

Tips for Respectful Communication in the Face of Resistance



As we continue to work toward creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning) individuals in our schools, workplaces and faith communities, we may come up against strong resistance from people who feel that we are not being respectful of their beliefs. Below are some tips that may help to create an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued.

Assume goodwill: Assume that the intent of the person sharing their discomfort is not to be mean or to attempt to restrict someone else's rights, but because they simply don't understand or are feeling threatened. People often fear what they don't understand. Educating on LGBTQ issues is a process, not a single event. Continue to offer support and information whenever needed.

Connect: Try and make connects with people. You might try, "You know, I used to feel that way too, but here's what I learned..." Also, let people know that they are entitled to their opinions, but that hopefully you can agree on the fact that schools/workplaces/faith communities should be safe places for everyone.

Use "I" statements: Personalizing your comments, sharing your experiences and speaking from the heart, can help reduce contradiction and defensiveness in others.

Focus on policies and inclusion: It is important to clarify that there are certain standards that everyone is expected to follow regarding non-discrimination policies and maintaining respectful behaviors. With that said, ensure individuals that no one is asking them to change their beliefs. You are simply asking them to be courteous and respectful towards all people.

Listen for myths and stereotypes behind questions and concerns: Much of the information people have about LGBTQ individuals comes from the media, where they are often represented inaccurately using extreme stereotypes. Some of people's discomfort may be related to these false images. Allow people to share their fears and concerns, as some of these myths may come out in conversation and then they can be addressed.

Be a part of the process: Think about a time when your beliefs about a group of people or a different culture changed. Did the change happen overnight? Often shifting our personal understanding is a lengthy process. Try not to pressure yourself into having to come up with the perfect response immediately for every possible situation. Have open and honest conversations and seeds will be planted.

Inclusive Spaces Help Everyone: So many individuals are touched by LGBTQ lives! Family members and friends all benefit from respectful spaces. Also keep in mind that extremely resistant people may be wrestling with their own identities. Your acceptance, strength and support of the LGBTQ community may be making a big impact on them and their long-term mental health.

www.gayalliance.org