

Recruiting Straight Allies

What is an ally? Allies are members of the dominant heterosexual group who support, and advocate for, the oppressed LGBT population. Tell them about your experience about being an ally. Have them talk to you about it. Dumb questions are allowed.

The Four Takeaway Messages:

1. Being an ally is a learning and interpersonal process, not an inborn trait.
2. Straight people go through their own coming out process as allies, make it safe to come out.
3. The goal is not to make sure that straight people have pro-gay attitudes. The goal is to explore the many LGBT topics at a complex level.
4. Your PFLAG Chapters play a critically important role in developing straight allies.

How hard could this be? I have an open mind.....

This was harder than I expected....I accept LGBT persons but.....

- 1) I don't know much about LGBT issues
- 2) I don't really understand what an LGBT person experiences
- 3) I don't necessarily say anything about LGBT issues

What am I supposed to do about that:?

- 1) I am straight. I have no LGBT family member.
- 2) I have two LGBT friends. One is in St. Louis, the other in New York. I never really talked to them about gay issues.
- 3) Others who had LGBT children or siblings who "came out" seemed to know more.
- 4) I never had those experiences, so how could I relate?

Conclusion:

- 1) I am not qualified nor credible enough to respond.
- 2) I am nobody special...is there any difference that I could make?
- 3) What's my goal and what should I do?

Ally Identity Development:

- 1) People acquire attitudes, learn LGBT knowledge, and practice their LGBT ally skills
- 2) Confidence as allies is given by others. Receiving external feedback helps straight people realize that they are acting as allies.
- 3) People build their identities as allies - how an individual chooses to identify him or herself to others - I am a PFLAG Mom; I am a PFLAG Dad; I am a straight ally.

Risks and Fears of Coming Out as Allies:

Some people are afraid to come out as an ally. Some are embarrassed and scared because they don't want to be ostracized. Some have religious families and they don't know of many places where they could take their opinions and make a difference.

Anybody can be an ally. We all start somewhere. There are many types of allies. But we have to be engaged with them throughout the process.

Recommendations - Recruit:

- 1) Advertise LGBT events to straight allies.
- 2) Recruit at volunteer offices at universities; college courses whose students need volunteer credit; volunteer offices at workplaces; state or local government volunteer offices.
- 3) No prerequisites are needed to be a straight ally - demystify and normalize the anxiety - offer the chance to talk to someone before attending an event.

Recommendations - Tasks:

- 1) Becoming a straight ally takes work
- 2) There is a hierarchy of tasks from easy to hard - Political advocacy is the task that is perceived to be the most daunting task
- 3) Need to match tasks with their strengths

Example tasks:

- 1) Invite them to PFLAG meeting
- 2) Follow-ups with people who attend meetings - contact people who have ceased attending meetings
- 3) Web design, outreach advertising tasks
- 4) Organizing an event - e.g. open house
- 5) Contact High Schools, College diversity or sexuality courses - invite

students to come to a PFLAG meeting or event

6) Libraries/bookstores outreach

7) Invite students from psychology training program, social work programs, or teacher education programs for teachers - e.g. arrange a panel discussion at professional conferences

8) Political advocacy - letter writing; talks about advocacy experiences; the need for a target; tag-along system for visiting political officials

Sustaining Involvement in Tasks:

1) Need supervision

2) Have allies take on tasks that they have not done before

3) Show allies that there are topics that they did not know existed that can be explored

4) Provide compensation or a celebration

Recruiting Straight Allies

Presented by Peter Ji, psychology researcher at University of Illinois at Chicago who teaches a class titled "Being an Ally to the LGBT Community" in which students learn the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to become allies. After defining what an ally is, students were asked to interview lgbt persons, do an lgbt activity (such as attending a PFLAG meeting), present a seminar on lgbt topics and write reaction papers.

This session was based on his experiences in that class and the various reactions of the students. The change from beginning to end was dramatic for many. Initial anxieties and obstacles were overcome and the importance of being a straight ally became evident. Recommendations were made regarding ways to engage straight allies.

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