



## Supporting Students: Staff & Faculty

Are you a mentor or authority figure at UW-Madison? Staff, faculty, and teaching assistants all make important decisions about how to create inclusive classroom and office environments for LGBTQ students.

The following items are a starting point for thinking about student experiences in your classroom, office, or center.

### Check your assumptions

When a student comes to you, what assumptions are you making about the student's gender, sexual identity, and/or partnerships?

### Use language that creates space and invites safety

Use gender-neutral terminology when exploring the student's situation (i.e. "partner" vs. "spouse/ husband/ wife/ girlfriend/ boyfriend"; "they" vs. "he/ she/ ze") until the student has disclosed a label, pronoun, etc. for others involved.

### Listen for and honor the student's language and self-identification

Remember that at different stages of identity development and within different cultures, how students perceive themselves may vary widely. Realize that how you perceive and label a relationship or process often varies considerably from how the student self-identifies and conceptualizes their experience.

### Offer options and use questions to get a sense of what might be helpful

Again, check your assumptions. Be careful not to assume that just because someone identifies as LGBTQ that they would automatically find comfort in working with an LGBTQ therapist, police officer, advocate, doctor, etc. Using exploratory questions to determine what

information or referrals might be useful is one way of respecting students' identities and needs.

### Remember that you may represent an entity that may not feel safe

Even if you have the student's comfort and safety in mind, you may represent a profession, department, or other organizational entity that may not feel safe for them. Honor the student's fear, hesitation, concern, etc. and emphasize their control over what, when, how, and to whom they disclose. Note how past experiences of marginalization within traditionally oppressive systems (i.e. medical, legal, police, mental health) may create additional barriers to getting help and support. Validate these experiences and fears whenever possible and emphasize working with the student in their comfort zone.

### Understand how systems work

Be familiar with campus housing policies, UHS and mental health services offered, the preferred name policy, bias reporting, and other basics of campus experience. Use your knowledge to have intentional conversations: "Would you like that name in our office system? Other staff will be able to see it. Would you like me to correct others if they misgender you?"

### Be aware of how intersectional identities affect access to resources

Trans folks and queer women of color can face multiple barriers due to feelings of isolation within LGBTQ groups as a result of isolation within their cultural communities resulting from unrecognized and non-mainstream gender and/or sexual identities. Disabilities, poverty/ SES, and other experiences of oppression, marginalization, and difference may also affect a student's ability/willingness to access support from you and/or other resources.

*Adapted from "Making a Coming Out Plan," University of California-Riverside LGBT Resource Center. [www.out.ucr.edu](http://www.out.ucr.edu).*

