

## Guidelines to Being an Ally\*

These are some guidelines for people desiring to be allies for the LGBTQ+ community. In today's world, LGBTQ+ issues are being discussed more than ever before. The discussions taking place in the media, in classrooms, in churches, in offices, on the streets and in people's homes are often highly charged and emotional. This 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 heteronormativity and cisnormativity.** In our society, we generally assume that everyone we meet is heterosexual and cisgender. Often people hide who they really are until they know they are safe to "come out". Use **gender-neutral language** when referring to someone or their 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. Ask for a person's pronouns when you are first meeting them, provide your pronouns as well. Also, don't assume the sexual orientation of transgender individuals.
- Don't wait for someone else to confront inappropriate behavior. **Be brave!**
- **Educate yourself about LGBTQ+ issues.** The LGBTQ Resource Center has a [Lending Library](#) of books and DVDs for students, staff, and faculty. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- When speaking about sexuality and gender, present all sexualities and gender identities as equally valid.
- **Creatively integrate LGBTQ+ issues in your work.** Establishing dialogue and educating about LGBTQ issues in the context of your other interests can be a valuable process for everyone. Integration of LGBTQ issues into work you are doing instead of separating it out 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+ individuals 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, myths and prejudices. Take risks. Show your LGBTQ+ support.
- Be aware of how you react when sexuality is the topic. **Do you try to avoid being identified as LGBTQ+?**
- **Examine the effect sexual orientation and gender** have on people's lives and development. Identify how race, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, gender identity, and immigration status intersect with sexual orientation and how multiple identities shape our lives.
- What does your office look like? Is there anything that might make someone uncomfortable or feel you are untrustworthy?
- Don't assume people who support LGBTQ+ issues are LGBTQ+.
- **Avoid the use of heterosexist language**, such as making remarks implying that all people in the gender binary date or marry members of the opposite gender. Respect how people choose to name themselves. Most people that are not heterosexual prefer to be called gay, lesbian or bi/pansexual people rather than homosexual. 'Queer' is becoming most acceptable, 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 person or group, it's okay to ask.
- Respect the need for **privacy** of the people you know are LGBTQ+.

- **Don't expect members of any population that is the target of bias** (e.g. gays, Jews, people of color, women, people with disabilities) to always be the experts pertaining to their particular identify group. Avoid tokenizing or patronizing individuals from different groups.
- **Encourage and allow disagreement** on topics of sexual and gender identify and related civil rights. These issues are very highly charged and confusing. 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. Explore your own personal feelings. If you think you have no prejudices, it might be a good idea to spend some time reflecting on that issue. To be human is to have prejudices. Recognizing our own bias is the first step in addressing them.
- **Ask for support** if you are getting harassed or problems are surfacing related to you raising issues around sexual orientation and gender identity. 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, transphobia, heterosexism, and cissexism. Make sure you are safe.
- **Don't be discouraged when change does not happen overnight.** The homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism, and cissexism throughout the world are the result of hundreds of years of misunderstanding and fear. You may feel that once you come to truly understand the issues, the rest of the world will immediately follow suit. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Take time to celebrate the small victories along the way. They each make a difference.
- Do not patronize companies that support anti-gay legislation.

\*Adapted from: Cleveland state university, office of Diversity and Multicultural affairs website

### Glossary

**Cisnormativity:** the assumption that a person's gender identity matches their biological sex, otherwise known as being cisgender.

**Cissexism:** belief or assumption that cis people's gender identities, expressions, and embodiments are more natural and legitimate than those of trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people.

**Gender binary:** is the classification of gender into two distinct, opposite forms of masculine and feminine.

**Heteronormativity:** is the belief that heterosexuality, predicated on the gender binary, is the norm or default sexual orientation. It assumes that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of opposite sex

**Heterosexism:** discrimination or prejudice against sexual minorities on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.

**Homophobia:** dislike or prejudice against homosexual people.

**LGBTQIA+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual

**Transphobia:** prejudice or discrimination against transgender individuals.