

## **Frequently Asked Questions: ALLIES**

### **How can I tell if someone I know is LGBT?**

Ultimately, the only way to tell if a person is LGBT is if that person tells you so. There are many stereotypes of people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual or transgender (LGBT). Many people who are LGBT don't fit those stereotypes, and there are people who fit the stereotypes who aren't LGBT. Assumptions on your part can be misguided. The important thing to remember is that there is a great possibility that someone you interact with on campus is LGBT and to try to be sensitive to that no matter whom the person is.

### **What should I do if I think someone is LGBT, but they haven't told me?**

Again, remember that assumptions on your part may be inaccurate. The best approach is to create an atmosphere where that individual can feel comfortable coming to you. You can do this by making sure you are open and approachable, by giving them indications that you are comfortable with this topic and that you are supportive of LGBT concerns. If a person is already "out" to oneself, and they feel you are worthy of their trust, then they may tell you. If the person seems to be in conflict about something, it may or may not be their sexuality. In this case, it is best to simply make sure they know you are there if they need to talk. Remember, they may not have told you because they don't want you to know.

### **If someone tells me they are LGBT can I tell other people?**

Coming out to someone is a very personal decision. If a person came out to you, it means that they trust you and want you to know more about them. Furthermore, just because a person came out to you does not mean that they are out to anyone else. A person who identifies as LGBT has to think about many different things when deciding whether or not to come out to someone, and therefore it **MUST** be their personal decision to do so. Outing someone can be very dangerous and will many times be seen as a betrayal of trust.

### **How do I make myself more approachable to people who identify as LGBT?**

Demonstrate that you are comfortable with topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity and that you are supportive of LGBT concerns. Be sensitive to the assumptions you make about people and try not to assume that everyone you interact with is heterosexual, that they have opposite-sex partners, etc. Try to use inclusive language; for example, avoid use of pronouns that assume the sex of someone's partners or friends, or use inclusive examples that specifically use LGBT topics. Use a person's preferred name and pronouns –and if you are unsure of what they prefer then politely ask. Be a role model by letting others know that you don't

appreciate homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic jokes or remarks; when you hear these kinds of jokes or remarks, confront them. Make yourself knowledgeable about LGBT concerns by reading books or attending a meeting or activity sponsored by a LGBT organization.

### **What kinds of things might a person who is LGBT go through when "coming out"?**

Because of the difficulty of growing up in a largely homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic society, people who are LGBT may experience guilt, isolation, depression, suicidal feelings, and low self-esteem. As people who are LGBT become more in touch with their sexual orientation and gender identity, they may experience any number of these thoughts and feelings to any degree. On the positive side, coming out can be an extremely liberating experience as people who are LGBT learn who they are, gain respect for themselves, and find friends to relate to. Coming out to others can be an anxious process, as the individual worries about possibilities of rejection, ridicule, and loss of family, friends, and jobs. For students, college life is already stress filled, and adding the process of grappling with one's sexual identity or gender identity to that mix can be overwhelming.