

WHAT IS ASEXUALITY?



We live in a sexualised world. The idea that all people should couple-up, be romantic and sexually active is everywhere. But human beings come in all shapes, ways and varieties! So let's learn about the A in LBTTQIA+ — asexuality.

Asexuality is the lack of sexual attraction to others, sometimes shortened to 'ace'. It's important to understand that asexuality differs from celibacy as it is a way a person is by nature, as opposed to a behavioural choice. Some asexuals use the analogy of hunger to explain this difference - celibacy is the choice not to eat, whereas asexuality is the lack of appetite itself.

Many people mistake the 'A' in the acronym as standing for 'allies', but no! Asexuality is included in the rainbow umbrella as it is a minority sexual identity. Asexual people experience phobia and discrimination just like people of other LBTTQIA+ identities. They are welcome in the rainbow whānau.

There's no single way to be asexual! Being asexual means different things to different people — here are some variations to be aware of.

Some asexual people experience other types attraction. People who don't experience sexual attraction can still experience other forms of attraction, like aesthetic, platonic or emotional attraction.

Some asexual people experience romantic attraction. There's a difference between aromanticism (having little or no romantic attraction to others) and asexuality. Aromanticism is a related but separate identity to asexuality, and a person can identify as both, one or neither of these labels.

Thus, **asexual people might identify with multiple labels.** So, for example, a person might identify as both asexual and gay if they experience romantic attraction towards people of the same sex. So bear in mind that asexual people might identify with multiple sexual identities.

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Some asexual people engage in sexual activity while others do not. Those who have sex (with others or solo) might do so for a variety of reasons, including: to show and receive affection, to conceive children, or for the sensual pleasure or intimacy of sex. This is totally valid, and doesn't make them any less worthy of an asexual identity.

Some asexual people might experience sexual attraction. These asexuals will sometimes use the term greysexual or grey-asexual - meaning they only experience sexual desire or attraction on occasion, or to a limited degree.

Similarly, **demisexuality** is often considered to fall within the asexual umbrella and refers the experience of sexual attraction only when someone experiences a deep connection. So if you only find yourself desiring sex only after you've formed a strong emotional connection, you might be demisexual!

As with all things, asexuality is a spectrum, and it's awesome that this vocabulary is on offer to help members of the asexual family self-identify.

So, how can you support asexual people?

- Believe them — while asexuality is still one of the least visible rainbow identities, it's nonetheless real and valid.
- Respect all kinds of relationships — partnerships that aren't necessarily both sexual and romantic can be equally as rewarding and supportive as those that are.
- Don't ask intrusive questions — asexual people don't need to explain themselves or their their sexual habits to you, so don't ask them to.
- Don't presume — we know that sex and romantic love aren't necessary for people to live a full and happy life. Coupling-up and having sex might not be a priority for some people, and that's fine, natural and awesome.
- Stay educated — support sexual diversity by staying up to date on issues, language and stories from the asexual community. We've linked a bunch of great resources on our website, and the wider internet will provide you with even more.

Keep up the great work of asexual allyship, everyone!

