

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, or -bisexual comments, attitudes, remarks or jokes.
2. Ask others that any anti-lesbian, -gay, or -bisexual 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, or bisexual. If possible, post flyers on activities, support groups, programs, and resources for people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
5. Have available referral information for services which people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual 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, or bisexual. Take the initiative to obtain accurate information.
9. Attend events, meetings, or programs sponsored by or for people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
10. Gain insight by talking to people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Learn from their experiences.
11. Maintain a balanced perspective. Don't assume that the sexual orientation of a person who is lesbian, gay, or bisexual 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 lesbian, gay, or bisexual is so hard and presents so many problems that you should feel sorry for people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. 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, or bisexual 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.

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19. Provide positive reinforcement to people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual to help counter the messages of shame and guilt about homosexuality that are so prevalent in society.
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, or bisexual.
21. Include lesbian, gay, and bisexual 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 lesbian, gay, and bisexual topics, because you are friends with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, because you are reading a lesbian, gay, or bisexual 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, or bisexual 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

Just as lesbian, gay, and bisexual people may go through stages of "coming out," heterosexual people also experience changes in attitudes toward sexual minorities. Where are you in the process of becoming an ALLY?

1. Repulsion

Homosexuality is seen as a crime against nature. Gays/lesbians are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. Anything is justified to change them: prison, hospitalization, negative behavior therapy, violence, etc.

2. Pity

Heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of becoming "straight" should be reinforced, and those who seem to be born that way should be pitied.

3. Tolerance

Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people grow out of. Thus, gays/lesbians are less mature than heterosexuals and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gays and lesbians should not be given positions of authority because they are still working through their adolescent behavior.

4. Acceptance

Still implies there is something to accept. Characterized by such statements as "you're not a lesbian, you're a person" or "what you do is your own business" or "it's fine with me, just don't flaunt it".

5. Support

Work to safeguard the rights of lesbians and gays. People at this level may be uncomfortable themselves but they are aware of the homophobic climate and irrational unfairness.

6. Admiration

Acknowledges that being gay/lesbian in our society takes strength. People at this level are willing to truly examine their homophobic attitudes, values, and behaviors.

7. Appreciation

Value the diversity of people and see gays/lesbians as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and others.

8. Nurturance

Assumes that gay/lesbian people are indispensable in our society. They view gays/lesbians with genuine affection and delight, and are willing to be allies and advocates.