

## How can I be supportive of my lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender colleagues?

Some Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) colleagues are not out in the workplace. Often their coworkers are supportive, but do not want to make LGBT colleagues feel uncomfortable and don't know how to approach the subject.

The following suggestions are offered to help all employees promote a safe work environment that is inclusive of LGBT colleagues whether they choose to disclose or not.

### Display a Safe Space emblem in your office.

LEAGUE at AT&T uses this emblem to designate "safe spaces" in the workplace. The emblem bears a pink triangle, an internationally recognized symbol of positive LGBT identity surrounded by a green circle, an international symbol of acceptance.



Displaying this emblem will let others know you support all employees regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, characteristics, or expression.

### Do not permit sexist, homophobic, transphobic jokes or comments.

Do not make inappropriate comments or jokes, and speak up when someone else does. These types of remarks are harmful and don't belong in the workplace. If you hear a co-worker talking inappropriately, let them know that you find the remarks offensive. This will reinforce your support of a safe workplace.

### Do not assume everyone is heterosexual.

Although it is difficult to establish precise statistics, it is estimated that 5-10% of the global population are gay, bisexual or lesbian. Few of them represent the stereotypical behavior or appearance. Likewise, it's not safe to assume that people who do fit these stereotypes are gay or lesbian. Include significant others in work functions where spouses are invited.

Use inclusive language such as "significant other" or "partner" and instead of asking if someone is married, ask if they are in a relationship.

If you know a co-worker is involved in a relationship, include his or her partner in the same work functions where spouses or dates are normally invited. When you're conversing socially, refer to a domestic partner the same way you would refer to someone's husband or wife. If you are unsure how to refer to someone's partner, ask them privately.

### Do not 'out' a LGBT colleague; if you're unsure, talk to them privately.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender colleagues

frequently feel invisible or alone. Many fear losing their job, reputation, and even their career.

Respect the privacy of the individual as self-disclosure can be a difficult process for many LGBT colleagues. Even in a supportive environment, some people may never feel comfortable coming out. You can provide a supportive work environment without insisting that they self-identify.

### Always use a transgender person's chosen name & pronoun.

Transgender individuals should be addressed with their chosen name and appropriate pronoun, regardless if it has been changed legally or within the corporate directory of the company. The easy way to remember this is to address them according to how they present themselves in the workplace. It is ok to ask them privately so ensure you are being respectful.

## What can I do now?

Learn more about the LGBT community. Take a workshop or class that is designed to create awareness of the concerns of their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender colleagues. Educational materials are available from many sources, including LEAGUE.

Display a "Safe Space" magnet in your work space. LEAGUE has magnets available with the Safe Space emblem. These magnets are suited for the office environment and can be placed on your office door, desk, or cabinet. The Safe Space emblem shows your colleagues that your workspace is a "safe space" for our LGBT colleagues.

## Why the Safe Space Program?

Many employers have an equal opportunity employment policy stating that a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, characteristics, or expression cannot be used as criteria for personnel decisions. A comprehensive EEO policy confirms that an employer wants its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender colleagues to feel comfortable in the workplace to be their authentic self and perform their best.

Even with a non-discrimination policy in place, many people remain unaware of the facts about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) colleagues. This can lead to an uncomfortable or openly hostile environment where employees feel forced to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. Fear can result in isolation and reduced effectiveness in the workplace.

Conversely, managers and employees who want to be supportive of diversity often don't know how to show support to LGBT colleagues.



The Safe Space Program was created to provide a message to all colleagues that the environment is supportive of LGBT people and that hostility will not be tolerated. Displaying a Safe Space magnet in your workplace creates a feeling of acceptance and leads to increased engagement of all employees.

## Why the Pink Triangle?

The pink triangle is a widely-recognized symbol of LGBT pride and liberation, but its origins are oppressive. Homosexuals were among those persecuted during a time of Nazi Germany; they were arrested, placed in concentration camps, and targeted for extermination. Just as Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David, homosexuals were identified by pink triangles. A quarter of a million people died in places like Dachau. Even liberation by the Allied armies did not always bring freedom; often, LGBT prisoners were forced by the Allied powers to serve out their sentences in prison.



Founded in 1987, LEAGUE at AT&T, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Allies employees of AT&T, is the oldest LGBT employee resource group (ERG) organization in the nation. For further information, visit <http://www.league-att.org> <http://www.league-att.org>

The Safe Space Emblem is a registered trademark of EQUAL! . For more information on EQUAL! and the Safe Space Program, please visit us on the web at: <http://www.league-att.org>

## The Safe Space Program



LEAGUE at AT&T provides a supportive environment for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) employees and Allies to develop leadership and professional skills adding value at AT&T by appreciating, promoting, and partnering on diversity in the community everywhere we live and work.

