A Guide for LGBTQI+ Youth

RISE UP: Educate to Empower
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CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice
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RISE UP
EDUCATE TO EMPOWER

Introduction
Acknowledgement
- Purpose of Guide
- About CAISO
- About Wholeness and Justice

Letter to the Youth
A love letter to LGBTQI+ Youth
- Sharing our experiences
- The guide

Identity and Discovery
Describing terms and labels
- Gender Identity
- Gender Expression
- Sexual and Romantic Attraction
- Connect with Community

Advocacy and Safety
Understanding what safety and advocacy means
- Connecting with community
- Advocacy tips
- Safety tips

Social Services
Available legal and social services
- Legal Services
- CSO Social Services
- Government Social Services

Affirmations and Additional Resources
Providing information on common concerns for queer and trans persons
Purpose of the Guide

This resource guide aims to empower and support LGBTQI+ youth. It does this through offering tools for emotional support, building self-confidence, and raising awareness about the unique experiences faced by LGBTQI+ youth. This guide, along with its companion ‘Rise Together’, hope to foster a culture of compassion, understanding, and inclusivity rooted in facts rather than fear or myth. Grounded in evidence-based research, studies of Caribbean gender and sexuality, and intersectional analysis, the resource guides build upon education and research materials produced by CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice programme over the past two years.

About CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

CAISO is a feminist civil society organisation committed to ensuring wholeness, justice and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago’s LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex) communities, by developing analysis, alliances, and advocacy. CAISO’s work is guided by eight core values: Wholeness, Justice, Imagination, Inclusion, Empowerment, Community, Accountability, and Feminism.

CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice

CAISO established the Wholeness & Justice programme to expand access by diverse LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad & Tobago to wholeness, justice, and social services. The Programme responds to violations of LGBTQI+ community members, with an emphasis on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming, and intersex people; and aims to deliver clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience.
My dearest,

The experience of being a young LGBTQI+ person is complex. It can be both beautiful and confusing. It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience and never wears the same face. As fellow young LGBTQI+ people, we understand that this time is one filled with attempts to find yourself, independence, and community. You can feel like you are flying in one moment and in another like you are being burned by the sun. While it is important to listen and learn from the experiences of others who have walked the path before you, there are also parts of this journey that are being created as you walk it. This guide intends to walk beside you as you discover yourself. This guide hopes to give you tools to understand more about queerness, strengthen your ability to advocate for yourself, navigate your expanding world, and access tools that will help you along the way.

We know that it might not be that easy to work through what it means to be LGBTQI+ in the world we live in. There are those who may make this process more difficult than it should be, but we also know that there is a lot of comfort, joy, and love to be found in accepting, celebrating, and understanding who you are. We want to remind you that you are not alone and that there are ways to connect to others who are a part of this community as well.

We hope that this guide helps you. You are loved. You are worthy. You are enough.

Yours sincerely,
A young trans Trinbagonian
Queer is often used as an expansive term to identify genders and sexualities that are not straight (heterosexual). It also can be used to speak to a way of living that is about self determination, advocacy, resistance, and refusing normative violence. Here we use queer to be about sexuality and a way we see the world.

Language however is an art. It is beautiful because we are a part of creating it. We can use language to label ourselves and to identify who we are and who we are becoming. Labels can allow us to express our feelings, discover community, and a sense of self. They can help us feel whole, find our voices, and advocate for justice.

The label that is right for you is something you learn about as you grow and change. A person’s connection to a label—or lack thereof—is a personal one; it should be something you learn for yourself and share with those with whom you feel comfortable. There may be language you use to describe yourself and others from your community that may not feel appropriate for others to use. There also may be words that you want everyone to use when referring to you. There is no need to squeeze yourself into a box; if a label is not for you, that is also perfectly okay. Labels have powerful meanings but do not limit one’s feelings, expressions, or identity. Each person is valid in their experience.

Other terms

**LGBTQI+**
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex.

**Matti**
Caribbean term often used to refer to women loving women.

**Gay**
Often used to describe men loving men but also as a general umbrella term.

The I in Identity

Your identity is something that you get to create and decide. It’s the part of you that you can define for yourself. Being LGBTQI+ is a part of the constellation of your identity. The human experience has so many bits and pieces that it is impossible for a person to just be one thing. Rather, we are a combination of parts, that fuels our interests, creates our personalities, and connects us to others.
Gender – refers to the systems and ideas through which societies and cultures define, enact, and enforce differences in expectations, roles, and opportunities for people, based on their perceived biological sex. These are socially constructed and can vary across cultures and ethnicities in terms of what is deemed ‘masculine’, ‘feminine’, neither or both. While understandings of gender have shifted, unequal power relations in terms of gender still prevail.

Gender Identity

Gender Identity refers to a person’s internal, deeply-felt sense of being a woman or man or neither. Everyone has a gender identity. Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation.

Cisgender: refers to a person whose gender identity matches the sex/gender they have been assigned at birth.

Transgender: is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression does not match the cultural expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth. People of transgender experience may or may not make this experience part of how they self-identify publicly; they may simply identify as a man or woman. Some people many choose to identify as neither i.e. non-binary or gender non-conforming.

Gender Expression

Gender Conforming: a person whose expression matches with what society thinks they should look and act like.

Gender Non-Conforming or Non-Binary refers to a person whose gender expression does not conform to binary (man/woman) gender expectations.
Sex – often refers to biological differences between bodies, including the reproductive system and/or other physical characteristics. Sex is most commonly divided into the categories of male and female; however, biological sex is much more diverse and people can have a mix of biological characteristics that do not all fit into what we have defined as only male or only female.

**Binary Sex** - This understanding of sex divides it into male and female categories. Here all hormonal, biological, and physical characteristics are split into two separate categories. This definition of sex is most widely used.

**Intersex** - Being born with physical or biological sex characteristics, such as sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal patterns and/or chromosomal patterns, which do not fit the typical definitions of male or female. These characteristics may be apparent at birth or emerge later in life, often at puberty. Intersex people can have any sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Non-Binary Sex** - This understanding of sex suggests that people’s bodies do not always fit into neat categories. That there are people who have a mix of biological, hormonal, and physical characteristics. This understanding does not negate the existence of biology, but acknowledges that even in science the words we choose for categories are based on the social and can reproduce those meanings.
Sexual orientation refers to a person’s physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction towards other people. Everyone has a sexual orientation, which is part of their identity. Many cultures use various identity labels to describe people who express these attractions. It is important to note that sexual orientation is different from gender identity.

**Bi** - a person whose emotional, sexual, and romantic attractions are to both women and men.

**Hetero** - a person’s attraction is with that of the opposite gender.

**Lesbian** - a woman whose romantic, emotional, or sexual attractions are to other women.

**Gay** - a man (but is sometimes used for a woman) whose romantic, emotional, or sexual attractions are to other men.

**Pan** - a person’s attraction is with the connection one makes and is not determined by the other person’s gender.

**Queer** - refers to individuals who are not straight – this term can be used as an adjective to describe sexuality or sexual identity as non-normative or diverse (i.e. outside the norm) or fluid. People who identify as queer may find the terms bisexual, gay, or lesbian too limiting or restrictive.

**Connect with the community**

It can be helpful to learn about online and physical safe spaces for LGBTQI+ people. These spaces may provide some relief and connect you with a network of helpful people and social services. A good place to start may be with advocacy and community groups. This is often a safer way to become engaged with other members of the community or find out more about events that are LGBTQI+ friendly. Many organisations have websites and social media where you can learn more about the support and services they offer.
Advocacy is an important way to protect yourself and your community by using your skills to ask for a better world. This may present itself in interpersonal relationships or through advocacy for policy and/or legal changes.

**Advocacy and Safety**

**Advocacy**

Advocacy is an important way to protect yourself and your community by using your skills to ask for a better world. This may present itself in interpersonal relationships or through advocacy for policy and/or legal changes.

**Capacity**

What are the resources available to you?

Think and learn more about your abilities and limitations.

Manage your time and energy.

**Community**

Who do you rely on?

Who do you provide safe interactions or spaces for?

Get involved with community activism - join an organisation.

**Involvement**

Learn about your rights and needs.

Use your strengths to advocate for yourself and help your community towards rights, freedoms, and goals.

**Goals**

What are the goals you have for yourself and your community?

Give yourself benchmarks to assist in the feeling of accomplishment.

**Strengths**

Do you know the things you are good at and how to develop them?

Do not strain yourself and acknowledge your weaknesses.

**Needs**

What do you need to accomplish your work?

What do you need to access resources to help yourself?

Set aside time for rest and relaxation.

Examples of advocacy include: CAISO’s Add all Three Campaign that seeks to add LGBTQI+ status, age, and health conditions to the Equal Opportunity Act, or using your skillsets to reduce verbal harrassment of working-class queer persons in your workplace.
Safety

Questions to ask yourself:

Are you in a safe situation? -
Do I feel uncomfortable or afraid? Am I silencing an internal voice that thinks I should leave?

Is there abuse or fear of abuse? -
Have I been harmed in this space? Have others been harmed in this space? Am I receiving threats of harm?

Are you experiencing violence and or violations?
Violence and violations can look like different things to different people. Are you paying attention to the signs your body may be giving you?

Community

There is often safety in numbers. Going out with trusted people can be a form of protection.

Let someone you trust know when you are going to go out with someone you’ve never met before or to unknown places. If appropriate, share your location so that someone knows you are out and can confirm your safety, as needed.

Quiet & Avoidance

These are complicated but sometimes necessary strategies. There may be moments where you feel that your physical and psychological safety are at greater risk than you can manage. While it can be frustrating and upsetting to be silenced, there is no shame in protecting yourself this way. Find safe spaces to retreat, and/or people you can talk to after situations that cause you to seek silence or avoid certain people and places.

See more safety tips on CAISO’s social media or by clicking here: Online Safety Tips
Displacement

Not all families are understanding, unconditionally loving and respectful towards their queer and/or trans family members. There are unfortunate circumstances in which LGBTQ+ people are forced out of their homes and can be displaced.

The Queer and/or Chosen Family

Chosen family is an important part of queer culture. They are people who may not be related by blood but share and uphold a strong bond that reproduces feelings and structures of a supportive, loving family. Within these structures, there are spaces for expression, comfort, encouragement, and safety.

Legal actions to take

If you are renting, or there is paperwork that gives you the legal ties to where you live, and you are removed from your home due to some form of discrimination, then you may have a legal case. If you are in this kind of situation, then you may be able to seek help from organisations that provide services, such as CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice Programme.

Unfortunately, young adults without clear property rights to the home cannot argue for residency. Therefore, there is not much room for legal action if you are uprooted from your family home because of your identity. Regardless, it is important that you speak with a lawyer and get legal advice on your situation. You can contact CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice Programme and seek legal and social services support for issues like these.
Organisations, services, and additional resources

CAISO: Sex & Gender Justice:
Website: caisott.org | Email: info@caisott.org | Phone: +1 (868) 384-9557 | IG: @caisott

CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice Programme:
Website: caisott.org/wholeness-and-justice | Email: wholenessandjustice@caisott.org
Phone: +1 (868) 282-2476 | IG: @caisott

Coalition Against Domestic Violence:
Website: coalitionagainstdomesticviolence.org | Email: cadvt@gmail.com
Phone: +1 (868) 627-6844 / +1 (868) 624-0402 | FB: Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Trinidad and Tobago Transgender Coalition:
Email: tttranscoalition@gmail.com | Phone: +1 (868) 349-7574 | IG: @tttranscoalition

Rape Crisis Society:
Website: ngocaribbean.org/rape-crisis-society-of-trinidad-tobago | Email: rapecrisisntt@yahoo.com
Phone: +1 (868) 627-7273 / +1 (868) 657-5355 | IG: @rapecrisissociety

Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago:
Website: ttfpa.org | Email: fpattrep@ttfpa.org | Phone: +1 (868) 627-1760 | IG: @fpa_tt

Families in Action
Website: familiesinaction.net | Email: fia@familiesinaction.net / youtheducation@familiesinaction.net
Phone: +1 (868) 622-6952/5365 | FB: Families in Action

Transgender and Nonbinary Trinidad and Tobago
Email: trans.and.nbtt@outlook.com | IG: transnbtt

Pride UWI
IG: prideuwi

The Silver Lining Foundation
Website: silverliningtt.com | Email: thesilverliningfoundation@gmail.com
Phone: +1 (868) 470-1967 | IG: silverliningtt
Government Social Services

Food Support Programme
A system that provides a cheque or food card to persons who need financial assistance for groceries per month. The amount that you can receive depends on the number of people in your household and how great their need is.

The three price ranges are:
- $510 for 1-3 persons
- $650 for 4-5 persons
- $800 for 6+ persons.

Rental Assistance
A program that assists citizens who are temporarily unable to pay their rent for reasons such as: pending eviction, fire damage to your residence, or if you’re a survivor of domestic violence.

I’ve heard there is a great resource to use when learning about social services

Yes! The Ready, Set, Go - Social Service Navigation Guide for LGBTQI+ People
Find it on CAISO’s Website
Religion has long been used to belittle and hurt the LGBTQ+ community. However many religions have valued and appreciated LGBTQI+ people, including those that are most present in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Jewish culture which is the root religion through which Christianity was formed (and that also follows the old testament) there are six gendered identities and expressions in the texts: Androginus, Zachar, Nekevah, Tumtum, Aylonit, Saris.

The Hijras are a group of transgender persons in Indian and Hindu culture that have been documented over 4000 years ago. They were revered as spiritual beings and still hold the religious status for certain rites.

Classical Islam law recognizes four genders with respect to the human beings:
- Male
- Female
- Khunsa - intersex/DSD
- Mukhannath - effeminate male
Is it a trend?

Similar to religions, in many cultures (in the past and today), there is acceptance and celebration of diverse genders and sexual orientations. Some of you may know the Two Spirit peoples of Indigenous tribes who are reembracing parts of their identity, demonised and belittled by Europe when they colonised the Americas and the Caribbean, but there are other groups that still show us that these identities are not new from Indigenous, African, and Asian cultures. Here are a few examples:

**Muxe**
The Zapotec tribe recognizes the muxes as a third gender and celebrates them as a significant part of their culture. There are two types of muxe, the guanaa and the nguiiu. The guanaa is often someone who we would identify under western binaries and norms as a man. The guanaa however identifies as a woman, is attracted to men, and takes up roles and responsibilities that are associated with the women of the community. The latter group, the nguiiu, consists of people who are attracted to men and were born with characteristics often identified as belonging to men.

**Nat Kadaw**
The Nat Kadaw is a ‘third gender’ that is observed in Myanmar where it is believed that a female spirit inhabits a male’s body. The connection between the male and female within the Nat Kadaw is revered as highly spiritual beings and important to rituals.

**Buganda (Uganda), Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria, Benin, Togo), Dagaaba (Ghana)**
In these African tribes, pre-colonialism, there were many leaders that were recorded as being gay and/or same-sex loving. For example, Mwanga II was an openly gay King of Buganda, who opposed European indoctrination and colonialism.

Many cultures operated with systems that did not have a binary understanding of gender nor did they assign a gender to a baby at birth. Rather, they believed that social values and norms were based on the principles of respect and divinity. Societal roles were informed by this and chosen later on in one’s life.

They also did not assign gender based on a child’s biological markers but rather on the energy that was presented. Therefore one’s identity was in the hands of the individual and the way they choose to express.
The question of LGBTQI+ identity being a phase comes up often. Sexuality is understood as fluid and can change over time; however, this does not make the importance of exploring one’s sexual and gender identity any less important. Further, LGBTQI+ experience and queer identity is often impacted when people are placed in uncomfortable or difficult situations.

Research on transgender people in the Caribbean shows that many persons have experiences that may discourage them from identifying as trans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not have documents that had their gender markers</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had not changed their birth/dead names to their chosen names</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were unemployed</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced homelessness at some point in their lives</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had available hormone replacement therapy</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used hormones but did not have their hormones level tested</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced depression and anxiety at some point in their lives</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced police violence, and verbal, sexual and/or physical violence in their live</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This highlights that what is often marked as just a phase cannot be so simply understood. Until we have a more just and free society stating someone’s identity is a phase is not an accurate or helpful way to understand why people may choose to change their minds about how they present.
Thoughts and Questions

Am I Queer or Trans enough?

You are you enough, there is no one example queer or trans experience that is better than others and that you have to live by.

Do I pass enough?

You don’t need to look a particular way to be who you are, just being yourself is enough. Your heart, your mind, and your soul make you enough.
My body feels so wrong sometimes I feel like self-harming.

You are not wrong and your body is beautiful. There are things that might trigger you or bring shame. Reach out for help to create a future where you’re able to lessen the pain. You may find support in LGBTQI+ organisations such as Trans Coalition, Silver Lining, or CAISO. You are not alone. There are resources & support available.

Can I call myself bisexual if my preference is skewed?

The idea of bisexuality is one that people like to either box in or throw away. Some tend to say that people who are bisexual are just confused, haven’t chose to come out yet (for men), or are experimenting (for women). But bisexuality is simply a person who is attracted to more than one gender. It doesn’t have to be equal or consistent. If you understand yourself as bi then that’s all that matters.
Being LGBTQI+ does not fit into one particular look, expression, or way of being. No matter who you love or how you express gender, you are valid in your sexuality and gender identity, and should be taken seriously.

Should I come out and if so when?

Coming out is up to you. It is your story to tell, when and with whom you want. It is often helpful to do so around safe people, in safe places and situations. It may also look different to different people. People have different timelines, and some may even come out more than once. It is personal and completely up to you.

Should I act like a typical LGBTQI+ person to be taken seriously?

Being LGBTQI+ does not fit into one particular look, expression, or way of being. No matter who you love or how you express gender, you are valid in your sexuality and gender identity, and should be taken seriously.
Sexuality and gender are not always solid and constant. They may change as we grow. We learn that we like some things more or differently, and at times the way we feel and see ourselves changes. Take the time you need to learn about yourself, celebrate every change, and surround yourself with people willing to learn about you, with you.
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African Sexuality and the Legacy of Imported Homophobia

Beyond Gender: Indigenous Perspectives, Muxe

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More than Just Male and Female: The Six Genders in Ancient Jewish Thought | Sefaria


Social Welfare – Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

The Socially Displaced Persons Act

The Islamic Perspectives of Gender-Related Issues in the Management of Patients with Disorders of Sex Development doi: 10.1007/s10508-016-0754-y

Transgender People in Asia
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