ten steps to being an ally for transgender people

1. **Don’t assume.** You might not know if a transgender person is in your presence. If speaking to a group, try to be inclusive.

2. **Don’t tolerate anti-trans remarks or jokes.** If someone makes a transphobic joke or remark, call them out on it. Challenge transphobic thinking.

3. **Use someone’s preferred pronoun.** If a person says she identifies as female, use “she” and “her” regardless of what that person’s body or appearance is. If you are not sure which pronoun to use, ask the person, “What pronoun would you like me to use?”

4. **Respect confidentiality.** If a person comes out to you as transgender, transsexual or questioning, ask that person who else knows and who you can talk to about it.

5. **Listen.** Every trans person’s experience is unique. If someone is having a hard time coming out or experiencing discrimination, you can help a lot by just listening.

6. **Know your limits.** Admit when you’ve reached the limit of your knowledge. Ask for guidance or find an appropriate resource.

7. **Don’t try to label someone.** If someone tells you they feel like they are “trapped in the wrong body” don’t tell them they are necessarily a transsexual. People who are struggling with their gender identity often need the space to figure out for themselves how to identify.

8. **Don’t assume you know what someone’s sexual orientation is.** Sexual orientation and gender identity are not directly connected. Someone who is transitioning may also be questioning their sexual orientation or may choose to identify in a different way than they have previously.

9. **Look at yourself.** Examine your own ideas of gender stereotypes and challenge those around you to do the same.

10. **Stay open.** Remember transgender people are individuals who deserve respect and understanding.

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**when someone comes out to you**

“Coming out” is an ongoing process of being open about any of the many identities that a person may associate with. Here, we talk about someone who is choosing to tell you their sexual orientation or gender identity, but anyone can come out for any of their identities (race, socioeconomic status, ->Lady Gaga fan<-, etc.). Coming out takes a lot of courage and authenticity and may be the culmination of months or years of personally coming to terms with one’s sexuality or gender identity/expression.

When someone builds up the courage to come out to you, it is important for you to be as supportive as you can because the things that you say can have a strong impact on the person (especially for those who are just coming out).

Here are some guidelines on what you can do:

1. **Listen.**
2. **Remain neutral and non-judgmental.**
3. **Ask sensitive questions and be willing to learn.**
4. **Be supportive:** Let them know that you are there if they need something, and/or point them towards a few resources if necessary. You do not need to be an expert to be supportive, just remember to be open-minded.

5. **Don’t ignore it:** Make an effort to take an interest in this part of their life.

6. **Don’t make their sexuality the extent of your interactions:** Remember that this person has not changed; their sexuality is one part of their life, but not the only part of their life.

7. **Be honest and be open:** When someone is coming out to you, the most important thing is not how much LGBT background knowledge you have but to communicate to the person that you value the existing relationship.

Coming out is a huge step for anyone, and really means that someone trusts you enough to share a big part of their life with you. They may fear that you will not accept them, or that your relationship will change. By being honest, open-minded, and caring, you can help someone coming out to you feel more at ease.
understanding the ‘you are welcome here’ sign

The sign says to me: “You are not alone. You can talk to me. I will stand by you, fight for you, and defend you. Here, you are safe.” For some people it may not mean much but for those in distress like I was, it makes a world of difference. – MIT Grad Student

I had a very difficult time coming out to the point it significantly affected my studies. When I could not complete an assignment and had to meet with a professor, I only had the courage to tell her the truth when I saw the sign at her office. She was incredibly accepting and has been supportive for the past two years. I would not have had the courage to do so without knowing that she welcomes me.

– MIT Undergrad Student

For an LGBT grad student, the anxieties and politics of interacting with faculty can pose a challenge. YAWH cards allow faculty members at MIT to easily and clearly communicate that your sexuality is a non-issue to them - during research or during daily conversation. This eases the infamously heavy psychological burdens of graduate school for LGBT students. Without these little cards, I would have wasted valuable time and energy wondering how my sexuality might affect my relationships with faculty. – MIT Grad Student

The sign reminds me of the growing support for LGBT rights and human dignity. Seeing them on the doors is heartening; not seeing them makes me question if it was simply neglected or if the person has a biased view against me.

– MIT Faculty

My own coming out process took decades. As an openly gay staff member, I display the sign inside and outside my office, in hope of easing the process of coming out for those who are struggling like I was.

– MIT Staff Member

I have been at MIT for twenty years. I started in the closet and felt invisible. When I finally came out my co-workers were very accepting. I wish that the signs had been around earlier so I would not have waited for so long.

– MIT Dean

LGBT resources

MIT Resources
LGBT@MIT/Rainbow Lounge
Working to create a more inclusive and welcoming campus community for lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer, questioning individuals and their allies, with a primary focus on students. web.mit.edu/lgbt 617 253 5440

Trans@MIT
Transgender-related information and resources for the MIT community. web.mit.edu/trans

LGBT Issues Group
A committee that seeks to foster a safe, welcoming environment and to ensure MIT’s educational mission is upheld for all students. lgbt@mit.edu 617-253-5440

LGBT Student Groups
http://web.mit.edu/lgbt/subform.html

MIT Medical Mental Health 617-253-2916
MIT Student Support Services 617-253-4861

Massachusetts Resources
Fenway GLBT Helpline 888-340-4528
Peer line 800-399-PEER

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in Boston 866-427-3524

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) 617-778-0519
www.masstpc.org

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network of Massachusetts 617-536-9669

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders 617-426-1350

National Resources
Trevor Project Crisis/Suicide Line 866-4-U-TREVOR
Human Rights Campaign 202-628-4160
American Civil Liberties Union 212-549-2627

As part of MIT’s continuing effort to create a safe and welcoming environment for its LGBT students, the “You are Welcome Here” Campaign was launched in 1999. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness and create visibility and support for members of the LGBT community at MIT.

More than an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, LGBT has also been used as an umbrella term to imply the more inclusive acronyms for Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Allies. LGBT Allies, advocates and supporters of the LGBT community are a very important part of the effort to create a more welcoming campus climate.

At times, the LGBT community is looked at as a group that seeks special attention. On the contrary, the members of the LGBT community would like the world to embrace and celebrate the diversity of the human experience. We would like to be respected as individuals with valid identities, relationships, and as those who lead healthy, responsible lives rather than “lifestyles”. The LGBT community at MIT seeks to ensure a safe and supportive campus, free from homophobia, bi-phobia, trans-phobia, and any kind of hate, where all are welcomed as equals. We envision an MIT where all aspects of people’s identities are celebrated and where all individuals are respected for who they are, free from any prejudice, harassment, or discrimination.

While the main effort of the Campaign is to invite faculty and staff at MIT to join the Campaign by posting a “You Are Welcome Here” Card in their office or workspace, ongoing education and awareness programs are an important part of this effort as well. Two such programs are the monthly lgbt@mit e-newsletter and the monthly LGBT Issues Group meetings. For more information about these and a variety of other LGBT, Ally, and Diversity Resources at MIT, please visit: http://yawh.mit.edu/