

How Can You Support an LGBT Person?

ASK! "How can I be helpful to you?"

How to be most helpful to an LGBT person or someone questioning their identity:

By supporting the student through this (sometimes difficult) period, floor mates, friends and staff members have the opportunity to make a real difference in the life of a struggling student. Here are some concrete ways you can help:

- Do not 'out' the student! Do not reveal anything about the student's sexual orientation unless he or she has specifically given you the go-ahead.
- Protect the student from cruel remarks from others.
- Find out if the student has come out to their parents or guardians. If they have, find out how things are going. If not, offer support if the student chooses to approach this monumental task.
- Listen, listen, and listen - without judgment. Take the opportunity to learn about this person's experience.

How to help the friend/roommate/family members support a person who has come out to them:

- Sometimes, friends and even staff members are surprised when a student/floor member comes out.
- Normalize the surprise reaction. It's okay to express surprise to the student. People have a strong ability to see through floor mates or staff members who pretend like they're not surprised, or try to hide true emotions.
- At the same time, it is important for friends, floor mates and especially staff members to offer support, even if they have to push the boundaries of their comfort to do so. It may help to think of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people as being neither good nor bad, but simply the way they are - like being left-handed in a mostly right-handed world.

If you or other individuals believe that having a non-heterosexual relationship or being a gender variant person is "wrong", note that the student stands nothing to gain from disapproval - he or she will only feel more rejected and uncared for. Staff members who are concerned about how to manage their own reactions have an ethical obligation to talk these issues through with their supervisors. Staff have a responsibility to provide support to all students.

Campus Support Resources:

- LGBT Resource Center: 302 Student Services Building, (517) 353-9520, lgbtrc@msu.edu
- Counseling Center, 207 Student Services Building, (517) 355-8270, counseling@cc.msu.edu (please be thoughtful about how a referral is made. Student referrals should be made when a student desires an additional resource to sort through their own emotions or is in crisis.
- There are a number of community based resources (both MSU and greater Lansing) located from the LGBT Resource Center web-site: <http://lgbtrc.msu.edu/index.htm>.

The contents of this handout were adapted from an article published on <http://www.sexualityandu.ca/teens/orientation-5.aspzx>