HOW TO BE AN ALLY (CONTINUED)

Have something (a sticker, poster, flyer, brochure, book, or button) affirmative of a range of sexual orientations and gender identities visible in your office/agency. This will identify you as an ally and allow a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual or intersex person to feel open and safe with you.

Learn about and refer to community organizations. Familiarize yourself with the related community resources (and call them before you refer to make sure they are ongoing).

We all make mistakes and we are all learning. Be proactive; don’t avoid potentially uncomfortable conversations. Approach discussions with respect and curiosity. Be open to feedback and others’ perspectives. If these conversations are difficult for you for any reason, feel free to seek consultation from peers, professors and field advisors.

Adapted from Transitions volume 14, issue 4, Washington, DA: Advocates for Youth, 2002 and Youth Pride, 1997

RESOURCES

Simmons College—It Gets Better
www.simmons.edu/itgetsbetter

NASW—LGBTQ Issues
www.socialworkers.org/diversity/new/lgbt.asp

Glossary of terms
www.internationalspectrum.umich.edu/life/definitions

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition
www.masstpc.org

Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender Health Access Project
www.glbthealth.org

OUT IN THE FIELD

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

REFERENCES


This brochure was created in collaboration with the Field Department at University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill and University of Michigan, as well as the students and faculty who have been crucial in guiding this process.
WHERE WE STAND

Welcome to Simmons School of Social Work field education department! Field education is an integral part of the SSW curriculum. It enriches the educational experience and gives students the opportunity to integrate and apply classroom learning with actual practice with individuals, families, groups and larger systems.

This brochure is designed as a resource and support for students in field placements who are navigating sexual orientation and gender identity as they enter the social work profession. We also hope the information provided will serve as a valuable resource to agencies, field instructors, field advisors, allies and faculty.

While all agencies are selected based on their shared commitment to social justice and equality, we also recognize that students may still be faced with homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and other forms of discrimination. Our program is committed to challenging these inequalities, modeling social work values and supporting students’ positive and successful learning experiences.

The field of social work is guided by the principles and values of the social work code of ethics. At Simmons College we have a non-discrimination policy, which includes a commitment to access for all students, regardless of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, national origin, handicap, or veteran status. Furthermore, Simmons College is committed to creating an atmosphere within which the diversity of its members’ individual roles meets with understanding, respect, and encouragement, and where discrimination and harassment will be condemned and redressed.

In the field education department we ask all agencies and field instructors to sign an Affiliation Agreement with the College and School of Social Work stating they “will not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, military service, veteran status, gender identity or expression or sexual orientation...” in the selection of students or in any aspect of the provision of educational training.

COMING OUT IN THE FIELD

Working in a safe and comfortable field environment is a right that all students should be afforded. Deciding to “come out” is a personal choice and one that should be respected. Many people may choose to withhold personal information such as sexual orientation, gender identity or expression for fear of discrimination, rejection or isolation.

Not knowing when and what to reveal about who you are is potentially a question for all professionals in this field. However, if you are a person trying to integrate aspects of your identity related to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression you may have additional questions and need for support.

HOW TO BE AN ALLY

Everyone can express their support for students navigating gender identity and sexual orientation through their actions and words:

“Come out as an ally.” Publicly acknowledge your support for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and the issues impacting them.

Make no assumptions about sexuality or gender identity. Use neutral language such as “Are you seeing anyone?” instead of “Do you have a boyfriend?” Do not assume that someone’s partner or significant other is of the opposite sex.

In terms of gender identity, use the pronouns and terminology the individual prefers. If you’re not sure what to call someone, ask.

Normalize and validate students’ feelings about their sexual orientation and gender identity. Let them know that you are there for them.

Make it clear that homophobic and transphobic sentiments and actions have no place in your agency. Develop a ‘zero tolerance’ policy regarding discriminatory words and behavior directed at gender identity and sexual orientation, just as you would toward racist or sexist remarks.

Work proactively to address stereotypes and misperceptions that may exist in your agency/work environment about people who have a non-dominant sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Encourage your agency/work environment to adopt and enforce anti-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Assess your agency for sexual orientation and gender identity friendliness. Support diversity in hiring and encourage the presence of “out” staff.

(continued...)

FINDING SUPPORT

There are several sources of consultation and support if you have questions and concerns around sexual orientation and gender identity in field education.

Talk to people in the SSW field department. The field director is Kim Kelly Harriman. Your field advisor will get to know you (and your supervisor) well over the year, and can offer invaluable consultation about if and how to discuss aspects of your identity related to sexual orientation and gender identity with your supervisor.

If and when you become comfortable discussing sexual orientation and gender identity with her or him, you may find your supervisor to be a source of support and of advice about sharing your experience with colleagues and clients.

Student Government has a committee focused on issues pertinent to sexual orientation and gender identity. Each year students are identified as representatives to this committee.

At the end of this brochure you will find a listing of other resources, especially the link to Simmons College—It Gets Better.