

Suggestions for Combating Heterosexism

1. Assume that wherever you go to work there are lesbians, gay men, bisexuals or transgendered individuals who are wondering how safe the environment is for them. Don't assume that everyone you meet is heterosexual. Provide safety by making clear your support of LGBT identities.
2. Realize that the cultural oppression of LGBT individuals is perpetuated in social situations where physical affection is exclusively heterosexual. In consideration of this, where it is appropriate and mutually consensual, feel free to be physically affectionate with someone of the same sex.
3. Challenge heterosexism whether or not a LGBT person is present. Don't always leave it to gays and lesbians to do it.
4. Remember that silence is complicity, challenge/confront anti-LGBT statements and structures as well as the assumptions behind them. Do not promote the institutionalized invisibility of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals.
5. When speaking of your heterosexual lover, don't point out that he or she is of the opposite sex, implying that he or she may not have to be.
6. Confront your own fear, memories, and bad feelings about LGBT persons; recall and release those feelings, diminishing their influence.
7. Do not assume that a gay or lesbian of the same gender is automatically attracted to you. Do you assume that all straight people of the opposite gender are interested in you? If a gay or lesbian is attracted to you, try to be flattered, not offended. If it still bothers you, talk about it.
8. Change your use of language from "Do you have a girl (boy) friend?" to "Are you seeing anyone?" Heterosexism is promoted and maintained powerfully through language. Respect the profound personalness and delicacy of the "coming out" process.

And the Big Challenge

9. If people jump to the conclusion that you are lesbian or gay because of your friendship with gay or lesbian people or because you are reading a gay or lesbian publication or because you are being affectionate with someone of the same gender, resist your impulses to deny it. Challenge yourself to experience gay/lesbian oppression rather than taking advantage of heterosexual privilege.