

## Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Basic Concepts

(from Training to Serve [www.trainingtoserve.org](http://www.trainingtoserve.org))

- *Sexual orientation*: Refers to the gender of the person to whom someone is attracted. Falls on a continuum from homosexual (gay/lesbian) to heterosexual.
- *Lesbian*: A woman who is attracted to other women.
- *Gay man*: A man who is attracted to other men.
- *Bisexual*: A person who is attracted to women and men.
- *Heterosexual*: A man who is attracted to women OR a woman who is attracted to men.
- *Queer*: A person who is attracted to others along a broad spectrum of sexual and gender identities. While many older LGBT adults may have a strong, negative reaction to this word, others may appreciate its use. Some older adults prefer the term queer if they, or the people they are most attracted to, identify as neither fully male nor female.
- *Sex*: Your biological sex. This is typically used to assign a gender at birth.
- *Intersex*: Refers to a person who has both male and female sex characteristics. This may be noticeable at birth or become apparent after puberty. Intersex replaced the term hermaphrodite, which is neither accurate nor acceptable.
- *Gender identity*: Refers to a person's internal sense of their gender (male, female, or a gender that falls on a continuum between male and female).
- *Transgender*: This term refers to people whose gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth, some of whom modify their bodies through sex reassignment surgery, hormones, or other medical interventions to bring their body into alignment with their sense of themselves.
- *Cisgender*: Refers to a person whose gender identity is consistent with the gender they were assigned at birth. (Cis is Latin for "on the same side as")
- *Transwoman/MTF* (male-to-female): A person who is a biological man, assigned the male gender at birth, whose gender identity is female.
- *Transman/FTM* (female-to-male): A person who is a biological woman, assigned the female gender at birth, whose gender identity is male.
- *Genderqueer*: A person who was assigned to either the male or female gender at birth who identifies as either both male and female or neither male nor female.

## Check List of Practical Solutions: Does Your Organization Do this?

*(Adapted from Project Visibility, Boulder, Colorado)*

### Creating an inclusive infrastructure:

- Agency procedures and policies are inclusive.
- Forms have inclusive language. For example, the word “partner” is an option along with “married” and “single.”
- Admission forms explain how confidentiality is protected and who accesses medical records.
- A system is in place and enforced to maintain confidentiality of client records.
- Human resource policies include and LGBT non-discrimination policy for hiring and acknowledging partners.
- Care conferences/records have LGBT/open questions.
- Marketing materials contain a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Your agency/services are listed in LGBT publications and local resource guides.
- Representatives from your organization or practice speak to LGBT organizations and conferences.
- Your organization provides orientation training for all staff members on homophobia and LGBT elder concerns.

### How to create a welcoming environment:

- Post a non-discrimination policy in your waiting room or office that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.
- In our lobby and waiting area, include magazines, brochures and resource guides of interest to LGBT elders.
- Have LGBT friendly referrals if you are unable to serve a client.
- Treat friends and/or partners accompanying an LGBT client with the same respect given to spouse or relative.

### Develop effective communication skills:

- **Don't assume anything.** For example, don't assume heterosexuality even when a client reveals they are married, have children, and/or grandchildren.
- Let the client give information at his or her own pace.
- Ask only what is needed to provide competent care/service.
- Explain why you need certain sensitive information before asking for it.
- Apologize if a client is offended by what you ask.
- Be willing to accept only vague references about a client's personal life.
- Talk to colleagues who are LGBT or who have experience with LGBT clients.
- Continually train yourself and staff on LGBT issues.

## Ask open-ended questions such as:

- Tell me about our living situation. With whom do you share the household?
- Are you currently in a relationship? Tell me about that.
- Where do you get your support? Who do you turn to in time of need?
- What people are important to you? Who do you consider to be family?
- Is there someone you would like to have involved in your care?

## Use gender-neutral language:

- Use gender neutral terms when you do not know the sex of a client's significant other.
- If a client is using gender-neutral language they **may** be trying to conceal their sexual orientation.
- If you think a client is using gender-neutral language to conceal their sexual orientation from you, do not assume they don't want you to know.
- If a client uses derogatory terms to describe themselves (e.g., fag, dyke, etc.) do not assume it is okay to use those terms. **Ask what terminology the client prefers.**

## OUR POLICY

We **do not discriminate** on the basis of:

Age  
Race  
Sex  
Religion  
National Origin  
Language  
Education  
Marital Status  
Sexual Orientation  
Gender Identity  
HIV Status  
or  
Disability

## Resources - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Elders in the Community

### ORGANIZATIONS

- CenterLink:** <http://www.lgbtcenters.org> The Community of LGBT Centers, an association of over 150 organizations, can be a primary point of contact for people coming out, seeking LGBT health services, community information and referrals. Search the directory to find a center near your community.
- Family Caregiver Alliance** <http://www.caregiver.org> (Click on "Groups"; select "LGBT Caregiver Discussion Group") FCA's LGBT Caring Community Support Group connects you with others facing the day-to-day challenges of caregiving. If you're assisting someone with Alzheimer's, stroke, Parkinson's, traumatic brain injury or other chronic health problems, or a person over 60, you can get support from the convenience of home.
- Human Rights Campaign** <http://www.hrc.org> See the issues section of this web site. Entire text of "The cost of marriage inequality to gay, lesbian and bisexual seniors," can be accessed here.
- Lambda Legal** <http://www.lambdalegal.com> Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, the transgendered, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.
- Lgbt Aging Issues Network (LALIN) of the Am. Soc. of Aging:** <http://www.asaging.org/lain> LAIN seeks to foster professional development, multidisciplinary research and wide-ranging dialogue on LGBT issues in the field of aging through publications, conferences, and cosponsored events. LAIN welcomes the participation of all concerned individuals regardless of age, sexual orientation or gender identity. Check out "Recommended Resources" and "Web Guide."
- National Center on LGBT Aging:** <http://www.lgbtagingcenter.org/> The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging is the country's first and only technical assistance resource center aimed at improving the quality of services and supports offered to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) older adults.
- National Center for Lesbian Rights** <http://www.nclrights.org> NCLR is a national legal resource center with a primary commitment to advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through a program of litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling, and public education. In addition, NCLR provides representation and resources to gay men, and bisexual and transgender individuals on key issues that also significantly advance lesbian rights. Check out the Elder Law Project at this website.
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** <http://www.thetaskforce.org/issues/aging> NGLTF has a growing aging focus. This webpage provides links to a number of well-researched fact sheets and reports about older LGBT people as well as recorded interviews with LGBT elders. Recommended report under Related Reports: "Outing Age: Public Policy Issues Affecting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders."
- Old Lesbian Organizing for Change** <http://www.oloc.org/> OLOC provides old lesbians with the chance to meet like-minded women in our common struggle to confront ageism, to share mutual interests, and to experience the joy and warmth of playing and working together.
- Prime Timers** <http://www.primetimersww.org/> The purpose of our organization is to provide mature gay and bisexual men, and their admirers, with opportunities to come together in a supportive atmosphere to enjoy social, educational, and recreational activities.
- SAGE** <http://www.sageusa.org/> SAGE, founded in 1977 and is the nation's oldest and largest social service and advocacy organization dedicated to LGBT seniors. SAGE offers social services, programs and community-building to LGBT seniors in and around New York City and provides education and advocacy on LGBT aging issues nationwide.
- Transgender Aging Network** <http://www.forge-forward.org> (Click on TAN (Transgender Aging Network)) The Transgender Aging Network (TAN) exists to improve the lives of current and future trans/SOFFA (significant others, friends, family and allies) elders.

### STAFF TRAINING

- \*\*Training to Serve** <http://www.trainingtoserve.org> Awareness and sensitivity training curriculum to assist service providers with skills and tools to meet the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender elders.