

HOW TO SIGNAL TO LGBTQ+ PEOPLE THAT YOU ARE AN **AFFIRMING PROVIDER**



A QUICK GUIDE





As someone who likely provides behavioral health services to LGBTQ+ people, even if you are unaware of your clients' identities, it is important you know how to demonstrate that you are an affirming provider. As a result of minority stress, navigating anti-LGBTQ+ climates, and being more likely to experience discrimination, LGBTQ+ people have increased risks to suicide, depression, anxiety, and several other negative health and life outcomes. By actively demonstrating that you are an affirming provider, you could be opening the door to vital discussions about your client's identities, strengths, hardships, family life, stressors, and other important areas of life. To treat each person with dignity

and the best care possible, we must make space for them to be their authentic selves, to be vulnerable, and to be able to seek support without the fear of discrimination.

Here are some tips to ensure that you are an affirming behavioral health provider:

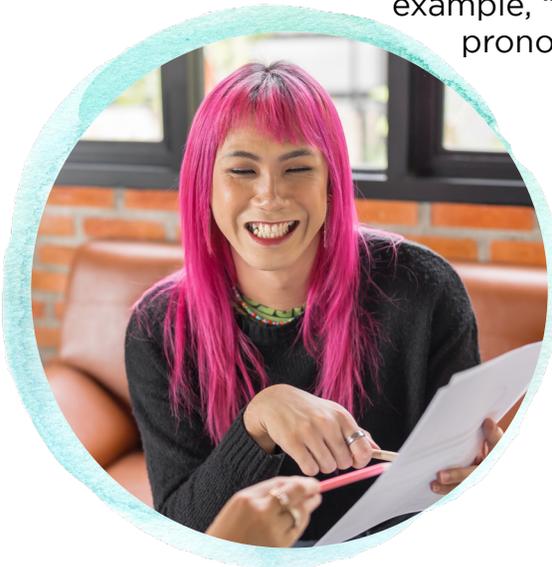
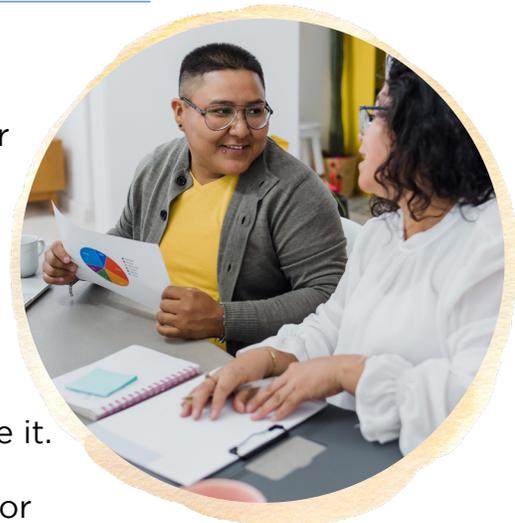
1. Attend training that helps you build your knowledge about LGBTQ+ communities so that you understand the issues and know the best terminology to use. Here are three great animations that can help you build your knowledge about this population:

- [Learning About Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression \(SOGIE\)](#)
- [Providing Equitable and Affirming Care to LGBTQ+ Older Adults](#)
- [Supporting LGBTQ Youth Starts at Home](#)

2. Think about how LGBTQ+ people might experience your practice. Walk around the office space, scroll through your website, and look through your social media to determine how much targeted outreach to the community you have been doing. What have you done to communicate that you are an affirming provider?

3. If you feel uncomfortable having discussions about LGBTQ+ people, explore why that discomfort exists and seek coaching from peers or supervisors to help overcome it.

4. Practice asking for and using pronouns in introductions. For example, "Hi, my name is Mike, and my pronouns are he/him/his. What pronouns do you use?"



5. If meeting with people virtually, make sure to add your pronouns to the name on display. You can also add your pronouns to your email signature or have them displayed in your office as another great way to signal affirmation.
6. Use non-gendered language. For example, "Are you married or dating anyone" instead of asking, "Do you have a boyfriend or husband?" Or instead of saying "Good morning, Sir," just say "Good Morning" or "Good Morning Everyone."

7. If clients fill out forms in your office, then make sure forms offer a range of identities to choose from. For example, include nonbinary on a gender identity question, ask for pronouns on the form, and leave a space for another name outside of what is on their birth certificate. For information on documenting and collecting SOGIE in safe ways, visit the [National SOGIE Center's hub on SOGIE Data Collection](#).
8. Display affirming symbols, like pride flags or messages of affirmation, in your office space to visually signal affirmation.
9. If your office has pictures of people, make sure the pictures are diverse. For example, showing different types of families, including same-gender couples or non-binary people in the photos. Likewise, if your office offers resources, information packets, and brochures to clients, make sure you have some materials that are specifically for LGBTQ+ people.
10. Intervene when you see discrimination and harassment. Sometimes, these instances are shocking. So, practice a few methods that are comfortable and allow you to intervene on the spot.
11. Learn about what your professional associations say about the importance of gender affirming care to positive mental health.
 - [Gender-Affirming Care Is Trauma-Informed Care: A Statement from The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)
 - [Association of American Medical Colleges: To Protect Evidence-Based Medicine and Promote Health Justice, Protect Gender-Affirming Medical Care](#)
 - [Gender-Affirming Health Care Saves Lives, NASW Why We Stand Up for Transgender Children and Teens, American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
 - [Approved Advocacy Statement for Transgender and Nonbinary Issues and Concerns, American Counseling Association](#)
 - [Statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
12. Read research and briefs on gender affirming care from reputable sources. For a list of relevant research, visit this resource page on [Supporting Trans Youth](#).
13. Talk to colleagues about the needs of LGBTQ+ people and encourage them to adopt these affirming practices.

Keep in mind that not all LGBTQ+ people that you provide services to will disclose their SOGIE to you. So, take as much effort as you can to avoid assumptions about how someone identifies, instead practice these affirming tips with every person you serve. You never know who they might help!

