

Thank you, SOJOURN supporters!

The generosity of supporters like you has enabled SOJOURN to develop eight dynamic programs, impacting thousands of people. Thank you so much for supporting our mission: to empower communities to advance gender and sexual diversity across the South.



The Philip Rush Center,
1530 Dekalb Ave., Suite A, Atlanta, GA, 30307
404-275-4637 • info@sojourngsd.org

sojourngsd.org


**You, y'all,
US** — *The
SOJOURN
Way.*



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Illustrated by
Natasza Remesz
Designed by Dawn Stein
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SOJOURN: the Southern Jewish Resource Network for Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD) is the resource for Jewish and LGBTQ+ programming, education, support, and advocacy across the Southern United States..

Since 2013, SOJOURN has worked with gender and sexually diverse individuals and their allies, both within and outside of the Jewish community, at all different stages of life. Our programs utilize Jewish and universal values to challenge, explore and unlearn gender stereotypes, create affirming and celebratory environments, and advance equality for GSD people all across the South.

Mission

Empower communities to advance gender and sexual diversity across the South.

Vision

A South rooted in belonging, full inclusion, and justice.

Values

Jewish Identity, Liberation, Individual Worth, Intersectionality, Empathy, Education and Community.

Big Bold Goal

Every Jewish organization in the South is a Welcoming Community™

What is “gender and sexual diversity”?

The term “gender and sexual diversity” refers to the infinite variations on gender expression, sexuality, and the combinations thereof that can inform a person’s identity. As our notions of binaries in both gender and sexuality are eroding, it’s becoming clear that not everyone whose gender or sexuality differs from the heterosexual, cisgender norm sees themselves fully represented by one of the categories in the LGBTQIA+ acronym. “Gender and sexual diversity” also provides space for people still figuring out who they are to exist within the community without having to attach themselves to definitive labels. SOJOURN uses “gender and sexually diverse”—or the acronym “GSD”—to refer to the community that we serve and advocate for.

Why is it Jewish to celebrate gender and sexual diversity?

At SOJOURN, we believe that to understand Judaism is also to empower and celebrate gender and sexual diversity.

As Jews, we have a biblical imperative to welcome both the stranger and the neighbor. We are commanded to align ourselves with people on the margins.

GSD people have been in Judaism from the beginning! For example, there are 6 different sexes-genders mentioned in the Talmud—Nekeva, Zachar, Androgynos, TumTum, Saris, and Aylonit. There are hundreds of ways that Jewish text and tradition relates to the GSD experience.

We believe that every human being is made in the image of G-d—and that G-d is creative and allows for infinite possibilities of ways to be.

We believe no one should feel shame, shunned, isolated, or alienated from Judaism or Jewish communities because of who they are or who they love. A central part of keeping Jewish life in the South ongoing and vibrant is affirming and celebrating the GSD people in our shuls, schools, and organizations.

SOJOURN’s programs serve and benefit Jews, both GSD and not, at all stages of life.



EARLY CHILDHOOD

The EDGE (Early Development for Gender Equity) Program

is for any setting where one spends time with young children, such as Jewish preschools, day schools, Hebrew schools, camps, and parents.

I love being Jewish and I love going to Hebrew school! But sometimes, it feels like Judaism says that boys should be one way and girls should be another way. The way we talk about important people in the Torah is different if they're a boy or a girl. There's prayers that boys say, and prayers that girls say. It feels like there's a right way to be me, and sometimes that's confusing.

But my teacher worked with people at SOJOURN, and they said that Judaism wants everyone, no matter their gender, to be strong, brave, kind, gentle, and true to themselves. I know that when I go to my synagogue, the adults there want me to be me—there's no one right way to be myself!



PRETEENS

The EveryBODY Program offers a body-positive, queer-inclusive, Jewish-values-focused approach to sex and puberty for preteens.

I don't start health class until high school, but my body and mind feel weird already and I don't know what to do. Some of my friends go to extra classes at their churches where they learn about body stuff they don't teach us in school, but I'm Jewish, so it doesn't feel like the right place for me. I know some parents at my synagogue wanted there to be a Jewish space where I could learn about puberty, so they reached out to people at SOJOURN to make it happen.

Now, in the EveryBODY program, I'm learning about the physical changes I'm going through, mental health, body image and social media, and healthy relationships. It's all based around the idea that Judaism teaches us to honor our bodies, even when it's conflicting and confusing. I'm starting to feel more confident in my body and in my Jewish identity, and it feels great.

TEENS

Tum Tum, a group for gender and sexually diverse teens, both in Atlanta and across the South.

As a queer Jewish teen living in the South, sometimes it feels like there's no one else around like me. Jewish spaces like youth group and camp can feel aggressively straight, and none of my queer friends at school grew up Jewish like I did.

That's why I'm so glad I'm a part of Tum Tum, SOJOURN's group for gender and sexually diverse Jewish teens. I used to go hang out in person every week, but now we meet online, which means that people from other cities can join as well. There's a different topic every session, and we have meaningful discussions about things like justice, empathy, and the impact we want to have on the world. I've made new friends who have a lot of similar experiences as me, and I've never felt prouder to be both queer and Jewish.

OLDER TEENS

Much like parents of preteens often look for supplemental lessons on healthy puberty, parents of teens in the South are looking for age-appropriate sex ed for their children—and SOJOURN's **Sex Ed Queeries program** offers the queer-inclusive Jewish programming that they need.

I've had awful experiences with sex ed at my Southern high school. They're mostly focused on preventing STI's and pregnancy, so they only teach abstinence, which I know for a fact doesn't work and feels like it's based in Christian values. They didn't even mention the fact that gay or trans people exist and have sex too.

I'm so lucky I found Sex Ed Queeries online—first their TikTok account, then their longer content on YouTube. They have videos not only on queer-inclusive sex ed, but on coming out, healthy relationships, communication, rejection, consent, and so many more topics surrounding sex and relationships. They even tie in Jewish values via Mussar soul traits. They provide info that's useful to me, inclusive of my identities, and grounded in the values that I live by.

ADULTS

GSD 101 is SOJOURN's single-session program for schools, nonprofits, synagogues, and other organizations. The program covers the changing field of terminology around gender and sexual diversity and helps participants explore the messages they've received in their lives about gender roles and sexual orientation. It also provides vital information on how to be an ally.

I'm a teacher at a Jewish day school, where I run the GSA (gender and sexuality alliance). I realized that many of my colleagues knew very little about gender and sexual diversity, and I started to worry that their ignorance would have a lasting impact on our LGBTQ+ students. I asked SOJOURN to come in and do their GSD 101 workshop for the staff, and I'm so happy I did. They facilitated team activities and discussions that taught us about pronouns and gender-inclusive language, explored the difference between sex and gender, and encouraged us to think about our deeply-held beliefs about gender roles and sexual orientation. I had fellow teachers coming up to me afterwards to say how much they learned, and I'm much more confident that our students are getting their education in an affirming environment.

ADULTS

Welcoming Communities is SOJOURN's flagship program, for individual organizations and whole communities. We work with our Welcoming Communities in a very intentional way, with an emphasis on meeting them where they're at when it comes to GSD education and inclusion.

I knew that my congregation had a lot of work to do when it came to LGBTQ+ issues, so I was excited to work with SOJOURN to become a Welcoming Community. Their staff really took the time to get to know our community, and led several sessions and workshops that took our previous level of knowledge about gender and sexual diversity into account.

After a year of working with SOJOURN, the leadership at my synagogue understands that being welcoming to GSD individuals is more than just saying "we're welcoming"—we're committed to education, intentionality, and practicing true allyship in our community. Our congregation definitely needed to change and adapt in order to remain a vibrant community and ensure a Jewish future in our area. This whole process has given me a lot of hope that a dynamic Jewish life in the South will continue to exist, if we remain committed to welcoming the stranger and honoring everyone's true selves as b'tzelem elohim.

PARENTS

From Acceptance to Celebration is a group run in collaboration with JF&CS Atlanta for parents of gender-expansive children.

When my 12-year-old told me they were nonbinary, I was so proud of them, but also terrified. What would the school situation be like? Would our synagogue be able to do a gender-neutral b'mitzvah? There was no doubt I would accept my child for who they are, but it seemed like everything was too fraught for me to celebrate their journey.

I'm so grateful to the From Acceptance to Celebration group for bringing me both the education and resources to advocate for my child, and a community of people who could relate to my experiences. We met every other week over Zoom, and I felt like I had grown so much after every session. I finally feel like I am not just accepting of who my child is, but celebrating how special they are every day.

SENIOR CITIZENS

I came across SOJOURN through my synagogue, and as someone who grew up LGBTQ+ in the '60s, I've always admired the work that they do. I'm getting a little older now, starting to think about moving into a retirement home and setting up plans for future medical care. It's been difficult to find places that make me feel confident they would align with my values as a Jew and respect my identity as a gay person.

I know that SOJOURN has done some programming with organizations that serve senior citizens, but I wish they had the resources to do more. The statistics on loneliness, depression, and isolation in older LGBTQ adults are worrying, and making sure that we have access to respectful medical care and affirming communities to grow old in is extremely important. I know that this work would benefit a lot of people.



How you can help!

Your contribution to SOJOURN helps us staff, fund, and expand our programs that touch every stage of Jewish life.

We want to:

- Offer these programs in more Southern cities and at more organizations
- Not have a financial barrier to program participation
- Enhance the quality of our programming

To do that, we need:

- To attract and retain more program staff
- Increased resources to do program outreach
- A higher budget per program for materials, interactive elements, etc.

Glossary

Gender Identity — an identity based on one's relationship to femininity and masculinity, especially as it relates to society and culture.

Gender Expression — how one externally presents one's gender identity through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Biological Sex — A label given at birth based on medical factors, including hormones, chromosomes, and genitals.

Assigned Gender At Birth — sometimes abbreviated to AGAB, this refers to the gender identity assumed for someone at a young age, usually based on their hormones, chromosomes, and genitals at birth. Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB), Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) are the specific designations based on above.

Nonbinary — a term someone might use to indicate that they don't fit into the gender categories of "male" or "female".

Transgender — anyone who doesn't identify with their assigned gender at birth.

Cisgender — anyone who identifies with their assigned gender at birth.

Intersex — someone born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that is typically not exclusively "male" or "female" (i.e. XXY Chromosomes).

Pronouns — a way to refer to someone without using their name. Historically these have been gendered, i.e. she/her

or he/him. However, gender-neutral pronouns can include singular they/them, xe/xem, ze/hir, and more.

Sexual orientation — an identity based on the people someone is sexually and/or romantically attracted to.

Asexual — someone who experiences no sexual attraction to anyone (though they could still be romantically attracted to people).

Aromantic — someone who experiences no romantic attraction to anyone (though they still could be sexually attracted to people).

Gay — usually refers to men who are attracted to other men; is also used as an umbrella term for diverse sexualities.

Lesbian — women who are attracted to women. This may include nonbinary or transmasculine people that identify as part of the lesbian community.

Bisexual — someone attracted to their own gender and other genders.

Pansexual — someone who is attracted to people regardless of gender.

Queer — historically used as a slur, this term has been reclaimed as a broad umbrella term to describe sexual and gender identities other than straight and/or cisgender. Queer is sometimes used to express that sexuality and gender can be complicated, change over time, and might not fit neatly into either/or identities.

Heterosexual or Straight — a cisgender person being attracted exclusively to other cisgender people and whose gender is different from your own.

This list of terms shows the variety of language that people can use to describe themselves; which is often evolving, therefore this list is far from complete. Terms exist so that people can reach for language that feels applicable, feel proud, and find community with others who identify the same way. The purpose is NOT to establish rigid categories that people feel excluded from or pressured to fit into. When someone says how they identify, that's how they see themselves. It's everyone's job to take that identity seriously and with respect.