

What Can I Do?: Ideas for Allies

A Starter List of Things You Can Do to Be Supportive, Confront Homophobia, and Resist Heterosexism

1. Refuse to tolerate anti-lesbian, -gay, -bisexual or -trans comments, attitudes, remarks or jokes.
2. Ask others that any anti-lesbian, -gay, -bisexual or -trans humor displayed in common areas be removed completely or placed within private office or living spaces.
3. Report all harassment or discriminatory behavior to the appropriate officials.
4. Display positive materials in support of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans. If possible, post flyers on activities, support groups, programs, and resources for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans.
5. Have available referral information for services which people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans might need. Become familiar with resources, including literature, support groups, organizations, individuals, etc., in your area so you can refer people when appropriate.
6. Do not assume that everyone you meet is heterosexual.
7. Use inclusive, non-gender specific language that does not assume heterosexuality in others. Use inclusive language in conversation and also in written materials, policies, forms, etc.
8. Educate yourself on issues and concerns for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans. Take the initiative to obtain accurate information.
9. Attend events, meetings, or programs sponsored by or for people who are LGBTQ+ identified.
10. Gain insight by talking to people who are LGBTQ+. Learn from their experiences.
11. Maintain a balanced perspective. Don't assume that the sexual orientation of a person who is LGBTQ+ is the most important aspect of that person. Remember that everyone is a multi-faceted individual whose sexuality is only one part of their total life.
12. Don't assume that being LGBTQ+ is so hard and presents so many problems that you should feel sorry for people who are LGBTQ+. They have the same problems as anyone 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 prejudice and discrimination, however, they have to deal with some unique stressors.
13. Don't assume that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans doesn't matter; for example, thinking that "They're the same as everyone else and I treat all people the same." While everyone deserves to be treated equally, that is different from treating everyone the same. The experience of being lesbian, gay, or bisexual in a largely unaccepting society has a profound effect on how that person views himself or herself and how he or she experiences the world.
14. Respect confidentiality at all times. It is imperative that you can be trusted.
15. Examine your own biases and fears. You must explore your deepest feelings and beliefs concerning homosexuality. If you are uncomfortable with the issue, this will be communicated to others. Your ability to be open and accepting will be limited by unexamined beliefs and attitudes. Be willing to look at the areas with which you are uncomfortable. Be willing to talk about your doubts, fears, and uncertainties with others, so that you can address them.
16. Know your own limits. There may be times when an individual's needs or concerns are beyond your ability to help them. Know when you have reached the extent of your knowledge or patience and be prepared to seek out others with additional knowledge or expertise for assistance.
17. Don't be surprised when someone comes out to you.
18. Deal with feelings first. You can be helpful just by listening and providing someone a chance to talk about their feelings and their experience.
19. Provide positive reinforcement to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans to help counter the messages of shame and guilt about homosexuality that are so prevalent in society.

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20. Assume that in any setting (e.g. workplace, organization meeting, residence hall, etc.) there are people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual who are wondering how safe the environment is for them. Provide safety by making clear your support of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
21. Include LGBTQ+ issues and topics in training seminars, curricula, programming, professional development workshops, etc. when appropriate.
22. If people jump to the conclusion that you are lesbian, gay, or bisexual because you talk about LGBTQ+ topics, because you are friends with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, because you are reading a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender publication, or because you are being affectionate with someone of the same gender: resist your urge to deny it. Challenge yourself to resist seeing such an assumption as an accusation, or as something that must be denied. Challenge yourself not to immediately retreat into the security of your heterosexual identity and heterosexual privilege.
22. Remember that people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender come from widely diverse backgrounds with a wide range of experiences. Treat everyone as a unique individual.

Source: Northern Illinois University Safe Zone Ally Handbook Revised 7/15