

Strategies for Being an Effective Ally:

Challenging attitudes and institutional practices that curtail the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students requires verbal tactics and strategies of intervention and interruption. Teachable moments abound in the area of GLBT concerns because the general public is usually quite open about its anti-gay sentiments.

The following items are meant only as a guide to how you might begin to be more inclusive of LGBT people, communities, issues, and concerns in your personal and institutional life.

- ① Understand that heterosexism and homophobia affect all of us and that one must work on ridding oneself of it – even if one is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Heterosexism and homophobia are also experienced cross-culturally.
- ① Assume that in any group there are LGBT people present. Use language that is inclusive and avoid using language that speaks to people as if heterosexuality and its institutions were the only choices. Also avoid the notion that homosexuality is a European invention. Accept that LGBT people are part of the multicultural mosaic.
- ① In professional interactions with peers, students, professionals, and others, take an anti-heterosexist stance. Make it known that you support, as the institution, the rights of LGBT people to express their identity openly if they choose.
- ① After assessing the risks, challenge and interrupt homophobic and heterosexist remarks and behaviors. Take an educational approach. Ask for clarification. Question.
- ① Continue to educate yourself about sexual diversity, homophobia, and heterosexism as well as their cultural, social, and political implications – e.g. attend campus programs, see the films and TV shows, visit LGBT bookstores, etc.
- ① Use the terms “gay”, “lesbian”, “bisexual”, or “transgender” and refrain as much from using the term “homosexual” in reference to LGBT people.
- ① If you are heterosexual, learn (by doing) not to become defensive or distracted from your anti-heterosexist stance at work with people ‘accuse’ you of being gay or lesbian simply because you have taken a pro-gay stance. If you are an LGBT person but are not out in your professional role, try not to let fears of exposure prevent you from taking an anti-heterosexist stance.
- ① Accept that bisexuality is a viable sexuality and lifestyle rather than the posture of a confused person or a person who is rejecting a gay or lesbian identity.
- ① When an LGBT person comes to you, affirm him or her, and respond as you would to any other person who reveals important or sensitive information.
- ① Integrate LGBT concerns into the concerns of minority student communities.
- ① Resist privileging heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships and institutions in programs, services, classrooms, leisure time, and social activities.
- ① Understand why there is heterosexual privilege.

- ① Be supportive when an LGBT person is upset for angry about discriminatory treatment.
- ① Respect a person's choice not to reveal his or her LGBT identity.
- ① Believe in yourself!
- ① Recognize that everyone, both allies and LGBT people alike, are the product of a heterosexist and homophobic society.
- ① Assume that making mistakes is part of the learning process of being an effective ally. Acknowledge and apologize for mistakes; learn from them, but **do not retreat** as an ally.
- ① Be a 100% ally; no deals; no strings attached.
- ① Have a good understanding of sexual orientation and be comfortable with your own.
- ① Be aware of the coming out process and realize it is a lifelong process. The coming out process is unique to LGBT people and brings challenges that are not often understood.
- ① Understand that LGBT people receive the same messages about homosexuality and bisexuality as everyone else. Thus, LGBT people suffer from internalized homophobia and heterosexism. It is important to recognize the risks of coming out and to challenge the internal oppression.

