

Gender and Sexuality:

A Clinician's Guide to Supporting
the LGBTQ+ Community



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Specialized Eating Disorder Support

All genders • All levels of care

As passionate allies dedicated to providing specialized support for the LGBTQ+ community, we at Walden Behavioral Care are committed to ensuring that our treatment spaces reflect the unique needs of our ever-evolving patient population. This content was developed to be utilized as a resource in your day-to-day work with individuals and their families to help you feel empowered to comfortably and confidently interact with diverse populations.

In sharing the knowledge that we have accumulated over years of experience working with the LGBTQ+ community, we are hopeful that we can cultivate a larger network of resources for our patients and provide them with more opportunities to access compassionate, inclusive and affirming healing environments.

Term Glossary

Ally: A term that typically refers to a straight or cis-identified person who supports, advocates, affirms and/or respects individuals within the LGBTQ+ community.

Bisexual: A term describing a person who is emotionally, physically and/or sexually attracted to people of both genders.

Cisgender: A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

Gay: A term used to describe male-identified people who are emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to other male-identified people.

Gender expansive: A term describing someone whose gender presentation does not align in a predicted fashion with gender-based expectations. Similar to gender non-binary, gender-fluid and genderqueer.

Gender expression: A term describing how a person expresses their gender through hairstyles, clothing choices, accessories, etc. Gender expression may or may not align with a person's gender identity due to issues that may include, but are not limited to, perceived and/or actual safety concerns and/or the cultural norms within someone's environment.

Gender identity: A term that refers to how a person thinks about themselves. This cannot be declared or assumed by anyone other than the person themselves.

Intersex: A term used to describe people who are born with or who develop variations in sexual characteristics. These traits can be visible or not, and may not fit within our culture's binary understanding of what constitutes a "male" or "female" body. For example, a person may appear to be male on the outside, but have mostly female-typical anatomy internally.

Lesbian: A term used to describe a female-identified person who is emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to other female-identified people.

Macroaggression: A term that describes an overt form of oppression (whether intentional or unintentional) that typically is based on assumptions about or harmful invalidations of an entire group of people.

Microaggression: A term used to describe a subtle form of oppression (whether intentional or unintentional) by people of privileged identities (cisgender, white, heterosexual, etc.) of people lacking the privileged identity. Microaggressions typically invalidate the identity of a marginalized group and/or their experience. Misgendering is one form of microaggression.

Misgendering: A term used when someone assumes the pronouns of someone else based on name, gender expression or other information when it results in use of the incorrect pronouns to address an individual. This can be a very difficult experience for many, so it is important to refrain from using pronouns until a person has confirmed them.

Pansexual: A term that describes a person who is attracted to people regardless of their gender identity, gender expression and/or sex assigned at birth.

Pronouns: A term referring to the way we communicate respect for another person and who we are with each other. Try as we might, we cannot know another person's pronouns until they tell us themselves. Until pronouns have been confirmed, it is respectful and affirming to use a person's name instead.

Queer: A term that has been reclaimed from its earlier negative use and is valued by some for its defiance, by some because it can be inclusive of the entire community, and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. This term is still sometimes disliked within the community, so it should only be used when self-identifying or quoting someone who self-identifies using that term.



Transgender: A term used to describe a person's gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. After a person transitions, regardless of what that means for the individual, that person may or may not continue to identify as transgender.

Transition(ing): A term describing the process that a transgender person goes through to change bodily appearance (whether that be through surgery, hormone therapy or gender expression) in order to be more congruent with the gender/sex they feel themselves to be and/or to be in harmony with their preferred gender expression.

While You Read

Please keep in mind that identities are self-selected and not imposed on people by others. In addition, the language that is used to communicate about gender and/or sexuality is continually evolving.

Try This Language...

...Avoid This Language

Gender-affirming surgery	Sex change, sexual reassignment surgery
Pronouns	Preferred pronouns
Gay/Lesbian	Homosexual (reminiscent of a painful time when "homosexual" was a mental health condition)
Sexual orientation	Sexual preference (implies that there is a choice involved)
Intersex	Hermaphrodite
Cross-dresser	Transvestite
Assigned male/female at birth or designated male/female at birth	Biologically male/female, born male/female (these phrases are reductive and simplify what can sometimes be a very complex experience; Sex is based on a number of things, not just biology and/or genetics)

Why Pronouns Matter

- Using pronouns shows the individuals around us that we accept them for who they are; acceptance is the **best predictor for successful treatment outcomes**.
- Using pronouns is a first step in showing all individuals the respect that they deserve.
- Using pronouns nurtures a culture that values the use of pronouns for all individuals and creates a more welcoming space for all people regardless of gender or gender expression.
- Using pronouns creates the opportunity for all individuals to share pronouns and helps us avoid our tendency to make assumptions about people based on their external appearance and/or presentation.
- Using pronouns purposefully in introductions challenges cisnormativity (the belief that everyone is cisgender).
- Using pronouns challenges transphobia (fear and hatred of and discrimination against transgender people and the transgender community).



“People in the LGBTQ+ community may not have the privilege of assuming that their environments are safe, supportive or welcoming. As such, it is critical for us – as care providers – to ensure that our welcome is explicit.”

– Stu Koman, *Founder, Walden Behavioral Care*



Putting Knowledge into Action

■ What do I do if I commit a micro-/macro-aggression (around gender)?

If you misgender someone, take a moment to correct yourself. This demonstrates your effort and commitment to treating all persons with the respect that they deserve. Please avoid assuming that it is the transgender or gender expansive person's responsibility to address your feelings after the fact. If the individual you accidentally offended has more feelings of their own to share with you, it is important to give them the opportunity to do so.

■ What should I do if someone shares their gender identity or sexuality with me?

- Thank them for sharing this part of themselves with you.
- Check in about how confidential this information is.
- Ask how you can best support them.
- Remember that their gender identity, gender expression or sexuality is only one dimension of themselves. Show equal interest and curiosity about all parts of themselves that they choose to share with you.



■ How do I ask about gender identity and expression during a phone screen?

Help the client on the phone understand why you might need this information. Example: "What's your name? How do you spell it? What would you like me to call you? What pronouns do you use? Now, for insurance purposes, in order to prevent any billing mishaps, does the name you gave me match the name on your insurance card?" If it doesn't, try, "What is the name on your insurance card? How do you spell it?" Be sure that throughout the conversation, you are referring to them by their desired name and/or pronouns.



■ How do I address a client's gender identity and sexuality during a clinical session?

The framework for this conversation is that gender, sexuality and mental health often intersect. LGBTQ+ clients are at higher risk for eating disorders, suicide and other mental health conditions. If you feel that knowing this information would be pertinent to and beneficial in your clinical work together, try asking the following questions:

- What's your name? How do you spell it? What would you like me to call you?
- Do you think of yourself as a boy, as a girl or in another way? What pronouns do you use?
- Do you think of yourself as straight, bisexual, gay, lesbian or in another way?

■ If I know a client is transgender, how do I know with whom to share that information?

Just as HIPAA protect a client in certain ways, it also protects their status as a transgender person. Use the same discretion as you would with other medical and health information. Ask yourself, "Is it clinically relevant for this person to know? Am I putting my client at risk by not sharing this information?" If the answer is no, it is probably fair to say that this information does not need to be disclosed.

■ If I have to address a group of people, how do I do so without using pronouns?

If you haven't asked everyone in the group what pronouns they use, avoid using them at all. Try "folks," "friends," "y'all" or "team."

Why and How to Be an Ally

The voices of LGBTQ+ allies are critical in working toward an equal society for all. Being an ally lets people know that just because someone may not identify as LGBTQ+ does not mean that these issues don't need to be yours too. Below is a list of attributes that the PFLAG* website suggests to help you better understand your role as an ally.

■ Allies want to learn.

Allies are people who don't necessarily know all that can be known on LGBTQ+ issues or about people who are LGBTQ+, but who want to learn more.

■ Allies address their barriers.

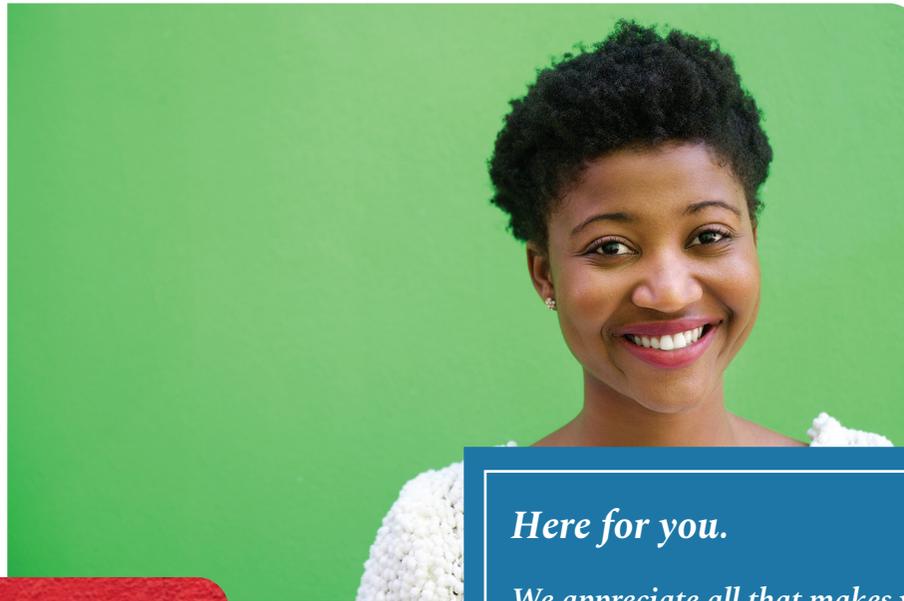
Allies are people who might have to grapple with some barriers to being openly and actively supportive of people who are LGBTQ+, and they're willing to take on the challenge.

■ Allies are people who know that "support" comes in many forms.

It can mean doing something super public (think covering yourself in rainbow glitter and heading to a Pride celebration with a sign reading "PROUD ALLY"), but it can also mean expressing support in more personal ways through the language we use, conversations we choose to have and signals that we send. True allies know that all aspects of ally expression are important and effective, and should be equally valued.

■ Allies are diverse.

Allies are people who know that there's no one way to be.



Here for you.

We appreciate all that makes you you. Here at Walden Behavioral Care, we are proud to welcome individuals of all genders, ethnicities, religions, sexualities and socioeconomic statuses to our empathetic and affirming healing environments. Walden's Rainbow Road program provides individualized treatment for the LGBTQ+ community by staff who identify as LGBTQ+ with therapy centered around how sexual orientation and gender identity impact recovery. Since 2003, our commitment to using evidence-based interventions at all levels of care and our focus on treating the whole person have been catalysts in helping people access the specialized support they need and deserve.

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* "Guide to Being a Straight Ally." PFLAG. <https://bolt.straightforequality.org/files/Straight%20for%20Equality%20Publications/3rd-edition-guide-to-being-a-straight-ally.pdf>.



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Massachusetts

- Braintree
- Dedham
- Peabody
- Waltham
- Westborough



Connecticut

- Middletown



Georgia

- Alpharetta



Virtual

- PHP
- IOP
- Specialty Programs

