

Supporting our LGBTQ+ Youth

How to be an Ally



OutNebraska empowers thriving LGBTQ+ communities through education, celebration, and advocacy.



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Objective

Raise awareness of and improve response to young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) in mentorship partnerships.

Group Agreements/Expectations

- Vegas + Rules
- Assume good intent
- There is no such thing as a dumb question
- Respect other viewpoints

Introductions - Break out

- Name
- Time in Mentoring
- Joy and Challenge

A study from the Centers for Disease Control revealed a "paradigm shift" in sexual openness of young people, finding bisexuality is on the rise.



A recent survey polled more than 1,000 people between ages 13 and 26 in the U.S. and UK, finding **57%** of respondents said they don't fit into the traditional definition of heterosexuality.

Common Misconceptions

#1 The mentee I work with is just too young to know that they are LGBTQ.

Young people are coming out at younger ages than ever before. A research study of LGB youth found that **75% recalled feeling “different” in childhood** and that awareness of difference usually came between 4 and 12 years old (as early as 3 years old, 8 years old on average)

D'augelli, A. R., Grossman, A. H., & Starks, M. T. (2008)



#1 The mentee I work with is just too young to know that they are LGBTQ.

One study of transgender youth found that the average age of “talking about gender being different” was 5 for trans girls and 8 for trans boys and it is not uncommon to do so as early as 2-3 years old.

#1 The mentee I work with is just too young to know that they are LGBTQ.

It is certainly true that a big part of adolescence is exploring and coming to understand your gender and sexuality. The young people we work with may demonstrate an evolving understanding of these aspects of themselves. **This exploration and evolution does not mean that it is impossible for a young person to know who they are.**



#2 Bisexuality/Pansexuality is a “phase” so the bisexual youth I work with will eventually identify as gay, lesbian, or straight.

The belief that bisexuality is a “phase” or “not real” is a harmful myth that must be debunked. Not only is bisexuality “real,” in fact, studies of both LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ adults show that the percentage of those identifying as **bisexual (around 40%)** is larger than the percentage of those identifying as other sexual orientations.



#2 Bisexuality is a “phase” so the bisexual youth I work with will eventually identify as gay, lesbian, or straight.

It is common for young people who do identify as bisexual to feel dismissed, mocked, or stigmatized by peers because of this myth. It is, therefore, even more crucial for adults caring for bi youth to **support and affirm that aspect of their identity.**



#3 LGBTQ youth need to be less “out” or “in your face” about their LGBTQ identity so they can be safer and fit in better.

It is true that **not all spaces are safe spaces** for LGBTQ youth. An important component of supporting LGBTQ youth is helping them navigate issues around safety, assessing risks, and deciding when and how they should be out to those around them.



#3 LGBTQ youth need to be less “out” or “in your face” about their LGBTQ identity so they can be safer and fit in better.

Encouraging an LGBTQ young person to conceal their LGBTQ identity or express themselves in a way that does **not feel authentic** to them is harmful and can damage the young person’s self-esteem and put them at increased risk for negative outcomes.



Talking about our labels...

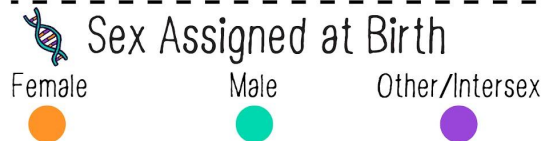
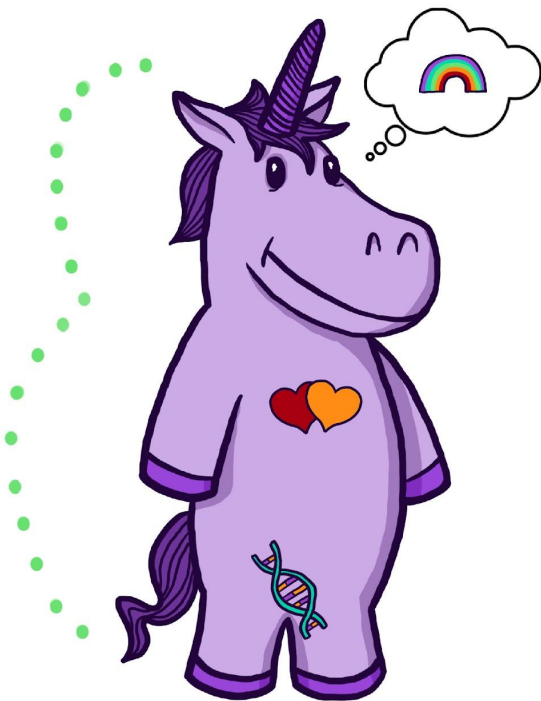
We all have a gender identity - it is the label we use to describe our internal sense of our own gender.

Western culture uses a binary to describe gender - either male or female. However, gender is better described as a spectrum.



The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Talking about our labels...

We all have labels to describe our genders and attractions, not just LGBTQ+ people.

Those who are cisgender and heterosexual are taught that their identities are the “norm” and therefore “neutral” or “noncontroversial” - this is not true.

- No identity is the “norm”
- LGBTQ+ identities are not “controversial”



Talking about our labels...

When you start talking about gender and sexuality, especially when you are not used to it, it can be uncomfortable.

Lean into it

The more we all talk, the easier it gets, and the less stigmatized LGBTQ+ people and our identities are.



What does it mean to be non-binary?

Someone who is non-binary experiences their own gender as being somewhere along or outside of the spectrum.

A non-binary person may use a different pronoun.

What are Pronouns:

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (I or you) or someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this).

When we talk about our pronouns, we are talking about the words we want people to use for us instead of our name.

Pronouns are a deeply personal way we identify ourselves.



Why is it important to respect people's pronouns?

You can't always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them. Try not to assume.

Correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.



How to talk about pronouns...

Offer your own - in writing, in introduction, on a name badge

Just ask - If you feel comfortable, can you share what pronouns you use?

A note on singular “they”:

“They” has been used to refer to singular persons for centuries.

We use it all the time today.

Remember that person who cut you off in traffic?
With their big truck? Gosh, how annoying they
were!



My mentee asked me to use they/them (or other) pronouns - now what?

It is important to use correct pronouns when speaking directly with your mentee.

When you do not use the right pronouns:

- You send the message that you do not respect the person
- The person can feel stressed, disrespected, and unwelcome



My mentee asked me to use they/them (or other) pronouns - now what?

- 1) Affirm your student
- 2) Ask whether the student is using that pronoun with other students, teachers, family members
- 3) Use correct pronouns in appropriate conversations
- 4) If you mess up - fess up

Don't let your face plants grow roots...



The science of apologizing

We are all human - we all make mistakes

Apology

- Sincere and authentic
- Affirm gender or pronoun
- Concise apology
- Move conversation along
- Practice and make a sincere effort to get it right next time



Pronoun Etiquette

Accept you may mess up, commit to improving every day. Practice at home or in your car

- Switch to their name for a while, helps to detach the person from the old pronouns
- Talk to yourself in your head about them OR outloud at home or in your car
- Have an accountability buddy - practice the pronouns with someone else who will stop and correct you if you mess up

The importance of confidentiality

Coming out to other people is a deeply personal process.

People do not always come out to everyone all at once - they generally start with people they trust the most.

You could be one of the first people your mentee talks to about their orientation or identity.



The importance of confidentiality

Family rejection on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity can have extreme effects on LGBTQ+ youth.



The importance of confidentiality

If your mentee comes out to you in any fashion, please keep that information confidential in regard to other students and parents.

Not everyone comes out - that doesn't make their identity less valid. Students who choose to remain quiet about their identities need support too.



Coming out etiquette

You can affirm your mentee by:

- Using the correct name and pronouns directly with them and as appropriate
- Maintaining confidentiality as appropriate*
- Educating yourself on LGBTQ+ issues

* It may be appropriate to share your mentee's information w/ school counselor's in the case that they express serious suicidal ideations or show signs of self-harm.



Words of Affirmation

Thank you for trusting me with this important information.

I appreciate knowing more about you.

As your mentor, how can I support you?



Stumbling, growing, and learning forward

Don't let your face plants grow roots.

Accept our mistakes, make amends, and commit to progress.

You *can* teach an old dog new tricks - it is never too late to learn and grow.



Stumbling, growing, and learning forward

Doing this requires humility from us:

- We must be willing to accept our mistakes
- We must be able to leave our egos at the door
- We must be willing to listen to the people we have hurt

Stumbling, growing, and learning forward

We must accept some people have been hurt too often to give us grace:

- And we cannot hold that against them
- We can give ourselves grace and patience, but so many of our LGBTQ+ siblings do not have the time to rehabilitate us - we must be our own rehabilitation centers
- This community is a great place to start and work together to make ourselves and our community here, in Lincoln, in Nebraska, and beyond, better



Stumbling, growing, and learning forward

- We must be okay with the discomfort of growing pains
- Learning empathy, taking care of each other
- The best we can do is learn and let our lessons motivate us toward progress

Some LGBTQ+ Resources for Mentors

PFLAG (pflag.org)

GLSEN (glsen.org)

Gender (genderspectrum.org)

Pronouns (mypronouns.org)

Books: *The ABCs of LGBTQ+* by Ash Hardell (published under old name Ashley Mardell)

This Book Is Gay by Juno Dawson



Some LGBTQ+ Resources for Mentees

Q Chatspace - a moderated, online community for youth 13 - 19 (qchatspace.org)

Trevor Project - 24hr suicide prevention for LGBTQ+ youth (thetrevorproject.org)



OutNebraska - outnebraska.org

- Advocacy for pro-LGBTQ+ policies
- Online community calendar of events
- Educational sessions for business and non-profit organizations

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