

How to Be an Ally to LGBT People

- Use the words “gay” and “lesbian” instead of “homosexual.” The overwhelming majority of gay men and lesbians do not identify with or use the word “homosexual” to describe themselves.
- Use non-gender specific language. Ask “Are you seeing someone?” or “Are you in a committed relationship?,” instead of “Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?” or “Are you married?” Use the word “partner” or “significant other” instead of “boyfriend/girlfriend” or “husband/wife.”
- Do not assume the sexual orientation of another person even when that person is in a committed relationship with someone of a different gender. Many bisexuals, and even some gay men and lesbians, are in different-sex relationships. Also, do not assume that a transgender person is gay or will seek to transition to become heterosexual.
- Do not assume that a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person is attracted to you just because they have disclosed their sexual identity. If any interest is shown, be flattered, not flustered. Treat any interest that someone might show just as you would if it came from someone who is heterosexual.
- Challenge your own conceptions about gender-appropriate roles and behaviors. Do not expect people to conform to society’s beliefs about “women” and “men.”
- Validate people’s gender expression. For example, if a person assigned male at birth identifies as female, refer to that person as “she” and use her chosen name. If you are unsure how to refer to a person’s gender, simply ask that person.
- Speak out against statements and jokes that attack LGBT people. Letting others know that you find anti-LGBT statements and jokes offensive and unacceptable can go a long way toward reducing homo/bi/transphobia.
- Educate yourself about LGBT histories, cultures, and concerns. Read LGBT-themed books and publications and attend LGBT events (you can learn about the LGBT events being held in the Pioneer Valley by subscribing to the Stonewall Center's QueerE listserv or by going to our website: www.umass.edu/stonewall).
- Support and involve yourself in LGBT organizations and causes. Donate money or volunteer time to LGBT organizations, such as the Stonewall Center. Write letters to your political representatives asking them to support legislation that positively affects LGBT people. Support local LGBT businesses and LGBT-friendly national chain stores (see the Human Rights Campaign’s website for information on LGBT-supportive corporations: www.hrc.org).

