

Shropshire Council Resource Pack

LGBT History Month 2022

LGBT History Month: Being an Ally

When we are talking about the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender community as a whole, being mindful about individuals and their needs and rights is more inclusive and respectful than just thinking about a wider grouping. In so doing, we may then draw from their individual experiences, positive or otherwise, to deepen our own knowledge and help us in our day-to-day interactions with anyone from any grouping.

This brings us on to what we can do as allies, to support the LGBT community, and individuals within it, much as we may hopefully also be trying to do to support people from other Protected Characteristic groupings, whether that is to do with Disability, Race, Religion or Belief, etc.

An *ally* is someone who is not a member of a particular community but nonetheless engages in action to support said community.

A *passive ally* may support Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity– but they make no positive difference to the experience of underrepresented people in the workplace.

An *active ally* is someone who witnesses injustices, unconscious bias or microaggressions and responds to them.

In thinking about allyship within the context of LGBT History Month, we can usefully also educate ourselves through reference to national sources, as well as starting and continuing local conversations with colleagues and friends, and family, and calling out prejudice and discrimination wherever we may encounter it.

Let's highlight a few ways we could be a good ally:

An ally is for life, not just for LGBT History Month

You can't be an ally just for a month. Yet now feels like a good time to write about some of the ways in which you can be a more effective ally all year round.

There are a few things you can do, especially at this time of year. And it's important to say, if you consider yourself an ally but some of this comes as a surprise, don't panic! No one is going to confiscate your ally card. There is simply always room to learn and be more proactive in your allyship.

Get between your friends in the LGBT community and the hostility they face

Actions like taking the initiative to offer your own time and energy can act to shift some of the responsibility to educate and explain away from people in the LGBT community themselves. This is active, meaningful and often hard allyship.

It takes practice and time, but it gets easier as your own confidence grows.

Resist the need for validation

If you get an opportunity to address prejudice, in public or in private, try to resist the urge for validation.

There's also the idea that your allyship itself is what matters. Seeking validation shifts focus on to the relationship between you and your friends in the LGBT community.

You could make them feel indebted and obliged to mark or heap praise on you. Rest assured that your LGBT friends will know the importance of your actions

Expand your reading and watching lists

There is so much cultural content available today that can teach us about LGBT history and about LGBT existence today.

This includes understanding the legacy of protest and political struggle that has brought us to this point in history today.

Yes, this is probably the lowest grade of active allyship imaginable. It takes almost no effort and carries zero risk. However, it can and should be in the mix, especially as more of these stories today are being told by us, not just about us.

Every ally has to start somewhere, and absorbing the right documentary or book at the right time can be life changing.

Parents, diversify your children's bookshelves

A few picture books exist specifically to help LGBT parents talk to their own children about difference and acceptance. But the majority of inclusive children's books are not intended just for the LGBT community.

Ally parents, your children need books that feature LGBT families. We live in an age where these lessons have never been easier to teach – the books have never been more beautiful or more plentiful.

And now that the Department of Education has introduced compulsory relationships education for schools, pupils should receive teaching on LGBT content during their school years. Teaching children about the society that we live in and the different types of loving, healthy relationships that exist can be done in a way that respects everyone. Primary schools are strongly encouraged and enabled to cover LGBT content when teaching about different types of families. Secondary schools should cover LGBT content in their RSE teaching.

There is guidance for parents and carers, available on the Department of Education web pages. Your child's school should have a specific policy in place for you to refer to, with regard to how the topic area is being approached in that school.

Write to your MP

Our political system can have a huge impact on our lives. The rights of some minorities have only recently or are yet to be enshrined in law. Your rights may never be publicly debated but as an ally, you need to stay alert to when others are.

There is a chance your voice as an ally will stand out and resonate louder than those of people directly affected.

MPs have varying levels of authority in different areas but they can all write directly to ministers and table questions in various parliamentary forums. Your MP's job is literally to represent you, so ask your LGBT friends and family what questions you should be raising with your MP.

Be conscious of your language

Language is ever-evolving, and LGBT terminology itself evolves and shifts. For example, we can now see acronyms like LGBTQ+ increasing in usage. But instead of looking at attempts to catch all appellations, in any scenario, we need to always think of the individual instead. Their own individuality, and their own intersectionality, are what we need to keep to the forefront of our minds if we are to truly be an ally to them.

Intersectionality can usefully be described as the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people: whether that is gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability, age, etc.

Take the time, whether it's a new name, a new pronoun or using gender-neutral language in general, for example about someone's partner, in order to avoid making assumptions.

Accept that you will still make mistakes

After all this, allyship still rests on the principle that your experience and understanding is secondary to the LGBT people you support. If you make a mistake, someone will hopefully call you in. It is the gentler form of being "called out".

This should never involve being belittled or harmed but it might feel terrible. The more active you are, the likelier it might happen. So, it's actually a good sign in the long run.

To be an effective ally, be an active ally.