



QUEER CAFÉ | LGBTQ INFORMATION & TRAINING  
**ADVOCATES & ALLIES**

## RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

### Communicating with Sensitivity

Words are important. We show respect by choosing the appropriate words and using proper language. It is important to communicate respect and be sensitive to others. We need to avoid verbal mis-steps and avoid being offensive. Also, it is important to be educated and informed, to display credibility and to sound like we know what we're talking about. And it's more than just political correctness. It's about respect.

**NO: Homosexual...**

**YES: Gay... Lesbian... LGBTQ...**

In general conversation, don't use the word "homosexual." Use the terms, "gay" or "lesbian" instead. The word "homosexual" sounds too clinical. It might suggest a person is diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered.

Also, the word "gay" should only be used as an adjective... as in "gay people"....and never used as a noun... as in "the gays."



**NO: Sexual Preference...**

**YES: Sexual Orientation...**

Use the term "sexual orientation" instead of "sexual preference." Such word usage might suggest that being lesbian or gay is a choice and therefore "curable." It is not a choice or a preference. It is the way a person was born. It is an inherent identity. Nobody makes a conscious choice to be straight. And nobody makes a conscious choice to be gay or lesbian.

**NO: Admitted Homosexual / Avowed Homosexual / Practicing Homosexual...**

**YES: Openly Gay...**

The phrase "Openly gay" is preferred to "admitted, avowed or practicing homosexual." Such insensitive rhetoric might suggest that being gay or lesbian is somehow sinister, shameful or inherently secretive. Coming out of the closet and being open about being gay should be seen as a positive and courageous act.

## **NO: Gay Lifestyle**

The “Gay Lifestyle” is an inaccurate term used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lives. As there is no one straight lifestyle, there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender lifestyle.

“Lifestyles” are identified by aspects other than sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity... Lifestyles might be based on occupation, region, culture, recreational activities, sports activities, arts-related activities, hobbies, interests, religion.



## **NO: Special Rights...**

### **YES: Equal Rights / Equal Protection / Human Rights**

It’s about “equal rights” not “special rights.” Anti-gay extremists frequently characterize civil rights and equal protection under the law for LGBTQ Americans as "special rights" in an attempt to energize opposition to anti-discrimination and equal opportunity laws. LGBTQ people just want what everybody else has.

## **NO: Homosexual Agenda / Gay Agenda...**

### **YES: Gay Rights Movement / Civil Rights Movement / Human Rights Movement**

Don’t talk about the “gay agenda.” Instead, talk about “gay rights” or “civil rights” or “human rights.”

The "lesbian and gay movement" accurately describes the historical effort to achieve understanding and equal treatment for gays and lesbians. Notions of a "homosexual agenda" are rhetorical inventions of anti-gay extremists seeking to portray the lesbian and gay civil rights movement as somehow evil and menacing.

## **GOOD: Gay Marriage**

### **BETTER: Same Sex Marriage**

### **BEST: Marriage Equality**

As gay and lesbian couples begin getting married, some may struggle with the appropriate words to use to refer to the wedding ceremony that is taking place or the marriage relationship that is beginning. You may hear confusion from someone who is sincerely trying to understand this new concept. They may even ask, “So, which one’s the groom and which one’s the bride?”

It is appropriate, of course, to refer to the ceremony or the occasion as simply a “wedding” or a “marriage” like any other wedding or marriage. There is no need to differentiate.

However, the term “Gay Marriage” is respectful. Using the term “Same Sex Marriage” shows greater knowledge of the subject. Using the term “Marriage Equality” shows a deeper understanding of what it means and why it is important.

**NO: Misgendering / Deadnaming**

**YES: Using Preferred Pronoun / Using Preferred Name**

People who are transgender or gender variant experience some sense of discomfort and dysphoria in having to deal with the mismatch of their external presentation with their internal feelings regarding being male or female. To cope with those feelings, and to affirm their true gender, they may choose a new name along with a new pronoun that more accurately expresses their identity.

A male who identifies as female, for example, may, in addition to wearing women's clothing and make-up, choose a female-sounding name and prefer to be addressed as she and her.

For people who are transgender or gender variant, the simple act by another person of using a preferred pronoun or preferred name can make a big difference. It is a profound display of respect.

“Deadnaming” occurs when someone intentionally or accidentally refers to a transgender person by the name they used before they transitioned. “Misgendering” occurs when someone intentionally or accidentally refers to a transgender person by the pronoun they used before they transitioned.

By the way, none of this is related to a transgender person's surgical status. And it is inappropriate to talk about a transgender person's pre-operative or post-operative situation or how far they are in their transition. A person is still considered to be transgender whether they have undergone surgery or not.



**NO: fag, faggot, homo, dyke**

**YES or NO: queer**

Fag, faggot, homo, dyke... These are derogatory or offensive terms, meant to demean or insult.

The term Queer is sometimes okay, and becoming more acceptable, depending on the context, situation, or the individual person. Some LGBTQ people are okay with the term, others regard it as derogatory.

More and more LGBTQ people are reclaiming the term as a means of self-empowerment. It is sometimes used as an umbrella term. It is sometimes used to describe academic categories... queer literature, queer studies, queer theatre, queer research, queer culture, queer theory.

**NO: pervert, deviant, depraved, unnatural, immoral, sinful...**

**NO: disorder, disease, illness, sickness, dysfunctional, crazy, unstable...**

These are terms used to portray gay and lesbian people as less than human, evil, unhealthy, mentally ill, or a danger to society. The notion that being gay or lesbian is a psychological disorder was discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s. Since then, the medical, mental health, and social work professions have also agreed.



**NO: in need of curing... in need of repair... in need of conversion...**

LGBTQ people do not need curing. They are not in need of repair. They do not need to be converted to a healthier or more moral state of being. This is offensive language that suggests LGBTQ people are sick.

**NO: promiscuity, pedophilia, child sexual abuse, sodomy, bestiality, polygamy, adultery, incest...**

It is offensive, defamatory and downright ignorant to suggest that homosexuality is associated with or synonymous with these acts. LGBTQ people are no more likely to engage in these behaviors than straight people. These associations often are used to suggest that LGBTQ people pose a threat to society, to families, and to children.