

LGBTQIA Ally Guide

Four Levels in Ally Development

1. **Awareness:** It is important to become more aware of who you are and how you are different from and similar to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.
 - Have conversations with LGBTQIA individuals
 - Attend awareness building workshops such as the Safe Zone workshop
 - Read about LGBTQIA issues
 - Self-examination
2. **Knowledge/Education:** Begin to, and continue to, acquire knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity and what the experience is for LGBTQIA persons in society and your campus community.
 - Learn about laws, policies, and practices, and how they affect the LGBTQIA community
 - Educate yourself about LGBTQIA cultures and norms of your community
 - Contact local and national LGBTQIA organizations for information
 - Utilize the educational materials and resources on UCM Safe Zone's website and UCM's LGBTQIA Resource page
 - Read LGBTQIA publications
 - Attend LGBTQIA events on campus and in the community
3. **Skills:** Develop skills in communicating the knowledge that you have.
 - Attend workshops such as Safe Zone and continuing education events
 - Role play situations with friends
 - Develop support connections
 - Practice interventions or awareness raising
4. **Action:** Action is, without a doubt, the only way that we can affect change in society as a whole. If we keep our awareness, knowledge, and skills to ourselves, we deprive the rest of the world of what we have learned, thus keeping them from having the fullest possible life.
 - Support LGBTQIA students and colleagues
 - Actively work to support social justice and equality for all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity
 - Challenge homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and heterosexism

Qualities of Allies

An ally:

- is an advocate for LGBTQIA people

- has worked (or is currently working) to develop an understanding of heterosexism, cissexism, biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, and heteronormativity, as well as the role of other "-isms"
- chooses to align with LGBTQIA people and responds to their needs
- believes that it is in their self-interest to be an ally
- expects support from other allies
- is able to acknowledge and articulate how patterns of oppression have affected their life
- is a "safe person" for someone who is LGBTQIA to speak with. this means that one is committed to providing support and to maintaining confidentiality (as much as possible given one's role on campus and reporting duties). This commitment extends to people with an LGBTQIA roommate, friend, or family member who may wish to speak with someone
- can refer someone to another ally if they feel they can't assist them with their particular concern
- expects to make some mistakes but does not use it as an excuse for non-action
- knows that an ally has the right and ability to initiate change through personal, institutional, and social justice
- tries to remain aware of how homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and other oppressions exist in their environment
- does not put down other groups of people on the basis of their race, ethnicity, citizenship status, religion, culture, gender identity or expression, sex, social status, physical appearance, sexual orientation, SES, or ability
- speaks up when a homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic joke or stereotype is related and encourages discussions about oppression, or looks within themselves to unlearn the "myths" that society has taught
- promotes a sense of community and knows that they are making a difference in the lives of others

Ten Ways to Be an Ally

1. Don't assume everyone is heterosexual or cisgender
2. Never "out" someone. Just because you might know, don't assume that others do.
3. Avoid anti-LGBTQIA jokes and conversations.
4. Create an atmosphere of acceptance.
5. Use all-inclusive and gender neutral language. Use "partner" instead of "boyfriend" or "girlfriend."
6. Actively pursue a process of self-education. Read and ask questions.
7. Acknowledge and take responsibility for your own socialization, prejudice, and privilege.
8. Educate others through one-on-one discussions, group programming, and utilizing teachable moments.
9. Interrupt prejudice and take action against oppression even when people from the target group are not present.
10. Have a vision of a healthy, multicultural society.

Benefits of Being an Ally

- Becoming less locked into sex roles and gender stereotypes
- Helping the lives of members of the LGBTQIA community
- Making a difference in the campus environment
- Relieving oppression--oppression impacts everyone.
- Supporting your friend, classmate, student roommate, teammate, brother, sister, colleague, mother, father, other peers, and other people you know who are LGBTQIA
- Developing stronger self-esteem and lowering occurrences of depression, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and suicide.

Guidelines for Allies

These are some guidelines for people wanting to be allies for LGBTQIA individuals. In today's world, LGBTQIA issues are being discussed more than ever before. The discussions are often highly charged and emotional and can be a scary and confusing to people on a very personal level. Being an ally is important, but it can be challenging as well as exciting. This list is by no means exhaustive, but provides a starting point. Add your own ideas and suggestions.

- Don't assume heterosexuality. In our society, we generally assume that everyone we meet is heterosexual. Often people hide who they really are until they know they are safe to come "out". Use gender neutral language when referring to someone's partner if you don't know the person well. Be aware of the gender language you use and the implications this language might have.
- Educate yourself about LGBTQIA issues. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Also, don't expect your students to always educate you. Often LGBTQIA individuals feel some pressure and frustration with having to always educate those who are supposed to be in helping positions.
- Educate yourself on transgender and intersex issues.
- Do not assume that everyone falls into the two categories of male/man and female/woman.
- Explore ways to creatively integrate LGBTQIA issues in your work. Establishing dialogue and educating about LGBTQIA identities in the context of your other work can be a valuable process for everyone regardless of sexual orientation/gender identity. Integration of LGBTQIA issues into work you are doing instead of separating it out as a separate topic is an important strategy to establishing a safe place for people to talk about many issues in their lives.
- Challenge stereotypes that people may have about LGBTQIA individuals, as well as other people in our society. Challenge derogatory remarks and jokes made about any group of people. Avoid making those remarks yourself. Avoid reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices.

- Examine the effect sexual orientation and gender identity have on people's lives and development. Identify how race, religion, class, ability and gender intersect with sexual orientation and how multiple identities shape our lives.
- Avoid the use of heterosexist and cissexist language, such as making remarks implying that all people of the same gender date or marry members of the other gender or that all people fit into the categories of men and women. Respect how people choose to name themselves. Most people with a same-sex or bisexual orientation prefer to be called gay, lesbian or bisexual rather than homosexual. "Queer" is increasingly used by some gay, lesbian, or bisexual people (especially in the younger generations, in more urban areas, etc...), but don't use it unless you are clear that it is okay with that person. If you don't know how to identify a particular group, it's okay to ask. ("How do you define your sexuality? Do you like to use certain terms over others?") Same goes for someone's pronouns – if you don't know ask! (How do you like to be referred to? What pronouns do you use?) It is better to ask than to assume.
- Don't expect members of any population that is a target of bias (e.g. gays, Jews, people of color, women, and people with disabilities) to always be the experts on issues pertaining to their particular identity group. Avoid tokenizing or patronizing individuals from different groups.
- Encourage and allow disagreement on topics of sexual identity and related civil rights. These issues are very highly charged and confusing. If there isn't some disagreement, it probably means that people are tuned out or hiding their real feelings. Keep disagreement and discussion focused on principles and issues rather than personalities and keep disagreement respectful. Address derogatory language and/or disrespectful comments directly, even if you believe there are "no LGBTQIA people in the room."
- Remember that you are human. Allow yourself not to know everything, to make mistakes, and to occasionally be insensitive. Avoid setting yourself up as an expert unless you are one. Give yourself time to learn the issues and ask questions and to explore your own personal feelings.
- Ask for support if you are getting harassed or problems are surfacing related to your raising issues around sexual orientation and gender identity. Don't isolate yourself in these kinds of situations and try to identify your supporters. You may be labeled as LGBTQIA, whether you are or not. Use this opportunity to deepen your understanding of the power of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and heterosexism. Make sure you are safe.
- Prepare yourself for a journey of change and growth that will come by exploring sexuality and gender identity issues, heterosexism, transphobia 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 people's lives.

Information in this guide was adapted from the [San Diego State University Safe Zone Manual 2009 Edition](#) and the [Metropolitan State University of Denver Safe Zone Program](#).