

LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy Affirming Language

Alongside structural and environmental considerations, appropriate language is a key indicator of LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy client safety. The language a health worker uses allows insight to the client in regards to the level of knowledge, understanding and experience of the person. Identifying and evaluating the impacts of non-affirming language in clinical settings is one key barrier to help-seeking and engagement for LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy clients.

Key identity definitions support people to understand general concepts. However, the limitations of definitions is that they do not cover an individual's experiences and deeply held sense of self. Developing confidence to ask open questions about bodies, genders, sexualities and identities will be an asset in creating affirming clinical spaces and using language that best reflects your client/s.

Language matters

Due to the changing nature of language relating to diverse bodies, genders, sexualities and relationships health workers may feel nervous or cautious with communication. This caution can lead to important information remaining undisclosed and impacting clinical outcomes reducing the ability to provide the most appropriate and responsive health care, advice and education. Non-affirming language may be both directly and indirectly discriminatory and have impacts on a person's health, social and emotional well-being.

For the client, impacts of non-affirming language can mean:

- Feeling uncomfortable or unsafe
- Perceptions of a lack of care
- A lack of trust
- Withholding information related to body, gender, identity and relationships that may be key to a clinical assessment
- Reduction in help-seeking behaviour
- Reduced engagement with a health clinic
- Increase in levels of psychological distress
- Increase in risk of self-harm or suicide
- Building resilience and reducing future engagement in health services

Enhancing health outcomes for LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy people and communities requires thoughtful questions and understanding for each person with affirming language used when discussing their body, genders, identities, sexualities and relationships.

Consider a client's perspective

Every person has their own identities, experiences and biases and so do the clients accessing health care. If a LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl or Brotherboy person has experienced non-affirming or discriminatory care within health settings this may impact their feelings of safety and trust.

Health workers are able to engage with clients by creating opportunities to build rapport, trust and begin to create a sense of safety. Language used and an understanding of diverse genders, bodies, relationships and identities is one way of beginning to create meaningful and affirming relationships.

Create affirming cultures

Creating inclusive and affirming cultures and clinical spaces is a priority in seeking to end the existing health disparities experienced by LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy populations.

Review the practice's client intake forms and record systems to ensure they support obtaining relevant information that can support an inclusive clinical environment. Determine which questions are relevant and necessary and understand that LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy may have complicated relationships with their bodies, genders, identities, sexualities and relationships. Avoid questions with tick box answers that may reduce the ability of the patient to provide a response through their perspective.

In addition, it is important to recognise the impacts of marginalisation and discrimination and the direct links to health disparities on LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy populations. Engaging in trauma informed health care practices are another way to begin creating affirming consultations and health care experiences for people with marginalised identities.

Hear your client

Avoid making assumptions about a person's body, gender, relationships and identities based on their physical appearance, expression and/or identity. Engaging in open, non-judgemental and affirming conversations about bodies, gender, relationships and identities are critical to creating meaningful professional and therapeutic relationships.

Understanding the limitations that forms and systems create in not capturing minority populations' client information in meaningful ways can, create opportunities for patients to provide information that they feel is important and relevant to the consultation. Ask open questions that avoid heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions.

Ask open questions about bodies, gender, sexuality, relationships and relationship structures. This may include asking questions such as:

- What is your full name?
- What are your pronouns?
- What language would you like me to use around gender?
- Is there any particular identity or experience that you wish to share?
- What language do you feel is affirming when discussing your body?
- What information about your health needs is important to you?
- What can I do to provide you with the most appropriate care?
- Can you please let me know if you feel uncomfortable?

You can also offer:

- Please let me know at any point if you would like to end this appointment early. We can always continue this appointment another time or you can be referred to another practitioner.

Respond to your client

If a person feels comfortable to share information about their body, gender, relationships or identities, ensure that the response acknowledges the information they have provided and is affirming. Affirming behaviour can be:

- Be present: Monitor your own body language, voice tone and pitch, and anxiety levels.
- Talk: Respond to the client's verbal queues. Offer gratitude for the information being shared. Keep the conversation open by asking open questions.
- Be honest: If you are struggling with language, indicate to the client that you will invest time outside of this appointment in learning more and attending professional development.
- Confidence: Treat this situation like any other. Prevent verbal or non-verbal reactions of surprise.
- Capacity: You do not need to assert your expertise. Avoid validating your expertise by mentioning that you have seen other clients with similar experiences. Avoid indications that the client may be 'different', 'interesting', or 'educating' for your practice.
- Build systemic trust: Encourage help seeking behaviours and ongoing appointments with health services.

Continually improve your practice

Find opportunities to increase access to knowledge and sensitivity around the needs of LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy cultures to enhance understanding. Consider accessing professional supervision or professional development with local LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy clinicians, groups or services in your region.

Conduct regular audits of internal forms, databases and health information to review and update language to remain relevant and reflective of your clients and the local community.

Actively request clients to provide feedback on their experience with the practice and staff. Create opportunities to discuss enhancing culturally competent care with all staff members that have client contact.

Taking pro-active steps towards inclusive and affirming clinical environments will mitigate existing health inequities and lead to enhanced clinical and health outcomes for all patients, including those who may be LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy.

Visit www.true.org.au or contact info@true.org.au for training opportunities or further information.