

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Creating an LGBTQ inclusive workplace

For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people (LGBTQ), “coming out” is the term -used to refer to the process of revealing sexual orientation or gender identity for the first time. Far from being a one-time rite of passage or overnight change, coming out is something LGBTQ people must do over and over again: to friends, family and indeed almost every time a new person, group, or situation is encountered. It is a process that is different for everyone – some people come out to everyone in their lives’ immediately, others take their time and others’ choose to protect their sexual orientation and or gender identity and not come out to certain people or groups. One thing that coming out has in common for most LGBTQ people is that it is not easy and may elicit anxiety and fear of being ostracized and excluded.

The workplace can be a particularly sensitive and challenging environment for employees to come out. At work, the line between what is professional and what is personal is often blurred and employees regularly discuss their families and even bring their partners to holiday parties or events.

As a manager, you will want to do your best to make your workplace a safe and comfortable environment for employees to come out. Here are some tips to encourage inclusivity and diversity when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Make your workplace’s discrimination policy available

Your workplace should have an anti-discrimination policy in place to cover sexual orientation and gender identity. Make sure this policy is up to date and readily available to your employees.

Don’t make any assumptions

We often assume people are straight and our language conveys these assumptions. Replace questions like “do you have a husband” with neutral language like “do you have a partner” and demonstrate this to your direct reports and their colleagues so it becomes the norm.

Allow people to identify as gender neutral

Washington DC recently pioneered as the first American city to issue gender neutral driver's licenses and identification documents. Allow your employees a third gender option on any official forms.

Celebrate LGBTQ pride

Many cities around the world dedicate specific days, weeks, or months to celebrating gay pride within their communities. Bringing the celebration into the workplace can help you demonstrate to your team and organization that you value acceptance, respect, inclusiveness and diversity. Displaying symbols of pride like a positive space sticker or flag in your workspace shows everyone that you are committed to a LGBTQ positive workplace and will make employees more comfortable in coming out. Check online for what Pride events are happening in your community and for other resources like videos and stories to share with your team.

Bring education into the workplace

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Educating yourself and your workforce is of vital importance in keeping current on the best practices to foster diversity and inclusivity. Invite a local LGBTQ organization to lead workshop for you and your staff.

Though visibility of LGBTQ people has increased and there have been gains in formal rights, discrimination still exists and it is possible that your workplace will include people who are prejudiced against these identities. Make it your mission to have a zero tolerance policy towards any harassment, homophobic or transphobic language in the workplace. Encourage anyone who has a problem or feels uncomfortable coming out to talk with you.