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## Allies Tips for the Workplace

- The #1 way to break down myths & stereotypes is by knowing someone who is LGBT!
- I have heard GLBT too - does it make a difference? No, it does not! The order varies around the world and you may also hear other letters included like A=Ally, Q=Queer or Questioning; I=intersex or Interested. How to decide which to use? You can ask a co-worker which they prefer or check local LGBT community resources for the preferred order in your area!
- Have you ever been part of a group that was new to the workplace....as a woman, a person of color, or maybe younger than the rest of the employees? Try to remember that feeling of being the "other". It helps to understand what LGBT employees are facing today!
- When I meet someone for their first time and they are LGBT, I'm not sure what pronouns to use! There are two approaches here.
  1. You can look at them and make your best guess on whether you should use he or she. They will correct you if you are wrong. Just say thanks and remember to use the right pronoun in the future.
  2. The other way is to ask them which they prefer. Sometimes you might get a strong reaction to this method if they don't understand why you couldn't tell that they are a man or a women, but for someone who is LGBT, they will appreciate the effort to get to know them!
- You hear sometimes people say that they don't like LGBT employees at work because they don't want them to behave like they have seen at Pride events. I often ask them if they ever went to Mardi Gras in New Orleans. The behaviors that happen there aren't what you would like to see in the workplace either!
- We may have been taught a certain way to think or have seen images in the media that shape our beliefs about LGBT employees. Those things you heard may or may not be the truth about the LGBT community. Either way, as an ally, it is what you do about naming and dispelling myths & stereotypes that is an important step to increasing understanding in the workplace!
- What do you do when you hear a comment like some of these in the workplace? First, be aware and realize that it is a myth or stereotype about LGBT employees. Next, don't go along with the group and let it pass, say something. You don't have to be confrontational, just say "Hey, that's not OK" or "I don't think that's true". There are others who may be thinking the same thing and will appreciate you speaking up, especially if they are LGBT!
- When you first meet someone, there are almost always questions about your family. If you ask me as a woman if I am married and have a husband, I assume you are heterosexist or not accepting of LGBT. I might choose to make up a story or just not answer your question. How could I ask about your family from another perspective? How about, so are you in a relationship or have a partner? There is room in this question for someone who is LGBT to answer now!
- Everyone has each an assigned/birth sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. For example, due to media attention, when someone asks what your sexual orientation is, it is now assumed that you are being asked if you are lesbian, gay or bisexual, not heterosexual! The concepts in this section are a way for us to draw together and see how diverse we are!

- The correct term to use is transgender to cover anyone who has a gender identity that is different from their birth/assigned sex. It makes no difference if they have started any transition treatments or not.
- It isn't appropriate to ask about if someone has or has not had surgeries or started hormones if they identify as transgender. These are medical privacy issues that each person may choose to share. Trying to guess and talking among other co-workers creates an unsafe environment for the transgender employee. Consider if you would like your co-workers to know all the medical details of your life.
- Can you tell from by looking at someone if they are transgender and if they have had surgery, taken hormones or started to transition? Does it make a difference on how you would treat someone who was transgender?
- Employees sometimes say that is hard for them to change pronouns when someone is transgender. I always use the fact that we adjust very easily when a woman comes into work and changes her last name after she is married. We may make a mistake once in a while but we adjust quickly to her new name. What's going on with us when we find changing pronouns to be so much harder?
- We might have a stereotypical image of a straight male but there are lots of exceptions....In the 1960's, hippies were not considered real men. Today, how many men use hair products and get their nails done which was once considered something only women did. Changes and freedom to express who you are are two key aspects of diversity!
- If a woman goes into a traditionally male job or work sector, one of the rumors that can start in the workplace is that she is a lesbian. Heterosexual women have faced these kinds of comments for years!
- One hurdle straight men face as they become LGBT allies and speak up in the workplace is the questioning of their heterosexuality ("Wow Bob, I thought you were straight" when you tell a group to not tell an LGBT joke). This pressure to go along with the "just having a good time" is one of the hardest parts to being an ally!
- Women also deal with questioning of their sexual orientation when they turn down a man for a date. One of the common replies or rumors that get started is that they didn't accept the date because they were lesbian, instead of just the fact they weren't interested in dating the man!
- Bisexuals face discrimination from both the heterosexual and LGBT communities. If they are with someone of the same sex, the heterosexual community isn't comfortable with them. And, when they are with someone of the opposite sex, there is a sense that they are no longer LGBT from the LGBT community. This makes it hard to share your life with those at work and an ally can make all the difference to bisexual employees!
- Asexuals are the newest group to discuss their rights and identities.
- So which of these concepts would you be "in the closet" about (not letting anyone know about it) and which ones would you "out" about (let others know)?