

# Top Ways Teachers and Service Providers can Support a Person with a Disability Who is Coming Out LGBTQ



## Quotes from people with developmental disabilities:



- “Being in the closet, it is so much pressure living this day to day lie of not being who I am.”
- “I hear staff tell gay jokes all the time? They just assume that because I have a disability, I am straight.”

- “I did not know I was gay. I was more focused on having autism and how that made me feel different. Feelings I felt for boys were difficult to understand and identify. I did not know if these feelings were part of my sexuality or part of my disability. For example, some people with autism have obsessive feelings toward a person.”



- “I want to go to my peer support group for self-advocates who are LGBTQ and my staff insist that they be in the room. Why do people not respect my privacy?”

- “I worry if I am I going to look the part when I go into the LGBTQ world. You’ve got to be pretty and smart. We are people with disabilities. Are we going to get a look? Will we be judged?”
- “I have no privacy now. How will my parents deal with me when they find out that I am gay?”
- “Telling my whole story was such a relief. Sometimes just being able to hear yourself talk about your feelings can help so much.”

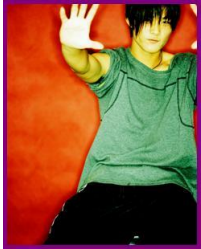


## Ways to Respond and Be Supportive



- ☐ Talk to us about self-care. Help us to find ways to feel better when feeling stressed and anxious. Ask what can we do to feel calmer and more relaxed? Self-care activities distract us until we are in a better place.
- ☐ Support us to identify people we can trust when feeling down. It helps to know which people we can trust at school, work, a faith community, a doctor's office or at an agency.
- ☐ Help us make friends. Friends can understand and react differently from family. Relationships are learning opportunities. We move in, out, and within them in different ways.
- ☐ People should not assume our disabilities determine everything we do. Sexuality and disability are a part of who we are. But that does not mean those things define everything about us.
- ☐ Get the facts. Learn about bullying and discrimination of LGBTQ students. These students are more likely to feel depressed, drop out of school and hurt themselves because they are often harassed.
- ☐ Words matter. Learn respectful terms used by the LGBTQ community. Be a role model and set a welcoming tone. Ask the person what words they want others to use.
- ☐ Accept people where they are; support people in discovering who they are. No judging – do not push your values on someone else.

- ❑ When you get to know a person with a disability, see the whole person including their sexuality. Be ready for someone to ask questions about being LGBTQ. If you don't have much of an idea about it, know who to ask.



- ❑ **Stop Bad Behavior** – More than half LGBTQ students who have been harassed do not tell because:

- they do not think adults will do anything about it
- and/or they fear the situation could get worse

Teachers and service providers must stop harassment whenever and wherever it happens. Step in, stop it and explain why it is harmful. For more information read this excellent booklet describing [The Top 10 Ways To Make Schools Safer For All Students](#).

- ❑ Support [sexual self-advocacy](#). The fundamental principles of self-advocacy that people with developmental disabilities can have control over their own lives, make their own decisions, solve problems and speak for themselves extend to sexuality and relationships.
- ❑ Treat adults as adults. Have respect for an individual's right to make choices and mistakes. People have the right to choose their own partners – same sex, opposite sex, with or without disabilities.
- ❑ Everyone has a right to the facts about health and sexuality information provided in an accessible manner. Take action to ensure that students and adults with disabilities get sex education.

