

Suggestions for Combating Heterosexism

- Assume that whenever you go to work there are lesbians or gay men who are wondering how safe the environment is for them. Don't assume that everyone you meet is heterosexual. Provide safety by making clear your support of gay and lesbian identity.
- Realize that oppression of gays and lesbians is perpetuated in social situations where physical affection is exclusively heterosexual. In consideration of this, where it is appropriate and mutually consensual, feel free to be physically affectionate with someone of the same sex. Also, consider refraining from public displays of physical affection, especially in situations where it is not safe for gays and lesbians.
- Challenge heterosexism whether or not lesbians and gay men are present. Don't always leave it to gays and lesbians to do it.
- Remembering that silence is complicity, challenge/confront anti-gay and lesbian statements and structures as well as assumptions behind them. DO not promote the institutionalized invisibility of lesbians and gays.
- When speaking of your heterosexual lover, point out that s/he is of the opposite sex, implying that s/he may not have been.
- Confront your fear, memories, and bad feelings about gay men and lesbians. Recall and release those feelings, thereby diminishing their hold on you.
- Do not assume that a gay or lesbian of the same gender is automatically attracted to you. Do you assume that all straight people of the opposite gender are interested in you? If a gay or lesbian is attracted to you, try to be flattered, not offended. If it still bothers you, talk about it.
- Changed your use of language from "Do you have a boy/girlfriend?" to "Are you seeing anyone?" Heterosexism is promoted and maintained powerfully through language. Respect the profound delicacy of the "coming out" process.

And the big challenge...

If people jump to the conclusion that you are lesbian or gay because of your friendship with gay or lesbian people or because you are reading a gay or lesbian publication or because you are being affectionate with someone of the same gender, resist your impulse to deny it. Challenge yourself to experience gay/lesbian oppression rather than taking advantage of heterosexual privilege.