

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

If a student comes to you as a first responder, what assumptions are you making about the student's gender identity, sexual identity, and/or primary partnership?

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 your student.

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 your commitment to work with the student within their comfort zone.

Be cognizant of myths regarding "mutual" violence, roles, and gender

Remember that while there may be violence exhibited by both partners in a relationship, there is almost always one partner who uses the violence to control and coerce the other. Gender expression, apparent "roles" in the relationship, and physical size do not automatically tell you who is the abuser or survivor in any situation.

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 "LGBTQ Quick Points," University of Texas at Austin Gender and Sexuality Center. www.utgsc.com