Ally Resources
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What is my part as an Ally?

What is an Ally?

An ally is an individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly.

As defined in our session:
Ally: A person who supports and honors LBGT individuals, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic, heterosexist, biphobic, transphobic and genderist remarks and behaviors, and is willing to explore and understand various sexual and gender identities.

Being Visible

One of the most important parts of being an ally to LGBT students is making yourself known as an ally. In order to come to you for help, students need to be able to recognize you as an ally. Even if students don’t come to you directly, research shows that just knowing that there is a supportive educator at school can help LGBT students feel better about being in school. Making yourself visible can be as simple task of displaying a sticker. It can also be as involved as demonstrating and modeling supportive behaviors. Below you will find some suggestions of how to be a visible ally to LGBT students.

MAKE YOUR SPACE VISIBLE
Make your classroom or office visible as a safe space for LGBT students. This will help students identify you as someone to come to for support and your space as one where they will be safe.

Post Safe Space materials. Display Safe Space stickers or posters in your classroom or office. This will let students know that it is a safe space and that you are supportive of LGBT students.
Display LGBT supportive materials.
Post supportive materials such as quotes from famous LGBT icons, information about the LGBT community or materials from LGBT organizations. Along with signs for national holidays and months of celebration already in the classroom (e.g., Black History Month or Women’s History Month), display information about LGBT History Month in October, LGBT Pride Month in June or Ally Week in October.

MAKE YOURSELF VISIBLE
Making yourself visible, as an ally will allow students to easily identify you as a supportive educator.

Wear a visible marker. Wear a supportive button or wristband or even a simple rainbow bracelet. These will let students know that you are a supportive ally without saying a word.

LET YOUR ACTIONS SPEAK FOR YOU
Sometimes your actions can speak louder than any button or poster. Here are simple actions you can take that will let staff and students know you are an ally.

(Taken from GLSEN, Gay Lesbian, Straight Education Network-Safe Space Kit, www.glse.org, 2009)
An Ally’s role in the coming out process…

Supporting Students When They Come Out to You

As an ally, LGBT students may come to you for support, comfort or guidance. You may encounter a situation where a student comes out or reveals their sexual orientation or gender identity to you. You may be the first or only person an LGBT student comes out to. It is important that you support the student in a constructive way. Keep in mind that the student may be completely comfortable with their sexual orientation and may not need help dealing with it or may not be in need of any support. It may be that the student just wanted to tell someone, or just simply to tell you so you might know them better. Below you will find more information on the coming out process and how you can be a supportive ally when students come out to you.

WHAT DOES “COMING OUT” MEAN?

Simply put, coming out is a means to publicly declare one’s identity, whether to a person in private or a group of people. In our society most people are generally presumed to be heterosexual, so there is usually no need for a heterosexual person to make a statement to others that discloses their sexual orientation. Similarly, most people feel that their current gender is aligned with their sex assigned at birth, therefore never having a need to disclose one’s gender identity. However, a person who is LGBT must decide whether or not to reveal to others their sexual orientation or gender identity. To come out is to take a risk by sharing one’s identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. The actual act of coming out can be as simple as saying “I’m gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender,” but it can be a difficult and emotional process for an LGBT student to go through, which is why it is so important for a student to have support. One positive aspect of coming out is not having to hide who you are anymore. However, there can be
dangers that come with revealing yourself. A student who comes out may be open to more anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment, yet they may also feel more comfortable and free to be themselves. One of the most important things you as an ally can do for an LGBT student is to be there for them in a safe, respectful and helpful way.

When a Student Comes Out to You…

When a student comes out to you and tells you they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) your initial response is important. The student has likely spent time in advance thinking about whether or not to tell you, and when and how to tell you. Here are some tips to help you support them.

**Offer support but don’t assume a student needs any help.** The student may be completely comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity and may not need help dealing with it or be in need of any support. It may be that the student just wanted to tell someone, or just simply to tell you so you might know them better. Offer and be available to support your students as they come out to others.

**Be a role model of acceptance.** Always model good behavior by using inclusive language and setting an accepting environment by not making assumptions about people’s sexual orientation or gender identity, and by addressing other’s (adults and students) biased language and addressing stereotypes and myths about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. By demonstrating that you are respectful of LGBT people and intolerant of homophobia and transphobia, LGBT students are more likely to see you as a supportive educator.

**Appreciate the student’s courage.** There is often a risk in telling someone something personal, especially sharing for the first time one’s sexual orientation or gender identity, when it is generally not considered the norm. Consider someone’s coming out a gift and thank them for giving that gift to you. Sharing this personal information with you means that the student respects and trusts you.

**Listen, listen, listen.** One of the best ways to support a student is to hear them out and let the student know you are there to listen. Coming out is a long
process, and chances are you’ll be approached again to discuss this process, the challenges and the joys of being out at school.

**Assure and respect confidentiality.** The student told you and may or may not be ready to tell others. Let the student know that the conversation is confidential and that you won’t share the information with anyone else, unless they ask for your help.

If they want others to know, doing it in their own way with their own timing is important. Respect their privacy.

**Ask questions that demonstrate understanding, acceptance and compassion.** Some suggestions are:

- Have you been able to tell anyone else?
- Has this been a secret you have had to keep from others or have you told other people?
- Do you feel safe in school? Supported by the adults in your life?
- Do you need any help of any kind?
- Resources or someone to listen?
- Have I ever offended you unknowingly?

(Taken from GLSEN, Gay Lesbian, Straight Education Network-Safe Space Kit, [www.glse.org](http://www.glse.org), 2009)
Definitions used in Training.

**Lesbian** [refers to a woman who has significant sexual and or romantic attractions to other women, or who identifies as a member of the lesbian community. Bisexual women may not feel included by this term.]

**Gay** [refers to a man who has significant sexual and or romantic attractions to other men, or who identifies as a member of the gay community. At times, “gay” is used to refer to all people, regardless of sex, who have their primary sexual and or romantic attractions to people of the same sex. Lesbians and bisexuals may feel excluded by this word. So for all intents and purposes, we only use gay when referring to men.]

**Bisexual** - As a noun, an individual who may be attracted to both sexes. As an adjective of or relating to sexual and affectional attraction to both sexes. Does not presume non-monogamy.

**Transgender** - An “umbrella term” for someone whose self-identification challenges traditional societal definitions of male and female with regards to appearance, manner, or behavior. Transgender people include transsexuals and others who do not conform to traditional gender boundaries or consider

**Sexual Orientation** –is a pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, both genders, neither gender, or another gender.

**Queer** - Originally a pejorative term for gay, now being reclaimed by some gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people as a self-affirming umbrella term. Still extremely offensive when used as an epithet.

**Closeted** (in the closet) – Refers to a person who wishes to keep secret his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Lifestyle** – An inaccurate term sometimes used to describe the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Sexual orientation may be part of a broader lifestyle, but is not one in itself, just as there is no “straight” lifestyle. Avoid.

**Homophobia** – Fear, hatred or dislike of homosexuality, gay men and lesbians.
**Heterosexism** – Presumption that heterosexuality is universal and/or superior to homosexuality. Also: prejudice, bias or discrimination based on such presumptions.

**Sex** - The biological assignment of “male” or “female” based upon the genitalia that an individual possesses at birth. The biological sexes are commonly seen as mutually exclusive, and it is often believed that a person’s sex should dictate their gender expression (those born with “male” genitalia should behave in a masculine way and those born with “female” genitalia should behave in a feminine way).

**Gender Identity** – An individual’s emotional and psychological sense of being male or female. Not necessarily the same as an individual’s biological identity.

**Gender Role**, which is defined as social and perceived expectations of gender acts or expressions.

**Partner** - a person with whom one shares an intimate relationship : one member of a couple
Common Misconceptions

**Gay** and Lesbian Myths | News | BET.com


**Gay Stereotypes**

http://gaylife.about.com/od/amiga1/a/gaymyths.htm
http://gaylife.about.com/od/bisexual/a/biman.htm

**Queer Resources:**

Local queer resources

http://queerhumboldt.com/resources/locallinks.htm

National queer resources

http://www.thetaskforce.org/
http://www.genderblind.org/
http://www.gaycenter.org/transgenderbasics
http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/trans.html#terms