purpose, like by cutting or hitting their own body. This usually happens because they're feeling very sad, upset, or overwhelmed and they don't know how to handle those feelings.
- \* **Eating disorders**, such as anorexia and bulimia, are when someone has big problems with how they eat or how they think about food and their body. This might mean they eat too much, too little, or are very worried about their weight or body shape.



## **What help is available when you are experiencing those problems?**

If you're worried about how you're feeling, it's a good idea to talk to someone you trust about it. Talking to a friend, a family member, a teacher, or a counsellor about how you're feeling can be a good way to get help. They



can listen and remind you that you're not alone, but they won't know how you feel unless you tell them. Think of someone you really trust and try to talk to them. If talking feels too difficult, you could write a note, or send a message or email to let them know you need their support.

You can also make an appointment with your doctor or ask a care professional to help you with that. The doctor might refer you to **a specialist**, such as a psychologist or a mental health counsellor. These professionals can help you understand your feelings and find ways to help you feel better. **Treatment** often involves talking about your feelings to figure out the best way to help you. It's good to know that not all therapies are the same. Sometimes, finding a therapist that suits you can be difficult, but it is immensely important and useful when you find one that connects with your needs. Talking therapies can be really helpful, and sometimes medication might also be needed. If you're under 16, you usually need a parent or legal guardian's permission for medical care. But if you're 16 or older, you have the right to keep things private and don't have to share everything with your family if you don't want to.

Remember that people who struggle with their mental health can learn to successfully manage their mental health symptoms and thrive! Everyone's journey is different, so there are many ways to recover. Most people need support from their friends and loved ones, and with the right help and treatment, they can improve and live happy and healthy lives.





## How can you support a friend who is experiencing mental health problems?

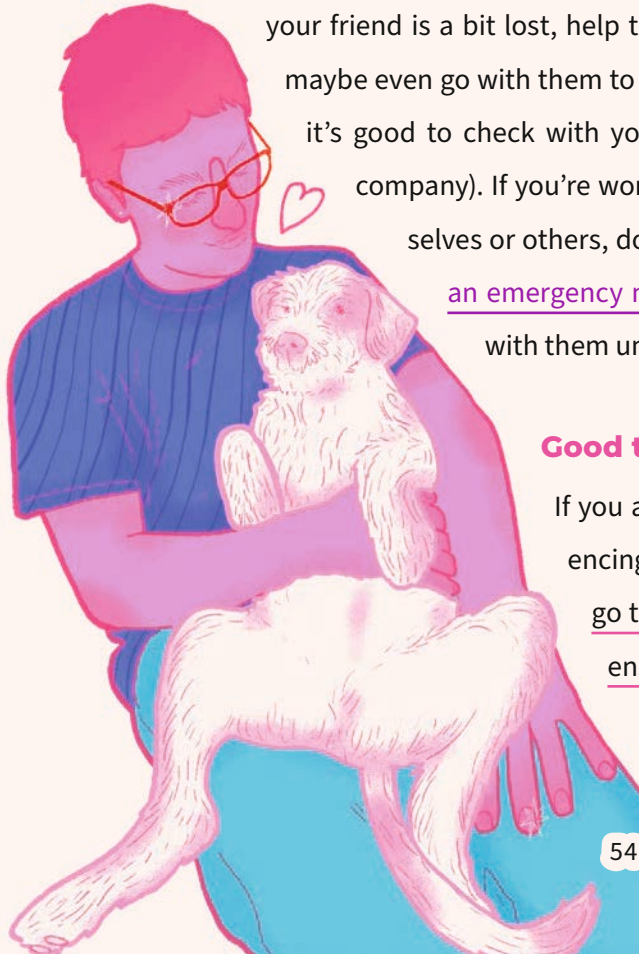
When your friend is talking to you, show them you care by putting away distractions like your phone. Ask questions, listen closely, and try not to give advice unless they ask for it. Just being there and paying attention is what matters most. Even if you don't fully agree with what your friend says, be kind and supportive. Let them know you understand what they're going through, like saying, "I see this is really difficult for you, but I'm here for you." If your friend is struggling, follow up to see how they're doing after your meeting. They might be worried that you don't want to be friends anymore, so checking in can reassure them that you still care.

Even if you're the best and most supportive friend, your friend may still need professional support, like from a doctor or a psychologist. If your friend is a bit lost, help them find someone to talk to, and maybe even go with them to their first appointment (of course, it's good to check with your friend to see if they want this company). If you're worried your friend might hurt themselves or others, don't wait—get help right away. Call an emergency number or a help hotline and stay with them until help arrives.




### Good to know...

If you are ever in any pain, or are experiencing an emergency, it is important to go to a trusted person immediately to ensure your safety.



But what about in **everyday life**, when you experience a period of anxiety, or suddenly become overwhelmed? Young people and adults alike struggle through difficult situations, and it can be easy to believe that you are the only one going through this. However, you are not alone, and there are methods to help ground yourself and calm down if you feel helpless, out of control, or scared. These methods are known as coping mechanisms. These can include:

- \* Breathing exercises
- \* Going for a walk 
- \* Listening to music – maybe your favorite song!
- \* Talking to a trusted person about how you are feeling
- \* Drawing
- \* Writing down how you are feeling
- \* Searching for community resources
- \* And more! You can explore what helps you feel better in times of uncertainty.



By using **coping mechanisms**, you can learn more about your emotions and how to help yourself.

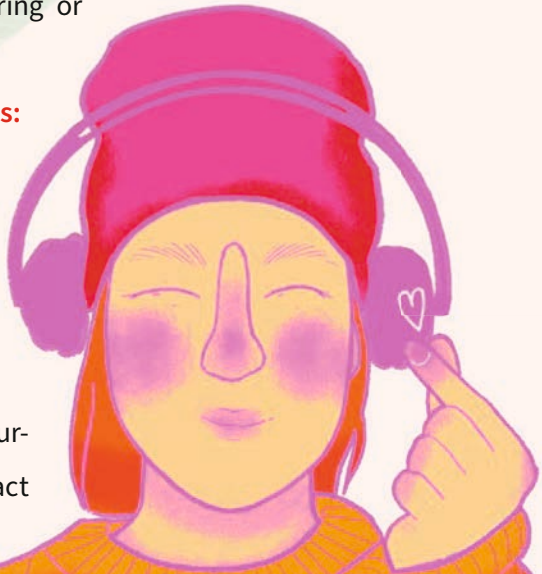
You can also help your mental and physical health by doing small things every day to help your body and mind. Most importantly, drink water, get a good amount of sleep, have some time to be active, make sure your hygiene is good, and don't use drugs or alcohol. Sometimes, very small tasks like brushing your teeth might feel impossible. It can be hard to find the motivation and energy to take care of yourself, especially if you are dealing with a lot of conflicting emotions and experiences. However, staying busy and doing just one or two things for yourself a day can make all the difference.

## LGBTQIA+-phobia and traumatic world events

Seeing LGBTQIA+-phobic events and traumatic things happening in the world can be really hard and impact our mental health in serious ways. It's normal to feel sad, angry, or scared when you witness hate, violence, or discrimination, whether online or in real life. These moments can create a feeling of not being safe or accepted, sometimes leading to anxiety or even depression. These feelings are valid and totally understandable. When things feel overwhelming, there are some things you can do to take care of yourself:

- \* **Take breaks from social media:** Try to step away when the news becomes overwhelming.
- \* **Reach out to the community:** Talking to friends can help you process what you're feeling. Online spaces dedicated to the LGBTQIA+ community can also provide support.
- \* **Engage in grounding activities:** Exercise, cooking, art, journaling, or mindfulness can help with anxiety.
- \* **Set boundaries on conversations:** It's okay to step away from discussions that feel too triggering or emotionally exhausting.
- \* **Find hope in small actions:**

You could think about signing petitions, participating in solidarity groups or associations, or engaging in small acts of kindness to remind yourself of the positive impact you can have.

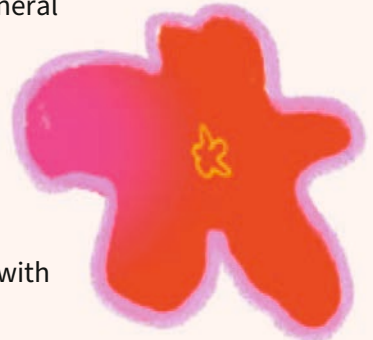


## Sexual health care

Taking care of your **sexual health** is important for everyone, regardless of your sexual orientation or gender identity. It's all about being responsible. Sexual contact involves risks for everyone, so make sure you're staying safe by getting tested for **STIs** (sexually transmitted infections) and using protection!

If you're having sexual relations, it's important to be aware of STIs like chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes, human papillomavirus (HPV), and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), among others. STIs are spread through sexual contact and are contagious. To protect yourself and others, it's important to use protection, such as condoms or dental dams, during sexual activities and to regularly get tested for STIs with your primary doctor or at a local STI clinic. For more information about **STI prevention and treatment**, you can check out the resources offered by the municipal health services or other reliable websites. Using protection helps prevent the spread of STIs and keeps you and your partner(s) healthier. Below, you can find several websites with information regarding sexual health, STIs, and how to possibly get tested if you wish. You can also discuss this with your doctor or general practitioner. They can help you think about the best possible method of protection for you specifically.

In the queer community, some people choose to use a certain medication called PrEP, which protects against HIV. It is meant for people who have a higher risk of contracting HIV, such as men who have sex with men. Generally, you can get a prescription through your general practitioner (GP) or the municipal health services. **Major cities may also have specific PrEP and sexual health clinics.** PrEP is a vital and effective tool for preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. People who take PrEP must follow up with



their provider every three months for STI testing and to make sure their kidneys stay healthy while taking the medication.

Certain sexual relationships can also lead to pregnancy. If you do not wish to become pregnant, you can use **contraceptives**, such as condoms, oral contraceptive pills, intrauterine devices, or implants, among other methods. Sometimes people get pregnant without wanting to and wish to end their pregnancy. If this is the case, you can contact your doctor or general practitioner to discuss your options.

Sometimes, people are judgmental or unkind to others who have sex, get an STI, experience an unplanned pregnancy, or need sexual or reproductive health care. But STIs are common and affect people everywhere. Pregnancy can also happen easily, especially if people don't have access to things like condoms or birth control pills. Negative attitudes about sex, STIs, or unplanned pregnancies can really hurt. They can make it harder for people to feel comfortable to talk about using protection, to talk openly with partners, or to get the healthcare they need.



### What is it like for you?

- \* How have you been **feeling physically** in the past week? In the past two weeks? In the past month? Have you been feeling any discomfort or pain, such as nausea, headaches, or having very low energy? If you have been feeling pain, where was or is this on your body, and when did these sensations take place?



- \* Have you been **feeling negative emotions**, such as being anxious, sad, or not enjoying the things you usually enjoy, in the past week? In the past two weeks? In the past month? Try to write down what emotions you have been feeling recently. Can you think of why you may have been feeling this way? Have there been any events that may have impacted your emotions or mood?
- \* Is there a **trusted person** in your life who you feel comfortable talking to about your mental and physical health? If so, do you feel it would be helpful to talk to them?
- \* **What do you do** when you are feeling sad? Angry? Overwhelmed?
- \* Regarding your **physical health**, are there any specific questions or concerns you have about sexual health that you haven't been able to ask? Do you know where to find information or support if you have concerns about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or contraceptive methods?

## Links

If you need someone to talk to about your health, check out [teen hotlines](#) and [LGBTQIA+ organizations in the resources section](#).



You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!







# Gender- affirming health care

Gender-affirming health care is all about supporting people in feeling comfortable with their gender identity. Some people feel that their gender doesn't match the one they were assigned to when they were born, and in those cases, **gender-affirming care** can help them feel more like themselves. This kind of care is important for people who are transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming. Remember, though, not all trans people want or seek gender affirming care – there is no right or wrong way to be trans.



There are different ways that gender-affirming care can help. For some, it might involve wearing different clothes, using a different name, or using pronouns that better match how they feel. Some people may see a counsellor or therapist to talk about their gender identity and gender expression and to get support in planning their coming out and transition. For others, it may include medical treatment, like taking hormones that help their body look or feel more like the gender they identify with. For some people (typically adults, depending on what country you live in), surgery might be an option to feel more comfortable in their own body.

If you're feeling unsure about your gender or think you might want gender-affirming care, it's important to talk to a trusted person or a health professional. They can help guide you, answer questions, and connect you with support so that you can be yourself. You might be able to find a gender-affirming clinic in your region. Institutions (spaces, places, organisations) offering gender-affirming services are not always easy to navigate.



Some may have requirements like making one see a number of professionals before they can access the services they need. So, it is recommended to do some research, ask people you trust and people who have used these services before you engage with them.





Remember that everyone's journey with gender-affirming care is unique, and there's no single way to approach it. What's most important is that people have the freedom and support to make choices that feel right for them. Doctors, nurses, and therapists can help by working with each person to understand their needs and provide the care that fits them best.

## Socially transitioning



**Socially transitioning** means presenting yourself in the way that feels right for your gender. This can include things like:

- \* **Changing your wardrobe or hairstyle, or using makeup:** You might start wearing clothes or styling your hair and doing your makeup in a way that makes you feel connected to your gender identity.
- \* **Packing:** This is when someone uses a special prosthesis or a pair of socks to create a penis-like bulge under their clothing. 
- \* **Tucking:** This involves (gently) pushing the testicles up against the body or into small cavities (called the inguinal canal) in the groin and using tight underwear or a special garment to flatten the groin area. Be careful when doing this (don't use regular sticky tape!).
- \* **Binding:** This means wearing a tight chest garment to flatten the breasts. Binders may be helpful to affirm your gender, but you should be careful to wear the right size for you, take breaks, and not wear them when sleeping or exercising, as they can cause harm with overuse or strenuous use.
- \* **Breast, hip, or buttock prostheses:** These are inserts used in clothing or bras to enhance or change your body shape.
- \* **Changing your name:** You might want to change your name, either informally or legally (see below). 
- \* **Changing legal documents:** This involves updating your name, gender identity, and/or pronouns on official documents like your ID or passport.



## Medically transitioning

**Medically or surgically transitioning** involves undergoing medical treatment to help align your body with your gender identity. This can include things like:

- ✦ **Hormone/puberty blockers:** These medications can temporarily stop the body from releasing the hormones typically released during puberty. This can help delay the development of “secondary sex characteristics,” like body hair, breast growth, or a deepening voice. Since your body needs hormones for healthy bone development, blockers should not be used for too many years. If you want to use blockers, speak with a medical provider to plan the timing and for how long you will use them.
- ✦ **Hormone therapy:** This involves taking hormones to develop physical traits that make you feel comfortable in your gender identity.
- ✦ **Hair removal:** This means removing unwanted hair from your face, body, or sometimes genital areas, sometimes to prepare for surgery or as a goal in itself.
- ✦ **Surgical transition:** There are different types of surgeries you can consider, such as top surgery (removing the breasts), bottom surgery (vaginal reconstruction or penis reconstruction), vocal surgery (to change your voice depth), body contouring (to change your body shape), or facial surgery (to change your face shape).
- ✦ **Speech therapy:** This involves working with a therapist to help change your voice or speech patterns.
- ✦ **Fertility preservation:** This involves storing your sperm or eggs in case you might want to have children in the future.

[Check out these links in the resource list for more info on gender-affirming health care!](#)

You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!





# Experiences of unequal treatment in care and society

It may be that you live in a nice place and you have great and supportive people around you. These people know who you are and you can be your real self with them. Of course, that would be great! Unfortunately, we also know that being an LGBTQIA+ young person in youth care can sometimes be extra tough. You might have doubts about who you are or what you feel. You may not know how others will react when you are open about your SOGIE and whether you can still be yourself then. Or you may have already had many negative reactions, been excluded, or even experienced violence. If you live in a group, all sorts of other questions come into play: What do my peers, supervisors, or social workers think of me? Am I safe? Where and with whom can I be open about who I am? These questions can also come into play when living with foster parents or with family home parents: Am I safe? Can I be myself in the home and what do others think of this?



It may also be that you feel like you can be open about certain aspects of your identity, but not all of them. Remember intersectionality? We mentioned it before, but it is really important for you to keep it in mind while you read this book. While being LGBTQIA+ may be important to your identity, it is not the only thing that makes you unique. Each person has a gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, social class, etc. In fact, being LGBTQIA+ and in care is an intersection, and many of the experiences detailed in this book are experiences uniquely shared by people who are not just LGBTQIA+ or just in care, but both at once. Every person has a

combination of identities. It is the combination of these traits that make you... you!



Similarly, how people are treated depends largely on how much value is given to their identities in different environments. These identities can impact the experiences, privilege, discrimination, or inequalities they will face. In other words, all identities are affected by privilege, power, and oppression. This comes from the stories societies have created about certain characteristics and how they are valued. Minoritized identities, such as being LGBTQIA+, Black, and/or neurodiverse, among others, are, unfortunately, historically connected with having less privilege. This is not something that happens naturally! It has to do with how society is built and, usually, how people in power have created those stories to maintain their privilege.



### **Discrimination and microaggressions**



Unfortunately, the privilege experienced by certain identities and denied to others impacts our daily life and the places in which we feel safe. It may mean that people sometimes discriminate or are unkind against us. They may openly say offensive things about us, or physically hurt us. However, when we feel unsafe, it isn't always easy to figure out why. For some of us, when we are asked: "Have you ever been discriminated against?", our initial reaction is to say: "Well, no one has ever punched me for being gay, or no one has called me by a slur, so I have not been discriminated against."

It's important that you know that discrimination doesn't always show up in such open or big ways. Sometimes, it may look like someone not wanting to change clothes in front of you because they know you are gay. It may look like someone continuously calling you by the wrong pronouns and saying you are "overreacting" when you ask them to stop. It may look like someone telling you you need to "make up your mind" when you tell them you are bisexual. All of these are examples of **microaggressions**. This means small acts or words that contain negative messages towards minoritized people.

The problem with microaggressions is the "micro" part about them. Sometimes, they are so subtle that they are hard to recognize. They may leave you confused and uncomfortable, even if you don't know why. It is important to learn to recognize these microaggressions and find a way that works for you in facing them. Some people choose to ignore them completely and not respond, hoping others will eventually get tired of treating them poorly, as they are not getting a reaction from them. Others choose to try to educate the people who are being (micro)aggressive towards them, or try to find allies who can help them to do this. Still others choose to confront the person mistreating them, and openly call out their behavior.

Which strategy you use depends on a variety of factors. Some have to do with you personally, whereas others have to do with the context (the place and people) around you when a microaggression happens. It may be that in a certain situation, it is very unsafe for you to confront someone, and you may choose to ignore them instead. It may




be that a person has continuously offended you and you are in an environment where you feel like you can try to educate them on why their behavior is hurtful. Some people may react unkindly when they are corrected, by saying things like “I didn’t know any better, you’re overreacting!” or “I didn’t mean any harm and you’re hurting me by calling me out.” It’s good to know that even though people say they didn’t mean to harm you, if they are hurting you, you’re valid in calling them out. Whatever strategy you use, it is valid, and only you can decide what is best for you.



### What is it like for you?

- \* Do you live in a group? Do you feel safe with your social workers and your groupmates? Do you feel you have to defend yourself because of who you are?
- \* Do you live with foster parents or in a family home setting? Do you feel safe with them? Are you able to be yourself at home?
- \* Have you ever had unpleasant experiences with social workers, counsellors, or people where you live? How did you respond? What did others do?
- \* If you were in charge and could do anything, what would you want to change about your group or with your foster/family home setting?
- \* Do you know who you can turn to if you have something on your mind? If yes, who? If not, check out [these links](#).
- \* It’s really important for you to remember: it’s never your fault! You are allowed to be who you are and you should not be ashamed if you experience violence or discrimination.

### Good to know...

You may live in a group, or live with foster parents, for various reasons. You may also be experiencing difficulties where you live right now, feel lonely and sad, experience problems with eating, or something else altogether. You may also be in a very unpleasant situation where you might have to spend this time in care because others have made the decision to place you out of your previous home. You might find this is not the care you want at all. This situation can make you feel unsafe. It could help to know that you are certainly not the only LGBTQIA+ young person living in care. 

We know that youth services still have a long way to go. There are very few people (such as social workers or foster/family home settings) who openly say they do not support LGBTQIA+ people. But there are still social workers and other professionals who do not accept LGBTQIA+ people for who they are, even if they say they do. There can be all kinds of reasons for this. For example, people working in youth care might have **learned bad or unreliable information** about LGBTQIA+ people. They may even think they are allies, but don't have the knowledge or skills to understand the unique cultures, needs, and experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth in care. Low acceptance or unacceptance and bad support from carers could come from



how they were raised, because of their beliefs, or how society oppresses certain people (for example due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, or social class).

### **What if people don't accept who you are?**

Sometimes, people might be mean or even bully you because of your race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other parts of your identity. Sadly, this can happen. It's really important to know how to handle this. Learn ways to stand up to bullying, even if it happens at school, at work, or at the place you are staying. There's a lot of info on this online, and knowing who to talk to is key. If you're ever bullied or discriminated against because of your identity, there are special organizations that can help (some are listed below). Whatever happens, don't keep it to yourself. Talk to someone about it.

To give an example on the topic of gender identity: it may be that care workers or family home/foster parents have been told that our gender has to be the same as our assigned gender at birth, or that other gender identities are a symptom of trauma. Nowadays, a lot of scientific research shows that "trauma" is not the cause of our identity are not "contagious." But some people (including people that work in care) still believe incorrect information. Maybe they heard or read a story about someone "who, for a short time, thought they were trans, but found out after therapy that they were not trans at all." When people read or hear these kinds of stories, they sometimes tend to think it is like that for everyone. This ignores the majority of transgender people who consistently and clearly know what their gender identity is.





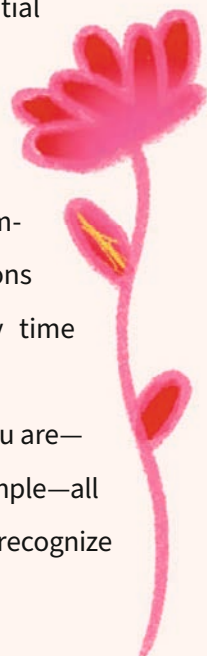
The body you were born with is not the business of your social worker. But social workers still write down which genitals you were born with in discharge and final letters. This is information that is often completely irrelevant to note down if you are being treated for, say, anxiety. Of course, it is different if you want to work with these social workers on this issue yourself. Sometimes, either verbally and/or in your file, your **personal pronouns** and gender identity might not be respected. These are all things that you then have to deal with, in a phase of your life that is already very difficult.



If similar experiences happen to you, then you're probably fed up with it. It is good to remember that there is hope and there are things you can do. In any case, don't doubt yourself! The weight of dealing with this should not be on your shoulders, but on the people that are treating you this badly.

**You could look for social workers who really want to help you.** If you find that your social worker is unsupportive, you can look for others to help you. Did you know that you can turn to a confidential counsellor for this? Most youth organizations have them.

It is important that you keep talking about how the social workers and your peers treat you. Find a person you trust and who understands you. This could be a family member or a close friend. Also know that there are organizations that understand you and that you can contact at any time – [check the links for helplines or for communities](#)

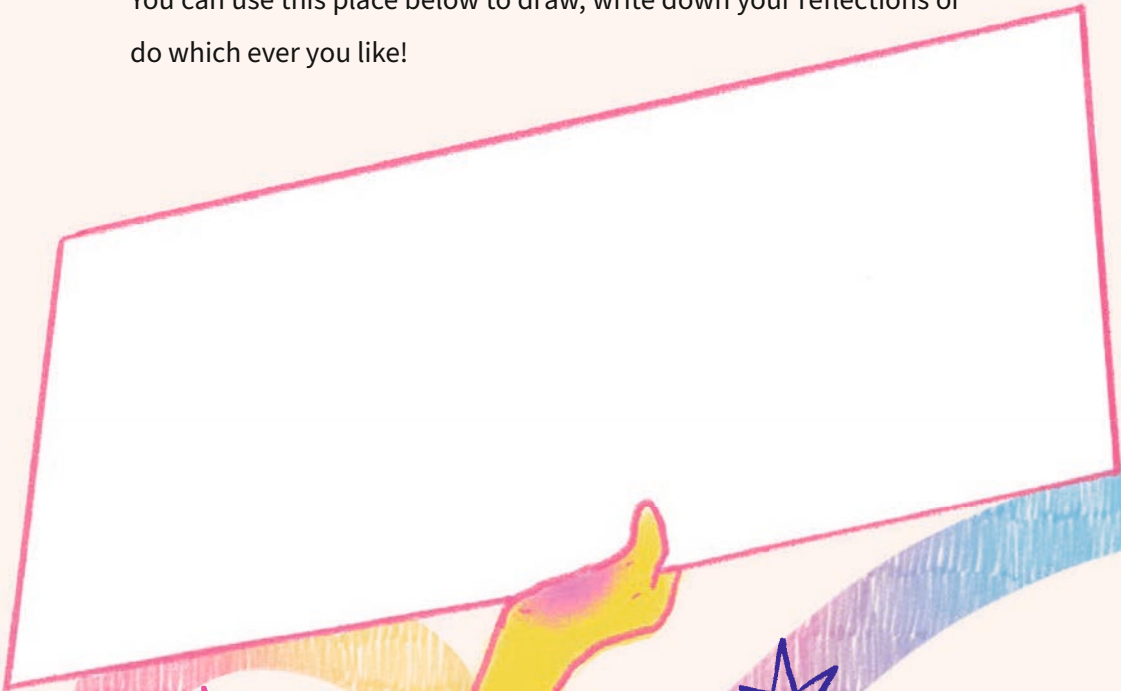


Intersectionality means that the different parts of who you are—your race, gender, sexuality, ability, or background, for example—all come together to shape your experiences. It's important to recognize

that these overlapping identities can affect the challenges you face, but also the strength and support you can find. Always know that there are people and communities out there who understand and are ready to help, no matter who you are or where you come from.

[Want to know more about what you can do? Check out these links](#)

You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!





# School as a safe space for all

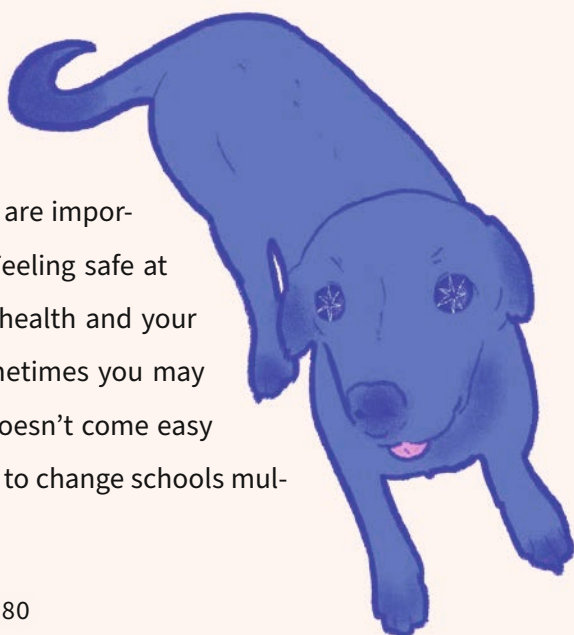
## Going to school as an LGBTQIA+ young person in care

Schools can be a wonderful place for you to learn, grow, and build connections with your friends and teachers. Unfortunately, sometimes they are not a safe space for LGBTQIA+ teens like yourself. It can be even trickier to **navigate these spaces** as a young person in care. You may have experienced bullying, feeling left out, or receiving education that didn't relate to your experiences (for example, education where only heterosexual relationships were represented, or where only one type of family was represented). You may even find yourself hiding parts of who you are from those around you because you are worried about others' reactions after finding out you are in care, or when you share your sexual orientation or gender identity. It's also possible that you have found a school where you feel safe, and you have moved away from it due to changes in your placement. These challenges are part of something you may face as your multiple identities overlap. Although these challenges can be hard, they can also offer great opportunities. The next few pages are meant to discuss some of these challenges and possibilities.



### Good to know...

It's important to note that you are not alone. In fact, other teens like you have identified some things that are important to them to feel safe at school. Feeling safe at school is necessary for your mental health and your ability to succeed academically. Sometimes you may become frustrated because school doesn't come easy to you; sometimes you may have had to change schools mul-



multiple times and have missed parts of the school year as a result. Sometimes your teachers or classmates may not understand how or why you react to certain situations; this may come as a result of previous difficult experiences you have faced. Some situations can bring up intense emotions or remind you of past experiences, or of situations that have not been safe for you as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. These reactions can impact your relationships with your teachers and the people around you.

It's important that you know that these experiences (and your reactions to them) do not define you. Try to take time to understand where your feelings are coming from, and be kind to yourself when you do this. Sometimes therapy can be a wonderful way for you to explore this. In the previous chapters, you also learned about meditation and journaling. In the next chapters, you will continue to learn all about taking care of your health. However, when it comes to school, there's a couple of additional things you can try.



For example, if it is safe for you to do so, try to speak to a teacher you trust about how you feel about your school work, if you feel like you are falling behind. Some schools also have counsellors who can help you with your school work. They can even help you in your relationships with yourself and others. Having an adult around you who is safe to talk to and who can help you manage the negative emotions you experience around school can be key to changing the way you experience your classes! You may find that subjects you thought you hated are not so terrible after all. You may find that you still dislike them, but others are not so bad. Finding subjects and activities you enjoy within school is part of what makes you unique!



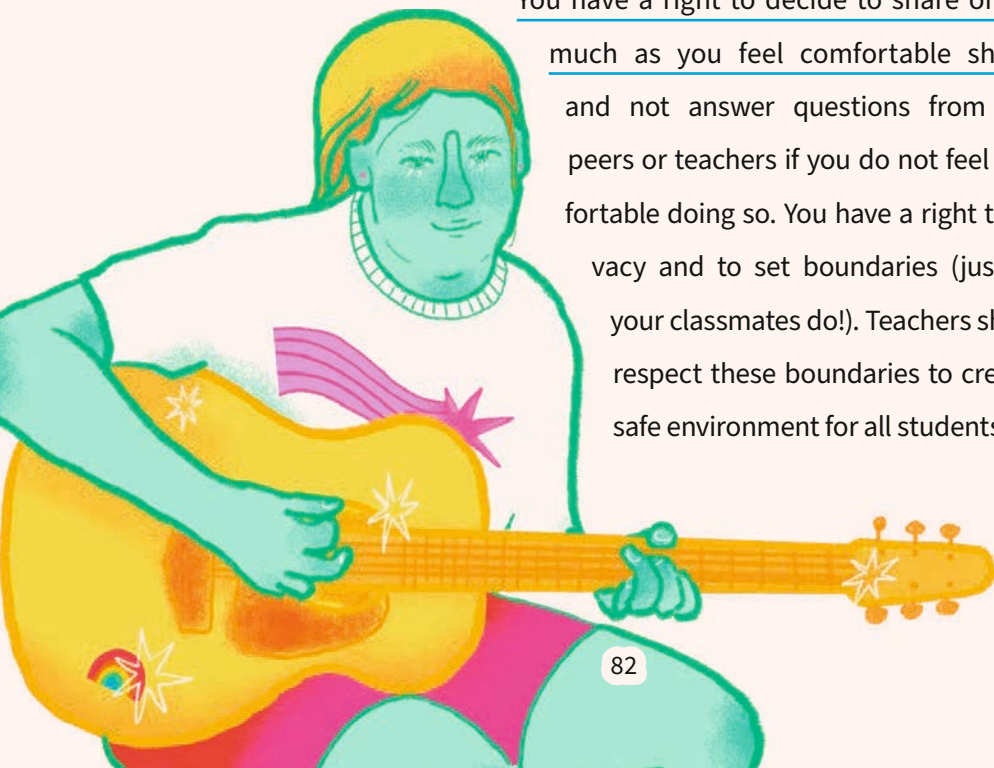


You can also reach out to friends around you who have different interests in school than you do. Maybe you really dislike maths, but your friend is doing really well in that subject. Try to build a study group with them, or ask for tutoring from them. Asking for help should never be something you are ashamed of. You may find that you simply learn in a different way than your teacher's preferred way of teaching, and a change may be all you need. You may also find that learning with a friend feels safer, and this helps you understand the material.



Sometimes subjects are simply difficult because you cannot relate to their content. It could be that the examples they use do not represent you at all or that differs from your worldview. For example, they may only include a version of family that does not match yours. If you disagree with something or someone at school, this can be an opportunity to create and show different perspectives in class; your teachers should support you in this even if they disagree with your perspective. Some exercises may ask you to talk about yourself and your origins, which can be hard for teens who are in care.

You have a right to decide to share only as much as you feel comfortable sharing and not answer questions from your peers or teachers if you do not feel comfortable doing so. You have a right to privacy and to set boundaries (just like your classmates do!). Teachers should respect these boundaries to create a safe environment for all students.



Finding a safe environment to learn is not always easy, but it can make such a difference! Having people around you who you feel comfortable sharing difficult situations with (at home or at school) is very important. Finding a safe adult can be key if you are experiencing bullying, for example. They can help put **anti-bullying protocols and policies** into action, which your school should have in place, especially regarding anti-LGBTQIA+ behaviors. They can also help close the gap between you and the school organization and help you to stand up for changes to be made around the school. For example, they can help to push for all teachers to be properly trained to handle bullying. A trusted adult can also help to push for staff to receive proper training about respecting diversity, such as by using inclusive language and respecting people's pronouns. They can even help you to push for the creation of **gender-neutral toilets**. Trans and gender non-conforming people can face harassment, especially when forced to use toilets that match with the gender binary. Gender-neutral toilets help create safer and more inclusive environments for all.



To help you to stand up for yourself and other LGBTQIA+ teens around you, creating a **Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA)** can also be important. These groups were previously called Gay-Straight Alliances, but the name has changed to reflect the various identities that LGBTQIA+ youth can have. They are student-led clubs with the goal of creating a safe, supportive environment for all youth who care about LGBTQIA+ issues. They are meant to provide support and education for others in your school and help organize awareness campaigns and activities.



Part of these campaigns may include putting the spotlight on important events and people who helped shape history in their fight for human rights, and particularly the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights. This is important not only so



that LGBTQIA+ teens feel more connected to the topics in class, but also because having visibility may help break through stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ people. Queer and trans people have always existed, but their important contributions may not always have been mentioned in your classes. There are far too many of these trailblazers to mention here, but some examples include: Audre Lorde, Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, the Combahee River Collective, Willem Arondeus, Harvey Milk, Pedro Lemebel, and Ifti Nasim. Maybe you could find out about your local history and look for people who fought for the rights of LGBTQIA+ youth like you!

### Bullying at school

Unfortunately, we know that bullying is not uncommon for LGBTQIA+ teens. We also know this can impact your mental and physical health, because it can cause a lot of stress or take up a lot of your energy.



It's important that you first understand that **being bullied is never your fault.** However, we know that sometimes, opening up about this still is difficult, maybe because you are afraid to do so or you think others will not take the situation seriously. It may even be that you've had situations like this happen in the past, and nothing changed. This can be extremely frustrating, and can make school a space you'd rather avoid.

Some youth who experience bullying start skipping classes, or their grades start to fall because they are too worried about the bullying they experience to concentrate. This should not happen. Schools should be a safe space for everyone! Because of this, different countries have laws meant to guarantee your safety. For instance, some countries have school safety acts. Laws like this require schools to have policies to combat bullying, to have a person to make sure that these policies are followed, and



that you (and your classmates) are asked about how safe you feel, so schools can make changes to make sure your safety is guaranteed. Most likely, your school has already started to include these elements; you can ask the school organization to share their existing policies. You can also ask to become more involved in creating policies and evaluating safety at school, and if you think it is important to make changes to the policies in your school, you can ask to become part of this process as well. You can also ask for your school's GSA to become involved in this.

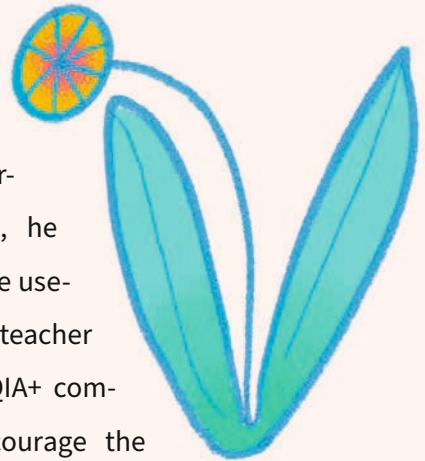
Finding an adult you trust can also help to have these difficult conversations. They can help you bring up situations in which you've been bullied to the school organization, present an official report, and even make sure you're informed (and in control) about what happens to your report. They can also help make sure that your report stays anonymous. It is important that whoever you talk to really listens to you, and they let you decide what you want to happen next.

Having the support of your friends can also help when facing bullying. If you're too afraid to report the bullying on your own, you can ask your friends to come forward with you. Being part of a GSA can also help you create bonds with people who can help you to push for activities to boost the safety of LGBTQIA+ students.



## The story of Sam

Sam is a 17-year-old trans man who has been in care for three years. He started transitioning two years ago and has been feeling frustrated with his school's inability to respond properly to his transition. He has experienced bullying due to his gender identity and his teachers have failed to do anything about it. Instead, they have told him to "tone down" his gender expression, for his "own protection." Although the school has an anti-bullying protocol, it is rarely enforced by the organization and teachers. In fact, one of his teachers (Miss J.) said that she didn't want to hear anything about his transition, because he "was free to do whatever" but "not in her classroom." Unfortunately, this teacher was in charge of Sam's health class and, during their lesson on sexual education, gave them outdated information that strictly enforced the gender binary. Sam then filed an official complaint. Because the school organization doesn't organize proper training for professionals, he wasn't very hopeful this complaint would be useful. Luckily, the school has recently hired a teacher (Miss M.) who openly supports the LGBTQIA+ community and has already started to encourage the school organization to provide the students with proper information.



### Some questions to reflect on the story of Sam

- \* How would you react to having a teacher like Miss J.?
- \* If you were Sam, what would you do next?
- \* If you were Miss M., what would you focus on to make the school a safe space?
- \* In terms of policies, what do you think Miss M. should encourage the school organization to do?

### What is it like for you?

- \* In your life, is there a teacher who has been particularly helpful in creating a safe space for you in the classroom? What did they do?
- \* What would you want all your teachers to do to support your identity?
- \* What are your school's policies around LGBTQIA+ topics? Would you change anything about them?
- \* Is there currently a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) in your school?
- \* Do your classes include examples of people who made important contributions to history who were LGBTQIA+?
- \* What do you need to improve the school environment around you?



**Check out these links:** 

- \* [The material here](#) can help your teachers learn how to better support you as a young person in out-of-home care.
- \* [This website](#) includes material which can help you create a GSA in your school.
- \* There are plenty of online resources on LGBTQIA+ history. You can find a list from [University College London here](#). There are also books, (such as “Queer: A graphic history” or “Pride: the celebration and the struggle” and “From Prejudice to Pride”) or apps which you can consult.

You can use this place next to it to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!







# Growing up and growing out of care

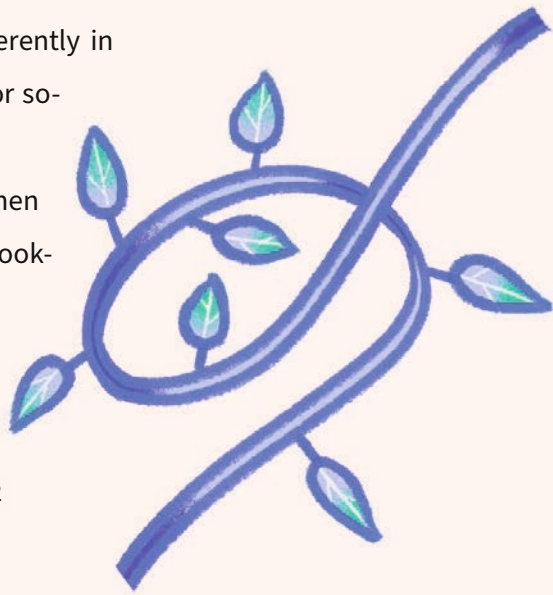
## Growing up after youth care

Becoming an adult is a path of **trial and error** toward learning to take responsibility and deal with new freedoms. You've learned a lot from your upbringing, school, and friends, but as you grow up, you get to decide how you want to live your life. Over time, you've figured out what you like and who you are. As an adult, it's your turn to really take charge and "spread your wings." If you've come from youth care, this step can be even bigger and more challenging than it might be for some of your friends. It is important to take extra good care of yourself.

### What is it like for you?



- \* Do you already know what is involved in growing up?
- \* Do you already know where to turn if you want help with your money matters, physical care, mental care, your safety, or at work?
- \* Do you know where to turn if you are bullied or discriminated against because of who you are?
- \* If you have something on your mind and don't know who or where to turn, who would you approach?
- \* Have there been times when you learned something from your friends that you didn't know yourself?
- \* Are there things you would do differently in your life than your (foster) parents or social workers do? And why?
- \* What are you looking forward to when you grow up and what are you not looking forward to? And why?
- \* Have you ever experienced being bullied? What did you do then?



**Good to know...**

Maybe you're in youth care right now and wondering about the future. What will I need to do when I grow up? Will I be able to take care of myself? How do I handle money? How do I get a job? What if people bully me because of who I am? Where will I live? Who can I talk to if I'm having a tough time?



These are all super important questions. If you've had a rough time at home or are in care, you might not have easy answers to these questions. While some people can lean on their parents for support, you might not have that. Plus, depending on where you live, the help you're getting now – such as financial support, food, housing, groups, social workers, and health care – might stop or change when you turn 18. They might assume you're ready for all the adult stuff. But if you're not, it can feel pretty overwhelming.



And depending on your background or identity, you might have extra challenges to think about. For example, if you are a person of color, you could face racism, which could make it harder to get a job or feel included. Next to this, you might worry about discrimination based on your gender identity or sexual orientation. If you are neurodivergent, you might also experience barriers, whether it's in finding a job, housing, or even daily tasks that others take for granted. All of these things can make finding your way in adulthood more complicated.



So, how can you prepare for this? If you get along well with your **social workers**, it's a great idea to ask them for advice. Anything they can teach you is super helpful! You can also learn from other people, like **friends**. If they've already learned things you want to know, ask them how they do it. This could be anything from friendships, money, or how to deal with a boss at work.



There are lots of other places to get help, too. Many **agencies** are out there to support you, and you can find a ton of good info **online**. Just make sure you're using reliable sources. If you're unsure about something, search for more information until you feel confident. And remember, when you're an adult, there are still people and places that can help you. If you need support, don't be afraid to ask around. If one person can't help you, keep looking until you find someone who can.



Of course there are many different, alternative ways of living and everyone's pathways growing out of care are unique. For some people, it's helpful to consider some stuff when you are transitioning out of care. For instance, have you thought about.....

- \* Practical stuff such as having a **place to live** (finding an apartment or place to stay and moving there), but also having a postal address and your electricity/water (and maybe even internet) connected. Some places ask you to register officially in their state/city or municipality.



Check the website of the place you are moving to, to check what they need you to do. This sometimes also means you might need an ID or passport to register there. Some countries provide financial housing assistance to youth transitioning to adulthood from care.

- \* Some countries work with **insurance systems**, which might mean you need to pay a monthly amount for social security. When you have a driving licence, this sometimes also means that you need to pay car insurance (if you have a car). So, check which insurance types you need.


- \* Having an **income** is different for everyone. Some people have a job when they leave care, while other people receive benefits, or support from their friends or family. It can be helpful to make a list of all the things that you need to pay on a monthly basis and what possibilities you have financial-

ly. You can also ask your caregivers to support you with making such an overview, because these things can be complicated.


- \* When you would like to **find a job**, there are several things to take into account, for instance looking for vacancies, writing your CV, and requesting references or reference letters. It sometimes helps to contact the place you would like to work and have an informal conversation to see what they are looking for and what you need to provide. But also ask your friends and caregivers to help you prepare for these things.
- \* Continuing with your **education** is also an option when you leave care: for instance, some people start with higher education (e.g., college or university), follow evening classes, or take courses or apprenticeships. Some countries have specific financial possibilities, like scholarships, for people who have been in care to continue with their education.
- \* Some people who leave care still want to continue receiving (psychological) **support and treatment**. Many medical gender transition treatments are only possible after the age of 18. You can check with your social worker or other caregivers which types of care you want to continue with or start after leaving care. Next to this, you might want to sign up with a general practitioner (doctor) and dentist.
- \* When you turn 18, you may gain new political rights and responsibilities. You may become **eligible to vote** in local and national elections. Look up your local government requirements on how to register to vote. When you turn 18, you may also become eligible to serve jury duty; your local government will let you know, typically by mail, if they need you to serve.
- \* When you have left care, it's also important to know that you have the right to access your **case files** of the time you were in care.



## Facing discrimination and bullying after care

What if you are not accepted for who you are? Maybe people act unkindly or even bully you, because of your gender identity, sexual orientation, or other identities. Unfortunately, this happens, even among adults. It is still  hugely important to know how best to deal with it. Learn how to deal with bullying behavior in different adult places, such as with coworkers at work. You can look up and learn a lot about this. Your work, college, or agencies where you receive services may have offices or staff who work on tackling bullying and discrimination. Know who to turn to. If you are bullied or discriminated against because of your orientation or identity, you can also turn to specific organizations. Some of these addresses can be found below. In any case, always talk about it. Do not get stuck with it.

### Did you know?

- \* Bullying among adults, at work for example, is still quite common? 
- \* There are lots of possibilities for adults to help you financially or mentally?

[Check out these links!](#)



You can use this place below to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!

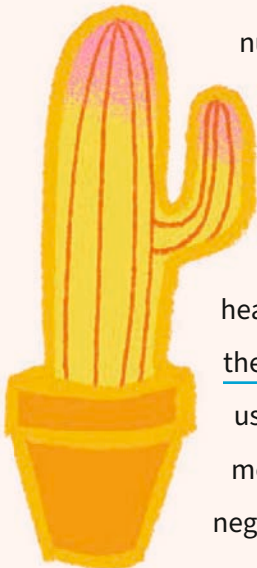




# The many pathways to resilience

## What is resilience?

Throughout this whole book, you have read about how difficult it can be to be different, whether this is related to your gender identity or sexual/romantic orientation, or based on your race, ethnicity, living arrangements, family circumstances, social class, or other characteristics. Living in a society that privileges certain identities, cultures, and lifestyles can definitely pose great challenges and obstacles, especially for those who belong to social groups which through history have been discriminated against, such as LGBTQIA+ youth in care. All these difficulties – the guilt you may feel for loving who you love, being attacked by some of your peers, the horrible experiences you might go through in medical systems – can be understood as **stressors**. Stressors are all the situations that affect you negatively, triggering unpleasant emotions like anxiety, hurtful and wrong ideas like thinking you are not worthy of love, or unhealthy behaviors such as turning to toxic substances to numb the pain.



Stressors have a strong impact on our wellbeing and they can really bring us down, like stones we have to carry with us. Living under these stressors, especially for a long time, can result in physical or mental health problems. Fortunately, it isn't all so dark: we have the capacity to confront our stressors! To do this, we make use of resources. **Resilience resources** are all those elements we can use to fight back against stressors and their negative outcomes in our life. You can think of resilience re-

sources as all the tools you use to avoid and confront stressors so that they can't affect you, or affect you less. You can find these resilience resources in many different areas of your life. These tools can take many forms, within yourself, in your social relationships, and also in your community and social services out there. Let's take a closer look at them:



**The resilience that lives within you.** Think of all those times when you used your personal skills, knowledge, attitude, and personality to get out of painful situations. Every one of us has learned to face difficulties in a number of ways. For example, some people move away from places or people who do them wrong as a form of escaping a stressful, negative situation. Others prefer to put up a fight and defend themselves verbally or physically from the people who bully them. And some others decide to just ignore the violence thrown at them, maybe because they can't escape or fight it, at least at that moment and place. They might be resisting until a better strategy is more suitable for them. It is important that you know that there is not necessarily a "best way" to confront violence. When you are targeted by violence, it is not solely your responsibility to fix the situation. No one should judge you for what you do to care for yourself, avoid harm, and survive. Likewise, try not to judge yourself for how you wish you'd reacted to violence or how you think you should have reacted to discrimination. Sometimes, you might feel it is best to distance yourself from certain people or places. Sometimes the best way would be having a direct discussion with the people who offended you. It all comes down to what you evaluate as the safest and most beneficial action in a particular situation.

Personal resilience can also stem from your deeply held beliefs and attitudes. For example, optimism is an attitude which could help you to ease

the bumpy road of life in care; by believing it is all going to get better (and we know it will!), you may keep the strength to keep going. Maybe your religious or spiritual beliefs are a source of comfort for you, and they can give you energy to continue ahead. And what about all the creativity and joy that lives inside you? Some young people write a journal or poetry, take photos, play the guitar, or do sports. These activities bring them positive emotions, which in turn allow them to confront their stressors.



**The resilience that comes from your social relationships.** In the past, resilience was only thought of as including resources that came from within you, like your willingness to fight, run away, or sponsor beliefs and attitudes that make it possible for you to confront challenging situations. However, we soon realized that resilience can also come from the supportive and loving people around you. Queer youth in the care system often find relationships full of love within and out of the care system. Can you think of any care worker, or foster carer, friend, or family relative who

you connect with and who helps you to stay afloat, especially in hard times?

Think about it – it could be someone who offers you advice or any other practical assistance, someone who sticks up for you and dares to defend you, or someone who gives you a hug or at least listens carefully to your stories and emotions. Those people can actually be



sources of resilience in your life (remember the importance of social connections explained in Chapter 2).


**The resilience within your environment.** Beyond your personal resilience and the resilience you find in your social connections, there are institutional systems, such as formal organizations offering services, whose aim is to improve your life and help you deal with the stressors that you face as an LGBTQIA+ young person in care. For instance, in some countries, there are care agencies which specifically serve queer youth and tailor their services to people like you. But even if those places do not exist in your country or neighborhood, there are likely to be at least a few governmental or non-governmental organizations looking after LGBTQIA+ rights (for example, trans-affirming organizations), racial and ethnic equality/justice, and the rights of youth with special needs, be it physical, mental, or spiritual. These organizations, beyond offering specific services, also allow you to get to know like-minded people, people who have walked similar paths of life to yours. These folks can become a relevant **supportive community**.



**Resilience in your environment also refers to all those basic services** we all have a fundamental human right to, such as education, health care services, and housing. These services are considered a source of resilience because you need education, well-being, and a roof over your head to tackle stressors in life. Although queer youth might experience difficulties in all these environments, you can hopefully find schools, hospitals, landlords, or employers that treat you with respect and affirmation and make you feel safe. Moreover, there are advocates for schools, health care, and housing who are pushing hard to ensure that the organizations offering basic rights are inclusive for everyone, including LGBTQIA+ youth in care. You may also find resilience in your environment through political work you and others do to change formal organizations to transform them into LGBTQIA+-friendly spaces, as well as safe spaces for other marginalized communities (also check the importance of resistance and advocacy in Chapter 10).

All these individual, social, and environmental resources act together to help us keep and improve our well-being, or to get it back on track when we lose it.



**Intersectional resilience.** Throughout this book, we have talked a lot about the multiple systems of oppression you may face because of your identities, starting with the ones central to this book: being LGBTQIA+ and in care. We have mentioned some other traits that may marginalize someone, such as their social and economic status, their race, or their place of origin. However, in the same way that those characteristics may bring some challenges, they can also be a great source of resilience! For example, say you are a young, Black, lesbian, trans woman in care. You may find strength, uniqueness, and even pride in living these multiple identities together! **Intersectional resilience** refers to this. 

As you read earlier, you can find sources of resilience that are specific to being LGBTQIA+, such as friends who support your identity by being careful to use the correct pronouns when talking to you, or healthcare providers who make it a priority to provide you with supportive care. However, this is not all friends and healthcare providers do. Your friends, for example, may share your cultural background, which helps them support you in ways that are particularly culturally relevant to you. You may be able to connect with organizations that don't only stand up for LGBTQIA+ rights, but also the rights of people who share other identities you have (for example, bi-cultural LGBTQIA+ youth). This means you can find community ties that make your relationship with others stronger, and your network of connections wider. Being sensitive to the multiple identities you have may help you to stand up for others as well. It might help you to get involved in the political work necessary to change environments so that they are safe spaces for all!

## The story of Alex

Alex is a bisexual teenager who is non-binary and who has been in a residential care home for the last 3 years. They have a physical disability. When they first arrived at the care home, they felt hopeless and didn't have much support, except for their brother, with whom they had a close bond and felt deep love.



They shared an experience that happened 2 years ago, in which they were leaving school and were stopped by some peers who started to yell slurs at them that were based on their gender expression (something that had been happening a lot). They expressed how back then, all they did was avoid them, rush home, and scream into a pillow. Alex remembers their throat hurting from screaming.



However, the next morning, Alex says that their brother, and one of the professionals in the house who they had always liked, offered comforting words and gave them a hug. The professional reminded them of their strength and since then, Alex has felt a deep connection to her. She is now helping Alex develop a life plan for their future. They want to travel the world with their brother and think their capacity to adapt and be flexible will be handy when they are travelling, and in their future.

Alex says that no one “messes with” them anymore, because now they can defend themselves and argue back when they are insulted. They have made a close friend group, who “didn't care at all” about their sexual orientation and gender expression. Last year, Alex started going to an association meant to support teens who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, which the professional put them in contact with. They have since started volunteering in that association, because they say that it makes them feel like they are “giving back.”

Alex has also changed medical providers that tended to their physical disability. They say it took them a long time to find the right doctor, and they felt very discouraged. However, they have since received the proper care and now go to a clinic where “from the start, the doctor didn’t assume my gender. I told him I was non-binary, and he asked what pronouns I went by, and that was it. I go there every couple of months, and he is always friendly and, even though I know he is really busy, he always takes the time to ask about my life, not just my disability.”



**Some things to think about the story of Alex.** In the story above, use different colors to highlight the elements of resilience you can find that supported Alex’s well-being (individual, social, and environmental).

**How am I resilient?** Alex’s story shows us that being LGBTQIA+ and living in the care system might bring some difficulties. Fortunately, Alex found many ways to tackle their problems. They found love and care around them! Has Alex’s story inspired you to tell yours? Next, you will

find some questions to keep reflecting on Alex’s story in relation to your own experience. **Feel free to use the questions below to tell us more about yourself.** You can use a notebook to write down your answers and make this part of your journaling (see also [Chapter 1](#)). You can also answer the questions in your head. Make this your own comfortable time to reflect.



- \* In your own words, what is it like to be LGBTQIA+ and live in out-of-home care? What are the main difficulties you face? How do you manage to feel better despite these difficulties?
- \* What are the best things about being LGBTQIA+?
- \* What are the best things about living in care?
- \* Who helps you when things get hard? How do they help?
- \* Is your LGBTQIA+ identity supported and affirmed by others? How is it supported?
- \* How can the care professionals help you to feel better?
- \* Do you feel that you receive caring and affirming treatment at school, by medical services, or at your job? Are there organizations in your area that could help you to access these services?
- \* What resilience resources come from your different social identities? Think of your gender, sexuality, family circumstances, nationality, race, etc.
- \* What are your plans, dreams, and wishes for the future?

For a list of great resilience resources in organizations...

[Check out these links!](#)

You can use this place next to it to draw, write down your reflections or do whichever you like!









# Resistance, advocacy, and self-care

## Resistance, advocacy, and sense of community

Our journeys exploring our sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions can be empowering and exciting. They can be filled with pride, joy, pleasure, self-knowledge, and connectedness. Without dismissing the challenges and maybe violence that we face in our personal and joint journeys, we should also think about how to increase the power and the beauty of growing as our true selves, with the support of others and supporting them in return. 

LGBTQIA+ people are continuously rising to different positions in societies. Our voices and bodies are entering spaces that were kept away from us for centuries, such as schools, media, and decision-making positions in the public sector. It is important to remember that people who do not fit the “Western” binary and heterosexual norms have always existed in virtually every society that has ever been studied. Unfortunately, for political and religious reasons, our existence in some societies has been challenged, dismissed, or made invisible. 

It is hard not to fit into common norms and expectations, whether this is due to our sexual orientation, gender identity, race, social class, ethnicity, or religion. People can react very annoyingly. This may be because, for example, they have never heard of it or do not understand. Our existence can also be a challenge to their own beliefs. This can trigger emotions such as fear or anger. Of course, they may also be curious and not respect your boundaries. You may have to deal with people who have a completely different view of your orientation, expression, or gender identity.

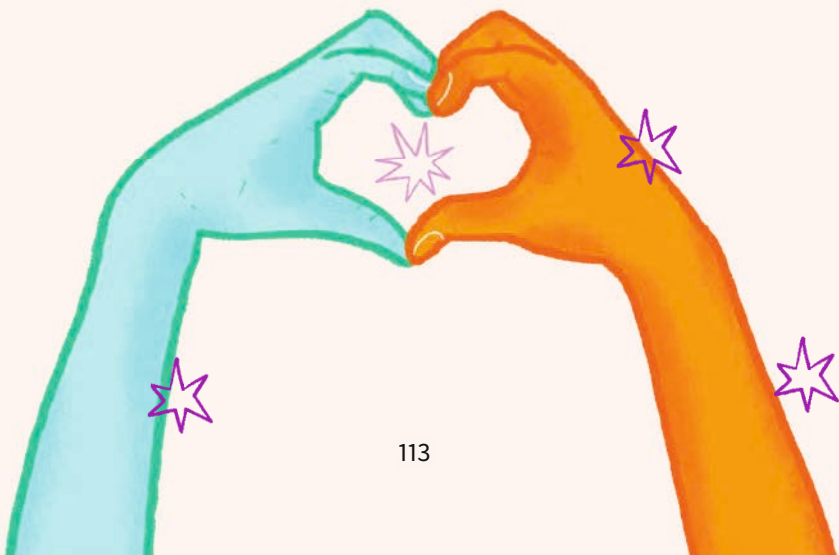
Of course, you don't have to talk about your **SOGIE** with people who ask you about it. You are entitled to your own feelings and beliefs. Nobody has the right to decide for you how you should feel or what you should be-

lieve. Also, some of their questions may come across as invasive, disrespectful, or aggressive. It is important to understand that you are not alone and that there are people and organizations that can help you to deal with such situations.

Importantly, it's not just about receiving support, but also about actively contributing to a larger, collective ideal of justice. It's about recognizing your own ability to take action in acts of solidarity, where you are not only helped but also play a part in helping and fighting for a collective cause. This is one of the reasons we invite you to think of resistance as a community tool. In the next paragraphs, we will reflect on that.

### What is it like for you?

- \* What changes do you want to see in the world? What organizations do you know, or can you find online, that are working to achieve those changes?
- \* How would you like to support other young people who are going through similar experiences to you?
- \* Did you know that young people who feel they are part of a community feel more empowered to deal with such questions? We will tell you a bit about this in this chapter too.



### Good to know...

There are people who choose to speak out about their sexual orientation and gender identity. They do this mostly with the aim of gaining and sharing understanding, so that more people know about it. Often, they do this together with others, in an organization dedicated to standing up for sexual and gender rights. After all, we are stronger together.

These same organizations can also often help or support you when you need it, for example, when your boundaries are not respected or if you need help accessing care. When you need help or can't figure something out, there are plenty of people – including advocacy organizations – who can and want to help you.



### LGBTQIA+ activism and social movements

LGBTQIA+ activism is when people work together to make sure everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community is treated equally. These movements are led by people who want to make the world a better, fairer place for everyone, no matter who they love or how they identify. At the same time – because multiple systems of oppression intersect with each other – they often connect with other struggles for social and environmental justice. **Activists** might speak out against unfair laws, fight for the right to marry, demand better healthcare, push for safer schools where no one is bullied for being who they are, or even oppose invasions of territory or international wars. It's like standing up for your friends, but on a bigger scale — making sure everyone gets the respect they deserve. And you do not have to be LGBTQIA+ to be an ally or an activist for our rights.



Social movements are groups of people who want to make changes in society. The LGBTQIA+ movement is one of these. Over time, the LGBTQIA+ movement has helped to change laws, shift people's attitudes, and build more inclusive communities. **Social justice movements** are about creating real change so that everyone can live freely and proudly. They can also be a lot of fun, boosting pride and empowerment while demanding social justice, as we see during Pride parades and marches in many countries. Some social movements are large groups and some are very small – you can even start one yourself!

By joining a social movement, you can connect with people of different sexual orientations and gender identities you may not have come across before. These interactions may widen your perspectives and it may help to see change within sexual and gender diversity as unifying and liberating. Plus, exploring new possibilities is way more fun when you've got people to share ideas with and support you along the way.





## What is LGBTQIA+ advocacy and how does it work?

LGBTQIA+ advocacy is about working to make sure that our diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are treated equally and with respect. Advocacy helps create positive change in how society views, treats, and protects LGBTQIA+ people, particularly by influencing government policies and laws.



Advocacy means speaking up for others or yourself to push for fairness and equality. It can involve: educating people about issues LGBTQIA+ people face, like discrimination, poor healthcare, or bullying in schools; working with organizations or movements to change public opinion; and pushing governments to pass laws that protect LGBTQIA+ rights.

LGBTQIA+ advocates help to create change by influencing the public sector (like governments, schools, or businesses) and shaping public policy (laws and rules that affect everyone's lives). We can achieve change by raising awareness and creating or participating in advocacy campaigns that bring attention to issues like marriage equality, transgender rights, or mental health support. When more people learn about these issues, they're more likely to support changes that benefit the LGBTQIA+ community.

Advocates often work with politicians or lawmakers to build support for new laws by demonstrating why these laws are necessary. For example, they may demand public policies that ensure transgender people receive proper and inclusive health services and advocate for LGBTQIA+ couples to have the right to adopt children just like heterosexual couples do. Additionally, they may challenge discriminatory laws or practices and fight against harmful actions that affect LGBTQIA+ people, such as **conversion therapy**.



Advocacy can make schools, workplaces, and communities safer and more inclusive. This might mean pushing for anti-bullying policies, promoting gender-neutral toilets, or demanding better mental health services for LGBTQIA+ youth.

### Self-advocacy for LGBTQIA+ youth


**Self-advocacy** refers to the ability of young LGBTQIA+ people to understand, express, and stand up for their own rights, needs, and identities. It involves speaking up for yourself in various situations, whether it's in school, care systems, social settings, or family environments. For LGBTQIA+ youth, this can be particularly challenging because of the additional layers of stigma, discrimination, or misunderstanding they might face due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.





In relation to LGBTQIA+ youth, self-advocacy includes several aspects:

- \* **Identity and expression:** Empowering yourself to express your gender and sexual identity openly and authentically. It may include learning to deal with fear of judgement or discrimination.
- \* **Navigating institutions:** Speaking up in schools, healthcare settings, or workplaces to ensure that your rights are respected, such as access to gender-neutral toilets, proper use of pronouns, or receiving inclusive healthcare.
- \* **Resisting discrimination:** Queer youth often face homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of marginalization. Self-advocacy involves standing up against these issues, whether through formal channels (e.g., filing a complaint at school, talking to an advisor or ombudsperson) or informal ones (e.g., educating peers).



\* **Mental health and well-being:** Advocating for your mental and emotional needs, particularly when facing unsupportive or hostile environments. This could include looking for therapy, support groups, or other resources that affirm our identities. 

\* **Community-building:** Finding and building supportive LGBTQIA+ communities can be a form of self-advocacy, as it provides safe spaces to grow, learn, and strengthen connections with others who understand our experiences. 

Self-advocacy is a powerful tool for finding your way in environments that may not always be inclusive or supportive. However, our efforts and advocacy become even more impactful when we work together with a community of like-minded individuals.  Building connections with people who share common goals, interests, and a commitment to social justice is really helpful for making meaningful change and creating supportive and inclusive spaces.

### Queer youth and intersectional mobilization

Many social movements and (young) activists have realized that freedom is indivisible. This means that true freedom cannot be achieved for one group without helping to fight the struggles of others. In other words, the fight for equality and justice is interconnected across different identities—such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, class, ability/disability, and age. If one community is still oppressed, everyone's freedom is incomplete.



**Intersectionality** is a powerful concept to understand how various identities intersect and shape individual experiences. Intersectionality highlights, first, the ways in which systems of oppression—such as racism, sexism, homophobia, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and others—overlap and create layers of discrimination and stress. Second, intersectionality emphasizes the strength that comes from having and finding your way in multiple identities and in the different groups you might belong to.

For example, being a young and proud Black trans woman might mean you have to face challenges that are tied to race, gender, and age, but it also means having a deep history, culture, and strength connected to each of those identities. Intersectional resistance helps us see that while these identities can face struggles, they also provide unique perspectives, power, and pride that can help us achieve personal and collective empowerment. Intersectional resistance celebrates the complexity of our identities and how they can be a source of strength, resistance, and solidarity across different communities.

When it comes to the challenges young people face, it's important to think about the different identities they have. For LGBTQIA+ youth, these identities might include being a migrant, coming from a tough financial background, living in an area with few resources, or having limited mobility or freedom of movement, among others.



Understanding how these different aspects of identity influence our lives can really help us find our way in society. It's useful to recognize not just our own identities (like gender, race, or social and economic status) but also the various challenges our peers might face due to their combined identities. By connecting with others who share similar experiences and challenges, we can discover the strength and resilience of our identities and build pride in who we are and our shared experiences. Working together in communities helps us support each other and celebrate the unique strengths we bring to the table.



### **Resistance and advocacy are not lonely projects**

It's easy to feel alone sometimes, especially when the world feels overwhelming. But we can work on this together. One of the most important things you can do is find or create a supportive community. It's something we've touched on before, but it's worth repeating: finding a community—especially one that shares your experiences and values—can be incredibly powerful.

A lot of societies push us to think individually, which benefits certain political and economic systems, like **capitalism**. These systems often make us feel like we can't change our circumstances and that we must fit in with what is already established. But when we look around, we can see a lot of violence and injustice around us. At the same time, big corporations and governments are using the planet for their own good, destroying ecosystems, and causing harm through wars and injustice—all to achieve profit and power.

By coming together in **intersectional communities**—where our different identities and struggles are supported—we can stand up against so-

cial and environmental injustices. **Community** is about mutual care and support, but it's also about what you bring: kindness, honesty, and compassion. Love and connection grow when we all contribute. There are already many people working toward a better world, and you can be part of that. Intersectionality makes us stronger, and finding people who understand and support us is a powerful way to resist and create change together.

### Did you know...

- \* Many people are afraid of not fitting in?
- \* Many people find it uncomfortable to end up in a situation they are not familiar with?
- \* There are lots of people who are accepted for their orientation and gender identity, despite various beliefs and backgrounds?



### Some things to think about

If you have not joined or participated in LGBTQIA+ social movements yet, why not give it a try by just participating in some of their open events? You can start by searching (on the internet, or asking peers or people that you trust) for groups and resources in your area. Some groups have online



meetings and events and many organize regular in-person meetings. Remember, you can also create your own social movement or communities.

How you can get started:

- \* **Join or support social movements:** Whether it's through school organizations, online communities, or local non-profit organizations, you can work with other people to support and speak up for LGBTQIA+ voices.
- \* **Use your voice:** When you feel it is safe for you, you could speak out when you see injustice, educate others about LGBTQIA+ issues, and contact local officials to push for better policies.
- \* **Get involved:** When you feel ready, consider participating in demonstrations, campaigns, and awareness events. If you feel it is safe, being visible and part of movements like Pride parades or online campaigns helps create momentum for change.
- \* **Help and support:** You could volunteer and contribute to advocacy organizations that work on LGBTQIA+ issues in areas like mental health, healthcare, or legal rights.

You can use this place next to it to draw, write down your reflections or do which ever you like!





# Your rights!

Nearly all countries around the globe (except for the USA!) have ratified the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989). This means that most countries are obligated to do everything they can to put these rights into practice. The Convention includes many articles specifically aimed at protecting children from harm, providing for their basic needs and enabling their participation in important decisions. Below we've listed some of these key rights.

- \* **Article 2:** you have the right to be protected from all forms of discrimination, including SOGIE-based discrimination, as well as discrimination based on your race, ethnicity, nationality, class, religion, ability and more.
- \* **Article 3:** your best interests should always be the primary consideration in decisions about your life. It's your life and your choice! All adults must prioritize what is best for you.
- \* **Article 6:** You have the right to life and development. This means everything should be done for you to be and become your true self.
- \* **Article 8:** You have the right to your own identity!
- \* **Article 12:** Your opinion matters. In every decision about your life, you should be able to have a say. Adults must also listen to you and act on what you consider important.
- \* **Article 19:** You have the right to be protected from any form of violence, abuse or neglect by those responsible for your care.

For more information, please go to the links provided. Additionally, [by clicking on this link](#), you can access a website with more detailed, country specific information.

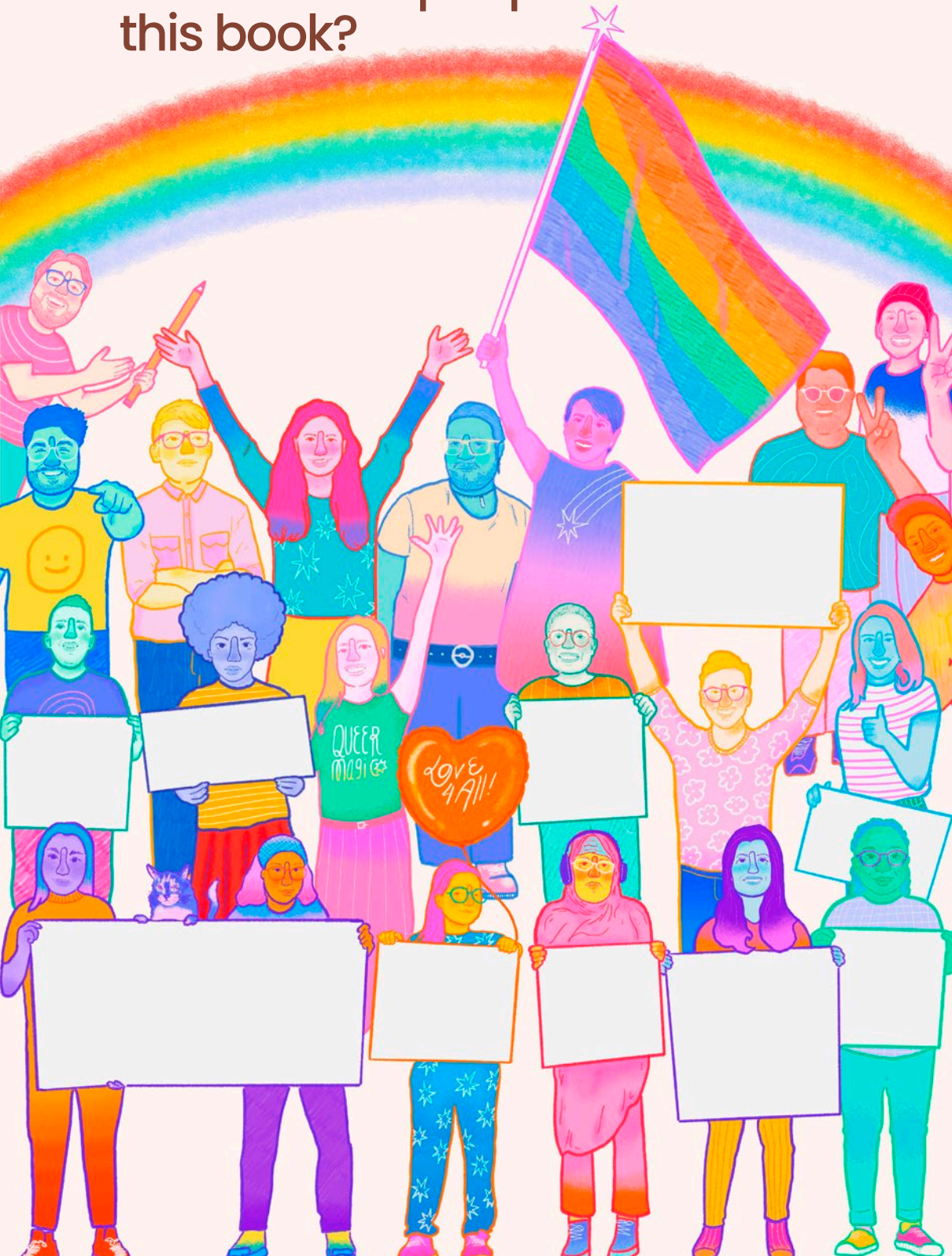


- \* The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (youth version)
- \* The simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights created especially for young people

# Links, resources, and websites

We have created an overview of resources and links to websites specifically for LGBTQIA+ youth. These platforms offer information, opportunities to join groups, and ways to connect with other queer youth – either globally or at a national level. We understand that things change quickly, so be sure [to check our interactive resource guide with additional links and up-to-date resources: queeringcare.org.](#)

Who are the people behind  
this book?





**Gaby Gallardo Lastra** – I am an Ecuadorian mestiza (mixed race) feminist cisgender woman. While I live in the Netherlands, my heart is in the Global South. I'm a PhD student at the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and the University of Zacatecas (Mexico). I firmly believe that love, resistance, community, and decolonial feminisms allow us to build better lives and more just societies.

**Erin García Gutiérrez** – I am a Spanish Anthropology student and activist. I live in Spain, where I spent my teenage years in care. Those experiences taught me invaluable lessons about understanding people with respect and sensitivity. Currently, I'm part of the International Coordinating Committee focused on organizing pro-Palestine support and raising awareness about the situation. I aspire to use my future work as an anthropologist to improve the world from an ecofeminist perspective, considering both people and the planet.



**Javiera Garcia-Meneses** – Hi there! I'm Javiera, but you can call me Javi. Some also know me as Nina, my coffee-order name and sometimes my artistic alter ego. I am a migrant, colored, and cisgender woman, born and raised in Chile. I now work at the University of Groningen on a postdoctoral project that examines violence within child welfare systems through the lenses of intersectionality, decoloniality, and feminism. I have always felt that I do not fit in heteronormative categories of womanhood. Over time, I have learned to love my personality, body, and aesthetics, as they are. Working on this book has been a profound experience that helped me further embrace who I want to be in the world. It showed me that community and advocacy offer a way to overcome the struggles of being pushed to the margins.

**Rodrigo González Álvarez** – I am Mexican/Dutch queer cisgender researcher and lecturer at the University of Groningen (RUG), the Netherlands. My favourite topics for research and teaching fall into the broad category of Queer studies. I find meaning and energy in the collective fight for social justice, within and beyond academia.



**Daniel Herrero Eguino** – I'm a trans guy born in northern Spain. I'm currently working at a cinema and planning to start a degree in social integration. I've gone through difficult situations that have helped me understand the immense importance of good mental health and personal well-being. This is why I want to become a therapist, to help people understand, listen to, and care for themselves with respect and love, and to support them in understanding and managing the various situations they may face in life. I am also a co-researcher on the FIRMUS project, which focuses on the importance of quality care for LGTBQ+ youth. In this project, we explored how LGTBQ+ youth navigate child protection, and identified potential improvements for providing adequate care for them in child protection and the community.



**Emi Howard** – I am a queer, non-binary person living in Northern Europe (UK/Netherlands/Germany). Because of political changes, nationality changes, and country changes, I struggle to answer the question of where I'm from or where "home" is. In any case, it is where I live with my life partner and our round and fluffy cat! I am currently working as a translator, editor and sensitivity reader, which is how I helped with this book. I have an academic background and got into this project through the Audre Alliance at the University of Groningen, as a LGBTQIA+ expert by experience. I really hope that this book offers a supportive shoulder for LGBTQIA+ youth in care.



**Elyse Jackson** – I am a mixed-raced, queer psychology student from the United States. I am studying at the University of Groningen and have lived in the Netherlands for four years so far. Although I am just starting my academic journey, I am so grateful to have been able to contribute to this amazing book with so many inspirational people.



**Mónica López López** – I am a Spanish woman with a PhD in Psychology who migrated to the Netherlands 13 years ago to become a teacher and researcher at the University of Groningen. I proudly embrace my queerness in both academia and daily life, challenging norms around love, sexuality, and relationships while striving to create inclusive academic spaces where everyone feels free to be their authentic selves. As a passionate advocate for participatory science, I dedicate myself to involving young people in shaping the research and narratives that impact their lives.

**Gary Mallon** – I am an Irish gay professor of social work in the United States and I also work internationally in Europe and Latin America too. I have been honoured to work with LGBTQI+ young people and their families as a social worker and researcher as my life's work for the past 49 years.





**Gaby Martínez-Jothar** – I am a cisgender, Mexican woman who is now living and undertaking my PhD in the Netherlands. However, I have been lucky enough to have loved ones all over the world, and I consider my home to be wherever they are. In my work, I focus on stigmatization, resilience, and resistance from an intersectional perspective, and particularly how these phenomena affect youth who are living in care. Though I identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, it took me a while to figure myself out (and I'm still working on it!) and even longer to figure out that that is OK! I loved working on this book with so many wonderful people, and I learned a lot about myself while writing in it. I sincerely hope it helps you in your own journey!



**Kevin (Irad) van Mierlo Amezcua** – I am a mixed-raced (Dutch & Caribbean) queer man, currently living with my partner, Ezrah, his brother Esteban, and our five pets, in Toronto, Canada. I have a BA and MA in Political Science. Due to the impact of my parents' divorce and the impacts of sexual abuse, I spent part of my teen years in residential care. For the same reason, I also did not graduate high school until I was 21. Until after my gay "great-cousin" and his partner, Alexi and Tim, allowed me to understand my worth – something I still struggle with. I am the oldest of four siblings. Determination is key: while co-authoring this book, I wrote and successfully defended my graduate thesis at the University of Waterloo. I am honoured to have been able to participate in research at University of Groningen since 2019, as an experiential expert, research assistant, co-writer, and co-editor.





**Yanira Muñoz Lopes** – I'm a student of the degree of Equality Promotion and a future Social Educator. Activism and a critical perspective on social issues are a core part of my life. I have lived in residential care facilities within the child protection system in the North of Spain. I have participated as a co-researcher in the Firmus project and provided several presentations in scientific conferences.



**Rory P. O'Brien** – I am a white, nonbinary, queer social scientist in the United States, where I research how laws affect LGBTQIA+ youth health. I am a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan School of Social Work and I've previously worked as a social worker in foster care, mental health advocacy, and violence prevention.



**Samar Orwa** – I am a Sudanese woman raised in the Netherlands and I am currently a doctor specialising in Gynaecology and Obstetrics. I have a passion for feminism, activism, human rights, and social justice. I want everyone to be able to feel safe in all and especially medical spaces and have access to sexual and reproductive healthcare.

**Luis A. Parra** – ¡Hola! I am Luis and I currently live in Michigan. I am a professor at the University of Michigan and I work on research focused on the health of LGBTQIA+ youths of color. I am driven by social justice and I use my platform to center the voices, lives, and histories of historically underserved and marginalized communities. Aside from that, I love art, cooking, and eating, and enjoy doing physical exercise as ways to practice self-care.





**Gab Castro Siqueira** – I am a non-binary queer activist from Brazil, deeply involved in social movements advocating against discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, and other intersecting forms of oppression and marginalization. As a social psychology researcher investigating queer activism, I am pursuing a PhD as a dual candidate at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands and the University of São Paulo in Brazil.




**Melvin Sturing-Bakker** – Heya! My name is Melvin, I am a young gay and genderqueer person living with my husband in the north of the Netherlands. I have a BA in pedagogical sciences and am currently busy with attaining the MA ‘youth, society, and policy’ at the University of Groningen. I got the luck to intern in the research group of many of these amazing people. Next to my academic career I also share queer joy as a coach in athletics at a local club for young children ages 2 till 12. Helping them grow up with more inclusion and acceptance next to being physically active fills my heart with much joy.



**Mijntje ten Brummelaar** – Hi! My name is Mijntje and I live in the north of the Netherlands (definitely not fully hetero and still learning more about my own identity). I am extremely happy to work together with this amazing group of people that have collectively written this book. Throughout my life, I’ve learnt the importance of community and connections. They have literally picked me up in times of need and kept me on my feet.



**Selena Torsius** – I lived in several youth care homes. I am also part of the LGBTQIA+ community. I use my experiences to try to inform and improve health care and society into a more accepting and safe place.

**Eli Verdugo** – I am a Mexican, non-binary psychologist, illustrator, and activist from La Paz, Baja California Sur. I love working with color and creating art to tell stories that celebrate diversity and community. I am the founder of La Paz es Diversa, an LGBTQ+ non-profit dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of the LGBTQ+ community in my hometown. 



**Daylano Verwer** – My name is Daylano (he/him), and I am one of the experts who contributed to this book. I previously worked as an expert by experience at Jongwijs and have been with COC Zwolle for several years now. I am passionate about supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. As a man with a trans past, my mottos are: “Fall, get up, fight, and keep going”, and “Blood makes you related, loyalty makes you family.”



**Skye Wijkstra** – Hi my name is Skye, I’ve had the amazing chance to help with this book. I’ve been working my entire life to improve the care for youth in foster care and the way foster care treats LGBTQIA+ youth.



**Ale Yáñez Cancino** – Hi, I am a feminist mother, migrant, sociologist, and a person from the Global South who is embracing her/his/their queerness in her/his/their 30s while pursuing a PhD at the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (Chile). I am committed to and passionate about debating issues of maternal empowerment and social justice.





This book was written with love by a diverse group of people who come from all sorts of backgrounds and places across the globe. We wrote this book for you. It is about what it's like to be young, in care, and queer. Being queer and in care can be a unique experience. You are unique. But sometimes, that uniqueness can also make you feel alone, and that's why we wrote this book. We hope that by reading and engaging with this book, you'll feel less alone, find comfort in who you are, and strengthen the connections you build. This book is also about connecting with your inner power to stand up for yourself and finding communities of support, because you deserve to be stood up for.



## Editors

Gaby Gallardo Lastra, Javiera Garcia-Meneses, Erin García Gutiérrez, Rodrigo González Álvarez, Daniel Herrero Eguino, Emi Howard, Elyse Jackson, Mónica López López, Gary P. Mallon, Gaby Martínez-Jothar, Yanira Muñoz Lopes, Rory P. O'Brien, Samar Orwa, Luis A. Parra, Gab Castro Siqueira, Melvin Sturing-Bakker, Mijntje ten Brummelaar, Selena Torsius, Kevin R. O. van Mierlo Amezcua, Eli Verdugo, Daylano Verwer, Skye Wijkstra, Ale Yañez Cancino