

10 Steps to Becoming an Effective Ally to the LGBT Community

1. In today's society, we generally assume that everyone is straight and gender-normative. We assume that everyone is cisgender (identifying as the gender that matches the sex one was assigned at birth). As result, people often hide who they are. This creates a lot of stress and thereby health disparities.

Rethink heterosexuality and gender normativity.

2. We have stereotypes about people with a non-heterosexual orientation. Take the opportunity to help educate those around you on the negative impact of such stereotypes.

Challenge stereotypes.

3. How does it feel being called a female name when you identify as male? How does it feel being called a male name when you identify as female? Does it cause sadness, anger and stress? Be aware of the gender language you use and the implications that this might have. An example of gender-neutral language is referring to someone whose gender you don't know as "they" instead of "him" or "her."

Use gender-neutral language.

4. Sometimes a person's gender identity is not apparent. Be respectful and ask a person which pronouns they prefer. Examples include she/her, he/him, and they/their. Then use those pronouns and encourage others to do so.

If you don't know which gender pronouns to use, ask.

5. It does not feel good to be labeled by others with a sexual orientation or gender identity you have not chosen for yourself. If a person is not sure which path fits them best, don't try to tell a person what "category" or "identity" they fit into.

Give people time and space to decide what sexual orientation or gender identity fits them best.

6. Education is invaluable for our future. Refer to LGBTIQQA issues in lessons or programs when the occasion arises. Make it known that LGBTIQQA individuals are welcomed at all functions. Invite local LGBT organizations to speak at programs.

Integrate LGBTIQQA culture into your curriculum and programming.

7. Educate and familiarize yourself with important laws, policies, and the proper use of inclusive language and understanding of LGBTIQQA history and share this knowledge with others. As an ally, you have the power to effect social change by educating and teaching others what you know.

Educate yourself and others.

8. Nobody knows everything. Don't be afraid to admit what you don't know! Allow yourself to make mistakes and learn from them. Give yourself time to learn, ask questions, and explore your own personal feelings. Curiosity is healthy and can lead you to understanding others better through respectful dialogue.

Remember that you are human.

9. There are countless different views and needs within the LGBTIQQA community. Being an ally will look different for each person. Listen and affirm what someone is saying.

Listen to LGBTIQQA voices and validate them.

10. Learning to be a good ally is a journey of change and growth that will come by exploring sexual and gender identity issues, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and other issues of difference. This can be a painful, exciting, and enlightening process and will help you to know yourself better. By learning and speaking out as an ally, you will be making the world a safer, more affirming place for all. Without knowing it, you may change or even save some peoples' lives.

Prepare yourself.