



NAMI

Tips and Resources for Family and Friends of GLBT Persons

National Alliance on Mental Illness

When someone close to us reveals that they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender we may experience a range of emotions. Similarly, when we learn that a family member has a mental illness, feelings may include concern, confusion, or a desire to provide support.

Whether a GLBT friend or family member has shared with you that they have a mental illness, or someone with a mental illness has revealed to you their sexual orientation or gender identity, there are some common strategies to being a good ally.

Be supportive

- Make sure to listen and provide support to your family member or friend. Ask questions to learn more while remaining open and non-judgmental.

Learn more

- Take the time to learn more about GLBT issues or about your loved one's mental illness. Public libraries and the Internet may provide a good starting place. You may also want to have a conversation with your family member or friend to learn more about the issues that are important to them. Demonstrating a desire to better understand their situation is a good first step to being an ally.

Offer compassion and respect

- Understand that because of the societal stigma associated both with sexual orientation (or gender identity) and mental illness, revealing such information may be difficult for your family member or friend. Even if you feel conflicted about the information they have shared, try to respect how difficult it may have been to reveal this information.

Find support for yourself

- To be a good ally, you may need to find support networks of your own. You may need to rely on others to talk through your emotions or to digest the information that was shared with you. A good source of support may be others who are experiencing the same issues as you, such as in support groups.

Listed below are additional tips for being a good ally to your gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender family member or friend:

Challenge stereotypes

- Challenge derogatory remarks or jokes made at the expense of any group, and avoid making them yourself. These remarks reinforce stereotypes and make it seem that prejudice is acceptable.

Don't expect GLBT people to be "experts"

- Don't expect members of any group that is the target of bias (e.g., LGBT people, people with mental illness) to act as the "experts" to educate others about their group. Avoid tokenizing or patronizing people different from you.

Remember that you are human

- Allow yourself to not know everything, to make mistakes, to occasionally be insensitive. Give yourself time to learn, ask questions, and explore your own ideas and feelings. Extend the same to others. Don't present yourself as an "expert" unless you truly are one.

Prepare yourself for change and growth

- It can be exciting, painful, and enlightening to explore issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or mental illness. Accept that even if it's painful, this will be a journey of learning and growth. By becoming a good ally you'll be improving society in the process!

For more information about being a GLBT ally see the HRC/PFLAG publication "A Straight Guide to GLBT Americans" available at www.hrc.org/comingout.

The *Handbook of LGBT Issues in Community Mental Health*, edited by Ronald E. Hellman, MD and Jack Drescher, MD, offers valuable information to community mental health providers in better understanding appropriate and effective treatment for LGBT clients.

General GLBT Web sites

Listed below are Web sites for some national GLBT organizations and the descriptions they provide of their work. Many of these Web sites have links to additional resources and information. This list is not exhaustive or comprehensive and readers are encouraged to explore the Internet for additional resources.

Bisexual Resource Center
www.biresource.org

HRC
Human Rights Campaign
www.hrc.org

PFLAG
Parents, Families and Friends
of Lesbians and Gays
www.pflag.org

GPAC
Gender Public Advocacy
Coalition
www.gpac.org

NGLTF
National Gay and Lesbian Task
Force
www.thetaskforce.org

Youth

GLSEN
The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
www.glsen.org

NYAC
National Youth Advocacy Coalition
www.nyacyouth.org

GLBT Health/ Mental Health

**Association of Gay and
Lesbian Psychiatrists**
www.aglp.org

Hearts and Ears, Inc.
www.heartsandears.org

NAMI HelpLine
National Alliance on Mental Illness
1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
www.nami.org

GLBT Help Line (for all ages)
1-888-340-4528
(6pm-11pm EST)

**LGBT Suicide Prevention
Hotline**
1-800-850-8078 or
www.TheTrevorProject.org

National Coalition for LGBT Health
www.lgbthealth.net

GLMA
Gay and Lesbian Medical
Association
www.glma.org

LGBT Youth Peer Listening Line
1-800-399-7337/PEER
(5pm-11pm EST)

Rainbow Heights Club
www.rainbowheights.org