



# Safe Zone Toolkit:

Resources for Working with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Students, Faculty and Staff at Kingsborough Community College

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# Defining a Common Language

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**Ally**—anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, whose attitude and behavior is anti-heterosexist and who works toward combating homophobia and heterosexism, both on a personal and institutional level.

**Androgyny** (also androgynous, bi-gendered, no-gendered)—a person who identifies as both or neither of the two culturally defined genders; and/or who expresses merged “feminine” and “masculine” characteristics, or who presents mainly neutral characteristics.

**Bisexual**—a person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to both men and women.

**Butch**—used to identify a person who expresses “masculine” characteristics. Often a person who self-identifies to a great degree with the stereotypically masculine end of a gender characteristic spectrum. Can be used either as a positive or negative term.

**Cisgender** (Also Cis)—a person whose gender identity is congruent with their societally recognized gender and/or gender assigned at birth.

**Coming Out**—to “come out” or to publicly declare and affirm one’s homosexual identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes by an act that places one in the public eye. It is not a single event but instead a life-long process. In each new situation, a lesbian or gay man must decide whether or not to come out; accepting and/or disclosing to others that one is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

**Drag** (also Drag King, Drag Queen, Female/Male Impersonator)—wearing the clothing of another gender, often with exaggerated cultural/stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as Drag Kings (female in drag) or Drag Queens (male in drag). Drag often refers to dressing for functional purposes such as entertainment/performance or social gatherings. Drag has held a significant place in GLBT history and community.

**Dyke**—derived from the term “dyke-loupers” from old Scotland. They had “louped” or jumped over the “dyke” or low wall that divided the fields and had gone over to the other side. Recent history has abused lesbians with the use of the term in a hateful manner. Within the community, some have reclaimed the term as a pride word.

**F2M/FTM** (Female to Male)—used to identify a person who was female-bodied at birth and who identifies as male, lives as a man, or identifies as masculine.

**Family of Choice**—persons forming an individual’s social, emotional, and practical support network and often fulfilling the functions of blood relations

**Family of Origin**—biological family, or the family in which one was raised. These individuals may or may not be part of a LGBTQ person’s support system.

**Femme**—a person who expresses “feminine” characteristics. Can be used either as a positive or negative term.

**Gay**—a person who has sex with people who have the same (or similar) genitals, more often used to describe males but also used to describe females.

**Gender presentation**—one's outward expression of gender. Elements of one's gender presentation can include clothing, mannerisms, speech patterns, facial hair, and body hair.

**Gender Identity**—one's psychological sense of one's self as male, female, trans, intersexed, and/or gender non-conforming.

**Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS; also Sex Reassignment Surgery—SRS)**—permanent surgical refashioning of genitalia to resemble the genitalia of the desired gender. Sought to attain congruence between one's body and one's gender identity.

**Gender Roles**—the socially constructed and culturally specific behavior and appearance expectations imposed on women (femininity) and men (masculinity).

**Heterosexual**—a person who is sexually attracted to members of the other gender.

**Heterosexism**—the assumption or belief that everyone is heterosexual, and if not, they should be.

**Homophobia**—a fear and/or intense dislike of homosexuals and homosexuality.

**Homosexual**—a person who is sexually attracted to people with the same (or similar) genitals. This was originally a clinical term that originated in the late 1800's.

**Hormone Therapy** (also Hormone Replacement Therapy, HRT, Hormonal Sex Reassignment)—administration of hormones to affect the development of secondary sex characteristics of the opposite assigned gender. HRT is a process, possibly lifelong, of using hormones to change the internal body chemistry. Androgens (testosterone) are used for female to males, and Estrogens are used for male to females.

**Intersexed** an individual born with full or partial genitalia of both genders, or with underdeveloped or ambiguous genitalia.

**In the Closet**—to be “in the closet” means to hide one's homosexual identity. Many gays and lesbians are “out” in some situations and “closeted” in others.

**Lesbian**—a common and acceptable word for female homosexuals only; a name taken from the island of Lesbos where Sappho, the great women-loving poet of 600 BC, lived. Most women-loving women adopt this name with pride.

**M2F/MTF (Male to Female)**—used to identify a person who was male bodied at birth and who identifies as a female, lives as a woman, or identifies as feminine.

**Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)**—the term is often used when discussing sexual behavior. It is inclusive of all men who participate in this behavior regardless of how they identify their sexual orientation. The acronym MSM is conventionally used in professional literature.

**Outing**—disclosing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity to another person without permission.

**Pansexual-** sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction towards people regardless of their gender or gender identity. Pansexual often assert that another person’s gender is not a determining factor in whether or not they find that person sexually attractive.

**Partner or Significant Other**—primary domestic partner or spousal relationship(s). May also be referred to as “girlfriend/boyfriend,” “lover,” “roommate,” “life partner,” “wife/husband,” or other terms.

**Pre-Op** (also Pre-Operative)—transgender individuals who have not attained gender reassignment surgery or other surgeries to change secondary sex characteristics, but who desire to and are seeking that as an option.

**Post-Op** (also Post-Operative)—transgender individuals who have attained gender reassignment surgery, and/or other surgeries to change secondary sex characteristics.

**Queer**— originally a pejorative term for gay people, many LGBTQ people have reclaimed this term as one that describes a wide range of sexual orientations.

**Sexual Orientation**—the inclination or capacity to develop intimate emotional and sexual relationships with people of the same gender (lesbian or gay), the other gender (heterosexual), or either gender (bisexual).

**Straight**—a term originating in the gay community describing heterosexuals and meaning “to enter the mainstream,” or “to go straight.”

**Transgender** (also Trans)—those who transgress societal gender norms; often used as an umbrella term to mean those who defy rigid, bipolar gender constructions, and who express or present a breaking and/or blurring of cultural/stereotypical gender roles.

**Women who have Sex with Women (WSW)**—the term often used when discussing sexual behavior. It is inclusive of all women who participate in this behavior regardless of how they identify their sexual orientation. The acronym WSW is conventionally used in professional literature.

## Myths and Realities of Bisexuality

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(Adapted from Vernon A. Wall and Nancy J. Evans, *Beyond Tolerance*, 1991)

Sexuality runs along a continuum. It is not a static “thing’ but rather has the potential to change throughout one’s lifetime, and varies infinitely among people. We cannot fit our sexuality into nice neat categories which determine who and what we are. Bisexuality exists at many points along the sexual continuum.

**Myth:** Bisexuality doesn’t really exist. People who consider themselves bisexuals are going through a phase/ confused/ undecided/ fence sitting. Ultimately they’ll settle down and realize they’re actually homosexual or heterosexual.

**Reality:** Some people go through a transitional period of bisexuality on their way to adopting a lesbian/gay or heterosexual identity. For many others bisexuality remains a long-term orientation. For some bisexuals, homosexuality was a transitional phase in their coming out as bisexuals. Many bisexuals may well be confused, living in a society where their sexuality is denied by homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, but that confusion is a

function of oppression. Fence-sitting is a misnomer; there is no “fence” between homosexuality and heterosexuality except in the minds of people who rigidly divide the two.

**Myth:** Bisexuality doesn’t really exist. People who consider themselves bisexual are really heterosexual, but are experimenting/playing around/trying to be cool/liberated/trendy/politically correct.

**Reality:** Whether an individual is an “experimenting heterosexual” or a bisexual depends on how s/he defines her/himself, rather than on some external standard. While there certainly are people for whom bisexual behavior is trendy, this does not negate the people who come to a bisexual identity amidst pain and confusion and claim it with pride.

**Myth:** Bisexuality doesn’t really exist. People who consider themselves bisexuals are actually lesbian/gay, but haven’t fully accepted themselves and finished coming out of the closet (acknowledging their attraction to people of the same gender.)

**Reality:** Bisexuality is a legitimate sexual orientation. Many bisexuals are completely out of the closet, but not on the lesbian/gay community’s terms. (It is worth noting that many lesbians and gay men are not completely out of the closet and their process is generally respected; it is also worth noting that the lesbian/gay community whose “terms” are in question here has tended to be quite different for working class lesbians, gays of color, etc.) Bisexuals in this country share with lesbians and gays the debilitating experience of heterosexism (the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and thereby rendering other sexual identities invisible) and homophobia (the hatred, fear, and discrimination against homosexuals.)

**Myth:** Bisexuals are shallow, narcissistic, untrustworthy, hedonistic, and immoral.

**Reality:** This myth reflects our culture’s ambivalence over sex and pleasure. The “sex” in bisexuality gets overemphasized, and our culture projects onto bisexuals its fascination with and condemnation of sex and pleasure.

**Myth:** Bisexuals are equally attracted to both sexes. Bisexual means having concurrent lovers of both sexes.

**Reality:** Most bisexuals are primarily attracted to either men or women, but do not deny the lesser attraction, whether or not they act on it. Some bisexuals are never sexual with women, or men, or either. Bisexuality is about dreams and desires and capacities as much as it is about acts. Bisexuals are people who can have lovers of either sex, not people who must have lovers of both sexes. Some bisexual people may have concurrent lovers, but bisexuals do not need to be with both sexes in order to feel fulfilled.

**Myth:** Bisexuals are promiscuous hypersexual swingers who are attracted to every woman and man they meet. Bisexuals cannot be monogamous, nor can they or live in traditional committed relationships. They could never be celibate.

**Reality:** Bisexual people have a range of sexual behaviors. Like lesbians, gays or heterosexuals, some have multiple partners, some have one partner, some go through periods without any partners. Promiscuity is no more prevalent in the bisexual population than in other groups of people.

**Myth:** Bisexuals spread HIV to the lesbians and heterosexual communities.

**Reality:** The myth above allows discrimination against bisexuals to be legitimized. The label “bisexual” simply refers to sexual orientation. It says nothing about whether one practices safe sex or not. HIV occurs in people of all sexual orientations. HIV is contracted through unsafe sexual practices, shared needles, and contaminated blood transfusions. Sexual orientation does not “cause” HIV.

**Myth:** Politically speaking, bisexuals are traitors to the cause of lesbian/gay liberation. They pass as heterosexual to avoid trouble and maintain heterosexual privilege.

**Reality:** Obviously there are bisexuals who pass as heterosexual to avoid trouble. There are also many lesbians and gays who do this. To “pass” for heterosexual and deny the part of you that loves people of the same gender is just as painful and damaging for a bisexual as it is for a lesbian/gay. Politicized bisexuals remain aware of heterosexual privileges and are committed enough to lesbian/gay/bisexual rights not to just abandon lesbian/gay communities when in heterosexual relationships.

**Myth:** Bisexual women will always leave their lesbian lovers for men.

**Reality:** Although this does sometimes happen, one can also find examples of bisexual women who have good long-term relationships with lesbians. There are bisexuals for whom bisexuality is a phase; there are also lesbians for whom lesbianism is a phase. There are bisexual and lesbians who never really come to grips with their sexuality and internalized homophobia. Bisexual women who truly accept themselves and their sexuality will leave a relationship with a woman or a man when it no longer works for them. The same could be said of lesbians who accept themselves. As hard as it is to get clear about the reasons a relationship may end, and as many challenges as lesbian relationship in particular may face, the notion that bisexual women can’t handle lesbian relationships is just a stereotype.

**Myth:** Bisexuals get the best of both worlds and a doubled chance for a date on Saturday night.

**Reality:** Combine our society’s extreme heterosexism and homophobia with lesbian and gay hesitance to accept bisexuals into their community, and it might be more accurate to say that bisexuals get the worst of both worlds. As to the doubled chance for a date theory, that depends more upon the individual’s personality than it does upon her/his bisexuality. Bisexuals don’t radiate raw sex any more than lesbians, gays, or heterosexuals. If a bisexual woman has a hard time meeting people, her bisexuality won’t help much.

**Myth:** Bisexuals are desperately unhappy, endlessly seeking some kind of peace which they cannot ever find.

**Reality:** Like lesbians and gays who have been told that they will live awful lives, bisexuals can respond that much of the pain comes from oppression, so people concerned about the “awful lives” of bisexuals should join the fight against homophobia.

It is important to remember that “bisexual,” “lesbian,” “gay,” and “heterosexual” are labels created by homophobic, biphobic, heterosexist society to separate and alienate us from each other. We are all unique and don’t fit into distinct categories. We sometimes need to use these labels for political reasons and to increase our visibility. Our sexual esteem is facilitated by acknowledging and accepting the differences and seeing the beauty in our diversity.

*Adapted from Vernon A. Wall and Nancy J. Evans “Using Psychological development theories to understand and work with gay and lesbian persons” in Nancy J. Evans and Vernon A. Wall (eds.) Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals on Campus, American College Personnel Association, 1991.*

## A Brief History of LGBTQ Folks in America- Please note that this history needs to be updated!

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(Compiled by Ladelle McWhorter, 7/96; Revised 10/96)

Despite the fact that humans have never limited their sexual pleasure to what we now call heterosexual intercourse, the history of homosexuality is relatively short. The genital anatomy of one’s partners - or what

Freud calls one's "object choice"- didn't become the definitive criterion for distinguishing homosexual and heterosexual selves until the last third of the nineteenth century. During the 1860's and 70's European public administrators began noticing that some people were organizing their lives not around family, household, and reproduction but around various forms of sexual pleasure. This was probably a recent phenomenon made possible by the forces of capitalism, which tended to draw people off the land into cities away from their parishes and families and to reduce the importance of arranged marriage. Alarmed, officials began studying these populations, whom they characterized as sexual deviants and grouped according to the particular practices they engaged in. One such class of deviant came to be called "homosexuals."

Homosexuals quickly became the target of medical, psychiatric, and legal intervention, and as early as the 1870's they came together in such places as Bavaria to fight criminalization of sodomy. Until the Nazis destroyed Magnus Hirschfeld's homosexual archives in Berlin and hundreds of thousands of homosexual people were sent to die in concentration camps, the homosexual movement in Germany was widespread and influential.

In the U.S. the history of homosexual culture and politics is even shorter than it is in Europe. The largest and best known communities are in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and there are reasons for that. First, because of economic dislocations and farm crises in the first half of the 20th century, people migrated to large cities to find work. Once there, they were often forced to live outside traditional family structures, many in same sex settings such as military and industrial barracks, for prolonged periods. Those with homosexual inclinations found one another at the same time that they found the freedom to express themselves without ever-present familial and religious disapproval. For women in particular this was a new experience.

But in addition to economics changes, another extremely significant factor in the development of coastal gay and lesbian enclaves was the ban on gays in the military. After WWII thousands of gay and lesbian people were dishonorably discharged from the armed services, and many were simply dumped in port cities. At times several hundred ex-service people were deposited in San Francisco per day. They couldn't go home in disgrace, so they stayed.

The first known homosexual political organization in the U.S. was the Mattachine Society, founded in November of 1950 in Los Angeles. This underground emancipation movement was the brainchild of Harry Hay, a young musicologist who had honed his organizing skills in the ranks of one of the most underground political movements in America in this century, the Communist Party. As Hay well knew, persecution of homosexuals was rampant. Police constantly entrapped and brutalized gay people. Public disclosure of homosexuality was enough to get most people fired from their jobs and ostracized from families and communities. By early 1953 under President Eisenhower homosexuality became by executive order a necessary and sufficient reason in itself to fire any federal employee from his or her job. Most defense industries and others with government contracts followed suit, and the U.S. Postal Service aided these industries by putting tracers on suspected homosexuals' mail in order to gather enough evidence for dismissal and possibly arrest.

The Mattachine Society drew tremendous support after one of its founders, Dale Jennings, was arrested for "lewd and dissolute behavior" in February 1952. Jennings took the unheard course of acknowledging his homosexuality in court while pleading innocent to the charges against him, thus forcing authorities to draw a distinction between being homosexual and being guilty of illegal activity. The jury was deadlocked and a retrial ordered, but the DA's office dropped all charges. Publicizing this victory wasn't easy, however. There was a news blackout on all the information regarding homosexuality; no press releases were accepted by any newspapers, magazines, or radio stations. The Mattachine Society was forced to circulate information solely through postings and flyers distributed in areas where homosexuals were believed to congregate. Nevertheless, the

event drew tremendous, if quiet, support, and membership in the Mattachine Society grew by several thousand in succeeding weeks.

Fears generated by Joseph McCarthy's campaign to rid America of Communists eventually led to the neutralization of the Mattachine Society. By late 1954 it was the weak, fully public, assimilationist organization whose main purpose was to convince heterosexuals that homosexuals presented no threat whatsoever to any of their values and were in fact exactly like them but for sexual preference. The lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis, founded in San Francisco in 1955, didn't fare much better, although both groups managed to sustain publications with national circulation through the 1950's and 60's. By 1969 there were about fifty "homophile" organizations in the US, all fairly small.

The main reason for the lack of visibility in post-war America was persecution - religious persecution, discrimination in employment, violence, and police brutality. Non-celibate gay people were condemned by and unwelcome in most mainstream religious organizations not only as leaders but even simply as members. This led the Reverend Troy Perry, a Baptist, to found the Metropolitan Community Church in 1968. Today the MCC is the largest gay and lesbian religious organization in this country and by far the largest in the South.

Discrimination in employment probably ranked as the most threatening type of persecution gay people faced and still face-second only to physical assault in its violence but affecting far more people. Eisenhower's executive order stood from 1953 until 1993. There has never been any employment protection for gay people as there is now for straight white women and straight men and women who belong to racial and ethnic minorities. Employers routinely refuse to hire gay people regardless of their qualifications and fire any who manage to get hired while closeted.

Still, the ugliest of all forms of discrimination was and is undoubtedly gay bashing, especially when carried out by public officials. Police harassment and brutality have been constant features of gay and lesbian life for decades. Indefinite detainment's, beatings, and public humiliations are only the tip of the iceberg. Lesbian and male drag queens through the 1950s and 1960s suffered frequent rapes and sexual assaults committed by police officers, sometimes inside police precincts. And police were certainly no help when beatings, rapes, and lesser indignities were visited upon gay and lesbian people by civilians.

It was in this atmosphere of terror and brutality that patrons of the Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village resisted a police raid in 1969. The Stonewall Inn was a working class gay and lesbian bar frequented by cross-dressers of both sexes. Police raids were common then and ugly. On the night of June 29, 1969, police attempted to raid the bar as usual, but the regulars were fed up. As the officers entered the building, patrons barricaded them inside and held them there. Thus began three days of rioting. At one point it was estimated that the gays held eight square blocks of the city. Word of the riots spread quickly through homophile organizations around the country. It was at that point that what had been since 1954 a rather quiet assimilationist movement became militant.

In December 1973, this movement achieved a major victory when pressure groups succeeded in forcing the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. This change eliminated one of the reasons employers so often fire non-heterosexuals and one of the reasons judges so often awarded custody to heterosexual over homosexual parents - but only one.

Through the early 1970s gay and lesbian communities pushed for anti-discrimination laws, and they were successful in a few cities. By 1977 California even had its first openly gay elected official; Harvey Milk was elected San Francisco City Supervisor from District 5. But it was also in 1977 that Anita Bryant began her anti-

gay campaign in Dade County, Florida, which was calculated to repeal Miami's legal protections for gay citizens. Throughout 1977 there were successful referenda to repeal gay rights laws across the country-in St. Paul, Wichita, and Eugene.

In 1978 California state senator John Briggs introduced a move to prohibit homosexuals from teaching in California public schools. The initiative was defeated in November after a series of statewide debates between Briggs and Harvey Milk. It looked like gay rights would hold firm in California, but less than three weeks later Harvey Milk and pro-gay San Francisco mayor George Moscone lay dead, assassinated by former city supervisor Dan White. An all-straight jury subsequently gave White the lightest possible sentence on a charge of manslaughter. San Francisco's gay population rioted; but the heyday of pro-gay politics was over in that city, and anti-gay violence sky-rocketed.

Not long after, scientists at the Centers for Disease Control began to notice a number of immune-deficiency-related illnesses in the gay male populations of major cities. Public officials (who didn't know what caused the illnesses or exactly how they were spread) began closing down establishments where gay people gathered. Not surprisingly, gay people resisted these moves, seeing them as just another ploy on the part of politicians and police to destroy gay communities and to oppress individuals. Tensions between gay communities and various branches of government increased.

In 1986 in *Bowers v. Hardwick* the U.S. Supreme Court held that states have a right to criminalize even private and consensual sexual behavior. Specifically the court said Georgia had a right to punish Michael Hardwick for sodomy even though his act occurred in private. The police officer who over-heard and then witnessed Hardwick's act had entered the house in order to speak to one of Hardwick's housemates about a traffic violation. Officer Bowers placed Hardwick under arrest in his own bedroom.

The following year, 1987, the second March on Washington was held. It was one of the largest civil right demonstrations in this country's history, drawing more than 650,000. The next day 5,000 demonstrators converged on the Supreme Court steps, and an organization new even to most lesbian and gay Americans, ACT-UP, made its first national appearance. Gay politics, like gay lives, had changed dramatically since Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society only thirty-seven years before.

Things have changed. But in many respects life has not gotten any easier. The FBI tells us violence against gay people and destruction of gay property and establishments is on the rise, and the crimes committed against us are getting uglier and deadlier. There are efforts in dozens of states and localities to repeal anti-discrimination laws where they exist and to prohibit them where they don't yet exist so that non-heterosexual people will have no avenue for changing the laws that affect them. More and more people are out of the closet, but while that may relieve and liberate in some ways, it also makes people easy targets for discrimination and hatred.

## The Pink Triangle Story

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Everyone knows about the Holocaust, during World War II that took more than six million Jewish lives. But many do not realize that other groups also were targeted for extinction, including the mentally retarded, Gypsies, and homosexual men and women. Nearly a quarter-million gay men and lesbians perished in Hitler's death camps. Prisoners were forced to wear identifying symbols on their symbols on their sleeves. People of Jewish descent were identified by a yellow Star of David. Homosexual men and women were branded by a pink

triangle. Today, it is a symbol of liberation and pride worn on buttons, lapel pins, tee-shirts, even car bumpers to remind gay and lesbian people of the oppression they have suffered historically and to signal their refusal to be silent victims again.

There is a story that relates directly to the witness we invite you to make today. When Denmark fell to the Nazi armies in 1940, the German occupation authorities immediately decreed that all Jews wear the yellow Star of David on their sleeves at all times, to facilitate their identification for transit to the concentration camps. Legend has it that the very next morning King Christian X, the aging Danish monarch, came out of the palace for his morning walk wearing a yellow Star of David on his coat, thus expressing his solidarity with the prosecuted minority. Word quickly spread about this silent and non-violent act of defiance and soon many other Danes wearing the symbol on their sleeves. Though historians disagree about the actual prevalence of this simple act of Danish resistance, there is no doubt that the population's compassion and resistance contributed to the fact that almost all of Denmark's Jews survived the barbarism of the holocaust that took the lives of most European Jews.

## Questions and Responses to Students Who Are Considering Coming Out to Their Parents

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### **1. Are you sure about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?**

Don't raise the issue unless you're able to respond with confidence to the question "Are you sure?" Confusion on your part will increase your parents' confusion and decrease their confidence in your conclusions.

### **2. Are you comfortable with your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?**

If you're wrestling with guilt and periods of depression, you'll be better off waiting to tell your parents. Coming out to them may require tremendous energy on your part; it will require a reserve of positive self-image.

### **3. Do you have support?**

In the event that your parents' reaction devastates you, there should be some one or a group that you can confidently turn to for emotional support and strength. Maintaining your sense of self-worth is critical.

### **4. Are you knowledgeable about homosexuality and gender issues?**

Your parents will probably respond based on a lifetime of information from a homophobic society. If you've done some serious reading on the subject, you'll be able to assist them by sharing reliable information and research.

### **5. What's the emotional climate at home?**

If you have the choice of when to tell, consider the timing. Choose a time when they're not dealing with such matters as the death of a close friend, pending surgery, or the loss of a job.

#### **6. Can you be patient?**

Your parents will require time to deal with this information if they haven't considered it prior to your sharing. The process may last from six months to two years.

#### **7. What's your motive for coming out now?**

Hopefully, it is because you love them and are uncomfortable with the distance you feel. Never come out in anger or during an argument, using your sexuality as a weapon.

#### **8. Do you have available resources?**

Homosexuality is a subject most non-gay people know little about. Have available at least one of the following: a book addressed to parents, a contact for the local or national Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays, the name of a non-gay counselor who can deal fairly with the issue.

#### **9. Are you financially dependent on your parents?**

If you suspect they are capable of withdrawing college finances or forcing you out of the house, you may choose to wait until they do not have this weapon to hold over you.

#### **10. What is your general relationship with your parents?**

If you've gotten along well and have always known their love and shared your love for them in return then chances are they'll be able to deal with the issue in a positive way.

#### **11. What is their moral societal view?**

If they tend to see social issues in clear terms of good/ bad or holy/ sinful, you may anticipate that they will have serious problems dealing with your sexuality. If, however, they're evidenced a degree of flexibility when dealing with other changing societal matters, you may be able to anticipate a willingness to work this through with you.

#### **12. Is this your decision?**

Not everyone should come out to their parents. Don't be pressured into it if you're not sure you'll be better off by doing so - no matter what their response.

- Texas A&M University, Gay and Lesbian Student Services Speaker's Bureau Manual

## **Ways To Prepare Yourself For Coming Out**

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1. Have a serious talk with yourself. Clarify specifically what you hope will happen as a result of disclosure, what you expect will really happen. Without a clear purpose, your presentation of self may be a scary and risky experience without an attainable objective.
2. Select the particular person or persons to whom you wish to disclose. Tell the person(s) that you want to share something important, that you want to have a serious personal conversation. Although you cannot make someone ready to hear what you have to say, you can create a situation in which the other person feels ready for a serious personal conversation.
3. Select a time and a place. Avoid situations that may result in a lack of time or privacy. Neither you nor the other person can interact honestly and fully if he/she does not feel there is enough situational privacy. Coming out is a continuing process, not a hit and run bombing mission or something done well in a crowded public place.
4. Keep your disclosure clean. That is, don't clutter it up with attempts to punish, cause guilt or gain sympathy. Talk about yourself, your feelings and your experiences. Stay with "I" statements. Being gay is no one's fault. What you as a person decide to do with your gayness is your responsibility.
5. Allow time for surprise reactions. It is doubtful that you came into self-acceptance overnight. Asking that another accept and appreciate you faster than you have learned to appreciate yourself is self-defeating.
6. Be ready to clearly identify learning resources that are available to the person. For example, books, films, magazine articles, journals, counselors etc. As your learning has taken time and energy, the "significant other" will need time to digest your disclosure and ingest a new understanding.
7. An important step, certainly not the last priority, is the setting up of a gay support system. Participating in a gay, lesbian, bisexual support group can help prepare you for disclosure to significant others in your life. It can also provide you with support and understanding during and after the disclosure. If this type of group is not available to you, having supportive friends, teachers, relatives, etc. is also a good source of support for the coming out process.

Coming out in our society is an endless process and being proud of being LGBTQ requires constant affirmation of self.

## Guidelines for Positive Interactions with LGBTQ People

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1. Check into your feelings values, beliefs, and thinking about LGBTQ issues and people.
2. Educate yourself about homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender issues.
3. Talk with LGBTQ people and with those who support them.

4. Identify community resources.
5. Provide a supportive atmosphere for those who are or think they may be LGBTQ. Have LGBTQ books or periodicals in view.
6. Avoid language (forms) that implies that all people are heterosexual and either “single, married, or divorced.”
7. Advocate and participate in educational programs for your staff, so that LGBTQ people receive service without prejudice and with the empathy and warmth deserved by all.
8. Remember that other workers at your workplace – or family members of workers - may be LGBTQ.
9. Remember that people do not choose to have “gay” feelings; People choose whether to act on their feelings. Note that “sexual orientation” is a term preferred in the lesbian or gay community, instead of “sexual preference” or “choice.”
10. Remember that societal oppression and discrimination create much of the unhappiness of many LGBTQ people.
11. Remember that one’s experience as a member of the LGBTQ community varies depending on their gender identity, gender presentation, race, socioeconomic status, and resources.
12. Remember that stereotypical “gay” behavior or appearance does not mean that a person evidencing that behavior or appearance is necessarily “gay.”
13. Help people to help themselves by increasing their sense of self-worth, self-acceptance, self-reliance so they can take charge of their own lives and integrate their feeling, thinking, and behavior in a positive way.
14. Know when your skills and knowledge reach their limit. Refer people elsewhere when they need help that you cannot effectively supply.
15. Know when and negative feelings you may have toward LGBTQ people men prevent you from offering unprejudiced help. If you cannot change your feelings, refer elsewhere.
16. Acquaint yourself particularly with LGBTQ networks in your area so you can inform people of these resources.
17. Help work for the human and civil rights of LGBTQ people in order to create a more positive environment for everyone.

# Interacting With Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender People

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**DON'T:** Assume that everyone is either homosexual or heterosexual.

**DO:** Assume everyone is a sexual person who may be attracted to and/or sexually or romantically involved with a partner of the same or opposite sex. Attraction and/or involvement fall along a continuum for everyone, which can vary over time.

**DON'T:** Assume that a lesbian, gay, or bisexual person's sexuality is the most important aspect of that person.

**DO:** Assume that everyone is a multi-faceted individual for who sexuality is one aspect of his/her life among many.

**DON'T:** Assume that sexual orientation or gender identity is the cause of a problem in the person's life. "He's depressed all the time because he's gay."

**DO:** Assume that LGBTQ people have the same problems as everyone else. They are just as likely to be well adjusted, and just as likely to have difficulty coping with stresses in their lives. Because of discrimination, they have to deal with particular stresses.

**DON'T:** Assume that being gay in our society is so hard and presents so many problems that you should feel sorry for LGBTQ people and/or assume that they would all really rather be heterosexual.

**DO:** Assume that a same-sex erotic and romantic orientation is as legitimate as an opposite-sex orientation.

**DON'T:** Assume that being LGBTQ "doesn't matter." They are the same as everybody else, and I treat everyone the same.

**DO:** Assume the experience of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual in a homophobic and heterosexist society has a profound effect on how that person views him/herself and how she/he experiences the world.

## LGBTQ-Inclusive Assumptions: Interacting with People Whose Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity Is Unknown To You

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**DON'T:** Assume all mothers/fathers are heterosexual.

**DO:** Assume that a parent might be heterosexual or a lesbian or gay man.

**DON'T:** Assume that all married women/men are heterosexual.

**DO:** Assume that a person who is married might have gay/lesbian feelings, might or have been involved in a gay/lesbian relationship.

**DON'T:** Assume when interacting with a “single” adult, that the person’s only “family members” are parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.

**DO:** Assume that any “single” person might be involved in a life-long committed relationship with a same sex partner who is as much a “family member” as a husband or wife.

**DON'T:** Assume that all children live in families consisting of the kid and a male-female couple or the kid and a single parent.

**DO:** Assume any kid might live in a family consisting of the kid and a single parent, the kid and an opposite-sex couple, or the kid and a same-sex couple.

**DON'T:** Assume the everyone will find male-female sexually suggestive imagery erotic, or that everyone will find banter about male-female sexual intrigue funny or playful.

**DO:** Assume that in any group of people, it is highly likely that there is at least one person who is much more interested in same-sex imagery and intrigue.

**DON'T:** Assume that the term “women” refers only to heterosexual women, and that the term “men” refers only to heterosexual men.

**DO:** Include lesbians in your use of the generic “women” and gay men in your use of the generic “men,” for example in a discussion of women’s sexuality include relating with same-sex and opposite-sex partners, or in a list of organizations for fathers include groups for gay fathers.

## Suggestions for Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students

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From PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

1. Respect confidentiality. It is imperative that you can be trusted.
2. Be informed. Most of us are products of a homophobic society. It is important that you are aware of the needs of LGBTQ students.
3. Examine your own biases. If you are uncomfortable with dealing with the issue, and know that you are unable to be open and accepting, you need to refer the student to someone else.
4. Know when and where to seek help. Become familiar with available resources.
5. Maintain a balanced perspective. Sexual thoughts and feelings are only a small (but important) part of a person’s self.
6. Be aware that you can be helpful by just listening and allowing LGBTQ students the opportunity to vent feelings.
7. Be supportive. Share with them that this is an issue that others must deal with, too.

8. Don't try to guess who identify as a member of the LGBTQ community.
9. Challenge bigoted remarks and jokes. This shows support.

## When to Refer an LGBTQ Student to a Mental Health Professional

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Most of the students you will encounter are seeking support, advice, or information. Occasionally, you may see a student who is experiencing psychological distress. This may be evident in the following:

1. When a student states they are no longer able to function in their normal capacity within their classes; when they have seen a drop in grades or academic performance.
2. When a student can no longer cope with their day to day activities and responsibilities. A student may state they are no longer going to classes or they have been late for their job and may be fired soon if this continues.
3. A student expresses depressive symptoms such as: sleep disturbance, sudden weight loss or weight gain, crying spells, fatigue, loss of interest or pleasure in previous enjoyable activities, and/or inability to concentrate or complete tasks.
4. A student expresses sever anxiety symptoms such as: feelings of panic, shortness of breath, headaches, sweaty palms, dry mouth, or racing thoughts.
5. A student expresses suicidal thoughts or feelings.
6. A student has no support. They have no friends or have no friends with whom they can talk about their sexual orientation. This person may not need counseling, but could benefit from a support group and the Counseling Center can make that assessment and referral.
7. A good guideline to use if all else fails: If you are feeling overwhelmed or worried about a student, refer them to a mental health professional!

# Harassment

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## **Reporting Harassment: Secondary Victimization**

(by Gregory M. Herek)

An LGBTQ crime survivor may experience increased discrimination or stigma from others who have learned about his or her sexual orientation as a consequence of the victimization. Such secondary victimization, which may further intensify the negative psychological consequences of victimization, is often expressed explicitly by representatives of the criminal justice system, including police officers and judges. It also extends outside the criminal justice system. If their sexual orientation becomes publicly known as a result of a crime, for example, some lesbians and gay men risk loss of employment or child custody. Even in jurisdictions where statutory protection is available, many gay people fear that disclosure of their sexual orientation as a result of victimization will result in hostility, harassment, and rejection from others. Secondary victimization may be experienced as an additional assault on one's identity and community, and thus an added source of stress. The threat of secondary victimization often acts as a barrier to reporting a crime or seeking medical, psychological, or social services.

### **When a student informs you they have been harassed:**

**Step 1:** Ask the student if they are safe. Assess their situation regarding safety.

**Step 2:** Inform the student that you will protect their confidentiality to the best of your ability and will not tell anyone their name without their permission.

**Step 3:** If the student does not feel safe, immediately call the campus police and the LGBTQ advisor.

**Step 4:** Make sure identifying information regarding the student is not revealed while communicating the situation with other Safe Zone members.

### **Helpful suggestions:**

Do not handle the situation alone if at all possible. You could spend hours with the student on this issue. Try to refer the student to the LGBTQ Center, the Counseling Center, the Dean of Students, and/or the campus police.

When communicating with campus police do not expect or assume that they will be sensitive to the issues of LGBTQ students. In fact, it is likely the campus police have had little sensitivity training or exposure to LGBTQ students regarding reporting of harassment. Make sure that the person(s) assigned to your particular case understands that the identity of the student can not under any circumstances be revealed, without their permission, to the general public or media. Police reports need to be purged of all identifying information (name, address, phone, etc.) before it is released to the media and general public.

# Heterosexual Questionnaire

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(by Martin Rochlin, Ph.D.)

This questionnaire reverses the questions that are often asked of gays and lesbians by heterosexuals. By trying to answer this kind of question, one can gain some insight into how oppressive and discriminatory a “straight” frame of reference can be to lesbians and gays.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were heterosexual?
3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?
4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you’ve never slept with a person of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good lesbian/gay lover?
6. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies?
7. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Can’t you just be who you are and keep it quiet?
8. Why do you heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into your lifestyle?
9. Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing all the problems they would face?
10. A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexuals. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?
11. Even with all the societal support marriage receives, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?
12. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex?
13. Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual?
14. Could you trust a heterosexual therapist to be objective? Don’t you fear that the therapist might be inclined to influence you in the direction of her/his own learning?
15. How can you become a whole person if you limit yourself to compulsive, exclusive heterosexuality and fail to develop your natural, healthy, heterosexual potential?
16. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change your sexuality if you really want to. Have you ever considered aversion therapy?

# What Is Homophobia/Biphobia/Transphobia?

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Homophobia/biphobia/transphobia takes many different forms, including physical acts of hate, violence, verbal assault, vandalism or blatant discrimination such as firing an employee, evicting someone from their housing or denying them access to public accommodations. There are many other kinds of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and heterosexism that happen every day. We often overlook these more subtle actions and exclusions because they seem so insignificant by comparison. They are not.

- Looking at an LGBTQ person and automatically thinking of her/his sexuality or gender rather than seeing her/him as a whole, complex person.
- Failing to be supportive when your LGBTQ friend is sad about a quarrel or breakup.
- Changing your seat in a meeting because an LGBTQ person sat in the chair next to yours.
- Using the terms “lesbian” or “gay” as accusatory.
- Not asking about a woman’s female lover or a man’s male lover although you regularly ask “How is your husband/wife?” when you run into a heterosexual friend.
- Thinking that a lesbian (if you are female) or gay man (if you are male) is making sexual advances if she/he touches you.
- Feeling repulsed by public displays of affection between lesbians and gay men but accepting the same affectional displays between heterosexuals.
- Feeling that LGBTQ people are too outspoken about civil rights.
- Feeling that discussions about homophobia are not necessary since you are “okay” on these issues.
- Assuming that everyone you meet is heterosexual.
- Feeling that a lesbian is just a woman who couldn’t find a man or that a lesbian is a woman who wants to be a man.
- Feeling that a gay man is just a man who couldn’t find a woman or that a gay man is a man who wants to be a woman.
- Not confronting a homophobic remark for fear of being identified with or as LGBTQ.
- Worrying about the effect an LGBTQ volunteer/co-worker will have on your work or your clients.

- Asking your LGBTQ colleagues to speak about LGBTQ issues, but not about other issues about which they may be knowledgeable.
- Focusing exclusively on someone's sexual orientation and not on other issues of concern.
- Being afraid to ask questions about LGBTQ issues when you don't know the answers.

## How Homophobia Hurts Us All

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(By Warren J. Blumenfeld, *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)

You do not have to be LGBTQ - or know someone who is - to be negatively affected by homophobia. Though homophobia actively oppresses LGBTQ people, it also hurts heterosexuals.

### **Homophobia:**

1. Inhibits the ability of heterosexuals to form close, intimate relationships with members of their own sex, for fear of being perceived as LGBTQ;
2. Locks people into rigid gender-based roles that inhibit creativity and self expression;
3. Is often used to stigmatize heterosexuals; those perceived or labeled by others to be LGBTQ; children of LGBTQ parents; parents of LGBTQ children; and friends of LGBTQs.
4. Compromises human integrity by pressuring people to treat others badly, actions that are contrary to their basic humanity.
5. Combined with sex-phobia, results in the invisibility or erasure of LGBTQ lives and sexuality in school-based sex education discussions, keeping vital information from students. Such erasures can kill people in the age of AIDS.
6. Is one cause of premature sexual involvement, which increases the chances of teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove to themselves and others that they are "normal."
7. Prevents some LGBTQ people from developing an authentic self identity and adds to the pressure to marry, which in turn places undue stress and often times trauma on themselves as well as their heterosexual spouses, and their children.
8. Inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. We are all diminished when any one of us is demeaned.

By challenging homophobia, people are not only fighting oppression for specific groups of people, but are striving for a society that accepts and celebrates the differences in all of us.

# Homophobia in Clinical Terms

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In the clinical sense, homophobia is defined as an intense fear of same sex relationships that become overwhelming to the person. In common usage, homophobia is the fear of intimate relationships with person of the same sex. Below are listed four homophobic attitudes and four positive levels of attitudes toward gay and lesbian relationships and people. (developed by Dr. Dorothy Riddle of Tucson, Arizona)

## Homophobic levels of attitudes

**Repulsion:** Homosexuality is seen as a “crime against nature.” Gays are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. and anything is justified to change them (e.g. prison, hospitalization, negative behavior therapy including electric shock).

**Pity:** heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of becoming straight should be reinforced and those who seem to be born “that way” should be pitied, “the poor dears.”

**Tolerance:** Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people “grow out of.” Thus, gays are less mature than straights and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gays and lesbians should not be given positions of authority (because they are still working through adolescent behaviors).

**Acceptance:** Still implies there is something to “accept,” characterized by such statements as “you’re not a gay to me, you’re a person,” “What you do in bed is your own business,” “That’s fine as long as you don’t flaunt it.”

## Positive levels of attitudes

**Support:** Work to safeguard the rights of gays and lesbians. Such people may be uncomfortable themselves, but they are aware of the climate and the irrational unfairness.

**Admiration:** Acknowledges that being gay/lesbian in our society takes strength. Such people are willing to truly look at themselves and work on their own homophobic attitudes.

**Appreciation:** Value the diversity of people and see gays as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and in others.

**Nurturance:** Assume that gay and lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view gays and lesbians with affections and delight and are willing to be gay advocates.

# Personal Assessment of Homophobia

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(By A. Elfin Moses and Robert O. Hawkins, Jr.)

Homophobia may be defined as an unrealistic fear of or generalized negative attitude toward homosexual people, and may be expressed by LGBTQ people as well as by non-LGBTQ people.

1. Do you stop yourself from doing or saying certain things because someone might think you're gay or lesbian? If yes, what things?
2. Do you ever intentionally do or say things so that people will think you're non-gay?
3. Do you believe that gays or lesbians can influence others to become homosexual? Do you think someone could influence you to change your sexual and affectional preference?
4. If you are a parent, how would you (or do you) feel about having a lesbian daughter or a gay son?
5. How do you think you would feel if you discovered that one of your parents or parent figures, or a brother or sister, were gay or lesbian?
6. Are there any jobs, positions, or professions that you think lesbians and gays should be barred from holding or entering? If yes, why?
7. Would you go to a physician whom you knew or believed to be gay or lesbian if that person were of a different gender from you? If that person were of the same gender as you? If not, why not?
8. If someone you care about were to say to you, "I think I'm gay," would you suggest that the person see a therapist?
9. Have you ever been to a gay or lesbian bar, social club, or march? If not, why not?
10. Would you wear a button that says, "How dare you presume I'm heterosexual?" If not, why not?
11. Can you think of three positive aspects of a gay or lesbian lifestyle? Can you think of three negative aspects of a non-gay lifestyle?
12. Have you ever laughed at a "queer" joke?

## Suggestions for Creating a Non-Homophobic Campus Environment

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(Adapted by Buhrke & Douce, 1991)

Object to and eliminate jokes and humor that put down or portray LGBTQ people in stereotypical ways.

Counter statements about sexual orientation or gender identity that are not relevant to decisions or evaluations being made about faculty, staff, or students.

Invite “out” professionals to conduct seminars and provide guest lectures in your classes and offices. Invite them for both LGBTQ topics and other topics of their expertise.

Do not force LGBTQ people out of the closet nor come out for them to others. The process of coming out is one of enlarging a series of concentric circles of those who know. Initially the process should be in control of the individual until (and if) they consider it public knowledge.

Don’t include sexual orientation information in letters of reference or answer specific or implied questions without first clarifying how “out” the person chooses to be in the specific process in question. Because your environment may be safe does not mean that all environments are safe.

Recruit and hire “out” LGBTQ staff and faculty. View sexual orientation as a positive form of diversity that is desired in a multicultural setting. Always question job applicants about their ability to work with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students.

Do not refer all LGBTQ issues to LGBTQ staff/faculty. Do not assume their only expertise is LGBTQ issues. Check with staff about their willingness to consult on LGBTQ issues with other staff members.

Be sensitive to issues of oppression and appreciate the strength and struggle it takes to establish a positive LGBTQ identity. Provide nurturing support to colleagues and students in phases of that process.

Be prepared. If you truly establish a safe and supportive environment, people that you never thought of will begin to share their personal lives and come out in varying degrees. Secretaries, maintenance personnel, former students, and professional colleagues will respond to the new atmosphere.

View the creation of this environment as a departmental or agency responsibility, not the responsibility of individual persons who happen to be LGBTQ. Always waiting for them to speak, challenge, or act, adds an extra level of responsibility to someone who is already dealing with oppression on many levels.

## Being An Ally For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People

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These are some guidelines for people wanting to be allies for LGBTQ people. In today’s world, LGBTQ issues are being discussed more than ever before. The discussions taking place in the homes are often highly charged and emotional. This can be a scary topic and confusing to people on a very personal level. Being an ally is important but it can be challenging as well as exciting. This list is by no means exhaustive, but provides a starting point. Add your own ideas and suggestions.

**Don’t assume heterosexuality.** In our society, we generally assume that everyone we meet is heterosexual. Often people hide who they really are until they know they are safe to come ‘out’.

**Use gender neutral language** when referring to someone's partner if you don't know the person well. In general, be aware of the gender language you use and the implications this language might have.

**Educate yourself** about LGBTQ issues. There are many resources available, reading lists and places to go for information. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

**Explore ways** to creatively integrate LGBTQ issues in your work. Establishing dialogue and educating about LGBTQ issues in the context of your other work can be a valuable process for everyone regardless of sexual orientation. Integration of LGBTQ issues into work you are doing instead of separating it out as a separate topic is an important strategy to establishing a safe place for people to talk about many issues in their lives.

**Challenge stereotypes** that people may have about LGBTQ as well as other people in our society. Challenge derogatory remarks and jokes made about any group of people. Avoid making those remarks yourself. Avoid reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices.

**Examine the effect** sexual orientation has on people's lives and development. Identify how race, religion, class, ability and gender intersect with sexual orientation and how multiple identities shape our lives.

**Avoid** the use of heterosexist language, such as making remarks implying that all people of the same gender date or marry members of the other gender.

**Respect** how people choose to name themselves. Most people with a same sex or bisexual orientation prefer to be called gay, lesbian or bisexual rather than homosexual. 'Queer' is increasingly used by some gay, lesbian or bisexual people (especially in the younger generations), but don't use it unless you are clear that it is okay with that person. If you don't know how to identify a particular group, it's okay to ask. Don't expect members of any population that is a target of bias (e.g. gays, Jews, people of color, women, people with disabilities) to always be the 'experts' on issues pertaining to their particular identity group.

**Avoid tokenizing** or patronizing individuals from different groups.

**Encourage and allow disagreement** on topics of sexual identity and related civil rights. These issues are very highly charged and confusing. If there isn't some disagreement, it probably means that people are tuned out or hiding their real feelings. Keep disagreement and discussion focused on principles and issues rather than personalities and keep disagreement respectful.

**Remember that you are human.** Allow yourself to not know everything, to make mistakes and to occasionally be insensitive. Avoid setting yourself up as an 'expert' unless you are one. Give yourself time to learn the issues and ask questions and to explore your own personal feelings. Ask for support if you are getting harassed or problems are surfacing related to your raising issues around sexual orientation. Don't isolate yourself in these kinds of situations and try to identify your supporters. You may be labeled as gay, lesbian or bisexual, whether you are or not. Use this opportunity to deepen your understanding of the power of homophobia and heterosexism. Make sure you are safe.

**Prepare yourself** for a journey of change and growth that will come by exploring sexual identity issues, heterosexism and other issues of difference. This can be a painful, exciting and enlightening process and will help you to know yourself better. By learning and speaking out as an ally, you will be making the world a safer, more affirming place for all. Without knowing it, you may change or even save people's lives.