

STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

Being Culturally Aware of LGBTQ+ Concerns in an Ever Changing World



In a world full of differences, the topics of sexual and gender identity and gender expression continue to be open for dialogue. One can freely discuss LGBTQ+ concerns, or shy away and keep them in the proverbial closet. These topics can range from someone's sense of being male or female, which is their gender identity, to one's expression of how they present themselves to the world, as defined by their gender expression. Being culturally aware of these identities and concerns for the LGBTQ+ population is pertinent to the overall growth and development of the human race, but even more so to those who have been perceived as different their entire lives.

Why are LGBTQ+ people at risk?

When someone is perceived as being different they are often labeled. This can lead to an inability to build healthy relationships and connect with peers due to lack of trust and acceptance, and difficulty in finding a place in society or feeling a part of something

greater. It can be difficult to define a clear sense of self when there's a struggle between the known self and what is expected. There can often be a lack of connection to resources or assistance with finding the appropriate resources. See *local LGBTQ+ resources below*.

Some common issues facing the LGBTQ+ population include:

- Increased depression and suicide rates
- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of alienation
- Discrimination from homophobia and transphobia
- Religious and social ostracism
- Victimization
- Interpersonal and intrapersonal violence
- Struggles with heterosexism/heteronormative culture

People of color who are in the LGBTQ+ minority are often trying to reconcile and integrate their sexual orientation with their race and religion, while grappling with stereotypes of masculinity and femininity as it relates to behavior and expression.

The coming-out process

Being culturally aware of LGBTQ+ concerns includes learning how to support LGBTQ+ individuals while they are in the process of coming out. The coming-out process is ongoing and often invisible. Recognize that an individual makes the decision to come out — not their family, friends or society. Someone who identifies as LGBTQ+ has to come out to themselves first, before coming out to others. Reassuring them that there are constructive, protective factors when coming out is huge, and can be the difference in the person feeling accepted or rejected. Being conscious of the extent to which a person is out is also paramount. For instance, they may be out to one parent and not the other, to one circle of friends but not their co-workers.

How to be an ally

- Don't announce that you are an ally or an advocate; just be one!
- Be affirming, validating, empathetic, encouraging and compassionate.
- Avoid putting your prejudices or fears on others.
- Don't assume anything — just ask.
- Remember that pronouns are important. Ask if they prefer to be referred to as he, him, his; she her hers; they, them theirs, etc.

LOCAL LGBTQ+ RESOURCES

Wondering where to turn for help or assistance? Explore the resources below.

- » **UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center:** 205-934-2281, uab.edu/eacc
- » **UAB Student Health & Wellness Center:** 205-934-5816
- » **Crisis Center Birmingham:** 205-323-7777
- » **Magic City Acceptance Center:** 205-774-1173, magiccityacceptancecenter.org
- » **1917 Clinic at UAB:** 205-934-1917, uab.edu/medicine/1917clinic
- » **SHAPE (within 1917 Clinic):** 205-996-4119, facebook.com/SHAPEatUAB
- » **Alliance of LGBTQ Equality:** uab.edu/equitydiversity

