

**PROVIDING COMPETENCY-BASED SOCIAL WORK SERVICES
FOR THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY**

1. **Acknowledge that LGBTQ persons are your clients.** The first step is to realize and acknowledge that not all clients are heterosexually oriented. In making an assessment of your client, **do not assume that your client is heterosexual.** The only way that you will know someone's gender/sexual orientation is if they tell you. Many times we make assumptions based on inaccurate information or outmoded cues. Clients will tell you who they are when and if, they feel ready. Clients will also come out when they feel that a safe environment has been created for them to disclose. Whether you know it or not, you have clients who are LGBTQ.
2. **Educate yourself and your co-workers about LGBTQ persons.** Familiarize yourself with the literature, bring in speakers, or ask an openly LGBT professionals to discuss LGBTQ issues with colleagues.
3. **Use gender neutral language.** If you use language that assumes a person is heterosexual (i.e. inquiring about a woman's boyfriend or husband), a LGBT client may not feel that you are knowledgeable about their orientation and may not share valuable information with you. The use of words and terms such as "partner" or "someone special in your life" are appropriate and important to use.
4. **Use the words "gay", "lesbian," "bisexual" and "transgender" in an appropriate context when talking with clients about diversity.** As social workers we are always listing groups of people - i.e. Latino, African-American, Asian-American, developmentally disabled, etc. Be inclusive and also mention LGBTQ people.
5. **Have literature and other visible signs in the waiting room or in your office that speaks to creating a LGBTQ affirming environment.** Magazines, pamphlets, posters which have the words "gay" or "lesbian" "transgender" printed on them lets clients know that you are sensitized and that your office or the agency, is a safe place.
6. **If a client discloses to you that they are or think that they might be LGBTQ - Talk about it!** Don't just move on, talk about what it means for this client to be a LGBTQ person. Process the feelings and their concerns.
7. **Do not confuse transsexuality, transvestism, and homosexuality.** Be aware that these folks are also members of sexual minority communities and may require services which are unique to meet their needs.
8. **Research resources in the LGBT community.** Find out and go visit the resources that exist to people from the LGBT community.