

10 Ways to Make Your Workshop Inclusive

The following "10 Ways to Make Your Workshop Inclusive" has been created by student organizers on GLSEN's Teaching Respect for All 2003 National Student Leadership Team with the help of GLSEN staff. We encourage you to review the tips in preparation for your session to ensure the workshop is safe for everyone!

1. Names & Pronouns: Begin each session by having each person introduce themselves with name and preferred pronoun. This may not be plausible for large groups, but if any small group work is done include introductions and pronouns in your instructions.

2. Avoid Tokenizing: Do not single out people in front of the group to give the 'token perspective' (i.e.; do not put the only youth in the room on the spot by asking them, "How do students feel about this issue?"). Individuals should only speak for themselves and not a group of people.

3. Avoid Stereotypes: Refrain from using backhanded compliments (i.e.; "you're so articulate for your age"). These comments may be meant in a positive way, but are often degrading because they assume stereotypes of age/race/ability/etc.

4. Interpreters: If there is an interpreter in the room assisting a participant check in with them before you begin. Come up with a signal that can be used if the conversation is going too quickly for translation to be effective etc. If you are unsure about something, ask any GLSEN staff member or other volunteer.

5. Gender Neutral Language: Try to use gender neutral descriptions for yourself and other people. For example, say 'my significant other' instead of identifying a gender for your partner.

6. Physical Accessibility: Keep all activities accessible. Not all disabilities are immediately apparent, and many will not want to single themselves out. When introducing an activity that involves movement, introduce it with an alternative to movement for those who do not feel able to participate. The alternative may or may not be used, but addressing the issue up-front will help participants feel more able to adjust activities to their ability.

7. Avoid "Grouping": When using examples of unsupportive groups, do not single out groups of people (i.e.; religions). Instead of saying "all Southern Baptists are against LGBT students", talk about: Fred Phelps protesting LGBT students." It is a common mistake to comment on groups as a whole rather than on the individuals, groups or actions who give those groups a bad name.

8. Avoid Racializing: Unless someone's age, race, gender etc. is vital to the story you are telling, leave out those descriptions (i.e. don't refer to someone as 'my black friend' if the story is about sexuality).

9. Derogatory Comments: Challenge those ideas that may alienate participants. Avoiding confrontation is always a good idea, but it is inappropriate to let participants say comments that may be derogatory or unfounded. For example, if someone comments that straight people make weak allies, you could counter it by reminding the group that it is not sexuality that makes a good ally but the actions a person takes. This can often be done in a friendly manner, but the importance of you as the facilitator countering such bias in your workshop is unequalled.

10. Ground Rules: Lay out ground rules at the beginning of each session (have some ideas prepared) with the group. Ask if anyone wants to add a rule/guideline that they think would contribute to a safe and open environment. After taking all suggestions in a timely manner, quickly ask the group to agree to the rules. At this point, anyone who has a problem or who feels uncomfortable with the situation can quietly leave before the workshop fully begins. Later, you can reference that agreement to the rules if any problems occur.