

## Safe Zone Mission Statement

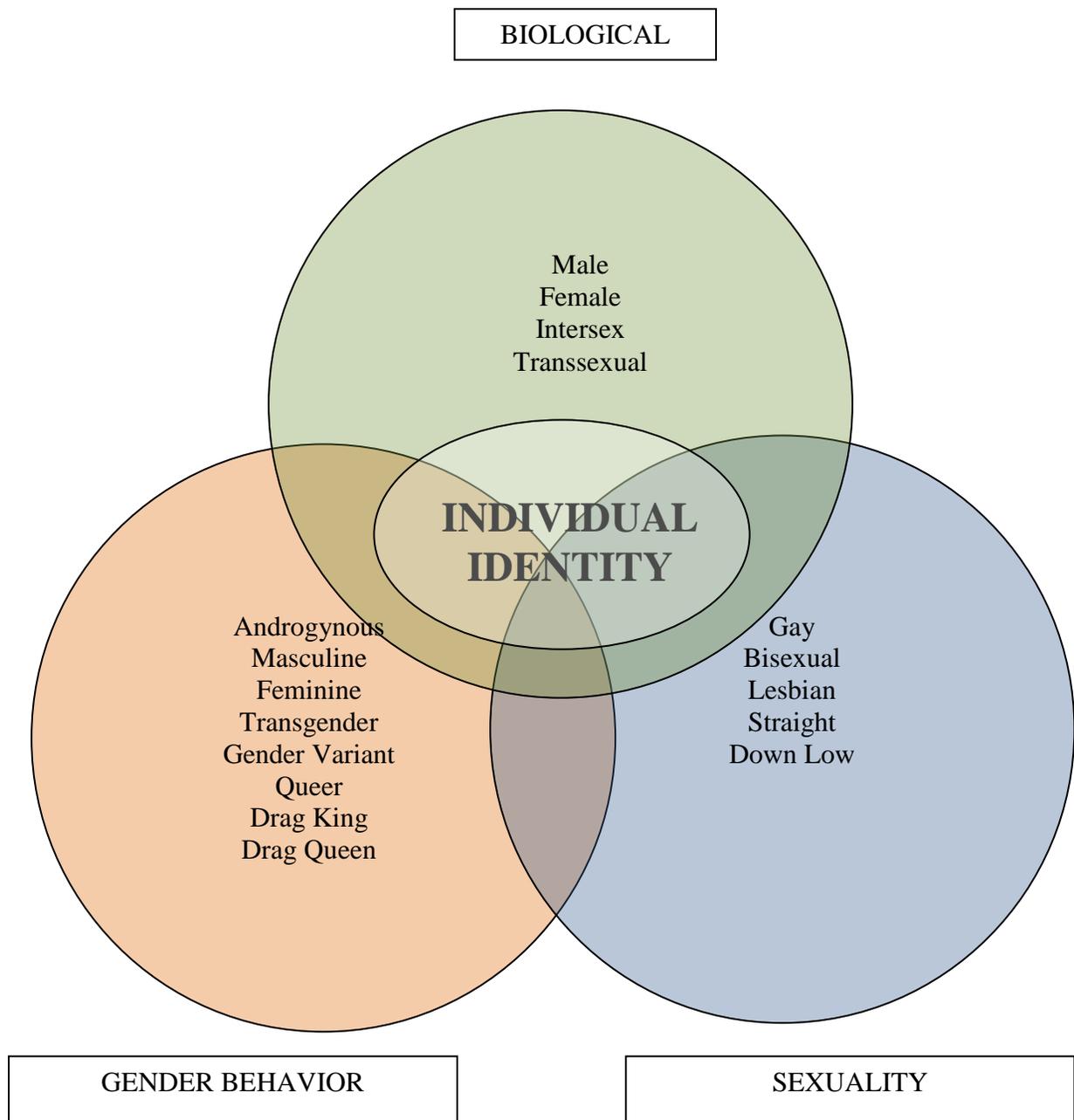
The mission of Safe Zone is to promote an inviting and inclusive environment that is emotionally and physically safe for LGBTQIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, questioning) students, faculty, and staff. This is achieved through:

- 1) Developing a network of allies who have been trained in LGBTQIQ issues, and
- 2) Increase awareness and education regarding LGBTQIQ people and the concerns and challenges they may face.
- 3) Increase awareness of heterosexist practices, biases, and beliefs in order to promote greater equality and appreciation of how LGBTQIQ individuals enrich our community.

Members of Safe Zone consist of a team of interdisciplinary staff, faculty, and students within the university who are committed to raising awareness and acceptance of the LGBTQIQ community through education, training, and support. It is our belief that promoting a campus environment that is more accepting and tolerant is beneficial to the growth and development of the MSU community in general. The Safe Zone symbol identifies members throughout the community and indicates these individuals provide a safe place to talk about issues that impact LGBTQIQ individuals.

## Why Have Safe Zone?

Research suggests that a reduction in discrimination towards any group provides a decrease in discrimination towards other groups as well; thus, everyone benefits. Students, faculty, and/or staff at MSU who identify as LGBTQIQ may not always feel safe about disclosing their sexual orientation due to potential negative consequences. This may lead to feelings of isolation or invisibility and experiences of campus life as hostile, uninviting, and/or un-accepting. Safe Zone provides an avenue for LGBTQIQ individuals to be able to identify places and people who are supportive, non-judgmental, and welcoming of open dialogues regarding these issues.



## Considering the Issues:

Just like heterosexual students, LGBTQIQ students may struggle with issues of self esteem, relationships, stress and fitting in; however, there are issues that are unique to LGBTQIQ individuals, which make finding support somewhat difficult. One of the large LGBTQIQ issues is coming out. If you have never had to “come out,” it may be difficult to understand how complex this process is for some people. There are many other issues that LGBTQIQ individuals face and need support while dealing with, but “coming out” is a common and important process to understand. Please bear in mind that just because a student comes to you, it does not mean that they are in crisis – as a minority group, some students are simply looking for a supportive and friendly environment from time to time.

### Coming Out

- ▶ **The coming out process is continual with no end point.** It involves more than discovering and disclosing sexual orientation and identity to others. All GLBTQ people must make decisions daily about who to come out to and how to come out.
- ▶ **Coming out also involves coming to terms with what it means to be queer** in a heterocentric world –how to find a place to belong, how to handle discrimination, how to present oneself to others (as obviously queer or not), how to develop intimacy in relationships, and how to maintain strong, queer relationships.
- ▶ **Coming out is both a process of self-discovery and of self-creation.** It is also fundamentally about actively taking control of one’s needs to be known, accepted, loved, and whole. It is about valuing and looking after oneself, as well as defining who one is.
- ▶ **Currently, the average age at which gay or lesbian youth come out has been decreasing over the past few decades.** The average now for both men and women is before college, at least to themselves and some significant people in their lives.
- ▶ **Men, on average, have same-sex sexual contact earlier than women, in their early to mid teens.** It is not at all uncommon for women to not have same gender sexual contact until college.
- ▶ **There remains a great variability in the timing of the various stages individuals go through in the process of coming out.**

(personal communication, Samantha Bergman, April 2007).

## Other Issues LGBTQIQ Students May Face Related To Their Sexuality

Harassment

Alienation

Inability to share about their lives/relationships

AIDS, HIV and STDs

Pressures to be heterosexual

Religious issues

Finding a peer group

Finding support

Fair and equal treatment

Confidentiality

Lack of legal support

Stereotypes

Rejection from family/close friends

Rejection from society/community

Gay bashing and threats

Dropping out of school

Heterosexism

Learning about sexual behavior

Social opportunities

Educating selves about LGBTQIQ issues

Gender

Building a family of their own

Letting people down

Guilt of hurting people's feelings

Discrimination

Finding mentors or positive role models

Pressures to bring dates to events

Oppressive laws in their states

Employment

Living arrangements

Suicidal Thoughts

Substance Abuse

## When to Refer a Student to a Mental Health Professional

As a Safe Zone Ally, most of the students you will come into contact with will be seeking information, advice, and support. There may be occasions where more serious psychological distress is presented by a student. The following list provides examples when this may be the case.

1. When a student states he/she is no longer able to perform within his/her normal capacity at school. Grades may have dropped or students may express they are having difficulty attending classes and completing academic work.
2. When a student can no longer cope with day to day activities and responsibilities. A student may state he/she is no longer going to work or having difficulty with basic self-care (e.g., showering, eating, etc).
3. A student expresses depressive symptoms such as: sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, fatigue, crying spells, loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyable activities, difficulty making decisions, or difficulty concentrating.
4. A student expresses severe anxiety symptoms such as: feelings of panic, shortness of breath, headaches, sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, muscle tension, fatigue, restlessness, sweaty palms, dry mouth, or racing thoughts.
5. A student expresses suicidal thoughts, feelings, or plans.
6. A student has no support or friends they can talk to about their sexual orientation. This student may not need counseling, but may benefit from a support group. Counseling & Psychological Services could assess and make a referral if appropriate.

As a general guideline, you may wish to refer a student to a mental health professional if you are feeling overwhelmed or worried about a student. You may consult other Safe Zone members when making a referral, though there may be times when others are not available. Remember to respect confidentiality.

## Creating a Safe Zone in the Classroom

1. Avoid using inappropriate or insensitive remarks or making jokes about gender or sexual orientation.
2. Use non-gender specific language whenever possible. For example, don't always apply masculine pronouns for stereotypical masculine roles and feminine pronouns for feminine roles (e.g., he for mechanics and she for nurses).
3. If you have personal biases towards GLBTQIQ students, be prepared to "refer" them to an ally staff or faculty person if they come to you with any issues or concerns related to their identity.
4. Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual. Be mindful of how these assumptions may play out in your language. For example, refer to *parents* or *caregivers* rather than mother and father; also, when discussing relationships, ask about *partners* rather than boyfriends, husbands, girlfriends, or wives.
5. In your curriculum, include examples of role models who identified as GLBTQIQ. When discussing current events, include GLBT issues.
6. Communicate with your students and make clear that anti-GLBTQIQ remarks and/or actions will not be tolerated and will be responded to when they occur. This may occur explicitly at the beginning of each semester during review of your syllabus (i.e., while discussing expectations related to student conduct or classroom behavior).

## Guidelines For Respectful Classroom Discussion and Inclusion Related To Sexual Orientation And Gender Identity

### **Preparing the class:**

Include in the course syllabus a statement of class policy indicating students are to show respect for all individuals in class discussion and interaction. Consider including relevant material related to MSU student code of conduct or policies on student harassment. Include expectations and guidelines for respectful class discussion. In reviewing the course syllabus at the beginning of the course, emphasize and discuss the expectations and guidelines, giving examples.

### **Suggested Guidelines:**

In stating one's opinion or belief, declare it as one's own personal opinion or belief rather than making a judgmental statement about another student or another student's opinion or belief.

For example, students are encouraged to make "I" statements rather than "You" statements. For example: "I believe adults of the same sex should not be allowed to marry." rather than saying: "You are wrong about same sex marriage...You don't know what you are talking about."

Students are encouraged to acknowledge another student's point of view or position before stating one's own. This practice fosters understanding of different points of views and ensures clear communication. A suggested response: "Your position on this issue is...That is what is true for you. I have a different position. Here is what I believe..."

Distinguish between personal opinion, reflecting personal values, and facts, documented by research and evidence, supported by scholarly and appropriate references. Making this distinction is very important in classes where students are asked to take and present a certain position on a class topic.

In discussing positions and making presentations that relate to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, as well as sexual orientation, students are expected to be respectful of other students who might be different from the speaker in any of these characteristics.

*Source: UAB Safe Zone Training Manual.*

## Tips for Responding to Homophobia

1. **Inform.** People making homophobic comments are often times working with inaccurate information. Recognize that some people will not want to hear something different than what they've known, but if you educate yourself in the issues you can at least be confident in being able to offer accurate information.
2. **Acknowledge them.** Don't dismiss what the other person says. If your goal is to have a dialogue, you need to acknowledge what the other person says. You don't have to agree, and can say that you don't, but recognize that he or she is speaking from his or her own beliefs and experiences.
3. **Acknowledge others.** Make a point of acknowledging other opinions. Point out that there are multiple beliefs on the issues and speak from personal experience.
4. **Ask questions.** Make sure you understand where the other person is coming from so you can approach the issue in the appropriate way.
5. **Be charming.** Getting angry or smug will not help anything. It is hard to fault someone for being polite and gracious.
6. **Find common ground.** Look for something you can both agree on. This offers a great starting point for discussion and forms a connection.
7. **Don't be a fixer.** You just aren't going to change some people's minds. Sometimes it's better to make your point and leave it at that. If nothing else, you can give the person something to think about and perhaps hit home for someone else in the group or nearby.

[www.uab.edu/safezone](http://www.uab.edu/safezone)

# The Basics – A Guide to Terminology

## **Bisexual**

Type of sexual orientation in which a person is emotionally and sexually attracted to either sex.

## **Coming Out**

The process by which a person begins to self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, or queer. Coming out can happen over a long or short period of time and at different levels (e.g., a person may be out to their friends, but not to their family).

## **Cross Dresser**

A person who enjoys wearing clothes usually associated with the opposite of her/his assigned sex or gender. Some cross dressers may also identify as transgender.

## **Drag**

Stands for (DR)essed (A)s a (G)irl. It is when a person performs in the clothes or using the mannerisms usually associated with the opposite sex or gender. Most people that do drag do not consider themselves transgender. Drag is usually done for entertainment purposes. There are Drag Queens (men dressing up as women) and Drag Kings (women dressing up as men).

## **F+M**

A Female to Male transsexual.

## **Gay**

A man who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other men. Preferred self-identifier for many homosexual men. Also, a term used to describe the GLBT community. See Sexual Orientation. [Some men who have sex with men do not identify as gay.]

## **Gender**

A social construct in Western culture typically divided between men and women and masculine and feminine. Behavior, appearance, and societal roles are differently defined for each gender. For most people, gender is their sex made visible.

## **Gender Expression/Identity**

Refers to the way in which people externally communicate their internal, personal sense of gender to others through behavior and appearance. For transgender people, their birth-assigned gender or sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match, and they seek to make their gender expression match their internal identity, rather than their birth-assigned gender or sex.

## **Hermaphrodite**

Considered a pejorative term, referring to an intersexed person.

## **Heterosexism**

Belief that heterosexuality is superior or more valid than other sexual orientations. Gives people who follow a more culturally traditional heterosexual lifestyle greater power, as well as increased opportunities for legal, medical, and economic, and social privilege, assistance and status.

## **Heterosexual**

Type of sexual orientation in which a person is emotionally and sexually attracted to the opposite sex (males attracted to females, females attracted to males).

## **Homonegativity**

Another term for homophobia that refers to a fear, hatred, and/or disgust for homoeroticism. Homonegativity assumes many forms such as acts of violence, verbal assault, overt discrimination, as well as other more subtle forms.

**Homophobia**

Irrational fear and hatred of homosexuality and anyone who identifies as anything other than heterosexual. Can often be internalized by someone who is having difficulty with her/his own gay, lesbian, or bisexual orientation. A direct result of heterosexism.

**Homosexual**

Type of sexual orientation in which a person is attracted to the same sex (males attracted to males, females attracted to females). A term originally used by the medical community to "diagnose" people who were not heterosexual. Considered a pejorative to some people who prefer the terms "gay," "lesbian," or "queer."

**Intersexed**

People who are born with ambiguous genitalia. Use "intersexed" rather than "hermaphrodite." Intersexed people may or may not identify as transgender or transsexual.

**Lesbian**

A woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women. Preferred self-identifier for many homosexual women. Can also refer to the community and culture of women who love/are attracted to other women.

**LGBTQIQ**

Common abbreviation for (L)esbian, (G)ay, (B)isexual, (T)ransgender (Q)ueer, (I)ntersex and (Q)uestioning.

**M+F**

A Male-to-Female transsexual. See *Transsexual* and *Transition*.

**Sex**

1. Verb: Consensual, intimate physical contact between adults.
2. Noun: Biologically based (though, some argue socially constructed) determination of a person's label of "female" or "male." Often based on doctor's visual assessment of a baby's genitalia.

**Sexual Orientation**

Refers to the identifiers used to describe the kind of sex a person finds attractive. Includes heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. See Gay and Lesbian. \*Transgender is not an indicator of a person's sexual orientation. Transgender people may have a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation.

**Transgender**

Often an umbrella term including transsexuals, cross-dressers, as well as people who identify as neither male nor female. Can also be the preferred self-identifier for someone who feels their gender identity differs from their birth-assigned gender or sex, but who does not wish to transition.

**Transition**

The process by which a person who identifies as transgender or transsexual changes their sex and gender. Can include changing name/ and or sex on legal documents, hormone therapy, living as the opposite gender or sex for an extended period of time, Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). Not all transgender/transsexual people choose to transition, or may choose some but not all of the options related to transition (an F+M or M+F may choose hormonal therapy but never have Sex Reassignment Surgery).

**Transsexual**

A person who does not feel that their birth-assigned sex matches their internal sense of their sex. Transsexuals may be male-to-female (M+F) or female-to-male (F+M). Transsexuals may or may not choose to alter their bodies hormonally or surgically. Some transsexuals also identify as transgender. See *Transgender* and *Transition*.

**Transvestite**

Considered a pejorative term when used to describe someone who is a Cross Dresser.

**Queer**

An umbrella term used for anything not heterosexual. Historically, it has been considered pejorative. However, the term has recently been reclaimed by many GLBT people as a preferred self-identifier, as well as an adjective (e.g., Queer Politics, Queer Studies).

For a more extensive glossary, please visit the Safe zone website  
[www.montana.edu/diversity/safezonereresources.html](http://www.montana.edu/diversity/safezonereresources.html)

# What's Your Attitude?

These statements are designed to help you reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors regarding homosexuality. Respond to each item by circling the number after each statement according to this scale:

**1 Strongly Agree 2 Agree 3 Neither Agree Nor Disagree 4 Disagree 5 Strongly Disagree**

(For the purposes of this survey, the term "gay" is used to refer to gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people.)

1. I feel awkward when I'm around people who are gay. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I believe that gay people deserve the negative treatment they receive. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I believe gay people should not work with children. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I openly object to derogatory remarks about gay people. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I can enjoy the company of gay people. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Marriage between gay individuals is okay with me. 1 2 3 4 5
7. It does not matter to me whether my friends are gay or straight. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I am concerned that a gay person may 'come on' to me. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I laugh at jokes about gay people. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Organizations that promote gay rights are not necessary. 1 2 3 4 5
11. Gay people should not have "special protection" under the law. 1 2 3 4 5
12. It bothers me to see gay people display affection in public. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I would be uncomfortable rooming with a gay person at a conference. 1 2 3 4 5
14. Gay people "suffer" from distorted images and stereotypes. 1 2 3 4 5
15. It would "disturb" me to learn that a close friend is gay. 1 2 3 4 5

Source: [www.uab.edu/safezone](http://www.uab.edu/safezone)