

## The 519 Church Street Community Centre

# Equity Glossary of Terms

The 519 celebrates diversity, values principles of inclusion, and works within an anti-oppression social justice framework. This introduction to language is intended to affirm the diversity of the identities and experiences of LGBTQ people and communities and to provide a basic understanding of terms that describe different forms of power, privilege and discrimination.

Being an ally involves allowing individuals to self identify as often as possible, as a way of listening for and using language that individuals and groups indicate is helpful and respectful for others to use. Some words can raise awareness about how groups of people are valued and/or managed by society, and words can help to trigger unlearning of assumptions and biases. Language is also about finding ways to describe and imagine freedom and equity for ourselves and for others.

It is important to acknowledge the cultural lenses that shape this particular list of definitions: an English-speaking, urban, Canadian community centre serving diverse and ever-changing communities. Language is fluid, evolves within communities, both locally and abroad. What is considered helpful to reduce oppression evolves over time. People within a “group” may prefer different terms. Individuals may use different words to describe themselves or use the terms in a slightly different way than they are described here. Differences may be seen across generations or regions. Let the conversations begin!

### Anti-Oppression and Equity Terms

**Accommodation:** An adjustment made to policies, programs and practices so that individuals can benefit from, and participate in, the provision of services equally and perform to their best, including ensuring that individuals are not disadvantaged on the basis of the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Code. Accommodation with dignity is pursuing the principle that our society should be structured and designed for inclusiveness.

**Ally:** A member of a dominant group who works to end a form of oppression that gives him/her/them privilege(s). Allies listen to, and are guided by, communities and individuals affected by oppression. Forms of oppression include: able-ism, ageism, audism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, and others.

**Anti-Oppressive Practice:** This work practice confronts power (im)balances between service users and providers to address oppressions through empowerment and individual rights to make choices. In striving to mitigate the effects of oppression, the practice aims to equalize power in communities.



**Barrier:** Any overt or covert obstacle that prevents a person from fully taking part in all aspects of society. For example, a belief, policy, practice, object or environment that prevents or limits a person's access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other members of society.

**Bias:** A subjective opinion, predisposition, preference, prejudice, generalization or inclination, formed based on personal characteristics or stereotypes, without reasonable justification that results in an impairment to fair judgment or accurate assessment of a situation, person or group.

**Bullying:** The use of threat, coercion, or force to cause fear, distress or harm to a person, in the context of a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviours are repeated or have the potential to be repeated.

**Colonization:** The process of focusing on and devaluing people's differences in order to dominate and control them, including various economic, political and social policies by which a powerful group maintains or extends control over other people or areas.

**Culture:** The sum of many things an individual learns (and may modify or pass on) from being immersed in a particular context – the shared (or perceived to be shared) ideas, beliefs, values, behavioural norms, knowledge, customs and traditions of a group of people who share some historical, geographic, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic or social context.

**Cultural Competence:** A person's ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence has four components: (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview; (b) Attitude towards cultural differences; (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews; and (d) Cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to better understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.

**Discrimination:** Any form of unequal treatment based on a ground protected in the Ontario Human Rights Code, that results in disadvantage, whether imposing extra burdens or denying benefits. Discrimination can be intentional or unintentional; and it may occur at an individual or systemic level. It may include direct actions or more subtle aspects of rules, practices and procedures that limit or prevent access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to others.

**Dominant Group:** A group that is considered more powerful and privileged in a particular society or context and that has power and influence over others.



**Duty to Accommodate:** The legal obligation that employers, organizations, service providers and public institutions have under the Ontario Human Rights Code to ensure fair and equal access to services in a way that respects the dignity of every person, if to do so does not create undue hardship. The principle of dignity strives to maximize integration and promote full participation in society, in consideration of the importance of privacy, confidentiality, comfort, autonomy, individuality and self-esteem.

**Equity:** The practice of ensuring fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people, with consideration of individual and group diversities. Access to services, supports and opportunities and attaining economic, political and social fairness cannot be achieved by treating individuals in exactly the same way. Equity honours and accommodates the specific needs of individuals/ groups.

**Harassment:** A course of comments or actions, such as unwelcome attention, jokes, threats, remarks, name-calling, touching or other behaviours that are known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome, offensive, embarrassing, humiliating, or demeaning. Harassment under the Ontario Human Rights Code is based on the prohibited/protected grounds.

**Hate Crime:** Criminal acts which promote hatred against identifiable groups of people, motivated by bias, prejudice or hate. Although individuals and groups that promote this destructive form of human rights-based discrimination often defend their right to “free speech,” it is a criminal offense to disseminate hate propaganda and/or to commit hate crimes.

**Human Rights:** The universal, equal and inalienable entitlement that all people should have access to freedom, justice and protection from discrimination and harassment, and that people should have equal access to a climate that preserves the dignity and worth of individuals and groups.

**Inclusion:** A state of belonging and interdependence that appreciates and provides opportunities for individuals and groups to be accepted as an equal and valued part of the society, and to use their unique differences - talents, beliefs, backgrounds, capabilities and ways of living- in a way that creates a dynamic, multi-dimensional society. It includes direct action to remove barriers that prevent full participation.

**Internalized Oppression:** When members of a marginalized group accept negative aspects of stereotypes assigned to them by the dominant group, and begin to believe that they are inferior. The incorporation by individuals within an oppressed group of the prejudices against them within the dominant society can result in self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence, feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, and powerlessness. It is a mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating power imbalance.

**Intersectionality:** When two or more oppressions overlap in the experiences of an individual or group, creating interconnected barriers and complex forms of discrimination that can be insidious, covert and compounded.

“\_\_\_\_\_”-ism: Prejudiced beliefs, behaviours or institutional practices by a group or person with power directed against specific groups, rationalized by an underlying belief that certain people are superior to others. Examples include: ageism, anti-semitism, audism, cis-sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, monosexism, racism, sexism, shadism, sizeism.

**Marginalization:** To relegate individuals or groups to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group by excluding them from meaningful participation and/or confining them to the outer edges of society.

**Oppression:** The obvious and subtle ways dominant groups unjustly maintain status, privilege and power over others, using physical, psychological, social or economic threats or force. Frequently an explicit ideology is used to sanction the unfair subjugation of an individual or group by a more powerful individual or group, which causes injustices in everyday interactions between marginalized groups and the dominant group.

“\_\_\_\_\_”-phobia: A learned dislike, aversion, or an extreme, irrational fear and/or hatred of a particular group of people. It is expressed through beliefs and tactics that devalue, demean and terrorize people. Examples include: biphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and others.

**Power:** Access to privileges such as information/knowledge, connections, experience and expertise, resources and decision making that enhance a person’s chances of getting what they need to live a comfortable, safe, productive and profitable life. Each person has different levels of power in different contexts depending on a personal combination of privileges and oppressions.

**Prejudice:** A negative prejudgment or preconceived feelings or notions about another person or group of persons based on perceived characteristics, without looking at all the facts.

**Privilege:** Unearned power, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities that provide unfair advantage for members of the dominant group(s) in society. People are not always aware of the privileges they have. Examples include: cissexual privilege, heterosexual privilege, male privilege, white privilege.

**Social Determinants of Health:** The economic and social conditions that influence individual and group differences in physical, mental and social health status and are influenced by access to resources, money and power in communities, societies, nations and globally.

**Social Exclusion:** Social disadvantage and relegation to a marginalized position in society. Social exclusion is a significant social determinant of health. When people are unable participate fully in society, health impacts result.



**Social Justice:** A concept based on a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and individuals and groups are given equal opportunity, fairness, civil liberties, and participation in the rights, freedoms and responsibilities valued by society.

**Stereotype:** False, overly simplistic, or unfounded assumptions or judgments about a group of people that disregard individual differences among group members and emphasize negative preconceptions that characterize all members of a group as being the same.

**Stigma:** Severe social disapproval or discontent with a person or group on the grounds of their particular circumstance, usually based on difference from social or cultural norms.

**Tokenism:** The practice of making only a symbolic effort towards limited involvement of underrepresented groups in order to give the false appearance of inclusivity.

### Terms Related to Ability

**Differently-abled:** An umbrella term used to describe people with different physical, mental, emotional and cognitive abilities.

**Disability:** An actual or perceived limit that keeps people from participating fully in society. This term covers a range of conditions, some visible and others not. There can be physical, mental, learning, and visual disabilities.

### Terms Related to “Race” and Culture

**Aboriginal Peoples:** An umbrella term for the original inhabitants of North America and their descendants. In Canada these include the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples as separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. While the collective term has offered a sense of solidarity among some indigenous communities, the term should not serve to erase the distinct histories, languages, cultural practices, and sovereignty of the more than fifty nations that lived here prior to European colonization.

**Anti-Racism:** Beliefs, actions, policies and movements developed to actively identify and eliminate prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination by transforming systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably and racism is eliminated.

**Deaf:** When a person has little or no hearing and relies on forms of visual communication like Sign language and lip-reading. The Deaf community does not view deafness as a disability.

**Ethnicity:** Socially defined category of people who may share a nationality, heritage, language, culture and/or religion.



**Race:** A culturally constructed label that imprecisely groups the true variation of human beings, and impairs an understanding that all humans share the same set of genes. Race is a prohibited ground of discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Code, and is described by the Commission as “socially constructed differences among people based on characteristics such as accent or manner of speech, clothing, diet, beliefs and practices, leisure preferences, places of origin and so forth”

**Two-Spirit:** a cultural and spiritual identity used by some First Nations peoples to describe having both masculine and feminine spirits. It can include people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex. For some, Two-Spirit describes a societal and spiritual role that people played within traditional societies, as mediators, keepers of certain ceremonies, transcending accepted roles of men and women, and filling a role as an established middle gender.

### Terms Related to Sexual Orientation, Sexuality and Queer Cultures

**Asexual:** A person who experiences little or no sexual attraction and who chooses to call themselves asexual. Since sexuality is a socially dominant framework, asexual people may feel marginalized.

**Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually attracted to members of more than one gender, though not necessarily at the same time.

**Gay:** A person whose primary attraction is to people of the same gender. The word can refer to men or women, although some women prefer “lesbian.” Sometimes used as an umbrella term for the LGBT community.

**Heterosexual:** A person who has romantic or sexual attractions to people of another gender.

**Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually attracted to women.

**MSM:** A man who has sex with men.

**Coming Out:** A process of revealing more openly to self or others one’s LGBTQ identity.

**Polyamory:** The practice, state or ability of having more than one sexual loving relationship at the same time, with the full knowledge and consent of all partners involved.

**Pansexual:** A person who has romantic or sexual attractions to people of any gender or sex.

**Poz:** An abbreviation referring to an HIV positive person.

**Queer:** An umbrella term used proudly by some people to defy gender or sexual restrictions. This is also one way some people identify themselves as members of the lesbian, gay, bi, and/or trans communities or cultures. The term was formerly a derogatory term that some have reclaimed but may be hurtful to others.



**Questioning:** A period where a person explores their own sexual and/or gender identity, reflecting on such things as upbringing, expectations from others, and inner landscape. The person may not be certain if s/he is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans and may be trying to figure out how to identify themselves.

**Sex-Positive:** An attitude that embraces a diversity of forms of consensual human sexuality, and advocates for sex education and safer sex.

**Sexual Orientation:** Toward whom a person's sexual desires and drives are oriented – toward only women, or only men, or nobody, or irrespective of gender. It is separate and independent from a person's gender identity. It can be fluid over time. The identity a person uses to describe their sexual orientation may not reflect their sexual behaviours.

**WSW:** A woman who has sex with women.

**Homophobia:** Negative attitudes, feelings, or irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of gay, lesbian, or bisexual people and communities, or of behaviours stereotyped as “homosexual.” It is used to signify a hostile psychological state leading to discrimination, harassment or violence against gay, lesbian or bisexual people.

**Heterosexism:** The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and preferable. The result is discrimination against bisexual, lesbian and gay people that is less overt, and which may be unintentional and unrecognized by the person or organization responsible for the discrimination.

### Terms Related to Gender

**Cisgender:** “Same As” Used to describe people whose gender identity is in harmony with the sex assigned to them at birth. Cisnormativity refers to the assumption that all people are cisgender and that this is “the norm.” This prejudice against trans people is more systemic in society, organizations and institutions. It may even be unintentional and unrecognized by the people or organizations responsible.

**Cissexism:** A system of oppression that considers cis people to be superior to trans people. It includes harmful beliefs that it is “natural” to be cis and “aberrant” to be trans. Examples include scrutinizing the genders of trans people to more than those of cis people or defining beauty based on how cis people look.

**Cross-Dresser:** A person who, for various reasons, wears gender atypical clothing or occasionally dresses in clothing of the “opposite” gender. They may or may not self-identify as a cross dresser.



**Drag Queen or Drag King:** Someone who dresses in the clothing of the “opposite” gender for performance. Drag performers can be of any gender identity or sexual orientation.

**Gender Identity:** Each person’s internal and individual experience of gender. It is a person’s sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither or anywhere on the gender spectrum. This sense of self is separate from biological sex assigned at birth and is not related to sexual orientation. Since gender identity is internal, it is not necessarily visible to others.

**Gender Expression:** How a person publicly presents or expresses their gender including behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, voice, chosen name and pronoun.

**Gender Binary:** This is the classification of sex and gender into two distinct and disconnected states of masculine and feminine. It describes a social boundary that discourages people from crossing or mixing gender roles.

**Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming:** An identity in which people feel that the very substance of their gender lies outside the binary of “male” and “female.” They reject the gender expectations and stereotypes for their birth assigned sex. They may identify and express themselves as “feminine men” or “masculine women” or as androgynous, outside of the categories of “boy/man” or “girl/woman” They may or may not identify as trans, and may use gender neutral pronouns such as ze, hir, hirs, they and them.

**Gender Role:** The oppressive culturally and historically specific expectations and restrictions that are placed on a person based on whether they are medically categorized at birth as male or female.

**Misogyny:** The hatred and denigration of women and characteristics deemed feminine.

**Transmisogyny:** Negative attitudes, expressed through cultural hate, individual and state violence, and discrimination directed toward trans women and trans and gender non-conforming people on the feminine end of the gender spectrum.

**Intersex:** A person born with biological and/or physical characteristics that are not easily categorized by medical practitioners as male or female. Intersex people are often assigned as either male or female at birth. Some intersex people identify with their assigned sex, while others do not.

**Passing:** This is the privilege given to a person who is believed to be a member of a dominant group (i.e., non-trans, cisgender, white, non-disabled). When a trans woman is passing, (i.e., believed to be a cisgender woman) she has an easier time accessing privilege(s).

**Sex:** The medical classification of people as male, female or intersex, usually assigned at birth based on the appearance of a person’s anatomy. Sex characteristics include chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics, and other aspects of the body.

**Stealth:** When a trans person is not “out” about being trans in their social circles (friends, employers, colleagues). There are a lot of different levels, but sometimes trans people need to end contact with those who knew them as their assigned at birth sex, move to new locations, or get new jobs.

**Trans\*:** “Across”. An umbrella term used for people whose gender identity is not in harmony with their birth assignment, either wholly or partially, or who experience their gender identity as radically different from what is expected of a “man” or “woman.” It includes but is not limited to people who identify as transgender, trans woman, trans man, transsexual, cross-dresser, gender non-conforming, gender variant or gender queer. There are many communities that live under this umbrella and there is no single or universal experience of what it means to be trans.

**Man (FTM):** A female-to-male trans person.

**Woman (MTF):** A male-to-female trans person.

**Transition:** A host of activities that some trans people may pursue to affirm their gender identity. This may include changes to their name, sex designation, dress, the use of specific pronouns, and possibly medically supportive treatments such as hormone therapy, sex-reassignment surgery or other procedures. There is no checklist or average time for a transition process, and no universal goal or endpoint. Each person decides what will meet their needs.

**Transphobia:** Negative attitudes and feelings and the aversion to, fear or hatred or intolerance of trans people and communities. Like other prejudices, it is based on stereotypes and misconceptions that are used to justify discrimination, harassment and violence toward trans people, or those perceived to be trans.