



Teens + Sex, Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

PATIENT EDUCATION



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TO YOU

you are
not alone

Be Strong
be safe

BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS
PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER



Lots of changes

and maybe questions too...

The teen years are full of new information and learning more about yourself every day. So it's no surprise that many people have questions about sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.

This booklet was written for teens:

- Who have questions about their sex, gender identity and/or sexual orientation.
- Who know what they want to say to friends and family but want help figuring out how to say it.

It was also written for friends and family:

- Who want to be compassionate toward loved ones who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex.
- Who want to learn more about these topics.

This can be complicated

This material shares information that we've learned from other kids — their thoughts about sex, gender identity, sexual orientation and how they've navigated the teen years. We've included some language that you can use to talk to other people too.

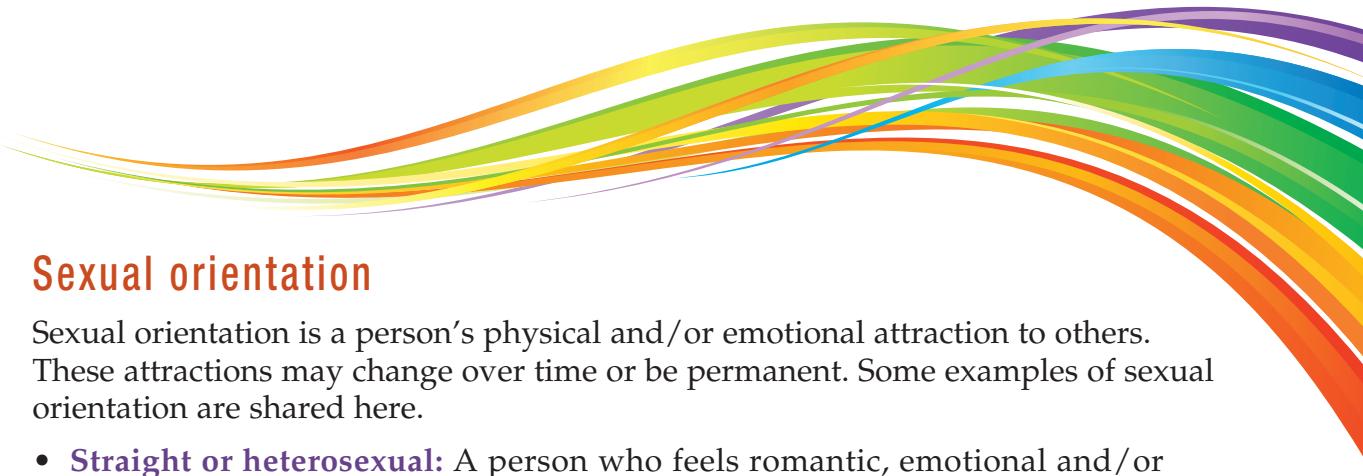


And the right words are....

The words and definitions shared here were commonly accepted at the time this material was developed.

Sex and gender identity

- **Sex:** A person's sex, as assigned at birth. This is usually identified by one's reproductive organs, hormones and chromosomes. The chromosomes are XX for females and XY for males.
- **Differences of sex development (DSD):** When a person's reproductive organs, hormones and/or chromosomes are not consistently male or female. A person born with DSD may identify as "intersex."
- **Gender identity:** A person's internal sense of being boy/man, girl/woman, neither or both. Your gender identity may not be the same as the sex assigned to you at birth.
- **Gender fluid:** One who exhibits a wider range of gender identity and expression. People who describe themselves as gender fluid do not feel restricted by society's typical gender norms and expectations. They may identify and express themselves as male or female or along a spectrum. Their identity and expression may vary over time.
- **Gender expression:** The way a person presents their gender to other people. You can express your gender as masculine, gender-neutral, feminine, or something in between any of those descriptions. A person's gender may be shared, or expressed, through body shape, clothing, accessories, hair style, mannerisms, voice, walk and interests.
- **Cisgender:** A person who has the same gender identity as the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Transgender:** A person who does not have the same gender identity as the sex assigned to them at birth. Also includes those who have different gender expressions and behaviors than what society expects for their biologic sex. May or may not involve altering one's body with hormones and/or surgery. Transgender status does not relate to one's sexual orientation.
- **Gender roles:** Society's expectations for a person's behavior, attitudes and emotions based on the sex assigned to that person at birth.
- **Gender non-conforming:** When gender identity, expression and/or role is not the same as what society expects for a person with that biologic sex.



Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is a person's physical and/or emotional attraction to others. These attractions may change over time or be permanent. Some examples of sexual orientation are shared here.

- **Straight or heterosexual:** A person who feels romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to a person of the opposite gender.
- **Gay:** Men who feel romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to men.
- **Lesbian:** Women who feel romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to women.
- **Bisexual:** A person who feels romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to men and/or woman.
- **Pansexual:** A person who feels romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction to people of various gender identities.
- **Asexual:** A person who does not have sexual feelings or associations.

Other definitions

- **Queer:** A general term used by people who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender. This term has been used to insult people. But for some people it is now gaining acceptance.
- **Questioning:** A term used to describe someone who isn't sure about their sex, gender identity or sexual orientation.
- **Ally:** A heterosexual or cisgender person who supports people who are LGBTQI*.
- **LGBTQI*:** A person who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex.

Note: The asterisk (*) is used to include all other gender and sexual minorities.

When are gender identity and sexual orientation known?

Gender identity and sexual orientation are typically set early in life. But at that age, most kids don't understand these issues. Around the time puberty begins, teens are better able to understand relationships, attraction, self-identity and more. This is why it's common to have questions about self, relationships, etc., as you age and learn more.

If you have questions about these topics at any time, be sure to contact your personal health care provider. He or she can connect you with other resources who will answer your questions.

How do you see yourself?

Your sex (based on biology — male, female or intersex), your gender identity (how you see yourself — man/boy, woman/girl, transgender, or something else), and your sexual orientation (your physical and/or emotional attraction to others) are **totally separate things**. They can happen in many combinations.

For example:

- You could be born into the male sex category, gender identify as a girl and be attracted to women. This may be described as being a trans lesbian woman.
- You could be born intersex, gender identify as a man and be attracted to men. This may be described as being a gay man born intersex.
- You could be born into the female sex category, *not identify* as a man or woman and be attracted to men. This may be described as being genderqueer and attracted to men.

Having a particular sex or gender identity does not mean that you have any specific sexual orientation.



Why is this important?

Each person is a unique individual. You deserve the right to describe yourself and identify yourself in any way that makes sense to you!

The topic of personal identity is complex, and it can be confusing. For some people, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation are permanent. Other people experience identities that may change (being “fluid”) or become clearer over time. What’s right for you may not be true for others.

Acceptance...

For most complicated issues, a person typically goes through stages before they fully accept new information. They question it, feel confused, ask new questions, get more information, get used to the idea and then begin to accept it.

If you find yourself bouncing back and forth — one minute you feel confident and open about your identity, and the next minute you're not sure, worried about what your life would be like if you come out — you're not alone. It is common for teens to work through some uncertainty over time. Be patient with yourself.

Working through a process of acceptance is a BIG PART of understanding your identity and feeling confident about it.



Thinking about hormones or surgery?

If you are interested in hormones or surgery, talk to your health care provider. He or she can refer you to someone who specializes in gender concerns and gender transitions (often called "gender corrections").



Sharing your story

If you've already done a lot of thinking and feeling about this, maybe you've moved past the stage of confusion or questioning. When you're ready to talk — about whatever your story is: gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, not sure, etc. — this information may be helpful.

There are lots of ways to “come out”

- You can have a few conversations — with friends, parents, siblings/relatives, coworkers and boss, teachers and coaches, religious/spiritual leaders, doctors, counselors, etc. You don't have to say everything in one conversation. And you don't have to have the same conversation with every person. Teens often report that each new conversation is a bit different and may be easier than the last one.
- You can change your status on social media.
- You can send a simple text message. Make your statement and invite people to talk to you if they have questions.
- You can send them an email. Share just what you want to share. Emails also give each person time to absorb the news before you talk to them in person.

Remember: You've had time to think about all of this. But some of the people you tell may be very surprised. It could take time for them to understand this and more time to begin to accept it. ***Other people's reactions often are more about THEM than they may be about you!*** You may want to offer to have another conversation after they've had more time to think about it.





As you think about sharing your story

Some tips shared by other teens...

- **Make a list of the people you want to tell.** Consider ranking them from “easiest” to “hardest” as far as how you think it will go. Telling a peer may be easier than a parent, or not. You’ll probably gain a lot of information and confidence from the first couple of conversations.
- **Decide how you want to tell each person on your list.** Yes, you can have an in-person conversation. But if that’s not the best option for some people, you can send an email, write a note or letter or talk on the phone.
- **Decide whether you’d like a friend with you.** He or she doesn’t have to say anything at all. Sometimes it’s just nice to have some support when you’re not sure how a conversation will go.
- **Think about the timing.** You probably want a time when you have some privacy and you won’t be rushed. Some evening at home might work for the family. An appointment during (or after) office hours may work well for your teachers, coaches or boss.
- **Write down some notes about what you want to say.** You can say as much or as little as you want. You may tell one person different information than other people. **Be sure to tell people whether they have your permission to repeat your information.**
- **Consider practicing with a supportive friend.** You may want to role-play some of the tougher conversations you think you’ll have.
- **Start the conversation.** Be prepared for the other person to have some questions. If you get stuck, it’s okay to say that you aren’t sure or you just aren’t ready to talk about that now. It’s also okay to say you’re still thinking through some of these issues. You can always offer to have another talk when you’re ready to share more.

Plan ahead

You don’t want to worry about things you can’t control. But if you think there’s any risk involved with these conversations, have a back-up plan. If you could lose your housing, where will you sleep after that talk? If you think anyone could react physically, have someone else with you during the talk. If you simply want someone there for moral support, that’s a great reason to bring someone with you.

Managing stress



LGBTQI teens often have more problems with depression, anxiety and other mental health issues because of the stresses of bullying, coming out and struggling with a world that isn't always accepting.

How do you take care of yourself when you're stressed? These options help a lot of people feel better:

- Learn relaxed breathing, guided imagery and muscle relaxation.
- Ask a friend to help you role-play some of the more difficult coming-out conversations.
- Take time for hobbies and social time with friends.
- Have good sleep habits.
- Exercise.



Know the warning signs

If you're experiencing any of the following warning signs of depression or anxiety, you need to reach out for help.

- You can't shake feelings of sadness, anxiousness or emptiness.
- You feel like there's no hope, like you're trapped with no way out.
- You're moody, and you cry or get angry easily.
- You're more irritable than you typically are.
- You worry all the time or have panic attacks.
- You stop caring about things you usually enjoy.
- You can't sleep well or you sleep too much.
- You don't have any energy.
- You stop doing your homework or don't follow through on other responsibilities.
- You can't concentrate or you're often restless.
- You are using alcohol, marijuana or other drugs to feel better.
- You have thoughts about hurting yourself or someone else.
- You think about dying or killing yourself.

Reach out — to a friend, trusted adult, a school counselor or your doctor. These may be signs that you're not just stressed. You may have an illness like depression or anxiety.

If you're thinking about hurting yourself

If you're thinking about hurting yourself or killing yourself, it's time to get help now.

24 hours a day, you can call:

- The Trevor Project, a national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13 to 24.

Helpline: 1-866-488-7386

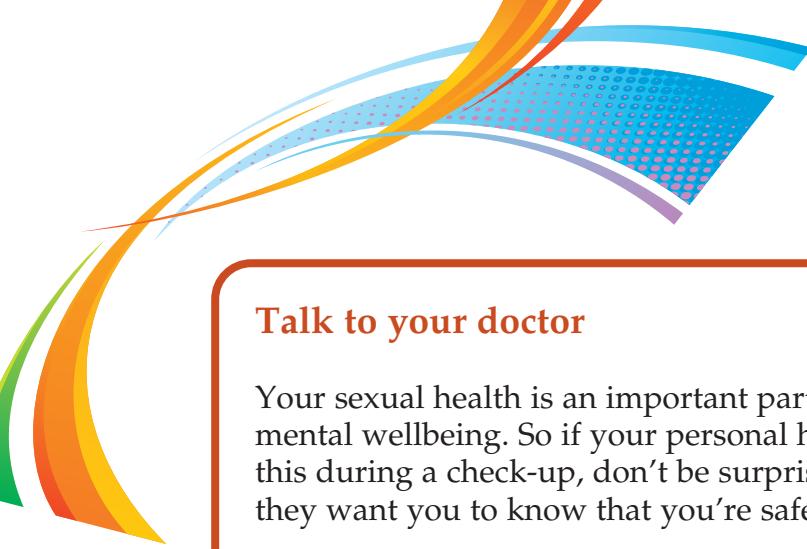
Website: www.thetrevorproject.org

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:

Helpline: 988 or 1-800-273-8255

Website: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org





Talk to your doctor

Your sexual health is an important part of your overall physical health and mental wellbeing. So if your personal health care provider asks you about this during a check-up, don't be surprised. They want to be respectful. And they want you to know that you're safe talking to them.

Want to know about safe sex? Want to know how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV or pregnancy? Just ask. **Nothing you say is likely to shock anyone!** Having an open, honest conversation is the best way to take care of yourself.

If your health care provider thinks you could be helped by another health care provider, he or she will talk to you about that before they reach out to the other provider.

About those bullies...

Everyone is different — not better or worse, just different. If someone treats you disrespectfully, try to speak up for yourself or find another person who can help you. People sometimes act like bullying is harmless. But in addition to making people miserable, bullying can cause serious health problems.

If you're bullied...

There are things you can do if you are being bullied:

- Look at the person bullying you and tell them in a calm, clear voice to stop.
- Try to laugh it off. This works best if joking is easy for you. It could catch the person who's bullying you off guard. But if the other person is really mad, this could make them madder. Choose your response carefully.
- If speaking up seems too hard or not safe, walk away and stay away. Don't fight back.
- Find a friend or a trusted adult who can help stop the bullying on the spot.

To stay safe in the future:

- Talk to an adult you trust. Telling someone can help you feel less alone. They can also help you make a plan to stop the bullying.
- Stay away from places where bullying happens.
- Hang out with groups of friends or near adults. Most bullying happens when other people aren't around.

Beware of cyberbullying

Bullying doesn't always happen in person. Cyberbullying happens through social media, text messages and emails. To help protect yourself:

- Always think about what you post and text. Do not share anything that could hurt or embarrass anyone. You never know what someone will forward. Being nice to others online helps keep you safe.
- Keep your password a secret from others. Even teens who seem like friends could give your password away or use it in ways you don't want.
- Think about who sees what you post online. Complete strangers? Friends? Friends of friends? Privacy settings let you control who sees what.
- Talk to an adult you trust about any messages you get or things you see online that make you sad or scared. If it is cyberbullying, report it.
- Tell your parents if someone is bullying you in any way! Sometimes bad situations can get worse pretty quickly. A parent may be able to help you stay safe.

Get help. If you are bullied, harassed or discriminated against at school, you can report it to the principal or a counselor. If you are harassed or discriminated against at work, report it to your department manager or to human resources. If needed, call the police.

*You have a right to be who you are.
No one should make you feel unsafe!*



For family and friends...



Whether you always knew or this was a total surprise, it's very important to accept your loved one as they are. This doesn't mean you have to like it. It simply means that you choose to be kind, compassionate and respectful of people who have chosen to invite you into their lives.

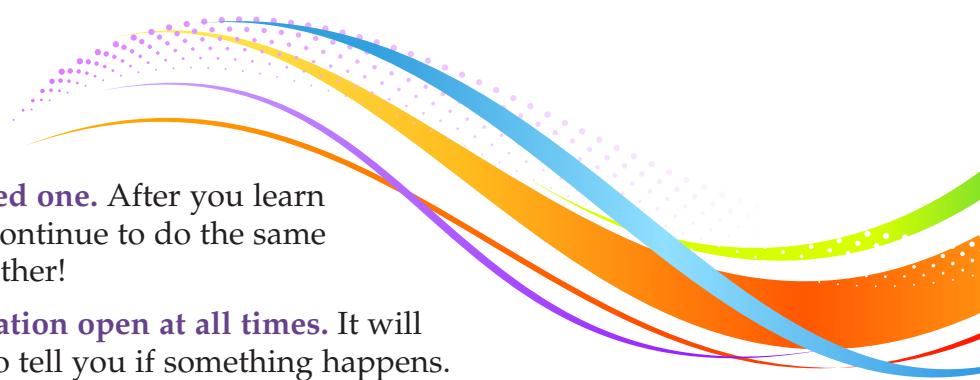
Some common questions

It's okay to ask:

- "How do you identify yourself?" This will tell you whether you should use male or female pronouns or something else.
- "How do you identify your sexual orientation?"
- "How can I support you?"

Listen to your loved one

They may not have all of the answers for you today. It's common to have a period of questioning before beginning to talk about this with family and friends. Keep the lines of communication open. And be patient with your loved one and yourself. It may take time for both of you to accept new information.



Support your loved one

- **Stay involved with your loved one.** After you learn this news, don't pull away. Continue to do the same activities you used to do together!
- **Keep the lines of communication open at all times.** It will make it easier for your teen to tell you if something happens.
- **Listen and ask questions about this topic.** This is a big part of your loved one's life! Most teens would rather have you ask questions. If you're silent on this topic, they could think that you don't care about them any longer. Or they could think that you're shutting out this part of their life.
- **Stand up for your loved one** when you hear someone making rude comments about people who are LGBTQI*. Be sure you have a safe way to do this.
- **Learn what bullying is and is not.** Understanding bullying is the first step in making a plan to prevent or respond to bullying with your child. Many behaviors that look like bullying may be just as serious, but may require different response strategies. You can also learn about:
 - The frequency of bullying.
 - Who is at risk for being bullied and bullying others.
 - The effects of bullying.
- **Learn how to work with your teen to prevent cyberbullying.** Cyberbullying often requires different strategies than in-person bullying. Know how to respond when it occurs.
- **Know the warning signs that your teen is involved in bullying.** Someone could be bullying them, they could be a bully or they could be a witness to bullying. Although these signs could signal other issues, talk to your teen if they display any sort of behavioral or emotional changes. If your teen is at immediate risk of harming themselves or others, get help right away. Remember, teens often don't ask for help. Be ready to step in.
- **If you know or suspect bullying has occurred, ask about it.** Ask for details. It could also help in communicating with school or community officials.
- **Learn how you and school or community officials can work together** to support your loved one, whether they were bullied, bullied others or witnessed bullying. Learn about considerations for specific groups.
- **Learn what your state requires schools to do.** Read your state's anti-bullying law(s) and policies. Learn also about federal laws that require schools to address harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex and disabilities and ways to report situations that have not been adequately addressed to the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice.
- **Get more help if it's needed.** If you have worked with your loved one and the school and you need more help, get it!

Final thoughts...

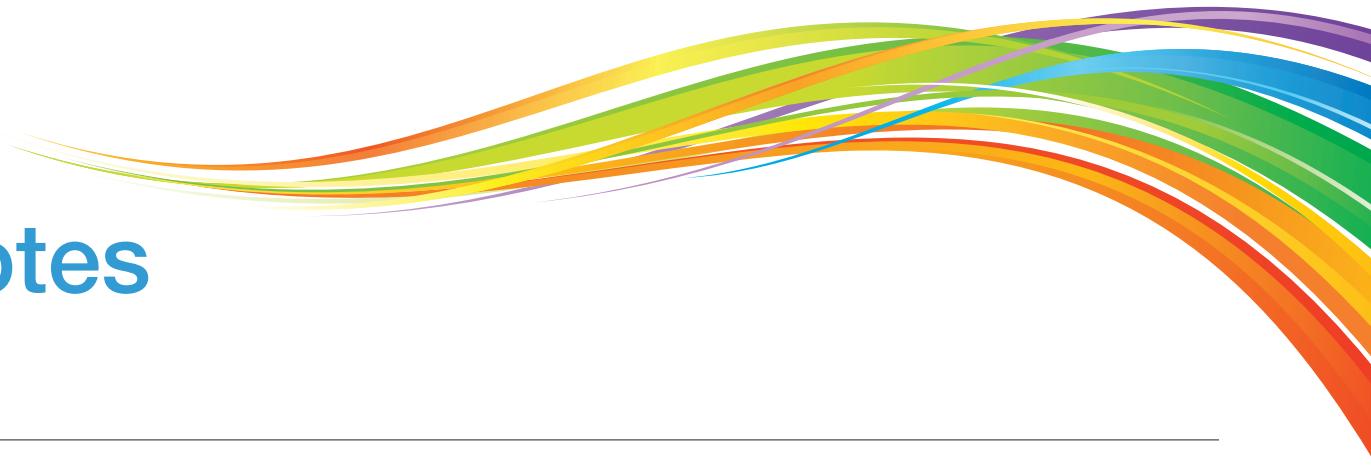
There's a lot of information here. But here are the key points:

- **You are not alone.** There are a LOT of resources for teens to ask questions or just talk. (See "For more information.")
- **This is a big deal — getting to know who you are and what that means for you.** You may not know all the answers right now. That's OK.
 - **Be patient with yourself and other people.** Everyone needs time to get used to new things.
 - **Get more information.** Find a support group online, in your community or in your school. Keep talking and sharing. It will help!
- **Keep yourself safe.** If you're being bullied or threatened, reach out to someone who can help keep you safe. If you're finding your emotions overwhelming, call a friend or the **Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988 or 1-800-273-8255.**
- **Stay away from people who don't accept you.** You don't have to listen to anyone who doesn't understand. And you don't have to be the person who educates them and leads them to become compassionate people. Until you are ready to speak up, you don't have to deal with "the haters."
- **Be yourself!** Everyone else is taken.

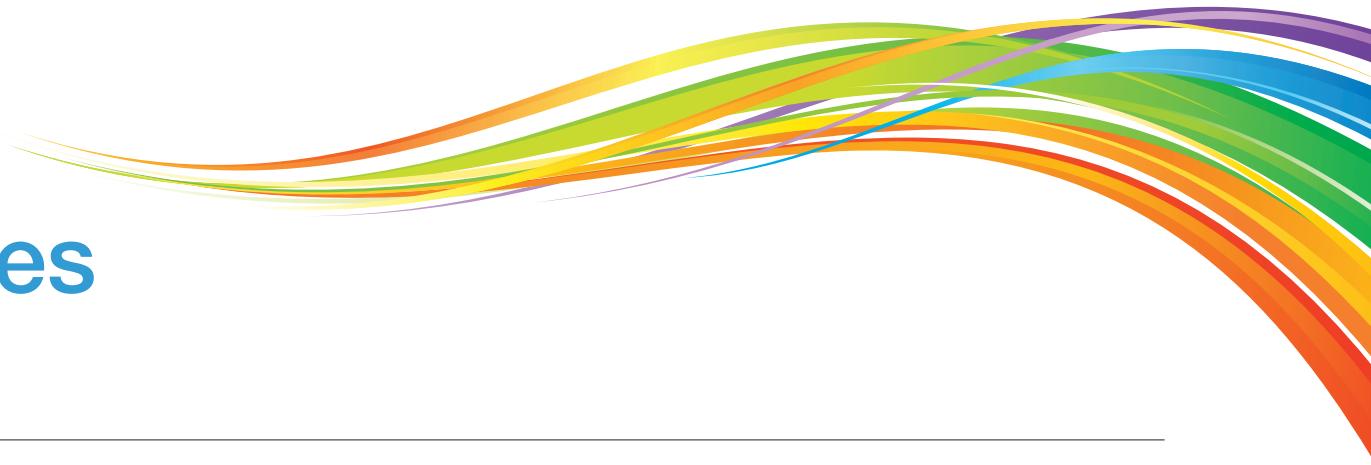
For more information

- **The Trevor Project**, a national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people ages 13 to 24. **Helpline: 1-866-488-7386.** **Website: www.thetrevorproject.org**
- **Human Rights Campaign (HRC)**, a national organization working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equal rights. **Website: www.hrc.org**
- **WPATH**, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. **Website: www.wpath.org**
- **PFLAG**, an organization for parents, families, allies and LGBTQ people united for equality. **Website: www.pflag.org**





Notes



Notes



BARBARA WOODWARD LIPS PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal Mayo Clinic patient of more than 40 years and a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment and her dedication to high-quality care.

This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.

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