

# HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE ALLY

## *An Effective Ally...*

- Respects confidentiality.
- Allows individuals to lead the direction of the conversation, lets them make their own choices, and listens, listens, listens.
- Talks to LGBT family, friends, and coworkers.
- Avoids assumptions and stereotyping.
- Tries using gender-neutral terms when talking about significant others, spouses, and partners.
- Expects to make some mistakes, but doesn't use them as an excuse for not acting.
- Acknowledges how homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism have operated in their life.
- Educates themselves about issues facing LGBT people.
- Has a sense of humor.
- Knows when and how to refer somebody to outside help, and to get professional adult intervention when necessary.

## *An Effective Ally Doesn't ...*

- Have all the answers.
- Try to "fix" problems
- Proceed with an interaction if boundaries or personal safety have been violated.



## When Someone Comes Out to You...

**Be a role model of acceptance.** The LGBT person has likely spent some time thinking about whether or not to tell you, and is aware of the risks that come with telling.

**Ask questions that demonstrate compassion.** Don't ask questions that would have been considered rude before the disclosure. The person has the same sensibilities as before. However, you might need to do some "catching up". Some good questions to ask are:

- How long have you known you were LGBT?
- Is there someone special?
- Has it been hard for you carrying this secret?
- Is there some way I can help?
- Have I ever offended you unknowingly?

**Appreciate the person's courage and trust.** Thank them for sharing with you, and follow up later to see how they're doing.

**Have a sense of humor.** While it's important to take the disclosure seriously, a little gentle humor might ease any tension the LGBT person is feeling.

**Offer support.** Ask if you might be available as the person comes out to others.

**Be prepared to give a referral.** If there are questions you can't answer, or if the person is feeling isolated, be prepared to refer them to a hotline, community center, GSA, or sympathetic counselor.

**Listen, listen, listen.** Coming out is a long process, and chances are you'll be approached again to discuss this process and its challenges.

**Assure confidentiality.** The person may not be ready to come out to others, or would like to do so in their own way.

