

Working with LGBTQQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer and Intersex) Clients:

In our society there are a breadth of attitudes about sexuality, gender and relationships. Wherever one stands on the continuum of attitudes, we as providers care about the LGBTQQI people who access our services and want to alleviate the isolation and rejection they may experience. Unwittingly, we can exclude LGBTQQI people and exacerbate these painful feelings through the language we have used when discussing issues of sexuality; i.e., changes related to puberty, romantic attractions and sexual relationships. The following guidelines are offered as a **minimum** of supportive action for providers to reach and acknowledge LGBTQQI folks.

Tips and Strategies for Counselors and Group Leaders:

Attitudes and Assumptions

- ◆ Explore your own attitudes, biases and beliefs on a regular basis, and be gentle with yourself! Since most of us have come from a homophobic society, we are likely to be influenced by misinformation and fear-based attitudes.
- ◆ Be sensitive to factors which may contribute to low self-esteem. The first step is simply becoming aware of the concerns faced by LGBTQQI people.
- ◆ Given statistics about the percentage of LGBTQQI in our society, assume about 10% of youth may be gay and that a far greater number of folks have important people in their lives who are gay or lesbian. Don't wait for a client to come out to then make the safe space, but keep the space safe enough for someone to feel confident in coming out!
- ◆ Avoid explaining gay and lesbian relationships only in terms of sexual activity. Stress the **similarities** between homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Gay and lesbian attractions are romantic and sexual feelings for another person of the same sex. "Straight" relationships are romantic and sexual feelings for people of the "opposite" sex.
- ◆ Be aware of heterosexism or heterosexist assumptions. These may include messages that identifying as heterosexual and having sexual and romantic attractions only to members of the other gender is good and desirable, and that other sexual identities and attractions are bad and unacceptable. It may also include the assumption that anyone whose sexual identity is not known is heterosexual.

Language



Adapted from the ETR Associates "Draw the Line/Respect the Line" Training of Educators Participant Manual

- ◆ Change language that assumes everyone is or should be heterosexual. Use the terms “partner” rather than girlfriend/boyfriend, “permanent relationship” instead of marriage.
- ◆ Avoid referring to LGBTQQIs as “they.” Be specific about which group you are referring to, and careful not to generalize, re-stigmatize or stereotype. There is a vast representation of identities, beliefs and attitudes within the LGBTQQI community. Respect this diversity.
- ◆ Use the terms gay and lesbian rather than “homosexuals.” The term homosexual focuses exclusively on the sexual aspect of being gay and lesbian, rather than acknowledging the larger cultural components inherent in being LGBT or Q.
- ◆ Use non-gender-specific names in activities and role plays.

Taking action

- ◆ Implement in-service trainings for all staff on a regular basis. It took many of us a lifetime to learn how to function in this homophobic society, and it will take more than a one-time session to unlearn that behavior.
- ◆ Create and enforce a zero tolerance policy. This could include a non-discrimination policy, a sexual harassment policy, a protocol for addressing bias-motivated incidents/hate crimes, a grievance procedure, and guidelines for referring perpetrators and their families.
- ◆ Do not tolerate name calling or put-downs of gays and lesbians. Deal with derogatory statements as you would ethnic or racial slurs. Whatever our setting, we can make sure to set and enforce clear boundaries (rules and norms) to ensure respectful behavior between individuals and to prevent harassment. Staying silent affirms the behavior, and further isolates LGBTQQI people.
- ◆ Immediately address negative incidents – such as targeted harassment, put-downs (whether or not targeted to individuals), anti-gay jokes, graffiti, and labeling.
- ◆ Be prepared to respond to a client who “comes out” to you. Know your limits as a counselor, or other professional role. Keep your referrals/resources current!

What is Homophobia?

- ◆ “The fear, dislike, hatred, aversion, intolerance, and ignorance of homosexuals and homosexuality. These feelings and beliefs, usually irrational, result in acts of discrimination, harassment and often violence” (*Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC*).
- ◆ Discriminating against or treating a person differently because they seem to be LGB or T
- ◆ Looking at a GLB or T person and automatically thinking of their sexuality rather than seeing them as a whole, complete person.



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- ◆ Changing your seat in a meeting because a gay/lesbian person sits in the chair next to yours.
- ◆ Thinking you can “spot one.”
- ◆ Using the term “lesbian” or “gay” as accusatory.
- ◆ Thinking that if a gay/lesbian person touches you they are making sexual advances.
- ◆ Wondering which one is the “man/woman” in a lesbian/gay couple.

What is Heterosexism?

- ◆ “The promotion of the superiority of heterosexuality, the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, and the belief that heterosexuality is the only right, correct, normal and moral expression of sexuality” (*Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC*).
- ◆ Assuming that everyone you meet is probably heterosexual.
- ◆ Assuming that heterosexuality is the “best” or “normal” way to be.
- ◆ Does not imply the same level of hatred as homophobia, but causes behaviors based on the thought that heterosexuality is “right” and the norm.
- ◆ Providing privileges to heterosexuals through societal customs, laws and institutions while denying those same privileges to homosexuals.

Some Definitions

Please note that these definitions are not standardized, and terms are used differently by different individuals and in different regions. Concepts and attitudes toward gender identity and sexual identity are changing in society as a whole, as well as within the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender communities. Therefore, the meanings of these words will continue to change as well. Definitions below have been adapted from Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found at:

*<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2335.html?state=media> and from Rebecca G. Bettencourt: *Cal Poly San Luis Obispo*; Jan. 9, 2009.*

Androgyne (androgynous): One whose gender identity is somewhere in-between male and female; may exhibit some aspects of one and some of the other.

Closeted/“In the Closet”: Describes a person who keeps their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret from some or all people.

Coming Out: The process of acknowledging one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people. For most GLBTQ people this is a life-long process.



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Cross dresser: One who wears clothing intended for the “opposite” gender for personal comfort or relaxation

Drag Queen or Drag King: One who wears clothing intended for the “opposite” gender for the entertainment of others

Gay: A person who is attracted only to members of the same sex. Although it can be used for any sex (e.g. gay man, gay woman, gay person), “lesbian” is usually the preferred term for women who are attracted to women.

Gender Expression: The manner in which a person **outwardly** expresses their gender.

Gender Identity: A person’s **inner** sense of self as male, female or somewhere in between. Most people develop a gender identity that corresponds to their biological sex, but many do not.

Heterosexual/Straight: A person who is only attracted to members of the opposite sex.

Heterosexism: The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or acceptable sexual orientation.

Homosexual: A clinical term for people who are attracted to members of the same sex. Some gay men and lesbians find this term offensive.

Homophobia: Fear of lesbians and gay men.

Lesbian: A woman who is only attracted to other women.

LGBT: Acronyms for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.”

Openly Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender: A person who publicly acknowledges their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Outing: The act of revealing a GLBTQ person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity without that person’s consent.

Queer: An umbrella term used by some LGBT people to refer to themselves. In the past, this term has been considered offensive and some people still consider it so.

Questioning: A person who is unsure about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation: A person’s attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex. Includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual.

Transgender: A person whose gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex. More generally, can describe one whose existence challenges the idea that gender exists only as two mutually exclusive categories of male and female (the gender binary).