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LGBTQIA+ Affirming Language

What to Say, What to Skip, and Why It Matters

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LGBTQIA+ Language Guide

Use affirming language for inclusivity.

Use Correct Pronouns

Use "your pronouns" — not "preferred pronouns." Pronouns aren't a preference, they're part of who someone is.

Gender-Affirming Terms

Say "gender-affirming care" — not "sex change" or "the surgery." It's healthcare, not a novelty.

Speak Inclusively

Say "all genders" instead of "both genders" or "opposite sex." Gender isn't binary.

Avoid Outdated Terminology

"Homosexual" sounds clinical. Use "gay" or "lesbian" — the words people actually use for themselves.

Respect Identity

Say "transgender" — not "transgendered." It's not past tense. Their identity is now.

LGBTQIA+ Intake Documentation Tips

Key considerations for inclusive forms and discussions.

Include chosen name

Include a field for chosen name AND legal name (if different). Not everyone's ID matches who they are.

Pronouns are essential

Add a pronouns field — not just M/F checkboxes. Ask, don't assume.

Separate gender identity

Separate "gender identity" from "sex assigned at birth" on forms. They're not the same thing.

Diverse relationship statuses

Go beyond married/single. Include partnered, polyamorous, etc. Families look different.

Ask about name usage

First session: "What name would you like me to use?" Simple. Powerful.

Common Mistakes in LGBTQIA+ Language

Avoiding errors fosters a supportive environment.

Assuming sexuality incorrectly

Don't assume sexuality based on who they're dating. Bi people in straight-passing relationships are still bi.

Inquiring about anatomy

Don't ask about surgery or anatomy unless it's clinically relevant. Curiosity isn't a good enough reason.

Outing someone without consent

Never out someone — to colleagues, family, or referrals — without explicit consent. Ever.

Using deadnames improperly

Don't use deadnames unless legally required — and if you must, note chosen name too.

Treating identity as the issue

Their identity isn't "the issue" unless they say it is. You're not there to fix who they are.

Substance Use and LGBTQIA+ Clients

Understanding substance use in LGBTQIA+ populations is vital.

Higher substance use rates

Higher SUD rates aren't about identity — they're about minority stress, trauma, rejection, and discrimination. Know the difference.

Coping mechanisms through substances

Substance use may have helped them survive identity concealment. Understand that before judging the coping mechanism.

Importance of safe recovery spaces

Traditional recovery spaces aren't always safe for LGBTQIA+ clients. Yours might be the only affirming room they have.

Support planning considerations

Chosen family matters. Ask who's actually in their corner — it might not be blood relatives.

Assessing living environments

Assess safety at home — especially for trans clients. Are they safe where they live?