

Things You Should Know as an Ally:

Four Basic Levels of Being an Ally

1. **Awareness:** Explore how you are different from and similar to GLBTQ+ people. Gain this awareness through talking with GLBTQ+ people, attending workshops and self-examination.
2. **Knowledge/Education:** Begin to understand policies, laws and practices and how they affect GLBTQ+ people. Educate yourself on the many GLBTQ+ communities and cultures.
3. **Skills:** This is an area that can be difficult for many people. You must learn to take your awareness and knowledge and communicate it to others. You can acquire these skills by attending workshops, role-playing with friends or peers, and developing support connections.
1. **Action:** This is the most important and frightening step. Despite the fear, action is the only way to effect change in the society as a whole.

(GMU Safe Zone Manual)

5 WAYS TO END HETEROSEXISM

Heterosexism is the hatred or discrimination of people who are not heterosexual.

1. When you meet somebody, don't assume that you know their sexual orientation.
2. Don't use gay as a synonym for stupid or bad.
3. Pay attention to how queer people are treated around the world, and speak up against mistreatment.
4. When people make homophobic comments, ask them to stop even if you aren't offended.
5. Don't act offended if people think you're queer.



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Five Other Points to Keep in Mind

1. Have a good understanding of sexual orientation/gender identity/gender expression and be comfortable with your own.
2. Be aware of the coming-out process and realize that it is not a one-time event. The coming-out process is unique to GLBTQ+ people and brings challenges that are not often understood.
3. Understand that GLBTQ+ people receive the same messages about sexuality and gender identity as everyone else. Thus GLBTQ+ people can suffer from internalized homophobia/heterosexism/transphobia/cis-centrism. It is important to recognize the risks of coming out and to challenge the internal oppression.
4. Remember that GLBTQ+ people are a diverse group. Each community within the larger GLBTQ+ community has unique needs and goals.
5. Know at least basic information about AIDS/HIV in order to address myths and misinformation and to be supportive of those affected by this disease whether in themselves or in partners and friends. While AIDS/HIV is a health issue for all, those who live with the most fear and have lost the most members of their community are GLBTQ+ persons.

Suggestions for Reducing Homophobia and Transphobia

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.

Don't assume heterosexuality/cisgender. In our society, we generally assume that everyone we meet is heterosexual and typically "male/female". 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 of this language.

Educate yourself about GLBTQ+ issues. There are many resources available, reading lists and places to go for information. Don't be afraid to ask questions, but don't put the burden entirely on GLBTQ+ people to educate you – do some research.

Support, normalize and validate a person's feelings about their sexuality/gender/gender expression. Let them know that you are there for them. If you cannot be supportive, please refer to someone who can be. Then work on your own biases by reading, learning and talking to people comfortable with this issue.

Do not advise anyone to come out to parents, family, and friends as they need to come out at their own safe pace. Many LGBTQ+ youth are forced to leave their home after they tell their parents. IT IS THEIR DECISION and they have to live with the consequences. Help them figure out what makes sense for them.

Guarantee confidentiality with students. Students need to know their privacy will be respected or they will not be honest about this important issue. If you cannot maintain confidentiality for legal reasons, let students know this in advance.

Challenge homophobia/transphobia. As a role model for your students, respond to homophobia/transphobia immediately and sincerely. Encourage in-service trainings for staff and students on homophobia/transphobia and their impact on LGBTQ+ youth.

Have something LGBTQ+-related visible in your office--a sticker, a poster, a flyer, a brochure, a book, a button. This will identify you as a safe person to talk to and will

hopefully allow an LGBTQ+ student to feel comfortable and welcome. SAFE ZONE campaign stickers and resources can provide this visibility.

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.

Combat heterosexual/cisgender-centrism in your classroom. Include visibly LGBTQ+ role models in your classroom.

Examine the effect sexual orientation/gender identity/gender expression 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/binary language – say things like “audience members” or “students” or “folks” or “guests” instead of “ladies and gentlemen”.

Respect how people choose to name themselves. Labels can be fraught/changing – listen to what people call themselves and respect it. If you make a mistake in a pronoun or how someone sees/labels (or IF they label) themselves, apologize and move on.

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.

Encourage school administrators to adopt and enforce anti-discrimination policies for their schools or school systems which include sexual orientation. The language should be included in all written materials next to race, sex, religion, etc.

Learn about and refer to community organizations. Familiarize yourself with resources and call them before you refer to make sure they are ongoing. Also, become aware of LGBTQ+-themed bibliographies and refer to students to LGBTQ+-positive books.

Provide role models. LGBTQ+ and cisgender/heterosexual students benefit from having openly gay teachers, coaches and administration. Cis/het students are given an alternative to the inaccurate stereotypes they have heard and LGBTQ+ students are provided with the opportunity to see healthy LGBTQ+ adults.

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 LGBTQ+ whether you are or not. Use this opportunity to deepen your understanding of the power of homophobia and heterosexism. Make sure you and others 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.