

the incredibly detailed honest forthright
fully comprehensive completely blunt
shockingly simple wonderfully helpful
and witty exposition on a topic that
sometimes makes people blanch but
really shouldn't because this compelling
open and straight to the point (no pun
intended) little publication will demystify
the secret world of gay people and be
your tried and trusted

guide to being a straight ally*

“

I remember learning about the civil rights movement and other social movements for equality in school and thinking to myself, 'Well, if I had been an adult then, I would have stood up and done the right thing.'

Now I am an adult, I see inequality and I know I should do something, but it is just not that easy. I have so many questions and fears and I am just not sure where – if anywhere – I belong in the gay rights movement.

”

Katie, 29

Sound familiar? Feeling the same way?

You've come to the right place.

Welcome.

Straight for Equality is an invitation and opportunity for people who want to stand up for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) equality but are not sure how. Through education, **Straight for Equality** will empower straight people in supporting and advocating for GLBT equality in their home, workplace and community.

The GLBT community cannot achieve equality without support from smart, energetic, compassionate, and dedicated straight allies...people just like you. We know that there are lots of barriers that may keep people from getting involved, and that's why we're here. This booklet is the first step to getting past them.

Got questions?

We'll answer them. Whether it is through our website, printed materials, in-person presentations, or suggested resources, we have answers.

Got concerns?

That's natural—and healthy! We'll do what we can to resolve your concerns and introduce you to people who have or had the same concerns as you.

Don't know how to get involved?

The **Straight for Equality** team has collected suggestions, both big and small, for how to stay informed, get involved and make a difference. You'll find some of those things in this guide.

Straight for Equality isn't about politics or politicians, Republicans or Democrats, radical activists or peacekeeping pacifists.

It is about creating a place where all people who care about equality can openly discuss and resolve the barriers they face to becoming an ally, get specific recommendations for action, and learn how to assist others—whether it is friends, family members, coworkers or community members—in becoming conduits for change.

Straight allies (and potential allies), your time has come.

Getting started is easy. Here are the first five ways you can start moving equality forward for your gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender friends today!

Equality guideposts

Here are some nifty icons to help identify things you might face on your journey to becoming a straight ally.



Stumbling Blocks

Caution with a twist. Read real-life stories from people about how they struggled to understand a situation, confronted a fear, or tried something new. They're good reminders that you're not alone in the "coming out" process as an ally.



Phone-a-Friend

Get quick access to great resources that can help you get past your stumbling blocks and back on the road, straight to equality.



Your Invitation

Learning more about how to be a powerful straight ally opens up a whole new set of opportunities for you to change your world. Take advantage of these invitations to try something new and help move equality forward.

“

On the way to meet some friends yesterday, I overheard someone on the bus saying that 'homosexual' was an offensive term. So after several days, I got up the nerve to ask one of my 'homosexual' friends what exactly he wanted me to call him.

He said, 'I prefer that you call me Jim, but if you must refer to my sexuality, 'gay' is preferable.'

I asked why I shouldn't use 'homosexual' and Jim said, 'How would you feel if you were reduced down to what happens in the privacy of your bedroom?'

I laughed because suddenly I got it. Even though it was tough at first, I was really glad that I asked the question.

”

Alex, 32

Step one: stay informed

Don't know what to call people?

Don't know what's going on with "GLBT issues"? (Wondering what's up with all of those letters anyway?)

Confused about definitions?

Unsure if you're about to say something that's going to offend?

It's ok. We've all been there...and there's a way to feel better.

You can ask—in fact, the best thing to do is ask.

One of the best ways that you can demonstrate your interest in being an ally is to get—and stay—informed. Ask questions, do research, and be honest about what you want to know. Our GLBT friends, neighbors, and coworkers are not so different from us, but there are differences that you need to understand so you can help others get on the same page.



Stumbling Block: “I was just embarrassed.”

Denise, 35, said this: “My city was voting on an employment nondiscrimination bill, but I didn’t know what it was! I knew it involved gay people somehow, but I was too embarrassed to ask. What if someone thought I didn’t know because I didn’t care?”

So I went online and Googled ‘Cleveland and gay’ and learned that you can actually be fired for being gay! Who knew?”

When you hear about an issue on the news that you don’t understand, look it up or ask a friend. When a gay friend uses a term that you don’t understand—like “queer”—ask. Why exactly are there rainbow flags all over the Pride parade each year? Is this about a culture? Look it up online. Chances are that your friends and colleagues will be pretty impressed that you took an interest in wanting to say the right thing or to understand what’s going on.



Phone a friend: Find out online!

Maybe you don’t feel comfortable asking directly—many people don’t. After all, some things are personal. There are lots of ways to get past this issue. Here are a few great online resources that you can look at for background information and answers.

Media — Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD): glaad.org

Workplace — Out & Equal Workplace Advocates: outandequal.org

Politics — National Gay & Lesbian Task Force: thetaskforce.org

Gender Identity — National Center for Transgender Equality: nctequality.org

Parenting — American Psychological Association: apa.org/pi/parent.html

So whether you're looking it up online, heading to the library, or having a real one-on-one conversation, getting informed is the first step in becoming part of the GLBT and Ally community.

Remember: Rome wasn't built in a day.

You don't need to learn everything at once before you can participate. Missing some terminology or not knowing everything about gay marriage (which, for the record, you should refer to as "marriage equality" or just plain old "marriage") doesn't mean that you're any less of an ally. It means that like most people, you're learning something new each day.

Still looking for some help on getting the right words? Check out the Straight for Equality glossary at www.straightforequality.org.



Your Invitation:

Your first invitation asks you to push the envelope a bit.

Once you've learned a preferable term, or figured out something you didn't understand about a particular issue, talk about it.

You don't need to have a big debate—just include it when the opportunity arises next time, whether it's with your GLBT friends or straight coworkers. Start getting comfortable using your new vocabulary.

“

So I was at work and someone told this joke:

‘A male-friendly lesbian, a man-hating dyke, Santa Claus, and the Easter bunny are in a race for a \$100 bill. Which one wins?’

The man-hating dyke because the other three are figments of your imagination.’

Most people around me were laughing. To this day I really regret not saying, ‘Dude, that’s really offensive.’

”

Rishi, 25

Step two: speak up

Everyone's been there. Whether it is a racist, sexist, or gay joke, we've all heard jokes that we knew were offensive, but—for any one of many reasons—haven't said anything to object. Whether we didn't want to be the PC police, felt frozen because we didn't know the words, or we just didn't want to sound like the downer, we knew something should be said...but didn't.

While some kinds of humor and comments are clearly taboo (most people wouldn't dare make a racist joke at a staff party), jokes about GLBT people tend to continue to slide by without much pushback.

Words hurt, and it makes a huge difference when you speak up. You're educating people around you and demonstrating that you do care about how these "jokes" make people feel.

Think about the one closeted person who heard the comment and felt shame because he couldn't respond. Or think about the woman who has a lesbian daughter and felt she shouldn't respond because she was afraid of her peers' contempt.

Your courage speaks to them, too.



Stumbling Block: “I didn’t want to make her look bad...”

Pat, 42, said, “Every Friday morning we stand around the office kitchen, have coffee, and talk about how great Grey’s Anatomy is. My co-worker, Mary, was kvetching about how unfair it was that they fired Isaiah Washington for – what she saw – as his comments about gay people.

I really love Mary—she’s my friend and I didn’t want to embarrass or make her look bad in front of other people, but I really felt like I needed to say something, so I commented, ‘But what if he had used the N-word? Would you be so offended that he was fired then?’ At first she seemed annoyed, but later we had a great conversation and she conceded that she never thought about it that way.”

So you know that you need to say something, you want to say something, but what do you say?



Phone-a-Friend:

How to say, “I object!” without sounding bossy.

Use humor.

“Not to be Debbie Downer, but...”

Use facts.

“I’m not sure you know this, but...”

Make your comment relatable.

“How would you feel if...”

It isn't just about jokes. People make huge generalizations—which are often wrong—about the GLBT community all the time. How many times have you heard, “He dresses well, he must be gay.” Or “She doesn't like me, so she must be a lesbian.” (Ever think that she doesn't like you because of the joke you just told?)

Misinformation and stereotypes are just as harmful and damaging as jokes especially when they go unchallenged and eventually get accepted as “fact.”



Your Invitation:

Be part of the solution even if you're not part of the GLBT community.

The GLBT community needs your help in correcting stereotypes, talking about just how offensive those jokes are, and stopping the use of “acceptable” slurs. Whether it is around the water cooler, at a restaurant, or with your kids on the way to soccer practice, speaking up changes minds. And the more you do it, you'll find that the less your help is actually needed as people on the whole begin to change.

Next time someone cracks a joke at the expense of GLBT people or makes a comment based on a stereotype, use one of the suggestions in the Phone-a-Friend to stage your response.

“

I was telling a friend of mine about how my sister is getting married. She was excited and asked, ‘Her fiancé...what does he do?’

I didn’t want to make her feel put on the spot, so I smiled and said, ‘Not *he*—she’s marrying a chick!’

We’ve been friends for years, and I knew that making her laugh a little would be the right approach. I saw the look on her face as she processed what I said and realized that she’d assumed my sister is straight.

She laughed and said, ‘So what does this chick do?’ Because I spoke up, she knew about my family, no one was uncomfortable, and I felt good about being honest.

”

Ernesto, 38

Step three: be honest.

To many people, GLBT relationships are the same... but different. Allies consider GLBT relationships to be just as valid, legitimate, and real as straight ones, but sometimes heterosexual terms don't always seem accurate or they tend to blur the facts.

Sometimes, we might even have the right terms, but we don't use them for fear of making the other person uncomfortable or confused.

Are you confused about what words to use? Just ask someone.

Ask what terms your GLBT friends and family prefer—

spouse, partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, significant other—

The list goes on, and once you know, your anxiety about picking the right term won't. But once you have the words, it's time to use them.



**Stumbling Block: “I didn’t want to make her—or me—
feel uncomfortable...”**

Evelyn, 74, commented, “I was talking to a friend who lives in the same assisted living center that I do. She was telling me about attending her granddaughter’s wedding ceremony, and asked how my grandson is doing. I said he’s well, but because I didn’t want to offend her, I neglected to mention that he and his partner of 10 years just had a beautiful commitment ceremony, which I proudly attended. I love my grandson and his partner, but sometimes I just don’t want to risk making other people uncomfortable.”

Being honest isn’t just about not knowing what terms to use, but about actually speaking about your GLBT family, friends, or even acquaintances once you know the terms. People often assume that they’re going to offend someone or have to hold an uncomfortable conversation if they actually mention GLBT people or issues, but more often than not, that isn’t the case.

A recent poll revealed that 4 of 10 Americans have close friends or relatives who are gay.

Another poll showed that more than half of all Americans think that being gay is just as ok as being straight.

Why not give people an opportunity to talk about it and express their support? (You can do it.)

Even if they don’t agree, it certainly wouldn’t be the first time you’ve talked about a difference in opinion with someone. As a straight ally, you can make a difference by helping make these opportunities open up and allowing conversations to happen.

Phone-a-Friend: Dear Abby...

One of the places that millions of people have gone for individual advice



is to one of the highest-profile straight allies in the world. Dear Abby has been dispensing wise words for people since 1956, and often has great suggestions for people in uncomfortable situations. Many times, she's offered guidance on how to talk about issues whether you're a straight ally, family member, or GLBT yourself. Her columns appear in more newspapers each week than any other column in the world, so find her in your local newspaper or go online to dearabby.com.

Maybe you're not ready to have every conversation at every time. Maybe you'll need to test the waters with someone close before you start announcing things at big social situations. That's ok. (By the way, why haven't you told your cubemate at work about how much you love catching new movies with your best friend's partner?)

Here's how to start: when you talk about your GLBT friends, include all the facts—not just the ones that you think people want to hear.

Your Invitation:



Validate terms that GLBT people use by using them yourself.

Sometimes GLBT people and their allies feel forced to omit "telling terms." Don't sacrifice what's right—and an opportunity to change someone's mind or find a new straight ally—just to ensure what you think will be the comfort of the listener. Who's to say they aren't just looking for a chance to be honest with you also?

Get the right terms, use them, and be honest.

“

My best friend at work is a lesbian. She recently asked me to join our company's Pride networking group for GLBT and ally employees.

I had actually considered joining so I could openly demonstrate my support, but I wasn't sure that I was really 'invited' to be part of it. Once she asked me—and I really thought about it—I knew that was never an issue, and now I'm a proud member of the group.”

”

Alice, 56

Step four: support equality.

The number of places where a straight ally can express his or her support in small but incredibly meaningful ways is limitless. Your workplace, house of worship, school, or civic organizations offer opportunities to introduce, support, or vote in favor of GLBT-inclusive policies.

Often, your voice as an ally can carry tremendous weight in these environments in ways that the voices of GLBT people cannot.

Why? Consider these two reasons...

First, many of these places still have policies or cultures that remain unfriendly or restrictive to GLBT people. But the one-on-one, honest and informed conversations that you have can help change this fact.

Second, as an ally, you bring a different perspective to the conversation. Your insistence on equality has a different ring. It *isn't* about you—it is about others, and about doing the right thing.



Stumbling block: “I thought it would be too political...”

Joe, 45, said, “I’m a teacher. One of the guidance counselors in my school expressed a lot of frustration and even some anger over a new policy that requires counselors to receive special training to help them work with GLBT youth. She was clearly agitated and didn’t see why she should have to do it.

My first inclination was to let it go and keep politics out of work. But I thought about how her attitude could affect the kids. So I told her about all the newspaper articles I’ve read on GLBT youth get bullied, how their fear and shame impacts their grades, and even how their suicide rates were higher. I realized that even though this was a small comment, it was a big help in changing the climate of my school.”

As the old adage goes, change starts at home...and at work...and at school. We could go on, but the point is that small changes—like not letting something that sounds wrong go unchecked—matter. Sure, there’s a chance that someone will push back on your opinion, but that is just another chance to talk about different—and persuasive—perspectives.

Many workplaces, houses of worship, and organizations are considering policies that help protect GLBT people from discrimination.

But these changes can’t happen without the active, open, and brave support from allies like you.

Unfortunately, there are people intent on making sure that these changes never happen, and they’re also vocal and active. If you support your GLBT friends—and equality—you’ll counteract their voices and make sure that fairness prevails. After all, if you don’t speak up for what’s right, how can you know someone else will? Fairness is best not left to chance.



Phone-a-Friend: Where do I get the facts?

How do you learn about the policies on GLBT inclusion that exist in your workplace, house of worship, school, or membership organizations? There are several great resources on the web:

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): pflag.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): glsen.org

The Institute for Welcoming Resources: welcomingresources.org

Human Rights Campaign (HRC): hrc.org/workplace

Once you've done some homework and know where the places that matter to you stand, get active. Join the Pride group at the office, get on a committee at your place of worship that is considering changes, or just be vocal in your social circles. All of your contributions as an ally make a difference, and as you witness positive change, doing it more becomes natural.



Your Invitation: Call for backup!

Concerned that you're not quite presentation-ready? The booklet that you're reading holds the answer.

Contact the **Straight for Equality** team by going to our website, www.straightforequality.org and invite them to come to your school, workplace, place of worship, or organization to talk about the importance of equality and the critical role that straight allies can play in achieving it.

“

I was on my way to the gay pride parade when my parents called and asked what I was up to for the weekend. At first, I planned on just saying that ‘I’m going out’ because I didn’t want to have to explain what Pride was and why I was going. But then I said it—‘I’m going to the Gay Pride parade.’

There was a silence, and my dad said, ‘Is there something you want to tell us?’

I replied, ‘Yes. I’m a straight ally—and proud of it!’

”

Stephanie, 21

Step five: come out.

Ok. Now that you've gotten informed, spoken up, been honest, and supported equality, if you haven't already, it's time to come out.

You heard us: Come out...as an ally, that is.

This isn't always easy. As allies we know that you have some fears, and that's totally natural. Fortunately, we have some answers...

What if people think I'm gay?

Yes. Some people may think you're gay. But you do have a voice. Simply clarify that you're a straight ally, or let people assume otherwise. The important point is just to speak up.

Am I welcome in this movement?

YES! You're certainly welcome in the equality movement (if you haven't figured that out yet, you might have missed the previous 22 pages). Not only are you welcome, but your help is very much needed—and appreciated.

I'm not ready to be an activist for all gay rights, all the time—is there a happy medium?

Yes. Being straight for equality doesn't mean dedicating every moment in your life to GLBT equality, but it means employing the ways that you

can contribute. They're all valid, they all make an impact, and they help whenever you feel comfortable using them. Hopefully, as you learn more and become more comfortable with your role as a straight ally, you'll speak up more frequently, but every bit of help you give is moving equality forward, and that's what matters.



Stumbling Block: “What if people think I’m gay too?”

Jacinda, 30, said, “I debated for weeks if I should put a rainbow sticker up in my cubicle at work. I know it sounds silly, but I was afraid that I’d never get another date at work again. Would everyone assume I’m a lesbian?

But once I did it, I realized that something so small made a huge difference—it started great conversations, several people told me that they have gay kids or siblings, and I can’t even tell you how many people came out to me. I’m really glad that I did it.”

Do you feel like your workplace is super-inclusive? Is your school very GLBT-friendly and already have a gay-straight alliance? That’s great news, but everyone can still use a reminder. Little things like visual images (like our Straight for Equality postcards that you can order or download from straightforequality.org) or big things like your comments can help keep people paying attention to equality—and how it can be challenged. Until there’s no need for a program like Straight for Equality, your contributions as a straight ally are needed and valued.



Phone-a-Friend: Resources for the Overachievers

Are you an A-student? Have you already been doing the things in this booklet? Ready to take the next step and do more? Check out the Straight for Equality website at straightforequality.org where you can learn more strategies, find additional information, get Straight for Equality merchandise, and connect with other allies.

Once they're out and proud, some people want to take their voices as straight allies for equality to the next level. This isn't a requirement, but it is certainly a great help.

Remember that the way you vote in local and national elections makes a huge impact on GLBT equality. What happens in a county election, for example has an influence on what happens inside our churches, schools, and offices.

If you'd like to learn more about how to make a difference through advocacy, we encourage you to visit **Straight for Equality's** "parent" organization, PFLAG, at www.pflag.org and click on Advocacy, then Issues.



Your Invitation: Sign on!

One excellent way to demonstrate and formalize your commitment to equality is to sign the **Straight for Equality** pledge.

To get more tips, and to read the pledge and make the commitment, visit straightforequality.org/pledge today. When you sign the pledge, you'll receive updates, information on opportunities, and learn about more ways to get involved as a straight ally.

SO...what now?

All allied up and feeling like there's nowhere to go?

We've got some next steps for you.

1. Go to straightforequality.org and find out what's new.

While you're there, you'll be able to access the latest news and resources from the [Straight for Equality](#) team, tell us what you think about the program and how you're doing, and even invite us to come speak at your workplace, school, organization, or place of worship.

2. Tell a friend: Don't keep this info to yourself.

Being an ally gets easier—and we all get closer to equality—as we increase our numbers. Know someone who you think will be interested? Pass this booklet along or send them the link to the [Straight for Equality](#) website. Get them to sign the [Straight for Equality](#) pledge, too.

If you know someone with a GLBT family member remember, they can help too! Let them know about [Straight for Equality](#) and PFLAG as well. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a great source for support, education and advocacy for the family members and friends of GLBT people. We can all play a role, but getting the right resources to do it is critical. PFLAG and [Straight For Equality](#) are those resources!

3. Do something!

What more can we say? The first time can be hard, but we promise it will be rewarding. This is only the beginning.

Keep coming back to straightforequality.org to learn more about specific programs and resources that we're developing—like [Straight for Equality in the Workplace](#)—to help promote equality everywhere.

**Stay connected...and keep moving equality forward.
We can't do it without you.**

the incredibly detailed honest forthright fully comprehensive completely blunt shockingly simple wonderfully helpful and witty exposition on a topic that sometimes makes people blanch but really shouldn't because this compelling open and straight to the point (no pun intended) little publication will demystify the secret world of gay people and be your tried and trusted [guide to being a straight ally](#)

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Looking for more information? Visit the Straight for Equality website at www.straightforequality.org to get the latest news or click "Contact Us" to send a note. (We'd love to hear from you...)



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* **made you look.**

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PFLAG National Office 1726 M Street NW Washington DC 20036 (202) 467-8180 pflag.org