

LGBTQ+ DO'S AND DONT'S

**A GUIDE TO BEING RESPECTFUL AND
INCLUSIVE OF LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

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DO'S - GENERAL

DO:

BE CAREFUL ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY, DISCLOSING PERSONAL INFORMATION AND OUTING PEOPLE

An LGBTQ+ person, and specifically trans people, are entitled to their history with their gender and sexuality being considered private information. It is up to them to share it with others. As such don't share information about an LGBTQ+ person without their permission. By sharing information without permission it is not only a betrayal of trust but also possibly exposing a them to intolerance and violence.

DO:

CHALLENGE HOMOPHOBIC/TRANSPHOBIC REMARKS AND/OR JOKES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

Anti-trans comments and rhetoric can come from both anti-LGBTQ+ activists and close personal friends. It can also come from people who are straight and cisgender as well as people who may be gay or bisexual. In essence transphobia can come from a multitude of different people and places. It's important to challenge anti-transgender remarks or jokes whenever they're said and no matter who says them. Even if it they are close family or friends or LGB themselves. As well challenging homophobia is important as well, especially in regard to those previously named groups and people

DO:

DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH AND MAKE AN EFFORT TO EDUCATE YOURSELF

Working with, being related to, and knowing someone who is LGBTQ+ is common these days. As such it's important to take the time to learn about someone's identity and to understand it well. Not only will this help you avoid making mistakes or accidentally hurting someone you care about, but it will also make them feel more comfortable and safe around you.



DO: LISTEN TO LGBTQ+ PEOPLE

Possibly the best way to be an ally or to educate yourself is to listen to the opinions and experiences of LGBTQ+ people and be open minded when doing so. A few ways of doing this is talking to those who may be LGBTQ+ in your community, reading books written by LGBTQ+ people and checking out online content produced by LGBTQ+ people such as YouTube videos. It's important to hear about the struggles and problems that LGBTQ+ people have within a community and to do so without judgement, anger or derision.

DO: KNOW YOUR OWN LIMITS AS AN ALLY

It's important to understand being an ally as a sustained pattern of behavior, not just one or two instances of advocacy. However it's important that LGBTQ+ voices are not silenced or repressed as a result of other's advocacy. Help amplify LGBTQ+ voices and work without stealing the spotlight or silencing them by speaking over them.

DO: HELP MAKE YOUR COMPANY OR GROUP LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE

If you are part of a company/group that says it's LGBTQ-inclusive, help make sure that statement is factual and actually followed through on. As well keep in mind that trans people face unique and challenging issues in the workplace and often times tangible physical and policy changes are needed to help them feel comfortable and safe.

DO: SUPPORT GENDER INCLUSIVE BATHROOMS

Some LGBTQ+ people, often times specifically trans people, may not feel like they're able to use gendered bathrooms. This could be due to internal struggles, discomfort in public spaces or the fear of violence. One of the best ways to help these people with this is encourage places in your area or community to have gender inclusive bathrooms. Schools, businesses, and agencies could all benefit from having these and they can be as simple as having single user unisex bathroom.

DO: RESPECT HOW A TRANS PERSON DESCRIBES THEIR OWN IDENTITY AND VALIDATE SAID IDENTITY

Simply put, whatever term a person decides on to describe their gender identity, whether that's transgender, transsexual, non-binary, genderqueer etc, you should respect and use that term for them. Do not try to force or push an identity onto someone if they are questioning their identity, it isn't your place to tell them how they should or shouldn't identify.

DO: RESPECT PRONOUNS

One of the most important things you can do in regards to trans people is to use the pronouns that they have requested. Using the wrong ones intentionally can be very very painful and disrespectful to a trans person and one of the quickest ways to both lose their trust and destroy the relationship you may have.

DO: RESPECT CHOSEN NAMES

Similarly another important thing you can do in regards to trans people is to use and respect the name they tell you to use. Using the wrong one intentionally is very painful and disrespectful to a trans person and one of the quickest ways to both lose their trust and destroy the relationship you may have.

DO:
**UNDERSTAND THAT EACH TRANS PERSON MAY TRANSITION
DIFFERENTLY AND THAT THERE IS NO “WRONG” WAY**

A trans person's identity is not dependent on any medical procedures they may have, hormones they may be on or what their build/physical features are like. Accept that if someone tells you they are transgender, they are. Some people choose to pursue surgery and hormones, others may simply change their expression. They are still trans no matter what though.

DO:
**LEARN TO TAKE CRITICISM AND FEEDBACK AS WELL AS
LEARN HOW TO APOLOGIZE**

There is nothing wrong with not knowing something properly and messing up. However being belligerent and disrespectful when corrected is not ok. Learn to accept when you're wrong and to apply what you've learned going forward. As well for apologizing, keep it simple, concise and respectful. It is very uncomfortable for someone who is LGBTQ+ to sit and endure a very public and long apology for something that they simply want you to learn from and to avoid doing.



DON'TS - GENERAL



DON'T: ASSUME THAT ALL THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE ARE STRAIGHT AND/OR CISGENDER

While it may seem that there are no LGBTQ+ people in your life, this is actually not true. LGBTQ+ people are fairly common and odds are you know at least one. To avoid possibly alienating or putting said person in a very uncomfortable spot, avoid assuming and acting like everyone you know is straight and/or cisgender

DON'T: TAKE ISSUE IF A PERSON IS FLUSTERED, UPSET OR SENSITIVE DURING AND AFTER COMING OUT

Coming out is a very stressful time and one of great change and upheaval. Often times this can create emotional instability for that person and can lead them to being sensitive and reactive. Don't take issue with this. In fact by having a problem and pushing back against them, you could easily create an issue that was not there before hand.

DON'T: TALK ABOUT THE LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE AS IF YOU ARE COLLECTING THEM OR IF THEY ARE TOKENS TO BE SHOWN OFF

LGBTQ+ people are not objects to find and collect. Don't become connected with a person simply because you want to know someone LGBTQ+. Don't brag about how many LGBTQ+ people you know. It is disrespectful and demeaning.

DON'T:

TRY TO SET THEM UP WITH OTHER LGBTQ+ PEOPLE THAT YOU MAY KNOW UNLESS SPECIFICALLY ASKED TO BECOME INVOLVED WITH THEIR PERSONAL LIFE.

LGBTQ+ people do not require your help with their personal lives unless specifically requested. Not only are there lots of options for LGBTQ+ in terms of people to date but it can be irritating to have someone push up into your personal business just because of your sexuality. As well dating for LGBTQ+ people is different and as an ally you may be missing an understanding of how that works that can severely affect how things go.

DON'T:

ASK, “ARE YOU THE MAN OR THE WOMAN?”

The idea that there needs to be a man or a woman in a relationship is reductive and heteronormative. As well it perpetuates sexist gender norms and then proceeds to push those on to LGBTQ+ people. Don't ask this to LGBTQ+ people and do research on why this is a bad thing.

DON'T:

ASSUME THE PERSON IN YOUR LIFE WHO IS COMING OUT EXPERIENCE SOME TYPE OF TRAUMA THAT “MADE THEM THIS WAY”

Being LGBTQ+ is not something caused by trauma. A person does not become gay because of a sexual assault or trans due to an abusive parent. Don't assume this about someone, it is incredibly disrespectful and pushes harmful notions about the LGBTQ+ community. Especially do not ask them if they are LGBTQ+ because of trauma. That is guaranteed to severely affect your relationship with that person.

DON'T:

MAKE IT ABOUT YOU

When someone comes out or you hear that someone is LGBTQ+, there can be the urge to be upset that they didn't tell you earlier or talk about how accepting you are or about the other LGBTQ+ people you know. Don't do this. Those moments and that information is not about you, it is about the LGBTQ+ person. Let them direct the conversation and what is happening and be polite and respectful.

DO'S - COMING OUT

DO: THANK THAT PERSON FOR HAVING THE COURAGE TO TELL YOU

Someone choosing to tell someone about their sexuality signifies that you are someone who is important to them and that they have a great deal of trust in you and place importance on your opinion and the relationship they have with you.



DO: RESPECT THAT PERSON'S CONFIDENTIALITY

If someone comes out to you the correct way to handle that information is keep it to yourself unless you've been told you can share it. Some may not want to or be ready to tell more people. It's not up to you to decide who should know but rather it is their choice to make

DO: MAKE SURE THAT PERSON KNOWS THAT YOU ACCEPT THEM UNCONDITIONALLY AND THAT YOU STILL CARE ABOUT AND RESPECT THEM

For someone coming out there exists a huge possibility of rejection and violence and they do not know fully how you may respond. When they come out to you, make sure that they know that you still accept them unconditionally and nothing has changed in how you feel about them, nor how you care about them.

DO:

ASK RESPECTFUL CLARIFYING QUESTIONS IF NEEDED BUT KEEP IN MIND THAT PERSON IS NOT OBLIGATED TO ANSWER THEM, NOR ARE THEY SIMPLY A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Sexuality and/or gender identity can be confusing and often times information about how someone identifies isn't widely available. It's perfectly acceptable to ask clarifying and respectful questions from the, but keep in mind they are not google. They are not obligated in anyway to answer your questions and it is generally a good idea to search online if you know very little or nothing.

DO:

DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH AND EDUCATE YOURSELF

Learning about the LGBTQ+ community through your own research is one of the best ways to become a good ally and community member. It also increases the trust someone who is LGBTQ+ may have in you if they know that you understand identities and what's the right thing to say or do regarding each.

DO:

OFFER AND BE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THAT PERSON IF OR WHEN THEY CHOOSE TO COME OUT TO OTHER

If you've been trusted by someone with information about their sexuality or gender identity they may ask for support when they come out to another person. This could be for physical protection, emotional support or help in an argument. It's important that you make yourself available to help if you are asked because it demonstrates that you are supportive and that you do care about them.



DONT'S - COMING OUT

DON'T: LET SOMEONE COMING OUT AFFECT HOW YOU TREAT THEM OR ACT AROUND THEM

Include them the same amount in your life and treat them as you always have. They are letting you into a personal part of their life, not dying or going away. As well being LGBTQ+ is nothing to be wary of or a cause to be hesitant.

DON'T: ALLOW SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE TO BECOME ISOLATED BECAUSE THEY DECIDED TO COME OUT

Sometimes when a person comes out, the people in their life may push them away or stop including them in activities. This can be from confusion, discomfort or homophobia. Regardless of the reason this should not happen. Continue to include and interact with that person just as before and do not let them become isolated as a result of sharing who they are.

DON'T: SAY THAT YOU ALWAYS WANTED A “GAY BEST FRIEND” OR SOMEONE WHO ALWAYS WANTS TO COME SHOPPING WITH YOU

LGBTQ+ people are not more partial to shopping than any other group of people. As well LGBTQ+ and specifically gay men are not all like the stereotypical representation of a “gay best friend”. Saying this to someone is demeaning and insensitive to who they are and the relationship you previously had. Continue to treat them as you would before and avoid thinking of LGBTQ+ people as just stereotypes.

DON'T: SAY “I KNEW IT”

Saying “I knew it” to someone who is coming out undermines the importance of the moment and makes the person who is coming out feel like their sexuality and/or gender identity is not important. Do not say this to someone who is coming out to you.

DON'T: TRY TO PUSH RELIGIOUS VIEWS ON SOMEONE OR TRY TO “SAVE” THEM

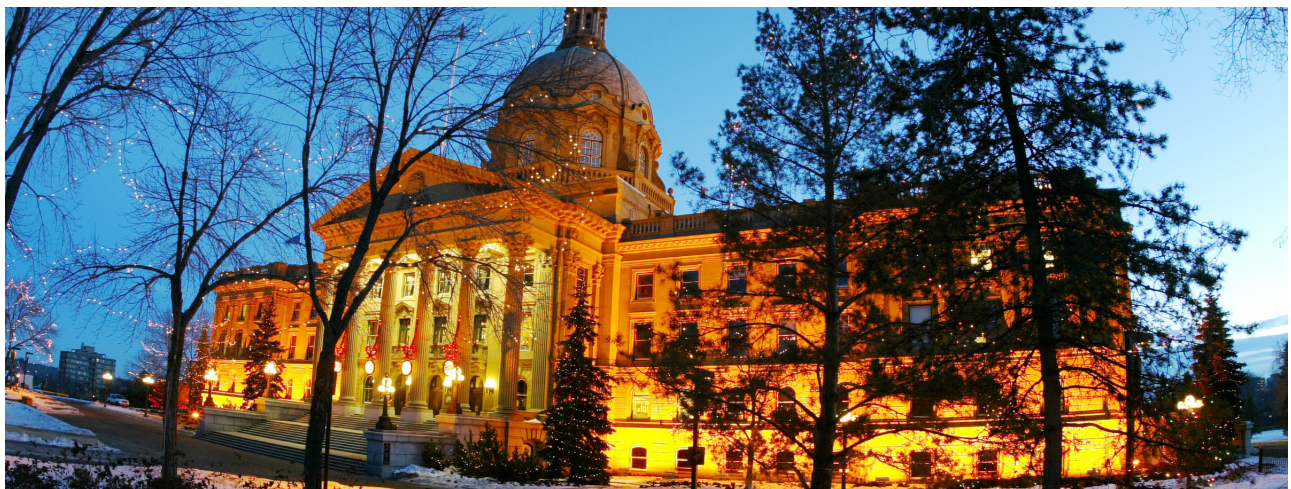
If someone comes out to you this does not become your opportunity to push religion on them, especially if it's in the effort to “save” them or convince them not to be LGBTQ+. You should be supportive and understand this moment is about them, not you. After that you should understand that their identity is an intrinsic part of them and not something they chose, nor is it something that's sinful.

DON'T: SAY “WHAT TOOK SO LONG?”

By saying “what took so long?”, the person who is coming out is made to feel as though they have been creating a problem by not coming out sooner. As well it makes them feel as if they've messed up by not coming out at a certain time or date. You should never make someone feel poorly when they are taking the time to tell you about a deeply personal part of themselves.

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DON'T: ASK IF IT IS JUST A PHASE

If someone has taken the time and courage to express their sexuality and/or gender identity, then it's something they've taken the time to think over and seriously debate. It is not simply a passing phase and by saying so it makes the person feel incredibly invalidate about their identity. It shows that you do not support and really care about them as you do not unconditionally accept their identity.

DON'T: SAY "ARE YOU SURE?"

By asking someone if they are sure, you show your doubts and your lack of acceptance towards someone. Their identity is a very personal thing and one that they have probably spent a long time thinking over. Do not cast doubt about this on them. Don't make them feel as though they have to justify their identity with a long drawn out explanation of their thought process.

DON'T: SAY "IT MUST BE HARD FOR YOUR PARENTS"

It may have been tough on the parents but it has been far more difficult for the individual. Being closeted is difficult enough but the painful journey that often is self acceptance is extremely difficult. Even after someone comes out they still have to deal with threats of violence, abandonment and discrimination. By saying "it must be hard on your parents", you make the parents feeling more important than the pain that person has gone through.





DON'T: MAKE A COMMENT RELATING THEIR APPEARANCE TO THEIR SEXUALITY

An example of this would be saying “oh but you’re so girly” to someone who identifies as a lesbian or commenting on the masculinity of a gay man. Someone's presentation is not tied to their sexuality and they can look however they'd like while still being true to their own unique identity.

DON'T: ASK “SO WHAT ARE YOU?”

This is a response that is more commonly seen in a situation where someone is confused about the difference between sexuality and gender identity. However that does not justify asking this question as ok. When someone is bisexual or gay, that does not mean that their gender identity is different. Similarly, if someone's gender identity is different that does not mean who they experience sexual attraction to is changing as well.

DON'T: TRY TO MAKE THE LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE ACCOMMODATE YOU OR BARGAIN WITH THEM

Having those who have come out to you act against what would make them happy simply for your comfort is harmful and dangerous. It signals that their feelings are not important to you or that your comfort matters more than them being happy. You end up forcing more pain and suffering on that person by doing this. Examples of doing this is not respecting pronouns, not allowing a certain way of presentation or of transitioning, or not allowing for same sex partners to be near by.

DON'T: ASSUME SOMEONE'S GENDER IDENTITY BASED OFF OF THEIR PERCEIVED GENDER EXPRESSION

Remember that appearances can't tell you what someone's gender is. Gender is not something you can necessarily see, although we sometimes choose to express our gender in a particular way. Gender is not a haircut, a way of dressing, a set of body parts, or a set of behaviors. Gender is a sense of self, an identity that is only for us to declare

DON'T: ASK A TRANSGENDER PERSON WHAT THEIR "REAL NAME" IS.

A trans person's name is a very important and personal item. It is the one that they chose and identify as and is a symbol of them becoming the person they always deserved to be. By asking what their "real name" is, you are invalidating their entire identity and transition. As well a trans person's dead name is a source of great pain and can actually be used to hurt them more through dead naming. Thus asking for it can single you may not be a safe person.

DON'T: ASK ABOUT A TRANSGENDER PERSON'S GENITALS, SURGICAL STATUS, OR SEX LIFE.

Just like it's impolite to ask any cisgender person about their genitals or sex life, so to is it rude to ask trans people about the same topic. It does not matter that they may be transitioning, it is still disrespectful to do so, and it should not happen. Do not ask just to satisfy your curiosity. Questions like this can create a threat for the safety of trans people because they do not know how you may respond if they do or don't answer.

DON'T: INVALIDATE SOMEONE'S IDENTITY

The worst thing you can do for your friend is invalidate their identity. When your friend comes out as transgender, it's not your place to greet them with disbelief, amusement, contradiction, or a refusal to recognize their gender. Regardless of how you perceived them in the past, it's your responsibility to believe your friend when they come out – and affirm their sense of self.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **10 Ways to Be an Ally & a Friend**
 - <https://www.glaad.org/resources/ally/2>
- **If Someone Comes Out to You**
 - <https://lgbtq.unc.edu/programs/education/safe-zone-training/guidelines-safe-zone-allies/if-someone-comes-out-you>
- **What NOT to Do When Someone Comes Out to You**
 - https://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-not-to-do-when-someone_b_5373052
- **If Someone Comes Out To You, Don't Say These 5 Things**
 - <https://www.elitedaily.com/life/culture/not-say-someone-comes-out-to-you/1979899>
- **So Your Trans Friend Is Transitioning and You Want to Be Supportive – Here Are 6 Ways How**
 - <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/06/how-to-be-ally-to-trans-friend/>
- **7 Things You Should Never Say When Someone Comes Out (and What to Say Instead)**
 - <https://www.readersdigest.ca/health/relationships/lgbtq-comes-out/>
- **6 Signs That You Might Not Really Respect Your Transgender Loved One**
 - <https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/03/respect-transgender-loved-one/>
- **Tips for Allies of Transgender People**
 - <https://www.glaad.org/transgender/allies>
- **Coming out - advice and guidance for parents**
 - <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/coming-out/coming-out-advice-and-guidance-parents>
- **5 Ways to Support a Trans Person Experiencing Body Dysphoria**
 - <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/03/supporting-trans-person-with-dysphoria/>

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