

VEREDUS TALKS

How to be an LGBT+ ally

LGBT+ History Month is an annual month-long observance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, and the history of gay rights and related civil rights movements. In support of this, we at Veredus would like to share the following snap-shot guide on 'How to become a better LGBT+ ally'.

Showing your support and allyship by hoisting a pride flag is a fine start, but make sure you don't leave it there. In the last 4 years, the number of people identifying as LGBT+ in the UK has increased by more than a third but a recent study by the charity Stonewall found that 35% of LGBT+ staff have hidden their orientation at work in fear of discrimination.

Being an LGBT+ ally means creating a safe and confidential space for those who identify as LGBT+, free of tokenism and rooted in genuine support and understanding.

Major concerns such as transphobia, homophobia, cissexism and heterosexism are never acceptable and should always be challenged, creating an environment where speaking out is encouraged whenever oppressive or bullying behaviour occurs.

The basics of good allyship

Acceptance: supporting those within the rich and complex LGBT+ community to be their authentic selves and to have equal rights in every aspect of their work and personal lives.

Employee resource groups: Either form one or join one. By joining you show your intention and support to diversity and inclusion matters

Ally networks: Many organisations have exciting LGBT+ networks. Consider establishing or joining a team of straight allies who act as champions for LGBT+ rights throughout the organisation.

Empathy v sympathy: Avoid making assumptions about the lives of your colleagues. Try starting a conversation with a small sentence or two of acknowledgement and let the other person choose to open up or not. Remember LGBT+ people are so much more than just their sexuality or gender, and using an affirming narrative can really make all the difference to how comfortable LGBT+ people feel in your work environment.

Encourage inclusion & avoid stereotypes: Try to leave behind preconceived notions of the role types people might have once been pigeonholed into. Try to be aware of the stereotypes that you may consciously or unconsciously buy into, particularly those associated with gender.

Language is powerful: Amplify the voices of your LGBT+ colleagues by calling attention to their accomplishments. Defend them if inappropriate situations arise. Assertively challenge jokes and comments brushed off as 'banter'. Take a stand.

Have sensitivity around terminology: LGBT+ culture has a vast lexicon to proudly describe its complexity and depth. Be mindful that some words are used within the community casually as 'reclaimed' terms but are inappropriate for those from a privileged outsider's position to use. If you're ever in doubt, don't be afraid to ask and to learn - there is no better form of allyship.

Educate yourself - Being informed about the nuances of the LGBT+ community can make you a stronger ally. Do your research on what questions are not appropriate.

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Knowledge takeaways

Sexual orientation and gender identity: Sexual orientation is how we label or express our preference or attraction for sexual partners. Gender identity is the gender we associate ourselves with whether, male, female, variant or as having none at all. You might not fully understand how this might feel - and that's okay. The important thing is to support and learn from the those who do and have lived experience of it.

Trans: Trans is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is not in harmony with their birth assignment. It often includes people who identify as transgender, trans woman, trans man, gender non-conforming or gender variant.

LGBT+: LGBT+ is one variation of many abbreviations used to refer to the spectrum of sexualities that are other than the heteronormative cisgendered orientations.

LGBT+ stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender - the + sign stands for a number of other identities, including queer and questioning, intersex, polysexual, non-binary, pansexual, two-spirit (2S), androgynous and asexual, amongst others.

LGBT+ is commonly used in materials relating to gender and sexuality in general, but for example where that material is specifically around certain orientations, it might be more appropriate to use an alternative abbreviation.

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