

WHAT IS AN ADVOCATE?



What is an advocate?

An advocate or ally is someone who advocates for and supports members of a community, especially other than their own; reaching across differences to achieve mutual goals.

Why do LGBTQ+ people need advocates?

It is a widely available statistic that an estimated 10% of the population is comprised of LGBTQ+ people. This means that one in four families have a sexual minority within their immediate circle and almost everyone loves someone who is LGBTQ+ within their extended circle of friends.

Despite decades of progress towards universal human rights, the LGBT community still confronts criticism, discrimination, and animosity. Alarmingly, these prejudices and stereotypes are often much more socially acceptable when directed towards sexual minorities than towards many ethnic, racial, and religious minorities. By forming an alliance with those that we love, we can forge a bridge of understanding and support that will strengthen the fabric of our society.

What do allies and advocates do?

- Help LGBTQ+ people feel supported and included.
- Help others understand more about LGBTQ+ experiences.
- Support fairness and justice for everyone.
- Make our neighborhoods, communities, and our world a safer place for everyone.

Support

- Stick around and offer support when others don't. A real friend walks in when everyone else walks out.
- Let them know you care.
- Listen, listen.
- Invite them (and their significant others) to activities with your friends.
- Learn to use the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender comfortably and correctly. Consider refraining from using the term "homosexual," as the overwhelming majority of LGBTQ+ people do not identify with or use the word to describe themselves.
- Do not assume that everyone is interested in sex or dating.
- Refrain from assuming the sexual orientation of another person, even when that person is in a committed relationship with someone of a different gender. Many people who identify as bisexual, gay, and lesbian are in relationships that may not clearly indicate their sexual orientation.
- Be interested in their romantic life and significant others. Use non gender-specific language when doing so. Ask "Are you seeing someone?" or "Are you in a committed relationship?" instead of "Do you have a

boyfriend/girlfriend?” or “Are you married?” If they are in a committed relationship, use the word “partner” or “significant other,” showing your acceptance of all couples.

- Join PFLAG, GLSEN, GLAAD, and other support groups.
- Remember that when you have privilege, you cannot see the oppression as clearly as the non-privileged group can. When people point out your oppressive attitudes or language to you, your first response should be to believe it. Try not to leap to defend yourself. Then it is time to ask questions and learn more.
- If an LGBTQ+ person hits on you, be flattered rather. Treat any interest that someone might show just as you would if it came from someone who is heterosexual or cisgender.
- Talk to them about the same things as you do with other friends (music, weekends, parties, parents, dates, movies, studies, etc.); sexuality is just one part of their life (just as it is with yours) and should not dominate all of your conversations with them.
- Volunteer for or contribute to organizations that support the LGBTQ+ community.
- Do not assume that a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person is attracted to you just because they identify as such.
- Be as physical (or not) with them as you are with heterosexual friends.
- Check in with them if there has been an anti-gay incident on campus or in the news.
- Do not inform others of their sexual orientation or identity without prior consent. In fact, as with all good friends, if they tell you anything in confidence, honor that trust. Go to LGBTQ+ events every now and then.
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- Actively work toward making the world a better place for all marginalized people, not just LGBTQ+ people.
- Remember that everyone in privileged groups is part of the oppression. No matter how much work you have done on that area, the work of unlearning oppression is never finished. Until we change the politics and economics of oppression, we are still "living off the avails" of oppression.

Educate & Advocate

- The responsibility of acceptance lies with those who have the ability to advocated and educate in areas uncomfortable/unsafe to the LGBTQ+ community.
- If you hear a prejudice comment or see an example of oppression or discrimination, try to speak up first. Do not wait for a member of the oppressed group to point it out.
- Support the process of unlearning oppression with other members of your own group. Fellow individuals with privilege might hear you even if they are not ready to believe and listen to LGBTQ+ individuals speak about their experiences.
- Make LGBTQ+ issues a comfortable part of your everyday conversation, just as you might talk about music, a class, or political ideas.
- Let people know you don't want to hear offensive slang, anti-gay jokes, stereotypical remarks, or put-downs of LGBTQ+ people.
- Write an editorial when someone prints a slanderous article about the LGBTQ+ community.
- Volunteer for organizations that advocate for civil rights.
- Support local LGBT businesses and LGBT-friendly national chain stores (<http://www.hrc.org/apps/buyersguide/#.UcyPWvmmguc>)
- Stand up against harassment of a person or group perceived as LGBTQ+.

- Join a political rally.
- Donate money to an organization that fights for civil rights.
- Count your privileges; keep a list, then work to break the invisibility of privilege by trying to help others who benefit from privilege understand oppression and make the links among different forms of oppression.
- Write a letter to your legislators encouraging them to defend the civil rights of the LGBTQ+ community.
- Report illegal discrimination, hate crimes, and abuse to the authorities.
- Write letters to your political representatives asking them to support legislation that positively affects LGBTQ+ people.
- Talk to professors about including LGBTQ+ history and information in the curriculum.
- Use your privilege to strategically amplify the voices of marginalized people you are working alongside in order to educate other allies in the movement.

Find Out

- Read books or magazine by or about LGBTQ+ people.
- Attend a workshop about diversity, homophobia, and/or transphobia.
- Listen to music by LGBTQ+ musicians.
- Visit your local LGBTQ+ Pride Center.
- Research topics at the library at the university campus or the LGBTQ+ Resource Center.
- Read poetry or stories with LGBTQ+ themes.
- Support LGBTQ+ artists by buying their artwork.
- Learn everything you can about oppression - read, ask questions, listen. Find LGBTQ+ who like to teach and educate others and ask them your questions (however, do not *expect* every LGBTQ+ to be willing to teach you).

Ask yourself some questions

- How comfortable are you with LGBT people?
- What are my conceptions about gender gender-appropriate roles and behaviors?
- What are your assumptions?
- Do you hold any stereotypes?
- What comes to mind when you think of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals?
- What personal characteristics and perspectives will make it easy for you to be an ally or advocate?
- What personal characteristics and perspectives will make it more difficult?
- Are there questions you'd like to have answered?
- How are LGBTQ+ civil rights related to other civil rights and social justice issues?
- How might I be contributing to the oppression of LGBTQ+ people?

“The best thing you can learn to do if you want to be an ally is realize that you’re going to screw up, and you’re going to do it a lot, so you will need to learn to apologize with honesty and a true desire to change. Then don’t get hung up. Move forward and do better.”
- Jamie Utt

Compiled from various resources, including: <http://lgbt.utah.edu/training/ally.php>, <http://www.umass.edu/stonewall>, and <http://www.daa.org.uk/>