

# LGBTQIA ALLY TIPS

Many folks are interested in learning more about how to practice allyship. In particular, our campus community has expressed interest in learning more about allyship to trans, intersex and asexual communities. Below we have highlighted some suggestions for allyship, as well as some general tips:

1. Recognize the diversity of trans & genderqueer lives. Remember that these identities are part of other identities, and intersect with race, class, size, sexual orientation, age, immigration status, etc.
2. Always use the pronouns & name people want you to use. If you're unsure, ASK! If you make a mistake, correct yourself – without being dismissive of its importance, without making excuses, & without making it a huge deal/over-apologizing/drawing attention to you. Politely (& subtly, if possible) correct others if they use the wrong pronoun. It helps to be explicit rather than hoping they pick it up.
3. Ask when & where it's safe to use their chosen name & pronouns (e.g., if a trans person is not out at home, ask them how you should refer to them around their family, etc).
4. Don't ask trans people what their "real" name is (i.e., the one they were born with). This is invasive and implies their chosen name is invalid and less "real." If you know their birth name, do not divulge it to others.
5. Instead of saying someone was born a boy (or a girl), try saying they were assigned male at birth (or were assigned female). These terms recognize the difference between sex & gender, and emphasize the ways in which sex & gender are assigned to individuals at birth, rather than being innate, binary or immutable qualities. AND... you can ask yourself if it is necessary to even mention what sex someone was assigned at birth.
6. Don't confuse gender with sexual orientation. Trans people, like cisgender people, are straight, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, etc.
7. Don't ask trans people about their bodies, how they have sex, what their genitals are like, etc. It's rude & objectifying & none of your business. It can be helpful to think about whether you would ask these questions of a cisgender person.
8. Don't ask about surgery or hormone status; don't ask "when are you going to have the surgery?" or "are you on hormones?" Like cisgender people, our medical histories & bodies can be intensely personal & private. If trans people want to share these details with you, allow them to do so on their own terms.
9. Don't assume the only way to transition is through hormones/surgery, & understand that medical transition is very often based on economic status. Recognize the classism inherent in associating medical transition with "authentic" trans identities.
10. Don't assume all trans people want hormones and/or surgery, or to transition at all.
11. Don't assume all trans people feel "trapped in the wrong body." This is an oversimplification and not the way (all) trans people feel.
12. Don't assume all trans people identify as "men" or "women." Many trans people and genderqueer people identify as both, neither, or something altogether different.

13. Don't tell trans people what is appropriate to their gender (e.g., trans women should grow their hair out & wear dresses). Like cisgender people, we have varying forms of gender expression.
14. Do listen if a trans person chooses to talk to you about their gender identity.
15. Be proactive and informed about restrooms - consider where nearby gender-inclusive/all-gender restrooms are near your work, classes, etc. Be understanding and think ahead about options if a trans or gender-non-conforming friend is uncomfortable using a gendered bathroom, locker room, or other segregated space.
16. If your organization is holding an event, designate a gender-neutral bathroom in the building.
17. Don't ask trans people to educate you. Do your own homework & research. Understand that there is a difference between talking to individuals about their preferences/perspectives and asking someone to be your educator. Try not to view individuals as spokespeople; trans communities are diverse, not one monolithic voice or viewpoint.
18. Recognize that trans women and trans feminine people deal with sexism and misogyny in a very real way (on top of transphobia).
19. Recognize that trans women deserve access to "women-only" spaces/programs/shelters/etc.
20. If you are cisgender, recognize your privilege & prejudices as a normatively gendered person.
21. Don't let transphobia/cissexism slide. Confront it as you would confront all other forms of oppression. Trans issues are rarely discussed & when they are it is often in a negative light.
22. Talk about trans issues/rights. Engage people in discussions & share your knowledge.
23. If you are a cisgender person, be aware of the role you can play as an ally. Remember that the way you talk about trans people (e.g., using the right pronouns) influences how others perceive us & can make a difference in whether we feel safe/comfortable.
24. Don't out trans people. This could be dangerous to their safety. Likewise, be aware of your surroundings when discussing trans issues with a trans person. For their safety & comfort, they may prefer not to discuss these topics in public places or among strangers.
25. Above all respect and support trans people in their lives and choices.

### **via Organization Intersex International**

1. Remember that most intersex individuals prioritize discussing how to combat human rights abuses [like surgeries on intersex infants], rather than being used as examples to explore concepts in sex and gender theory.
2. Be intersex inclusive - use LGBTI or LGBTQIA acronyms in your speech and writing at your university and organization. Consider how to be inclusive in the scope of your programming, your understanding of the variety of bodies, and the issues that you consider relevant to addressing LGBTQIA oppression.

3. Make intersex more visible - "Like" an intersex activist organization like OII via Facebook; share an article, blog post, book, documentary, movie, YouTube clip, or these ally tips; spread information via other formats such as tumblr and in-person conversations.
4. Learn about intersex from intersex people: intersex people are the experts on our experiences and needs; contact an intersex educator for speaking engagements, if unable to meet intersex people, view documentaries, etc., featuring intersex people telling their own stories.
5. When speaking to intersex individuals:
  1. Remember that being intersex may or may not be a part of their identity
  2. Remember it is not their duty to discuss intersex at any time, or that they will be comfortable discussing all aspects: follow their lead
  3. Phrase questions to understand intersex broadly, not in ways that are too personal and thus invasive
  4. Ensure questions do not serve to stigmatize or fetishize intersex individuals
  5. If intersex individuals are not comfortable discussing certain topics:
    1. They may wish to have this conversation at another time
    2. They may wish to have this conversation, but not publicly
    3. They may wish to have a broad/general conversation, rather than a personal one
    4. They may not wish to have this conversation; it may be too personal or triggering
6. Do not make the assumption that intersex is a medical condition - some intersex folks do not use the words "condition" or "syndrome" when discussing their form of intersex. You can use language like "variations of intersex" or "intersex variations" instead of "intersex conditions."
1. Educate yourself and others about asexuality
2. Speak up if you hear an asexual person being ridiculed or harassed for their orientation.
3. Explicitly include asexuality and its related identities in sexual orientation-focused groups, workshops, discussions, etc.
4. Don't automatically assume that everyone you meet is allosexual, even if they seem perfectly comfortable talking or writing about sex.
5. Respect a person's self-identity and refer to them by whatever labels (or lack thereof) they apply to themselves.
6. Don't ask highly personal questions about a person's sexual feelings or experiences, unless you are close enough to the person that you know such questions would be acceptable.
7. Don't tokenize an asexual person by expecting them to be the spokesperson for all things asexual.
8. Recognize that asexual people may have varying degrees of comfort with discussions of sex; some asexual people may be very uncomfortable with it, others may be completely fine with it and may

even enjoy flirting or making sexual jokes just for fun. If you're not sure where someone's boundaries are, ask them.

9. Correct misconceptions about asexuality if you hear someone expressing them.
10. Don't assume anything about an asexual person's romantic orientation, or about their past or present sexual experiences (or lack thereof).
11. Cultivate a vision of sex positivity in which not wanting sex is just as valid and affirming as wanting it.

### **Adapted from CSU Long Beach's "Being an Ally."**

1. Believe that issues related to oppression are everyone's concern, not just the concern of those who are the targets of oppression.
2. Understand that people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or asexual are experts on their own experience, and that you have much to learn from them.
3. Take responsibility for your own education on issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Take the initiative to become as knowledgeable as you can on issues of concern to people who are LGBTQIA.
4. Making mistakes is part of the learning process of practicing allyship. Acknowledge and apologize for mistakes; learn from them, but do not retreat.
5. Avoid trying to convince people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and intersex that you are on their side; just be there.
6. Remember that ally is a verb - actions are more powerful than words.
7. Create opportunities for allies to join together in coalition to reduce oppression of LGBTQIA people.