

# Become an Ally for Equality



by Shelley Argent

# **The Simple Guide to being an Ally for Equality**

**Individual Voices can make a difference by:**

**Being inclusive  
Celebrating difference  
Speaking Up which empowers others  
Advocating for rights**

The guide to being an ally is an invitation and opportunity for people who believe in equality for all Australians including the lesbian and gay couples living in our community.

Many of us believe in gay rights or equality of same-sex attracted couples but don't know how to be supportive.

We need to understand the lesbian and gay community cannot achieve equality without support from energetic, compassionate and dedicated straight allies. We understand there are barriers that may keep people from getting involved, and that's why we have printed this resource.

Some may feel this issue has nothing to do with them because they are straight. Others believe they have never met someone who is gay or lesbian. However, research shows that most people at least know of someone who is same-sex attracted and as many as 40% report they have friends or relatives who are same-sex attracted.

Getting started is easy. Here are five ways to start moving equality forward for the gay and lesbian community today.

## **Step 1: Educate yourself**

Don't know what's going on with lesbian and gay issues? Confused about definitions? Concerned that you may say something that is going to offend?

One of the best ways to become an ally is to:

- become informed
- ask questions
- do research

Our lesbian and gay friends, neighbours and co-workers are not so different from us, but there are differences that we need to know, so that we can help others to understand.

Your lesbian and gay friends and colleagues will be pretty impressed that you are taking an interest in wanting to say the right thing or understand what is going on!

If you don't feel comfortable asking questions directly to your gay and lesbian friends (that's ok) you can gain information from:

- internet
- libraries
- lesbian and gay organisations to phone - just look in the phone book or go on line.

## **Step 2: Speak out**

Everyone's been there. Whether it's a racist, sexist or gay joke we often stay quiet and don't speak up about it being inappropriate. We knew something should have been said but we just... didn't.

Step two is speaking up about inappropriate humour and jokes or statements based on inaccurate stereotyping. Silence condones inappropriate behaviour.

Most times, people make inappropriate comments just because they can. However, speaking up reminds people to be more aware and sensitive to those around them and it eventually changes minds.

### **Step 3: Be honest**

When we talk to or about our lesbian and gay co-workers and acquaintances, we should include all of the facts not just the ones we think people want to hear.

When talking to our lesbian and gay friends if unclear on an issue it's best to be honest and say "I don't understand, but I want to..."

We should never assume we are going to offend someone or have to hold an uncomfortable conversation.

### **Step 4: Support equality**

Places such as at work, the local school, university and at home are just a few areas where a straight ally can express his/her support in tiny ways to friends and family.

Often our voices carry tremendous weight where the voices of lesbians and gays cannot. We bring a different perspective to the conversation, our insistence for equality is different – It is not about you/us, it is about others, and about doing the right thing. Small things matter.

Presently, many lesbians and gays report that homophobic attitudes are still prevalent which means they are fearful to be honest at work. It is important to realise that in standing up for change, there will be people just as vocal as you who will argue against this change.

### **Step 5: Letting people know**

By now you have information, spoken up, been honest and supported equality. You may have some concerns that people will think you are gay.

Just clarify that you are a straight ally or let them assume otherwise. It's up to you. Let everyone know that they can become a straight ally too. You don't even have to know a lesbian or gay person.

However, just by attempting one or two steps can make a difference. Only do what you are comfortable with.

### **Some people want to take their voices as allies further**

You have the power to change things further by voting for politicians who are gay friendly. You can talk to people generally about the discrimination that the lesbian and gay community experience.

People will discover the more they read the more they will believe in the need for change and will feel more comfortable discussing these issues with others.

### **What's in it for you?**

You will know that you have helped the general community become less homophobic and fearful.

You will know that you have made a positive difference to lesbian and gay workers or friends, who know that you are supportive.

You will know that you have become an advocate for change.

### **What we as individuals can do**

- Make positive comments

- Be supportive if you feel they are being discriminated against

- Never condone gay jokes or the trivialising of lesbians and gays

- Never be condescending – for example, never assume “they are all lovely”, neat or artistic

- Ask about their weekends, friends, what they like to do

- Be inclusive of them with your friends when possible

*Lesbians and gays don't want to be treated differently.  
They just want equality.*

## **10 point plans on how allies can be accepting and understanding of lesbians and gays as individuals and with those in relationships with children**

**As a person in a same sex relationship I need society to understand I would like:**

my relationship to be seen as meaningful as anyone else's  
the same amount of compassion and understanding as my heterosexual counterparts, should my relationship breakdown  
people to ask after my partner's welfare  
the choice and privilege of marrying my partner  
people to not assume that everyone is straight or heterosexual  
to be able to show my partner simple signs of affection without being fearful of scornful looks or insulting comments  
to be included as a couple  
people to understand the discrimination and stigma we face as an individual and as a couple  
people to imagine how they would feel if they were treated differently just because of the person they love  
people to use inclusive language - use the term "partner" not "husband/wife or boyfriend/girlfriend" and don't use he/she pronouns until you know which one is correct, until then use the term "they"

**As an adult I need society to understand marriage regardless of sexual orientation is about:**

Inclusion of the partner's family  
Planning and building a life together  
Removing legal confusion  
Symbolic expression of love between two people  
How society values and celebrates relationships  
Emotional, financial and social commitment  
Removing next of kin issues  
Sharing sexual pleasure

Instant recognition of the relationship

People being healthier, happier because of being in a stable relationship

**As a same sex parent with a child in school I need society to understand I would like:**

people to welcome my child into their home the same as any other school friend

my child to be seen as worthy as any other child in the class

my child to not be made to feel inferior because he/she has 2 parents of the same sex

you to encourage your child to treat my child with respect and not be bullied just because he/she has two parents of the same sex

to feel comfortable attending school functions with my partner

the school to value our relationship and our family unit

us both to be given equal respect as parents

people to know we are caring, loving parents

people to know our child won't be lesbian/gay just because we are

my child's teachers to use language which is inclusive of our family type

**As a Teen at school I need society to know I am:**

not able, nor do I want to coerce or corrupt your son or daughters morals if they are friends with me

quite possibly fearful and confused with what is happening to me

quite possibly fearful others won't understand and may bully me

possibly struggling personally inside

doing my best to get through school

quite confused and need understanding because I may still be coming to terms with my sexual orientation

not lesbian or gay by choice, just like you haven't chosen to be heterosexual

may be depressed, or considering suicide, or running away from home because I am fearful of what my parents will say when they find out

of the belief that it would be so much easier to be heterosexual

may be feeling quite alone with so much happening in my head with school, sexuality issues and puberty generally

**As an individual I need society to understand I would like:**

- to be included in social events at work
- to be honest about myself
- the opportunity to live my life with integrity
- to see a balance in humour, but not in a disrespectful manner
- to have it understood that my sexuality is only a part of my identity
- my voice to be heard
- to recognise that I contribute to society just as much as anyone else
- society to know that being lesbian or gay is not a lifestyle choice
- society to know that being lesbian or gay is just as valid as being heterosexual

**Same sex parenting**

Parenting is not just a natural desire for heterosexual couples. It doesn't provide us with the tools to automatically be better parents than same sex couples. The desire to become a parent regardless of sexual orientation is a natural human instinct.

There is no legislative consistency between different States of Australia regarding same sex parenting issues.

Additionally, there is added confusion between some States of Australia and Federal legislation regarding same sex parenting. As heterosexuals we will never be confronted with the same discriminations.

Some States allow both parents to have their names on birth certificates while others don't.

Some States allow altruistic surrogacy while others don't

Some States permit same sex couples to adopt others don't

In most States same sex couples can foster, but only one can adopt the child.

Consistent same sex parenting legislation will provide security for the couple and their children when moving interstate and nationwide the laws should be uniform as a sign of equality.



Consistency would provide the parents and the children involved emotional and financial security. It would also remove next of kin issues.

The changes to legislation will have neither a negative or positive impact on the heterosexual community. But it would be of benefit to same sex couples and their children.

### **What we as individuals can do**

- Make positive comments

- Be supportive if you feel a lesbian or gay person near you is experiencing discrimination

- Never condone homophobic comments and jokes

- Never be condescending, don't assume "they" are all lovely, or all tidy.

- Ask about their weekends

- Be inclusive of them with your friends.

- If socialising with lesbian or gay friends be happy to go to gay venues

- Be inclusive at work events

- Encourage conversation about their friends or partner

- Keep conversations confidential, or if unsure ask if the topic is already general knowledge, if the topic seems private to you.

*Remember - lesbians and gays don't want to be treated differently.*

*They just want equality.*

*Many thanks, to PFLAG National USA for permitting us to adapt their project "Straight for Equality" to suit the needs and requirements of the Australian community.*

## **Useful websites**

*[www.pflagbrisbane.org.au](http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au)*

General information for understanding and acceptance plus extra tips on how to be more inclusive

*[www.lgbthealth.org.au](http://www.lgbthealth.org.au)*

Health and wellbeing affecting the LGBT community

*[www.australiamarriageequality.com.au](http://www.australiamarriageequality.com.au)*

Additional information on same sex marriage

## **Need further information or additional resources?**

*PFLAG Brisbane has a wealth of information & resources available for free on our website at [www.pflagbrisbane.org.au](http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au)*

The publication of this resource was made possible thanks  
to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund.



[www.pflagbrisbane.org.au](http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au)



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