

**2012 Edition**

the incredibly detailed honest forthright  
fully comprehensive completely blunt  
shockingly simple wonderfully helpful  
and witty exposition on a topic that  
sometimes makes people blanch but  
really shouldn't because this compelling  
open and straight to the point no pun  
intended little publication will demystify  
the secret world of gay people and be  
your tried and trusted

# guide to being a straight ally\*

“

I remember learning about the civil rights movement and other social movements for equality in school and thinking to myself, 'Well, if I had been an adult then, I would have stood up and done the right thing.'

Now I am an adult, I see inequality and I know I should do something, but it is just not that easy. I have so many questions and fears and I am just not sure where, if anywhere, I belong in the gay rights movement.

”

Katie, 29



## **Sound familiar? Feeling the same way?**

You've come to the right place.

## **Welcome to Straight for Equality.**

The GLBT community cannot achieve equality without support from smart, energetic, compassionate, and dedicated straight allies...people just like you. We know that there are lots of issues and barriers that may keep people from getting involved, and that's why we're here. This booklet is the first step.

**Straight for Equality** is an opportunity for people who want to stand up for gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender (GLBT) equality but are not sure how. **Straight for Equality** educates and empowers straight people in supporting and advocating for GLBT equality in their homes, workplaces and communities.

## **Straight for Equality isn't about politics or politicians, Republicans or Democrats, radical activists or peacekeeping pacifists.**

It is about creating a place where all people who care about equality can honestly and openly discuss and remove the barriers they face to becoming an ally, get specific recommendations for action, and learn how to assist others — whether friends, family members, coworkers, or community members — in becoming agents of change.

## **Got questions?**

We'll answer them. Through our website and social media tools, printed materials, in-person presentations, or with suggested resources, we have answers.

## **Got concerns?**

That's natural — and healthy! We'll do what we can to resolve your concerns and introduce you to people who have or had the same concerns as you.

## **Don't know how to get involved?**

The **Straight for Equality** team has collected suggestions, both big and small, for how to stay informed, get involved and make a difference.

## **Straight allies (and potential allies), your time has come.**

Getting started is easy. On the following pages you'll find the first five ways you can start moving equality forward for your gay, lesbian, bi, and transgender friends today!

# Equality guideposts

Here are some nifty icons to help quickly identify things you might face on your journey to becoming a straight ally.



## Stumbling Blocks

Caution with a twist. Read real-life stories from people about how they struggled to understand a situation, confronted a fear, or tried something new. They're good reminders that you're not alone in the "coming out" process as an ally.



## Phone-a-Friend

Get quick access to great resources that can help you get past your stumbling blocks and on the road, straight to equality.



## Your Invitation

Learning more about how to be a powerful straight ally opens up a whole new set of opportunities for you to change your world. Take advantage of these invitations to try something new and help move equality forward.

“

On the way to meet some friends yesterday, I overheard someone on the bus saying that 'homosexual' was an offensive term. So after several days, I got up the nerve to ask one of my 'homosexual' friends what exactly he wanted me to call him.

He said, 'I prefer that you call me Jim, but if you must refer to my sexuality, 'gay' is preferable.'

I asked why I shouldn't use 'homosexual' and Jim said, 'How would you feel if you were reduced down to what happens in the privacy of your bedroom?'

I laughed because suddenly I got it. Even though it was tough at first, I was really glad that I asked the question.

”

Alex, 32

# Step one: Get educated

Don't know what to call people?

Don't know what's going on with "GLBT issues"?

Confused about terminology?

Not sure what all of those rainbows mean?

Unsure if you're about to say something that's going to offend?

**It's ok. We've all been there...and there's a way to feel better.**

You can ask — in fact, the best thing to do is ask.

One of the best ways that you can demonstrate your interest in moving equality forward and in being an ally is to get — and keep getting — educated. Ask questions, do research, and be honest about what you want to know. Our GLBT friends, neighbors, and coworkers are not so different from us, but there are differences that you need to understand so you can help others get on the same page.





### **Stumbling Block: “I was just embarrassed.”**

Denise, 35, said this: “My city was voting on an employment nondiscrimination bill, but I didn’t know what it was! I knew it involved gay people somehow, but I was too embarrassed to ask. What if someone thought I didn’t know because I didn’t care?”

So I went online and Googled ‘Cleveland and gay’ and learned that you can actually be fired for being gay! Who knew?”

When you hear about an issue on the news that you don’t understand, look it up, or ask a friend. When a gay friend uses a term that you don’t know — like “queer” — ask. Why exactly are there rainbow flags all over the pride parade each year? What’s with the pink triangles? Chances are that your friends and colleagues will be pretty impressed that you took an interest in wanting to say the right thing or to understand what’s going on.



### **Phone a friend: Find out online!**

Maybe you don’t feel comfortable asking directly — many people don’t. After all, some things are seen as personal. There are lots of ways to get past this issue.

We know that there’s a lot of misinformation on the information superhighway, so here are a few great tried and trusted online resources that you can visit to get answers.

#### **Media —**

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD): [glaad.org](http://glaad.org)

#### **Politics —**

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force: [thetaskforce.org](http://thetaskforce.org)

#### **Gender Identity/Expression —**

National Center for Transgender Equality: [transequality.org](http://transequality.org)

#### **Workplace —**

Out & Equal Workplace Advocates: [outandequal.org](http://outandequal.org)

#### **Parenting —**

Mental Health America’s Resources for Parents: [nmha.org/go/what-does-gay-mean](http://nmha.org/go/what-does-gay-mean)

So whether you're looking it up online, heading to the library, or having a real one-on-one conversation, getting informed is the first step in becoming part of the GLBT and straight ally community.

### **Remember: Rome wasn't built in a day.**

You don't need to learn everything before you can participate. Missing some terminology or not knowing everything about gay marriage (which, for the record, you should refer to as "marriage equality") doesn't mean that you're any less of an ally. It means that like most people, you're learning something new each day.



#### **Your Invitation:**

#### **Your first invitation asks you to push the envelope a bit.**

Having conversations using inclusive language, or even just saying words like "gay" and "lesbian" comfortably, is a small personal change that can have a big impact on the people around you. To get started on your linguistic journey, visit [www.straightforequality.org/glossary](http://www.straightforequality.org/glossary) to download our Equality Literacy 101 guide.

Once you've learned a preferable term, or once you've figured out something you didn't understand about a particular issue, talk about it.

You don't need to have a big debate. Just include that term when the opportunity arises, whether it's with your GLBT friends or straight coworkers. Start getting comfortable using your new vocabulary.

“

So I was at work and someone told this joke:

'A male-friendly lesbian, a man-hating dyke, Santa Claus, and the Easter bunny are in a race for a \$100 bill. Which one wins?

The man-hating dyke because the other three are figments of your imagination.'

Most people around me were laughing. To this day I really regret not saying, 'Dude, that's really offensive.'

”

Rishi, 25

## Step two: Speak up

Everyone's been there. Whether it is a racist joke, sexist joke, or a gay joke, we've all heard jokes that we knew were offensive, but, for one of many reasons, haven't said anything to object. Whether we didn't want to be the PC police, felt frozen because we didn't know the words, or we just didn't want to sound like a downer, we knew something should be said...but just didn't.

While some kinds of jokes and comments are clearly taboo (most people wouldn't dare make a racist joke at a staff party), jokes about GLBT people tend to continue to slide by without much pushback.

Think about the one closeted person who heard the comment and felt shame that he couldn't respond. Or think about the woman who has a lesbian daughter and felt she shouldn't respond, afraid of her peers' contempt.

### **Your courage speaks to them, too.**

Words hurt, and it makes a huge difference when you speak up. When you do, you're educating people around you, and demonstrating that you are supportive of equality for all. Your voice also demonstrates that you're advocating for your gay friends because you care about how these "jokes" make people feel.



### **Stumbling Block: “I didn’t want to make her look bad...”**

Charlotte, 44, said, “The people I work with love talking about celebrity gossip and all of the pop culture news out there. On Monday morning, I heard Mary, one of my co-workers, talking about how unfair it was that Tracy Morgan got so much heat for his rant about how gay people disgust him and that he shouldn’t have been ‘forced’ to apologize for his comments.”

I really like Mary — she’s my friend and I didn’t want to embarrass or make her look bad in front of other people — but I really felt like I needed to say something, so I commented, ‘But what if he had used the N-word? Would you think he should apologize then? Or what if you had a gay son or daughter who heard what he said? Would you have defended his words?’ At first she seemed annoyed, but later we had a great conversation and she conceded that she never thought about it that way.”

So you know that you need to say something, you want to say something, but what do you say?

#### **Phone-a-Friend:**

How to say, “I object!” without sounding bossy.



#### **Use humor.**

“Not to be Debbie Downer, but...”

#### **Use facts.**

“I’m not sure you know this, but...”

#### **Make your comment relatable.**

“How would you feel if...”

#### **Make it about you.**

“I consider myself to be a straight ally, and that isn’t ok with me because...”

It isn't just about jokes. People make huge generalizations and assumptions — which are often wrong — about the people around them and GLBT community all the time. How many times have you heard, “He dresses well, he must be gay.” Or “She doesn't like me, so she must be a lesbian.” (Ever think that she doesn't like you because of the joke you just told?).

Misinformation and stereotypes are just as harmful and damaging as gay jokes especially when they go unchallenged and eventually get accepted as “fact.”



### **Your Invitation:**

**You can be part of the solution even if you're not part of the GLBT community.**

The GLBT community needs your help in correcting stereotypes, talking about just how offensive those jokes are, and stopping the use of “acceptable” slurs like “that’s so gay.”

Whether it is around the water cooler, at a restaurant, or with your kids on the way to soccer practice, speaking up changes minds. And the more you do it, the easier it gets as people around you start to understand how their words and actions make others feel.

Next time someone cracks a joke at the expense of GLBT people or makes a comment based on a stereotype, make a commitment to having a conversation with that person and use one of the suggestions in the Phone-a-Friend to stage your response.

“

I was telling a friend of mine about how my sister is getting married. She was excited and asked, 'Her fiancé...what does he do?'

I didn't want to make her feel put on the spot, so I smiled and said, 'Not he — she's marrying a chick!'

We've been friends for years, and I knew that making her laugh a little would be the right approach. I saw the look on her face as she processed what I said and realized that she realized that she'd assumed my sister is straight.

She laughed and said, 'So what does this chick do?' Because I spoke up, she knew about my family, no one was uncomfortable, and I felt good about being honest.

”

Ernesto, 38

## Step three: Be honest.

GLBT relationships are the same... but different to many people. Allies consider GLBT relationships to be just as valid, legitimate, and real as straight ones, but sometimes more traditional terms don't always seem accurate or they tend to blur the facts.

Sometimes, we might even have the right terms, but we don't use them for fear of making the person we're speaking with feel uncomfortable or confused.

### **Are you confused about what words to use? Just ask someone.**

Ask what terms your GLBT friends and family prefer —

### **spouse, partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, significant other —**

The list goes on, and once you know, your anxiety about picking the right term won't. But once you have the words, it's time to use them.

And remember that words aren't a one-size-fits-all thing. Use the opportunity to have a conversation your GLBT friends and colleagues about what words or terms someone prefers and find out how you can be a strong ally to them.





### **Stumbling Block: “I didn’t want to make her — or me — feel uncomfortable...”**

Evelyn, 74, commented, “I was talking to a friend who lives in the same assisted living center that I do. She was telling me about attending her granddaughter’s wedding ceremony, and asked how my grandson is doing. I said he’s well, but because I didn’t want to offend her, I neglected to mention that he and his partner of 10 years just had a beautiful commitment ceremony, which I proudly attended. I love my grandson and his partner, but sometimes I just don’t want to risk making other people uncomfortable by mentioning that he is gay.”

Being honest isn’t just about not knowing what terms to use, but about actually speaking about your GLBT family, friends, or even acquaintances once you know the terms. People often assume that they’re going to offend someone or have to hold an uncomfortable conversation if they actually mention GLBT people or issues, but frequently that’s not the case.

### **A recent poll revealed that 7 in 10 Americans have close friends or relatives who are gay.**

Another poll showed that more than half of all Americans think that being gay is just as ok as being straight.

### **Why not give people an opportunity to talk about it and express their support?**

Even if they don’t agree, it certainly wouldn’t be the first time you’ve talked about a difference in opinion with someone. As a straight ally, you can make a difference by creating an environment in which these conversations can happen.



### **Phone-a-Friend: Dear Abby...**

One of the places that millions of people have gone for individual advice is to one of the highest-profile straight allies in the world. Dear Abby has been dispensing wise words for people since 1956, and often has great suggestions for people in uncomfortable situations. Many times, she's offered guidance on how to talk about issues whether you're a straight ally, family member, or GLBT yourself. Her columns appear in more newspapers each week than any other column in the world, so find her in your local newspaper or go online to [dearabby.com](http://dearabby.com).

Maybe you're not ready to have a conversation every time the topic comes up. Maybe you'll need to test the waters with someone close before you start announcing that you're supportive of equality for GLBT people at big social events. That's ok.

The key is starting to include all the facts when you talk about your GLBT friends — not just the ones that you think people want to hear.



### **Your Invitation:**

**Validate terms that GLBT people use by using them yourself.**

Sometimes GLBT people and their allies feel forced to omit "telling terms." Don't sacrifice what's right — and an opportunity to change someone's mind or find a new straight ally — just to ensure what you think will be the comfort of the listener. Who's to say they aren't just looking for a chance to be honest with you also?

Get the right terms, use them, and be honest.

“

My best friend at work is a lesbian. She recently asked me to join our company's Pride group for GLBT and ally employees.

I had actually considered joining so I could openly demonstrate my support, but I wasn't sure that I was really 'invited' to be part of it. Once she asked me — and I really thought about it — I knew that was never an issue, and now I'm a proud member of the group.”

”

Alice, 56

## Step four: Support equality.

The number of places where a straight ally can express his or her support in small but incredibly meaningful ways is limitless. Your workplace, house of worship, school, and civic organizations all offer opportunities to introduce, support, or vote in favor of GLBT-inclusive policies.

**Often, your voice as an ally can carry tremendous weight in these environments in ways that the voices of GLBT people cannot.**

This is for two important reasons. First, many of these places still have policies or cultures that are unfriendly or restrictive to GLBT people. But this is starting to change, and the one-on-one honest and informed conversations that you have can help move equality forward.

Second, you bring a different perspective to the conversation. Often, when a GLBT person talks about equality, they are heard as people advocating for their own rights. But when a straight ally speaks about the same issues, it has a different ring. It isn't about you getting something. It is about you working for others, and getting people to do the right thing. Together, the messages sent are powerful.



### **Stumbling block: “I thought it would be too political...”**

Joe, 45, said, “I’m a teacher. One of the guidance counselors in my school expressed a lot of frustration and even anger over a new policy that requires counselors to receive special training to help them work with GLBT youth. She was clearly agitated and didn’t see why she should have to do it.

My first inclination was to let it go and keep politics out of work, but I thought about how her attitude could affect the kids. So I told her about all the newspaper articles I’ve read about how GLBT youth get bullied, how their fear and shame impacts their grades, and even how suicide rates were higher in this group. I realized that even though this was a small comment, it was a big help in changing the climate of my school.”

As the old adage goes, change starts at home...and at work...and at school. We could go on, but the point is that small changes, like not letting something that sounds wrong go unchecked, matter. Sure, there’s a chance that someone will push back, but that is just another chance to talk about different — and persuasive — perspectives.

Many workplaces, houses of worship, and organizations are considering policies that help protect GLBT people from discrimination.

### **But these changes can’t happen without the active and open support from allies like you.**

Unfortunately, there are people intent on making sure that these changes never happen, and some are vocal and active. If you support your GLBT friends — and equality — you’ll counteract their voices and make sure that fairness prevails. After all, if you don’t speak up for what’s right, how can you know someone else will? Fairness is best never left to chance.



### **Phone-a-Friend: Where do I get the facts?**

How do you learn about workplace, house of worship, school, or organizational policies on GLBT equality? There are several great resources on the web:

#### **Families and allies —**

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): [pflag.org](http://pflag.org)

#### **Schools —**

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): [glsen.org](http://glsen.org)

#### **Faith —**

Center for Welcoming Resources: [welcomingresources.org](http://welcomingresources.org)

#### **Advocacy —**

Human Rights Campaign (HRC): [hrc.org](http://hrc.org)

#### **GLBT families —**

The Family Equality Council: [familyequality.org](http://familyequality.org)

Once you've done some homework and know where the places that matter to you stand, get active. Join the Pride group at the office, get on a committee at your place of worship that is considering changes, or just be vocal in your social circles. All of your contributions as an ally make a difference, and as you witness positive change, doing it more becomes natural.



### **Your Invitation: Call for backup!**

Concerned that you're not quite presentation-ready? The booklet that you're reading holds the answer.

Contact the **Straight for Equality** team (you'll find our info at the end of this booklet) and invite them to come to your school, workplace, place or worship, or organization to talk about the importance of equality and the critical role that straight allies can play in achieving it.

“

I was on my way to the gay pride parade when my parents called and asked what I was up to for the weekend. At first, I planned on just saying that ‘I’m going out’ because I didn’t want to have to explain what Pride was and why I was going. But then I said it — ‘I’m going to the Gay Pride Parade.’

There was a silence, and my dad said, ‘Is there something you want to tell us?’

I replied, ‘Yes. I’m a straight ally — and proud of it!’”

”

Stephanie, 21

## Step five: Come out.

Ok. Now that you've been invited to be part of the equality movement, become more educated, and committed to speaking up, if you haven't already, it's time to come out.

### **You heard us: Come out...as an ally, that is.**

This isn't always easy. As allies we know that you have some fears, and that's natural. Fortunately, we have some answers...

#### **What if people think I'm gay?**

Yes. Some people may assume that you're gay. But you have a voice, and an important one at that. Tell them that you're a straight ally, and then tell them why. Your personal ally story may be the one to change someone's mind on these issues.

#### **Am I welcome in this movement?**

YES! You're certainly welcome in the equality movement (if you haven't figured that out yet, you might have missed the previous 22 pages). Not only are you welcome, but you are very much needed — and appreciated.

#### **I'm not ready to be an activist for all gay rights, all the time. Is there a happy medium?**

Yes. Being a straight ally doesn't mean dedicating every moment in your life to GLBT equality, but it means using some of the tips provided in this book — both large and small — that you can contribute. They're all valid,



they all make an impact, and they help whenever you feel comfortable using them. Hopefully, as you learn more and become more comfortable with your role as a straight ally, you'll speak up more frequently, but every bit of help you give is moving equality forward, and that's what matters.

### **Stumbling Block: “What if people think I’m gay too?”**



Jacinda, 30, said, “I debated for weeks if I should put a rainbow sticker up in my cubicle at work. I know it sounds silly, but I was afraid that I’d never get another date at work again. Would everyone assume I’m a lesbian?”

But once I did it, I realized that something so small made a huge difference—it started great conversations, several people told me that they have gay kids or family, and I can’t even tell you how many people came out to me. I’m really glad that I did it.”

Do you feel like your workplace is super-inclusive? Is your school very GLBT-friendly? Does it already have a gay-straight alliance? That’s great news, but everyone can still use a reminder. Little things like visual images (check out our Straight for Equality postcards\*) or big things like your comments can help keep people paying attention to equality. Until there’s no need for a program like [Straight for Equality](#), your contributions as a straight ally are needed and valued.



### **Phone-a-Friend: Resources for the Overachievers**

Are you an A-student? Have you already been doing the things in this booklet? Ready to take the next step and do more? Check out the [Straight for Equality](#) website where you can learn more strategies, find additional information, get [Straight for Equality](#) merchandise, and connect with other allies.

*\*Shameless self-promotion alert! Check out page 28 for details.*

**Once they're out and proud, some people want to take their voices as straight allies for equality to the next level. This isn't a requirement, but it is certainly a great help.**

Remember that the way you vote in local and national elections makes a huge impact on GLBT equality. What happens in a county election, for example, influences what happens inside our churches, schools, and offices.

If you'd like to learn more about how to make a difference through advocacy, we encourage you to visit **Straight for Equality's** "parent" organization, PFLAG National, at [pflag.org](http://pflag.org) and click on Advocacy & Issues.



### **Your Invitation: Sign on!**

One excellent way to demonstrate and formalize your commitment to equality is to sign the **Straight for Equality** pledge by going to [straightforequality.org/pledge](http://straightforequality.org/pledge).

When you sign the pledge, you'll receive updates on our work and find out about the resources available to you, get information on opportunities to demonstrate your support, and learn about more ways to get involved as a straight ally.

Interested in getting some immediate next steps after you sign? While you're visiting us, check out [straightforequality.org/tools](http://straightforequality.org/tools).

**SO...what now?**

## All allied up and feeling like there's nowhere to go?

We've got some next steps:

### 1. Go to [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org) and find out what's new.

While you're there, you'll be able to access the latest news and resources from the [Straight for Equality](#) team, tell us what you think about the program and how you're doing, and even invite us to come speak at your workplace, school, organization, or place of worship.

### 2. Tell a friend: Don't keep this info to yourself.

Being an ally gets easier — and we all get closer to equality — as we increase our numbers. Know someone who you think will be interested? Pass this booklet along or send them the link to the [Straight for Equality](#) website. Get them to sign the [Straight for Equality](#) pledge, too.

If you know someone with a GLBT family member remember, they can help too! Let them know about [Straight for Equality](#) and PFLAG as well. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a great source for support, education and advocacy for the family members and friends of GLBT people. We can all play a role, but getting the right resources to do it is critical. PFLAG and [Straight For Equality](#) are those resources!

### 3. Do something!

What more can we say? The first time can be hard, but we promise it will be rewarding. This is only the beginning.

Keep coming back to [straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org) to learn more about specific programs and resources that we're developing — like [Straight for Equality in the Workplace](#) and [Straight for Equality in Healthcare](#) — to help promote equality everywhere.

**Stay connected...and keep moving equality forward.  
We can't do it without you.**



the incredibly detailed honest forthright fully comprehensive completely blunt shockingly simple wonderfully helpful and witty exposition on a topic that sometimes makes people blanch but really shouldn't because this compelling open and straight to the point no pun intended little publication will demystify the secret world of gay people and be your tried and trusted [guide to being a straight ally](#)

Copyright ©2007 and 2011 Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National.

All rights reserved. This publication is available for online download or purchase at [www.straightforequality.org](http://www.straightforequality.org). Visit us there to get this book and find out how to download and purchase lots of other ally-friendly Straight for Equality goodies.

Looking for more info? Visit the Straight for Equality website at [www.straightforequality.org](http://www.straightforequality.org) to get the latest news and resources. Click on "contact us" to send a note or just e-mail [info@straightforequality.org](mailto:info@straightforequality.org). (We would really love to hear from you...)

Need to indulge your social media addiction? We are happy to enable you:



"Like" us on Facebook by going to [www.facebook.com/S4Equality](http://www.facebook.com/S4Equality)



Follow us on Twitter: @S4Equality.



[straightforequality.org](http://straightforequality.org)

\* **made you look.**

*Straight for Equality is a project of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) National.*

PFLAG National Office 1828 L Street NW, Suite 660 Washington DC 20036 (202) 467-8180 [pflag.org](http://pflag.org)