



# Cultivating Affirmation and Belonging

*Action Steps for Youth-Serving Professionals*

## Shared Language



- Refrain from referring to youth as "boys and girls" Be creative: they are readers, scientists, artists, and more!
- Practice using gender neutral terms like partner, parent, significant other, sibling, and avoid assumptions about relationships
- Normalize pronoun usage
- Consider language on forms, flyers, etc.
- Respond to abusive language immediately
- Understand that it's okay not to know it all!

## Trust Youth

Youth are the experts in their own experiences. Whatever their identity is today is what matters, regardless of their identity yesterday or tomorrow.

Youth know when it's safe to come out and when it's not. Follow their lead, and never "out" a youth to anyone without their express permission, including to their parents.



## Listen

For many youth, the hardest part of being closeted is not being seen, heard, respected, or listened to. When youth come out, you don't have to have all the answers. Just having someone to talk to might be all the support a young person needs. Make yourself available in an open-ended way.



## Visible Allyship

Even if you know you're an ally, it's really important to let your students know you're an ally. Make it obvious!

- Hang a safe space poster in your classroom or office (make sure it's in the frame if you're working virtually!)
- Put a rainbow sticker on your window, door, or laptop
- Wear a pronoun pin on your lanyard
- Introduce yourself using your pronouns
- Tell your youth verbally that they can come to you for support
- Offer to be the GSA advisor

## Inclusive Material

Represent LGBTQIA+ youth and families in the material you use -- for teachers, in your curriculum. Choose books that include LGBTQIA+ characters, whether the main character in a young adult novel or the parents in a picture book.

Science teachers: research the fact and fiction about human biology, including chromosome makeup! Talk about the animal species that "change sexes." *hint:* →



## Resources

Have comprehensive LGBTQIA+ resource lists and information ready for your youth should the need arise. You'll want to know where you can suggest your students go for support, whether it's a website or book, a school counselor, a community center like KYC, a school GSA, a therapist at a local agency, or an affirming teacher or colleague!

*Have them check out [kycohio.org](http://kycohio.org) for a programming calendar and virtual sign-up!*