

How to be an Ally to LGBTQ Parents, Youth, and Colleagues

1. **Take time to understand your feelings** towards LGBTQ people. Explore the range of thoughts, ideas, emotions, and questions you have and be mindful as you interact with clients to separate any potential biases from your role as a professional.
2. **Commit to learning** more about LGBTQ people all the time. Even the most affirming, open-minded, and educated people have room to continually challenge themselves and grow with respect to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
3. **Have a zero tolerance policy** for heterosexist or homo/bi/transphobic comments, jokes, or gestures in your presence. **Speak out** against hateful language and remind others that what they might think of as harmless comments can actually have a significant, negative impact on LGBTQ people. In fact, homo/bi/transphobia affects *us all*. Words do matter.
4. **Don't assume** anyone's sexual orientation or gender identity. Be open, ask questions, and listen. Avoid putting people "into boxes" that do not work for them – create space for all people by using LGBTQ-inclusive and/or gender-neutral language.
5. **Take people seriously**. How people identify and express themselves is not a joke, and should be respected. Adhere to the pronouns, terms, names, and gender identification that people use for themselves.
6. **Include the experiences and identities of bisexual, transgender and queer people**. Sometimes in efforts to be LGBTQ-inclusive, people may really only address inclusion for lesbian and gay people. Look for ways that your agency may be inadvertently leaving bisexual, trans, or queer people out. Advocate for full LGBTQ inclusion.
7. **Recognize the full diversity of the LGBTQ community**. When media depicts the LGBTQ community (e.g., in television, film and in the news), LGBTQ people of color, those of a lower socioeconomic status, or who are differently-abled, are often left out of the picture. Remember that, despite what mainstream media may display, the LGBTQ community is just as diverse as society as a whole. Listen and learn about the experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ folks across all races, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. Consider the impact of living at the intersection of homo/bi/transphobia, racism and/or classism.
8. **Don't "out" anyone**. Where, when, how, and to whom people come out is their business, and must remain in their control. Just like other sensitive and personal information you may handle as part of your role, when discussing and assessing sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression with your clients ensure confidentiality.



Introduction to LGBTQ Cultural Competency

9. **Respect and recognize the connections** that LGBTQ people have formed with partners, community, and families of choice. Do not limit LGBTQ people's networks of support by viewing them merely through the lens of what is recognized and expected by mainstream society and/or the law.
10. **Send gentle signals** that you are a safe person for someone to come out to. You can do this by:
 - Casually mentioning a news item about an LGBTQ issue in a positive way.
 - Mentioning other LGBTQ friends or family you might have.
 - Putting a symbol like the Human Rights Campaign equal sign, All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition (if applicable), or a rainbow sticker in your office.
11. **See LGBTQ people for all of who they are.** LGBTQ people are not defined by their sexual orientation and/or gender identity alone. Acknowledge, respect, and honor these things about them, but get to know what makes them who they are outside of being LGBTQ.
12. **Create a safe space** for LGBTQ parents, youth, and colleagues at your workplace. Advocate for affirming policies and practices, ensure that there are rest rooms for people of all genders, suggest a dress code that allows for the range of gender expression, etc. (See "Welcome Mat Tips" for more ideas.)
13. **Get involved** in the work your organization does on behalf of LGBTQ parents, youth and staff. Volunteer at a parent recruitment event targeting LGBTQ parents, attend the adoption finalization of a child into an LGBTQ-headed family, organize activities to observe LGBTQ Pride Month (June), etc.
14. **Be a friend** to an LGBTQ person! Share, listen, support, laugh, comfort, and celebrate.