

LGBT Affirmative Therapy

*Tips for creating a more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, & queer inclusive practice
from the AAMFT Queer Affirmative Caucus*

Affirmative therapy is:

an approach to therapy that embraces a positive view of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) identities and relationships and addresses the negative influences that homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism have on the lives of LGBTQ clients

Adapted from Rock, M., Carlson, T. S., & McGeorge, C. R. (2010). Does affirmative training matter? Assessing CFT students' beliefs about sexual orientation and their level of affirmative training. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36(2), 171-184.

"...I want LGBTQ clients to know that I support them and their families. Being affirmative means I treat loving couples, families, and transgender people with the dignity, respect, and affirmation they deserve; they are fine just the way they are."

Being an affirmative therapist involves:

1. Self-reflection – reflect on your own upbringing, attitudes and beliefs; acknowledge areas of privilege; recognize bias stemming from living in a heteronormative and gender-binaristic society.
2. Get involved – live an affirmative life; become familiar with the issues; strive for social justice and social change.
3. Create an affirmative setting – provide LGBT friendly reading material, literature and resources; include affirming language on all paperwork; use client's preferred name; don't resort to heteronormative assumptions, instead ask about a client's *partner*
4. Be open about your commitment to providing affirmative therapy with all clients, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
5. With heterosexual and/or cisgender clients, act as an advocate by challenging heterosexism and the gender binary.

Definitions

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Ally – a member of a majority group to works to end oppression

Asexual – an individual who has no significant interest in sexual activity

Bisexual – an individual who is attracted to men and women

Cisgender – a person who's gender identity is in line with the gender assigned at birth

Drag – involves the performance of gender expression; not based on sexual orientation

Gay – a man who is attracted to men

Gender expression- outward expression of gender (clothing, mannerisms, activities, etc...)

Gender Identity – a person's deeply held sense of their own gender, regardless of what they were assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming – people whose experiences, behaviors, interests, or identities fall outside stereotypical gender expectations

Gender roles – culturally defined behaviors, attitudes, emotions, traits, mannerisms, appearances and occupations

Genderqueer – a person who feels their gender identity is outside the binary

Tips for Affirmative Therapists

1. Talk about your LGBTQ affirmative stance to colleagues, potential clients, family, and friends.
2. Be aware of your own heteronormative and gender normative assumptions. Challenge oppression.
3. Know the LGBTQ resources in your local community.
4. Acknowledge that each person has a unique story related to personal discovery and disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
5. Know the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity
6. Using correct terminology. When in doubt about how to talk about identity, ask!
7. Ensure that intake forms include a blank option for gender and acknowledge LGBTQ relationships.
8. Access LGBTQ affirmative continuing education trainings and resources for clinical practice.
9. Include gay and lesbian literature in your waiting area.
10. Get involved in LGBTQ community events and activities.

Recommended Resources:

- Bigner, J. J., & Wetchler, J. L. (2012). *Handbook of LGBT- affirmative couple and family therapy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bieschke, K. J., Perez, R. M., & DeBord K. A. (Eds.), *Handbook of Counseling and Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Clients*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Chernin, J. N. & Johnson, M. R. (2002). *Affirmative psychotherapy and counseling for lesbians and gay men*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Fish, L. S., & Harvey, R. G. (2005). *Nurturing Queer Youth*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Deneborough, D. (2001). *Narrative Queer Counselling and Narrative Practice*. Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Lev, A. I. (2004). *Transgender emergence: Therapeutic guidelines for working with gender-variant people and their families*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Ritter, K. Y. & Terndrup, A. I. (2002). *Handbook of affirmative psychotherapy with lesbian and gay men*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- World Professional Association for Transgender Health. (2011). *Standards of care for the health of transsexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming people*. (7th ed.).

Definitions cont.

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Heterosexism – the presumption that all people are straight

Heterosexual/straight – a man who is attracted to women; a woman who is attracted to men

Homophobia – irrational fear or hatred of LGBTQ people

Intersex – a person whose biological sex is ambiguous; not synonymous with *transgender*

Lesbian – a woman who is attracted to women

LGBTQIA – an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex Ally or Asexual

Queer – a re-appropriated term for people whose identities challenge dominant norms related to sexuality and gender

Sexual orientation – describes an individual's attraction to another person

Transgender – people whose gender identity is different from their assigned gender at birth

Transman or Female-to-male (FTM) - a person who is biologically female, or assigned female at birth and identifies as male.

Transphobia – irrational fear or hatred of transpeople

Transsexual – a person who undergoes procedures to change their body to fit their gender identity

Transwoman or Male-to-female (MTF) - a person who is born biologically male, or assigned male at birth and identifies as female