



How Can Your Team Best Support LGBTQ+ Clients and Staff?

Working With LGBTQ+ Clients

It is imperative that we meet the needs of our LGBTQ+ patients/clients in a manner that promotes equity, inclusion, safety and respect. The following is helpful guidance for supporting LGBTQ+ patients/clients.

DO	DO NOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your patients/clients about their LGBTQ+ identity. Ask questions in a safe and confidential manner. • Express affirmation when your patient/client tells you or when you learn that your patient/client identifies as LGBTQ+. Use language your patient/client is comfortable with. • Support your patients'/clients' LGBTQ+ identity and, if any, examine your personal biases to ensure you are supporting their identity to the best of your ability. • Advocate for your patient/client when he, she or they are mistreated because of their LGBTQ+ identity. • Require that other staff respect your LGBTQ+ patients/clients. • Remember that a person's sexual orientation and gender identity are only two aspects of a person's overall identity and life experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume you can identify LGBTQ+ individuals by appearances, experiences or external characteristics. • Assume that treating everyone the same, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, is effective or will make LGBTQ+ individuals feel safe or welcome. • Force your patients/clients to answer questions about their sexual orientation and gender identity. If a client looks uncomfortable, anxious or refuses to answer, move on to the next question.

Now It's Your Turn!

Review the following scenarios and discuss your approach as a team. Remember to use inclusive language and keep in mind the above guidance.





Practice Scenario #1: Frontline Staff

You have an intake appointment with a new client, Max, today. You read the intake form ahead of time and learn that Max:

- Uses they/them pronouns
- Is in a relationship
- Is struggling with their mental health

What language would you use to help Max feel comfortable during the appointment?

Practice Scenario #2: Middle Management

One of your frontline staff mentions that some of her clients have been too scared to disclose their accurate gender or sexual identities on organization paperwork, meaning they might not be getting the right services. Another staff member mentions that she doesn't like seeing "gays" in the entrance area to your facility.

With these specific interactions in mind, what are some steps you might take to make your facility more welcoming to people regardless of gender or sexuality?





Practice Scenario #3: C-Suite Staff

You see on the news that LGBTQ+ individuals in your county experience some of the most intense mental health disparities compared to non-LGBTQ+ individuals...but you're pretty sure you don't have any LGBTQ+ clients...and you're pretty sure you don't have any LGBTQ+ staff either...

What are some steps you might take to understand the LGBTQ+ individuals in your staff and clientele?

What steps might you take to make your organization as a whole more welcoming to LGBTQ+ individuals?

Workplace Inclusion - Developing Policies

In addition to our patients/clients, it is vital that we ensure equal opportunity and a comfortable environment for LGBTQ+ staff. Organizational policies and procedures can often be invalidating and discriminatory towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The following are examples of ways an organization can update their written and/or informal policies to be more LGBTQ+ inclusive and welcoming.

- Establish an inclusive dress code (i.e., avoid gendered language in dress code policies).
- Update existing documents, policies and procedures to remove gender-specific language or include options beyond male and female.
- Encourage the use of gender-neutral titles.
- Develop an inclusive nondiscrimination policy (i.e., gender identity and expression as a protected category).
- Support gender transitions/coming out (i.e., establish gender transition guidelines).
- Ensure access to gender inclusive restrooms/locker room facilities.
- Provide information and training focused on education and compliance.
- Rethink recruitment and hiring processes (i.e., reduce implicit bias in the hiring process).
- Make healthcare benefits more inclusive (i.e., remove discriminatory health insurance exclusions, establish inclusive policies, including those around gender affirming surgery/care).





Using the above examples, or any other tactics you think of, how can your organization incorporate more inclusive practices?

References

National Resource Center on LGBT Aging. (2012). *Inclusive services for LGBT older adults: A practical guide to creating welcoming agencies*. SAGE. <https://www.sageusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/sageusa-welcoming-agency-guide-inclusive-services-for-lgbt-older-adults.pdf>

Ryan, C. (2009). *Helping families support their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) children*. National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. https://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/LGBT_Brief.pdf

