Supporting the LGBTQIA+ Community: Tips for being an ally

Even if you don't identify as someone within the LGBTQIA+* community, you can always be supportive to friends, coworkers, loved ones, and the community at large through becoming an ally. Here's how to start.

Educate yourself about issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Become familiar with basic terms like "coming out," "homophobia," "sexual orientation," and "gender identity or expression."

Learn about use of pronouns. People have the right to choose what pronoun they're addressed by (she/her, he/his, or they/their). If you're unsure what to use, ask what pronouns the person would like to be addressed by. If you make a mistake, apologize, and correct yourself. List your own pronouns in your email signature or on your name tag at events where you're meeting new people to signal that you understand and respect addressing people by their preferred pronouns.

Ask questions. Be honest and admit if you don't know what a word means or what language to use. Don't let being nervous about using the "right" language keep you from interacting. If you aren't sure what words to use or what to say when talking with your LGBTQIA+ friend or relative, ask for help or search online for the definition and use of the word.

Lead by example. Don't be afraid to speak up when other people act in a discriminatory way toward LGBTQIA+ people, tell offensive jokes, or engage in anti-gay behaviour. Don't use epithets, even if you hear other people use them.

Be respectful of people's privacy. Understand that some people may choose not to disclose personal information. Even if you suspect that someone might be gay, bisexual, or transgender, it's their decision to share this. No one should ever be "outed" by another person as this is a personal choice and there could be unknown dangers that they could be exposed to.

Join efforts in your community to raise awareness about LGBTQIA+ issues and to work for equality and non-discrimination. Participate in gay rights fundraisers or other "Pride" events, or volunteer at a support group or organization. Search online for organizations such as PFLAG Canada, which helps those struggling to understand their gender identity, offers support for the LGBTQIA+ community, and is a helpful organization for their family and friends.

Treat others as you would like to be treated. Remember that actions speak louder than words.

***** *The use of the acronym LGBTQIA+ — Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and/or Ally, and + to acknowledge non-cisgender/non-straight identities not included in the acronym — is an umbrella term accepted by advocacy organizations and is intended to include all those seeking gender equity.*

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