

ON IDENTITY

LISTENING DEEPLY,
SPEAKING THOUGHTFULLY
ABOUT GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY

People's views within the Christian community and elsewhere vary widely on gender and sexual identity. This document is offered as a guide to facilitate open dialogue that will lead to showing God's love and care for all people.

INSTEAD OF ASSUMING → TRY

- You don't know any lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or queer (LGBT+) people . . .
- You understand what someone else is experiencing . . .
- You're the first to have "this" conversation with the LGBT+ person . . .
- Sexual orientation is "contagious" . . .
- LGBT+ people chose their orientation . . .
- The experiences of all LGBT+ people are essentially the same . . .
- Being gay or bisexual means being promiscuous, predatory, or hypersexual . . .
- Sex and gender are identical . . .
- Sexual orientation and gender identity are the same thing as sexual behavior . . .
- Sexual orientation is the only important aspect of a person's identity . . .
- Debate is the only way to talk about LGBT+ lives or with LGBT+ people . . .
- You need to express your own perspective . . .
- Every space in church or on campus is safe for LGBT+ people . . .
- You know all you need or want to know . . .
- You need to advocate for a particular viewpoint . . .
- That God calls you to affirm or reject someone's identity . . .
- Acknowledging you likely do know someone, even if you may not be aware of who it is.
- Honoring each person's individual journey by listening with a caring attitude.
- Knowing that the person has probably had this conversation many, many times before. And it can be exhausting.
- Recognizing that sexual orientation is an aspect of identity.
- Remembering when you *chose* your orientation. (When was it, exactly?)
- Valuing each individual's story as unique.
- Assuming the very opposite: Does your own sexual orientation automatically mean you're promiscuous, predatory, or hypersexual?
- Understanding that sex is biological and gender is a social construct.
- Considering the different sexual behaviors of people with your own orientation. Sexual identity is not chosen. Behavior is chosen.
- Thinking about yourself and others in a more holistic way; we all have multiple aspects to our identity.
- Engaging in authentic conversation that requires deep listening and respect.
- Asking for and thoughtfully considering someone else's perspective.
- Being a safe person (for example, honoring confidentiality and building a friendship) so the space is one person safer.
- Accepting that you don't know it all and can stand to learn more about the lives of people who aren't you.
- Practicing support of a particular person.
- Simply extending God's and your own love and compassion.

INSTEAD OF SAYING → TRY SAYING

- Homosexual
- Transy.
- Hermaphrodite
- Homosexual lifestyle
- Gay relationship
- *How gay people ... they ...*
- Are you gay? Are you bisexual? Are you transgender?
- Love the sinner, hate the sin
- I understand. My niece is a lesbian.
- Have you prayed for God to deliver you?
- Let me tell you what I think.
- Lesbian or gay
- Transgender or trans. ("transy" is a slur)
- Intersex
- Nothing. There is no such thing as a "homosexual lifestyle," just as there is no one heterosexual lifestyle. LGBT+ people visit libraries, attend movies, feed pets, and dine at restaurants. What people often mean by "lifestyle" is more accurately termed "same sex sex."
- Same-gender relationship
- Those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT+) ...
- How do you identify? (If you *want* ask.)
- I love you.
- I want to understand more. Will you share your journey/story with me?
- Nothing. Assume, without asking, that the person has a friendship with God. Allow the person to express how God is guiding them.
- Would you share your thoughts with me?

CONSIDER THAT WHEN YOU SAY

- The gay lifestyle
- Love the sinner, hate the sin
- I love you, but I can't condone your lifestyle.
- I can't agree with your choice to lead a homosexual lifestyle.
- I value you, but ...

A PERSON WHO IS LGBT+ MAY HEAR

- A promiscuous, predatory, hypersexual, clubbing, drinking, drug-taking lifestyle
- You'll always be fundamentally flawed in my eyes.
- I can't love you unless you change what I disagree with or what makes me uncomfortable.
- I can't see you as anything beyond your sexual identity.
- I can't bring myself to truly, completely value you.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.” Matthew 7:12