

# how YOU can be an LGBTQ ally!

EVEN IF YOU ARE STRAIGHT

Adapted from and condensed for space:  
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/being-an-lgbtq-ally>

## WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU

For a lot of people, learning that a friend or loved one is LGBTQ can cause a lot of feelings, from confused to concerned, awkward to honored. It may be hard to know how to react, what to say, or how you can best be supportive.



## Having Conversations

Having conversations about this may feel strange at first, especially if this is new to you. It is normal to feel a little awkward, or to be a little afraid of saying the wrong thing or making it weird.

### Ask respectful questions to show you are interested:

- What was it like growing up?
- How did you know it was the right time to come out?
- What has the coming out process been like for you?
- How are you holding up?
- What can I do to support you?

### Be honest:

- Tell them that this is new for you — and if you feel awkward, say so.
- Ask them to be honest with you about what you say or do that may make them uncomfortable.
- Tell them if they do or say something that makes you uncomfortable. But at the same time, examine why you feel uncomfortable and see if that's a feeling you can change.
- Be as open and honest as you would like them to be with you.
- Tell them if you need a little time to process the information.

### Be reassuring:

- Explain to them that revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity has not changed how you feel about them, even if it takes a little while for you to digest what they have told you.
- Remind them that you still care for and respect them as much as you ever have, or more.

## "OUTING"

Most LGBTQ people prefer to come out in their own ways and in their own time. Unfortunately, an LGBTQ person's sexual orientation or gender identity may be exposed without their knowledge or consent. "Outing" takes the decision-making out of the individual's hands, which can be painful, awkward and even harmful for everyone involved. Showing your support, acceptance and respect for an LGBTQ person who has been outed can help the healing process and may help both of you build a stronger, more genuine relationship.

## DEALING WITH YOUR FEELINGS

Feeling confused or uncomfortable doesn't make you a bad person. It doesn't mean you are homophobic or transphobic. It DOES mean that you should take the time to work through your feelings fully and honestly so that you can support your friend or loved one without reservation.

It is important to remember that the person who came out to you is searching for support and acceptance. Before you begin to ask questions, it is essential that you make the other person feel that they made the right decision to come out to you. You might respond by saying, "Thank you for being honest" or "I appreciate your trust."

## SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

- Talk openly and honestly with your LGBTQ loved ones about their lives.
- Find opportunities to talk openly with your straight and/or cisgender friends about your LGBTQ friends and family and the issues they face.
- If you hear an anti-LGBTQ comment or joke, speak up and explain why such comments or jokes are harmful and offensive.
- Integrate inclusive language into your regular conversations.
- Get involved with pro-LGBTQ groups and campaigns and contact your elected officials about LGBTQ rights.
- Attend pride celebrations and other LGBTQ community events.
- Visit the website for PFLAG (formerly known as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), a national organization that unites parents, families and allies with people who are LGBTQ.
- Put a supportive symbol or sign in your home or on your vehicle. (For example, you could wear an LGBTQ ally button, add a rainbow sticker on your name badge at work, or put the Human Rights Campaign equal sign sticker on your car.)
- Post a message in support of LGBTQ issues on social media.
- Add your pronouns to your email signature or share your pronouns when introducing yourself to new friends or colleagues.
- Stand up for LGBTQ issues in every aspect of your life — even if there are no LGBTQ people there to see.

## SHOWING SUPPORT FOR DIFFERENT IDENTITIES

As no person is identical to any other, neither is any identity. While we have provided broad recommendations on ways to support LGBTQ people, we want to focus on a few of the often-marginalized parts of our community and provide examples of how you can better support them.

### LGBTQ People of Color

**1. No experience or journey is the same.** Queer people often have experience as part of multiple marginalized communities. To be an ally, take the time to listen to the experiences of marginalized people and help them to live openly and authentically.

**2. Support and advocate for our most marginalized communities.** The LGBTQ community will not achieve full equality as long as LGBTQ people of color face oppression and marginalization on the basis of race. Transgender women of color continue to face discrimination and violence simply for being who they are. Be an active and fierce advocate while still providing space for LGBTQ people of color to be heard.

**3. Embrace our leadership, share our stories and highlight our contributions.** To be an ally means listening to LGBTQ voices and respecting our understanding of our own identities. LGBTQ people have historically been ignored or subjected to ridicule in popular culture, so recognize and call out media that portrays LGBTQ people negatively or not at all. Most importantly, hire LGBTQ people of color, vote for them, buy their art and books, and continue to spotlight their voices.



**SPEAK UP FOR  
EQUALITY**

### Transgender and Non-Binary People

**1. Listen.** It is important to listen to transgender and non-binary people, especially when it comes to their own experiences. Even if you think you can't empathize, it is important to try your best to understand what your transgender and non-binary friends and loved ones are experiencing.

**2. Respect boundaries.** Learn and respect the boundaries of your transgender and non-binary friends and loved ones. Certain topics, such as someone's plans for surgery or about the name they used prior to their transition (often referred to as someone's dead name), should not be raised without them first initiating that conversation.

**3. Normalize pronouns.** It is important to normalize the use of your pronouns when you introduce yourself to others, follow up by asking for others' pronouns, and correct people when they use incorrect pronouns for someone else — even if that person is not in the room. We also recommend putting your pronouns in your email signature, on your nametag and other places where you introduce yourself in writing.

# Glossary of Terms

**AFAB** - Stands for “Assigned Female at Birth.” Used to describe someone whose sex was assigned as female when born, typically based on their external genitalia.

**AMAB** - Stands for “Assigned Male at Birth.” Used to describe someone whose sex was assigned as male when born, typically based on their external genitalia.

**Ally** - A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

**Asexual** - Describes a person who experiences little or no attraction to anyone, and/or does not experience desire for sexual contact.

**Biphobia** - The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to more than one gender.

**Bisexual** - A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. This is sometimes written as bisexual+ or bi+ to incorporate many non-monosexual identities, such as pansexual, fluid or queer.

**Cisgender** - A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Fluid** - A term people often use to describe their sexual orientation if their orientation changes with time, or if their orientation has the potential to change with time.

**Gay** - A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves.

**Gender-expansive** - Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.

**Gender expression** - External appearance of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

**Gender identity** - One’s innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. For more information on gender identity, visit the Human Rights Campaign's Transgender and Non-Binary Coming Out Resource: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-living-authentically-as-transgender-or-non-binary>

**Gender non-conforming** - A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

**Homophobia** - The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

**Intersex** - An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural biological variations that differ from those classically thought to be typical to either men or women. In some cases these traits are visible at birth, while in others they are not apparent until puberty. Some chromosomal variations of this type may not be physically apparent at all.

**Lesbian** - A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people use this term describe themselves.

**LGBTQ** - Stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer." Many people and organizations use "LGBTQ" as a catch-all term for the non-cisgender and non-straight community, but the acronym varies depending on culture and style. For example, some groups may add "I" for intersex.

**Monosexual** - Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of only one gender.

**Non-binary** - Describes a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. A non-binary person may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or completely outside these categories. While many non-binary people also identify as transgender, not all do.

**Pansexual** - Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

**Pronouns** - Any word that can replace a noun or noun phrase and refer specifically to people who are being talked about. Examples of pronouns an individual may use include She/Her/Hers, He/Him/His or They/ Them/Theirs. Some individuals use other less common gender-neutral pronouns, such as Xe/Hir/Hirs, or use no pronouns at all. The phrase "preferred pronouns" is no longer used, as it denotes that gender is a choice.

**Queer** - A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ movement.

**Sexual orientation** - An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.

**Transgender** - An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Do not use the term "transgendered," even as an adjective, as it is considered outdated and incorrect. Instead, use "transgender people," "transgender person," "trans people" or "trans person."

**Transition** - A process that some transgender and non-binary people go through when they decide to live as their true gender, rather than the one assigned to them at birth.

**Transphobia** - The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.