

How to be an LGBTQIA+ Ally in the Workplace

What is an ally?

Anyone, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, can be an LGBTQIA+ ally. An ally is someone who has a genuine, strong concern for the well-being of LGBTQIA+ people and who supports and accepts them. It is also a person that advocates for equal rights and fair treatment, and who confronts challenges that LGBTQIA+ people experience.

Why are allies important for the LGBTQIA+ community?

According to the Stonewall 2018 LGBT in Britain Work Report, 35% of LGBTQIA+ employees have concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity at work due to concerns about discrimination. Similarly, the Stonewall 2018 LGBT in Britain University Report revealed that 42% of LGBTQIA+ students have hidden their identity while in university for the same reason.

Allies play a crucial role in promoting LGBTQIA+ equality. Their support not only helps individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community feel more comfortable coming out, but also fosters understanding about the significance of equality and fairness for all individuals.

Creating a supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ people, such as colleagues wearing rainbow or trans flag lanyards or including statements like "proud to be an LGBTQIA+ ally" in email signatures, can make a huge difference to the confidence, motivation, and a feeling of acceptance in the workplace.

How can you be a better ally?

1. Understand that you don't have to understand.
2. Get comfortable being uncomfortable.
3. Don't assume!
4. Pronouns.
5. Speak up!
6. Educate yourself.

Keep reading for more information.



Understand that you don't have to understand.

It's crucial to acknowledge that you may not fully grasp or relate to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. It's okay if you don't fully understand their journey, as long as you recognise and respect their right to be who they are.

1.

Get comfortable being uncomfortable.

It's important to challenge your own biases and assumptions. Engage in discussions that might initially make you feel uncomfortable or uncertain. Be open to feedback and criticism without becoming defensive. Understand that you may make mistakes or unintentionally hurt or marginalise others. Instead of retreating or dismissing such instances, use them as opportunities to learn, apologize, and make amends. This includes if you are a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

2.

Don't assume!

It is best practice to refrain from making assumptions about your colleague's personal life. For instance, avoid using gendered terms like "boyfriend" or "wife" when inquiring about someone's partner. Instead, opt for gender-neutral language such as "spouse" or "partner" to be more inclusive.

Similarly, do not assume someone's gender or pronouns based on their appearance, clothing, or the way they speak. Showing respect through your language is a meaningful way to support LGBTQIA+ individuals and foster an inclusive workplace culture.

3.

Pronouns.

Never assume someone's pronouns based on their appearance, name or gender expression. Everyone's gender identity is personal and may not align with societal expectations. The best practice is to ask individuals for their pronouns or provide yours first.

Make it a habit to use the correct pronouns for colleagues, regardless of whether those pronouns align with your initial assumptions. Correct yourself if you make a mistake and apologise if needed. If you witness someone using incorrect pronouns for someone else, respectfully correct them.

4.

**THEY / .+
• THEM**

Including your pronouns in visible locations, like your email signature or Zoom name, shows you recognise the importance of pronouns to many LGBTQIA+ people. This also creates a safer environment for those who may not be openly out at work. However, it is important to understand and respect that some LGBTQIA+ individuals may not be ready to share their pronouns yet as they could be exploring their identity or simply want to maintain their privacy.

5.

Speak up!

When you encounter derogatory comments or jokes targeting LGBTQ+ individuals from coworkers, speak up and express your concern about how such remarks impact the company culture. Emphasize that there is nothing negative about being LGBTQ+ and that discrimination is not acceptable. While it may be intimidating, it's important to let your voice be heard and be an ally. By challenging bigoted views, you show that marginalisation and bullying have no place in a world where support is needed. This is the essence of being an ally.

6.

Educate yourself.

A fundamental principle of LGBTQIA+ allyship is to avoid placing the responsibility on marginalised individuals to educate those from non-marginalised backgrounds about being a supportive ally. The responsibility of acquiring knowledge, understanding, and skills should rest upon the person seeking to be an effective ally. Take the initiative to learn about the experiences, challenges, and history of the LGBTQIA+ community. Read books, articles, and watch documentaries to gain a deeper understanding of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

