LGBTQ+ issues are being discussed more than ever before in the media, community programs, schools, churches, offices, and in people’s homes. Being an ally is important; however, clear information about how to be a supportive ally can be difficult to find. This list is not exhaustive, but provides some starting points. Add your own ideas and suggestions!

Don’t assume a person’s gender or sexuality. Use neutral language until you know for certain how the person identifies. For example, use gender neutral pronouns such as they and them until you know their gender or the gender of their significant other.

Educate yourself about LGBTQ+ issues. There are many resources, reading lists, and organizations available for information. Don’t be afraid to do research.

Don’t expect members of any group that is the target of bias (e.g., LGBTQ+ people, BIPOC, women, people with disabilities) to act as the “experts” to educate others about their group. Avoid tokenizing or patronizing people who are different from yourself.

Explore ways to creatively integrate LGBTQ+ issues in your work. Doing so can be a valuable process for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Integrating LGBTQ+ people and issues instead of separating them out as a “special topic” is an important strategy for conveying and creating respect and acceptance.

Challenge stereotypes that others may have about LGBTQ+ people. Challenge derogatory remarks or jokes made at the expense of any group and avoid making them yourself. These remarks reinforce stereotypes and make it seem that prejudice is acceptable.

Examine the effect that sexual orientation and gender identity have on people’s lives and development. Explore how race, class, ability, gender, and other identities intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity and how multiple identities shape our lives. Explore your own reactions and feelings about LGBTQ+ people and issues, including their causes and if there are any you want to change.

Listen to and believe LGBTQ+ people when they tell you they are experiencing discrimination or problematic treatment.

Ask for support if you are experiencing harassment or other problems related to your raising LGBTQ+ issues. You may be labeled as LGBTQ+ whether or not you are. Don’t isolate yourself! Make sure you are safe, identify your supporters, and use the opportunity to deepen your understanding of the power of homophobia and transphobia.

Prepare yourself for a journey of change and growth that will come by exploring sexual orientation, gender identity, and other issues. It can be exciting, painful, and enlightening.

By learning and speaking out as an ally, you will make the world a safer, more affirming place for everyone.

*NAMI March 2016; Updated January 2022*