# Inclusive behaviors

## Why do LGBTQIA+ colleagues need inclusion?

Being LGBTQIA+ is what is known as an invisible stigmatised identity.

* **Invisible** - because unless an LGBTQIA+ person tells you that is how they identify, you would not know for sure.
* **Stigmatised** – because across society and even in their own homes, LGBTQIA+ people may have faced negative attitudes, treatment, and comments, simply for being who they are.

When an LGBTQIA+ person is not sure they can be themselves at work, access a service or safely shop at a business, they may choose to hide a part of themselves and that can come at a cost.

Keeping a part of your identity secret can lead to:

* **Exhaustion** - preoccupation with keeping a secret uses a lot of energy
* **Low self-esteem** – living with guilt and shame can make each day much harder
* **Disrupted interactions** – it is natural that colleagues may be sensitive to interactions they feel are less authentic

Keep in mind that being LGBTQIA+ is not a choice. Although you may have an opinion about LGBTQIA+ people, you do not have the right to disagree with the validity of their existence.

When LGBTQIA+ colleagues can show up at work, as a customer, or as a patient, and not have to spend any time worrying about how they will be treated or perceived, they can just focus on being who they are.

You have the power to choose how you make other people feel. You also have the power to speak up if you hear something you do not agree with.

## The importance of challenging unconscious bias

All brains have bias.

Unconscious or implicit bias refers to the stereotypes we attach to a person or group of people without even knowing we are doing it. These biases can unintentionally affect how we connect with and treat LGBTQIA+ people, but once we are aware of our biases, we can challenge them.

**Consider implementing these five practical tips:**

* **Awareness and Acceptance.** Unconscious biases exist in us all. Working to become aware of your biases will help you start to reduce how they impact your interactions with others. Take the free [Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT)](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/), to find out what your unconscious biases are.
* **Develop self-awareness**. Monitor your first impressions and reactions to people. For example, when you meet a new colleague, ask yourself if you made any fast opinions about them that may not be true.
* **Slow down**. Unconscious bias happens more when we make fast or snap decisions. If you have a decision to make, pause and take some time. Try to schedule big moments, such as making recruitment decisions, for a time of day when you feel most energised and are not hungry or tired.
* **Practise curiosity**. Ask people of a different background to your own about their day-to-day experiences.
* **Remove bias from decision-making**. Remove bias from decision-making by involving a diverse range of perspectives.

## Stereotypes and assumptions

No one wants to be judged on any single personal characteristic or attribute, so it is important to avoid stereotyping LGBTQIA+ people.

Because of a concept called heteronormativity, many non-LGBTQIA+ people unconsciously consider being heterosexual as “normal” or superior. It is important to be aware that these are our own personal biases and not fact.

Read the list below. How many have you thought in the past and when you stop and think, do you think they are true? *Hint – they are all stereotypes – none of them are true!*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Gay men are feminine | Men are only professional if they wear suits |
| Lesbians are masculine | Women are only professional if they dress feminine |
| Bisexual people are likely to end up either gay or straight | Trans people want attention |
| An asexual colleague just has not met the right person | Men must be assertive and lack emotion to be strong leaders |

Stereotypes lead to decreased productivity, dissatisfied customers, and even reduced revenue. They can hinder open communication and teamwork and lead to in-groups and out-groups.

**Quick check​**

You can check if you have a bias by swapping the language used in your sentence and noticing if it changes the meaning for you. For example, read both sentences and observe how you react:

* When gay colleagues speak about their partners, they are not being considerate of the feelings of those around them.
* When straight colleagues speak about their partners, they are not being considerate of the feelings of those around them.

## Microaggressions and unintentional hurt

A microaggression is an often-unintentional comment said to members of underrepresented groups which play into stereotypes and assumptions. Microaggressions are specific: they are statements, questions and/or actions that are connected to a person's identity.

**Examples of common microaggressions and practical tips to turn things around:**

| **Statement or behaviour** | **Microaggression** | **Instead** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Your choice of lifestyle is offensive to me. | *You have a choice in who you are attracted to and/or your gender identity.* | Remember that sexual orientation and gender identity are not a choice. |
| LGBTQIA+ people should not speak about their relationships at work. | *Because your day-to-day experiences are different to mine, I do not see them as acceptable.* | Ask about the person’s identity and be open to hearing about their day-to-day experiences. |
| But you do not look gay, or you are too pretty to be trans. | *I feel I can pass judgement on your identity based on my preconceived ideas.* | Take time to think what “gay looks like” and consider if this was an appropriate thing to say.  |
| I cannot imagine how hard it must be to be LGBTQIA+. | *I have attributed something negative to a part of your identity.* | Remember, we are all different and that is a good thing. There might be things about you that others could not imagine. |
| Oh, you are gay – my friend is gay, do you know them? | *I am assuming that, because you are a member of a minority, that you will know other members of this group.* | Remember, we all have things in common. By sharing things about yourself and listening to others you will make connections. |
| Wouldn’tit just be easier to dress normally? | *I have decided what “normal” is and believe you should conform to my ideas.* | Broaden your ideals by being truly observant of others – is there actually a ‘normal dress code’? |
| You are against my belief system. | *My beliefs outweigh your identity.* | Beliefs and behaviours are two separate concepts. You can hold your beliefs while showing respect to others. |
| I knew you were trans, or I knew you were gay. | *I knew something about you based on my assumptions.* | If someone comes out to you, acknowledge how big and important that moment of trust is. |

## Sharing information

All people have the right to share information about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and intersex status. A guide for what is ‘reasonable’ information sharing is to reflect on the nature and amount of personal information that non-LGBTQIA+ employees, customers or patients customarily share in the workplace.

**Example 1**: *When speaking to a colleague, Jane mentions the fact that her husband will be joining her when she transfers to Mt Isa. Therefore, Deepti may also speak about the fact her wife will be moving to Perth when she takes on a role there.*

**Example 2**: *Karon, a cis-gender woman, has asked her People Leader if she may attend a women in leadership conference, Maria (a trans woman), would also like to attend the same conference. Both requests should be given the same consideration based on the team’s capacity and developmental goals of the individual regardless of their gender identity.*

A colleague may also choose not to share their personal information. It is the decision of the colleague as to when, with whom, and how much personal information they share.

## Diversity in design

Consider diversity when selecting imagery, such as looking for images other than the traditional family. Avoid tokenism by using images that are relevant to the message.