

Straight But Not Narrow: How to Be an Ally to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People

- Use the words “gay” and “lesbian” instead of "homosexual." The overwhelming majority of gay men and lesbians do not identify with or use the word "homosexual" to describe themselves.
- Use non-gender specific language. Ask "Are you seeing someone?" or "Are you in a committed relationship?," instead of "Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?" or "Are you married?" Use the word "partner" or "significant other" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend" or "husband/wife."
- Do not assume the sexual orientation of another person even when that person is married or in a committed relationship. Many bisexuals, and even some gay men and lesbians, are in heterosexual relationships. And don't assume that someone who is transgender is gay or that the person will seek to transition to become heterosexual.
- Do not assume that a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person is attracted to you just because they have disclosed their sexual identity. If any interest is shown, be flattered, not flustered. Treat any interest that someone might show just as you would if it came from someone who is heterosexual.
- Challenge your own conceptions about gender-appropriate rules and behaviors. Do not expect people to conform to society's beliefs about "women" and "men."
- Validate people's gender expression. For example, if a male-born person identifies as female, refer to that person as "she" and use her chosen name. If you are unsure how to refer to a person's gender, simply ask that person.
- Speak out against statements and jokes that attack LGBT people. Letting others know that you find anti-LGBT statements and jokes offensive and unacceptable can go a long way toward reducing homophobia.
- Educate yourself about LGBT history, culture, and concerns. Read LGBT publications such as MU's shOUT Magazine, The Advocate, or Out Magazine. See movies that are by and about LGBT individuals.
- Raise LGBT issues, concerns, and experiences in your family, workplace, school, religious community, and neighborhood. Educate children about families that have two moms or two dads. Support efforts to get MU to offer full domestic partner benefits. Establish a LGBT welcoming committee in your faith community.

Adapted from the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley, Rochester, N.Y.