



This month, EAP asked Steve Jagord, Program Manager for the Pride Center of Western New York, to share ways that non-LGBTQ people can support and respect their LGBTQ co-workers. While we all have different life experiences, and there is never one “right way” to communicate, these are some general tips that can help you demonstrate your willingness to learn and your respect for people with experiences that may differ from your own.

1. Celebrate commonality—and accept your difference.

There are many ways in which our community brings us together through shared experiences and goals. That being said, if you don’t identify as LGBTQ, there may be certain experiences and shared understandings that you will not experience or understand yourself, and that’s ok. Listen when you don’t understand, and never be afraid to ask questions for more information.

2. Speak up for those who need support...

It’s important to speak up, especially when you hear an offensive assumption. Don’t just go along with the group—remember that there may be others who are thinking the same thing as you and will appreciate you speaking up, especially if they identify as LGBTQ.

3. ...But don’t speak for them.

Give your co-workers space to speak for themselves. When you want to be supportive, you can give support verbally and encourage those who are LGBTQ to speak. But when they start to speak, its ok to fade into the background when necessary—remember that you can support through listening, as well.

4. Always be ready to learn.

There isn’t one way to communicate with your LGBTQ co-workers—there is just as much diversity within LGBTQ communities as there

is outside of them. That means that sometimes you might accidentally say something that is potentially hurtful or offensive to someone—for example, if you don’t use the correct pronouns for transgender co-workers or if you make an assumption about someone based on their sexuality.

The key is to acknowledge the situation openly. If you made a mistake, apologize. If you avoid correcting yourself, you can make the person you’re speaking to feel like they’re not important enough to merit an apology. Sometimes, a quick “excuse me” or “I’m sorry” can be truly affirmative. If you don’t understand why you caused offense, feel free to ask—and really listen to what the person says and how they are feeling.

5. Don’t just say it, do it.

If you want to be an ally, get out and support LGBTQ concerns in your community, whether you write letters to your senator, post positive stories on social media, or volunteer for the Pride parade.

LGBTQ Resources in Western New York

Pride Center of Western New York

<http://www.pridecenterwny.org/>

Programs and services for LGBTQ people include monthly discussion group for those who identify as transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, or who are questioning their gender identity; a Coming Out Support Group; and LGBTQ Cultural Competency training (available to your organization through EAP). Additional programming and services are available for concerns related to healthcare, caregiving, arts and advocacy.

Gay and Lesbian Youth Services

<http://www.glyswny.org/>

Programs & services for LGBT & questioning youth ages 14-21.

PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara

<http://www.pflagbuffalo.org/>

Support group for family members of LGBTQ people.

VA Western New York Healthcare System LGBT Program

https://www.buffalo.va.gov/services/LGBT_Patient_Centered_Care.asp

Individual, family and couples therapy for LGBT Veterans, as well as LGBT health services, including gender reassignment support and hormone replacement therapy.