

# Tips for Working With Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People

**1 Don't assume heterosexuality.** There are an estimated 168,500 people living in Northern Ireland of a non-heterosexual sexual orientation. This is based on a widely agreed 1 in 10 figure, applied to the 2000 Northern Ireland census figures. *You are working with gay, lesbian and bisexual clients and colleagues whether you know it or not.*

**2 Don't try to guess who is Lesbian Gay or Bisexual.** Do not be tempted to perpetuate myths. It is not helpful for you or for the clients you work with. Gay and bisexual men and women in Northern Ireland are a diverse group, with diverse needs. Create opportunities for your client's to disclose this information without repercussions. You could do this through making literature available and advertising your inclusive equality statement to all clients.

**3 Respect confidentiality.** If a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person shares with you information about their sexual orientation, it is important you do not disclose this information without their permission. Sharing information with your colleagues can prove necessary but inappropriate disclosure or being 'outed' is cause for distress for LGB people and has led some to suicide. Inappropriate disclosure includes discussing an individual in a shared office or recording their sexual orientation on their medical records. In these settings it is very difficult to keep others from accessing this information. It is also important to realise that because a client is 'out' in some settings doesn't mean they are 'out' to family or friends or to their work colleagues.

**4 Be informed & examine your own biases.** Most of us are products of a homophobic society influenced by misinformation and fear. You need to be informed. Read reliable sources and talk to qualified persons.

**5 Remain neutral and non judgmental.** There is no way for a gay or bisexual person to predict your reaction accurately. You have spent your life in a society that teaches you to be intolerant of gay and bisexual people. The exchange of intimate information should not be seen as an opportunity for you to discuss the moral judgments that you may have of homosexuality. Also, avoid asking questions that would have been considered rude or unnecessary within this interaction before the disclosure of their sexual orientation (e.g. questions about sexual behaviour).

**6 Know when and where to seek help.** Know the reputable referral agencies in your area. LGB help lines can provide professional persons and organisations that are qualified to help. Tell them who you are and what kind of assistance you need. Cara friend (028) 9032 2023  
Lesbian Line (028) 9023 8668  
Also seek assistance from other LGB groups.

**7 Understand the meaning of sexual orientation and gender identity.** A person's sexual orientation relates to their attraction (emotional, physical or sexual) to another person. It is not a matter of a sexual 'preference'. People do not choose to be gay, lesbian or bisexual, they simply are. Understand that a person's sense of gender identity is a separate issue and relates to a person's sense of being feminine or masculine (or somewhere in between or outside of these gender categories).

**8 Challenge homophobic remarks and jokes.** Speak up when someone else makes disparaging remarks about LGBT people, or thoughtlessly uses anti-gay language, just as you would any other slurs. Don't perpetuate injustice through silence.

**9 Language is important.** When referring to someone's sexual orientation, it is best to have your client self identify. Make sure you have a good understanding of the following important terms:

**Gay man:** *a man who is emotionally, physically and sexually attracted to men.*

**Lesbian:** *a woman who is emotionally, physically and sexually attracted to women.*

**Bisexual:** *a person who is emotionally, physically and sexually attracted to people of both genders (not necessarily equal attraction or at the same time).*

**Homophobia:** *negative attitudes and prejudice towards people who are (perceived to be) gay, lesbian or bisexual.*

When referring to non heterosexual people avoid using the term 'homosexual' as this was a term was associated with a mental illness.

Use the term 'partner' rather than husband/wife or boyfriend/girlfriend in your interactions with all people.

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the  
**Rainbow**  
project



The Rainbow Project promotes the health and well being of gay and bisexual men living in or visiting Northern Ireland.

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