

Ally Situations*

What could do if you're sitting with a group of friends, and a couple of them make an obnoxious comment about gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transgender persons?

- Ignore it
- Refuse to laugh
- Casually leave
- Use “soft” confrontation and tell them it’s not funny or nice – *“Please don’t say things like that. I don’t think it is funny.”*
- Offer information to give a different (more accurate) perspective – *“Well, actually gay people choose a variety of professions, just like straight people.”*
- Tell them your feelings/attitudes about gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders – *“My experience with LGBT individuals is positive.”*
- Ask them not to make such comments you – *“I find those type of comments offensive, please don’t say them in my presence.”*

What’s hard about some of these responses?

- Could be ridiculed
- They might get mad at you
- Friends might get mad at you
- Create an awkward situation

What’s the trade-off? What will you gain if you confront them?

- Gain self-respect
- Gain respect from friends
- Support a closeted gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person in group
- Model acceptance of differences for friends
- Increase your sense of personal integrity

What could do if a friend tells you a “rumor” that a peer or colleague is supposedly gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered?

- Ignore her/him
- Tell him/her you couldn’t care less
- Tell her/him it doesn’t matter to you if s/he is LGBT
- Tell him/her its harmful to pass on such information
- Say that if she/he is gay, that’s its her/his right to come out only to people if she/he wants to and they have no right to violate that trust.
- Ask him/her not to tell anyone else
- Talk about the abuse LGBT persons can experience from those who are ignorant

When a LGBT person comes out to you, try to be aware that:

- The LGBT person is apt to have spent many hours in thoughtful preparation and shares the information with keen awareness of the possible risk.
- There is no way for the LGBT person to predict your reaction accurately. The LGBT person has no way of knowing in advance if you will be able to shed years of heterosexist and/or homophobic training. Such an intimate offering of self is a gift to be handled with caring and gentle hands.
- It is important to understand that the LGBT person has not changed. You may be shocked by their revelation, but remember this is still the same person as before. Don't let the shock lead you to view the LGBT person as suddenly different or that they have somehow deceived you by not telling you sooner. You now know that this person can love someone of the same gender completely—you have no reason to believe suddenly that this person is morally depraved, emotionally unbalanced, or lacking in integrity.
- Don't ask questions that would have been considered rude within the relationship before this disclosure. This person has the same sensibilities as before. However, you may well need to do some "catching up" Some common questions are:
 1. How long have you known you are...? (Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender)?
 2. Is there someone special in your life?
 3. Has it been hard for you carrying this secret?
 4. Is there some way I can help you?
 5. Have I ever offended you unknowingly?
- Be honest and open about your feelings. It makes the sharing more complete and makes change possible. If you find it hard to believe, say so. If you find you are reacting with emotional repugnance but want to learn more so you can throw off your prejudice, say so. If your feelings are totally negative, you can say that too. It is a possibility that the gay person has certainly considered this risk. But in fairness to yourself, admit aloud that negative feelings may change, so that the door might be open for you to return if you are able to get past your training. LGBT people are accustomed to hurt, but with someone close the rejections may hurt too much and they may have to get away.

Overcoming your homophobic reaction

You may well be tempted to break the bond you have with this LGBT person. Though he or she has not changed, the information now confronts you and your homophobic training. A conflict may be inevitable. Just as some people develop specific phobias (heights, snakes, deep water, etc.) many people take in the antigay messages of the culture and develop homophobia. It is a disability like others phobias and you can get help with it through psychotherapy, provided the therapist does not share your phobia. But just as the person who is phobic about deepwater may be unaware of anything more than a discomfort in the presence of gay people and the desire to avoid them. If you are prone to homophobia, you will be strongly tempted to rid yourself of this previously valued relationship by quick rupture or (if that induces too much guilt in you) by a slow undermining of the relationship. If you see the symptoms and want help, try to find a

gay-oriented psychotherapist. Don't risk unknowingly working with a counselor who shares your homophobia. If you destroy the relationship, chances are the gay person will be hurt, but survive, having been preparing through life for such a reaction on your part.

If your homophobia is of the very mild variety (like the person who can take the elevator up twenty stories but does not want to visit the tallest building in the city) you can get help from reading and from making social contacts with more gay people. Prejudice thrives on the lack of contradictory information. Integration destroys stereotypes. The more LGBT people you meet, the better the chances of ridding yourself of mild homophobia.

Create a safe coming out environment

If you know or suspect that someone you know is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered and have not yet been told, appreciate the fear and anxiety that inhibits the disclosure. All you can do, usually is to make it openly known that you support LGBT people. Actions speak louder than word, however. LGBT friends and LGBT-oriented reading materials in your home do more than announcements of pro-LGBT feelings, which can sound phony.

--From Loving Someone Gay, by Don Clark.

*Adapted from: Cleveland State University, Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs Website.