

Creating LGBTQ-Inclusive Spaces

Chelan-Douglas CASA is committed to LGBTQ inclusion. This commitment is reflected in the services we provide out in the community *and* in the environment, we strive to create together within our organization – an environment in which everyone feels comfortable being their authentic selves. Below are tips to assist you in taking an active role in creating this LGBTQ-inclusive environment during your time with us and beyond. Most of the tips encourage you to be mindful of your language to ensure you're not leaving anyone out unintentionally. The second page includes a glossary with common LGBTQ-related terminology. Thank you for taking the time to read and put these best practices into action.

- **Avoid gendered language like “sir” and “ma’am” or “ladies and gentleman” entirely. Instead, use gender-neutral greetings like “Good morning, everyone,” or “Hello, folks.”**

While gendered words like “sir” and “ma’am” may be intended to show respect or formality in new professional relationships, they can unintentionally exclude people who do not identify as “men” or “women” or allow you to incorrectly identify someone’s gender.

- **Use people’s correct pronouns and do not assume that you know someone’s gender or pronouns. If you don’t know, it is okay to ask someone for their pronouns.**

A person’s pronouns may be gendered (she/her and he/him) or gender-neutral (they/them and ze/hir -- pronounced “zee” and “here”). Using the pronouns “they/them” to refer to one person is a commonly accepted best practice and you should not question or comment upon the grammatical correctness of this. You will see that the nametags used for the event include a space for both “Name” and “Pronouns.” Reference these nametags to learn a person’s pronouns and indicate your own pronouns on your nametag. You may meet some people who have not filled in the pronoun line on their nametag. Some people prefer not to use pronouns, but instead, to be referred to using only their name (for example: “Yes, that pen belongs to Chris,” rather than “Yes, that pen belongs to them”).

- **Use gender-neutral language like “partner” and “spouse” rather than “boyfriend/husband” or “girlfriend/wife” when discussing relationships.**

This helps avoid making any assumptions about the gender of a person’s significant other. Remember that now that marriage equality is the law of the land, a person’s “spouse” may be someone of their same gender.

- **Avoid asking LGBTQ people personal questions about their LGBTQ identities simply out of curiosity.**

Some personal questions may be appropriate as you get to know someone better or discuss topics related to your specific visit to CASA. But if you would not generally ask a non-LGBTQ acquaintance a certain question then it is safe to say you should probably avoid asking an LGBTQ acquaintance that same question. For example, personal questions like, “When did you come out as gay?” or “How long have you known you are transgender?” should be avoided. It is not appropriate to ask a trans or non-binary person what their name used to be or anything about their bodies as it relates to being trans/non-binary and/or the status of a medical transition.

- **If you make a mistake, apologize concisely and move on.**

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Definitions

LGBTQ: An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

Lesbian: A term used to describe a woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted primarily to other women.

Gay: A term used to describe a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of the same gender.

Bisexual: A term used to describe a person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender though not necessarily simultaneously, or in the same way, or to the same degree.

Transgender: A term used to describe people whose gender identity does not match expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender experience does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, trans people may be straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.

Queer: This term can be used as an umbrella term for “LGBT,” to express a rejection of other gender and sexual orientation labels, or to describe sexual attraction to people of more than one gender. Historically “queer” has been used as a negative term for LGBTQ people. Some people still find the term offensive while others have embraced the term. It should be used carefully.

Sexual Orientation: A person’s emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people.

Gender Identity: One’s internal sense of being male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender Expression: External appearance of one’s gender, usually shown through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

To Learn More:

Please don’t hesitate to reach out if you have any questions about the tips included in this document and/or to learn more about CASA’s commitment to LGBTQ inclusion in our policies and practice.