

Safe Zone Manual

Researched and Written by K. L. Riley
Updated Fall 2017

The purpose of this manual is to equip Safe Zone Advocates with the tools, terminology, and knowledge necessary to provide a safe, understanding environment for students across the sexual/gender spectrum who may be disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination and harassment.



ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY

Chapter 1: Exploring the Sexual/Gender Spectrum

Human sexuality and gender exist as a spectrum comprised of great variety. Even within the blanket terms of “gay” or “queer” an abundance of diversity exists. The brief profiles in this section will introduce Safe Zone Advocates to some of the key sexual/gender minorities and provide basic definitions, vocabulary, and resources applicable to each group. Challenges specific to each group will also be provided, so that Advocates can respond to various student needs with awareness and compassion.

Asexual



Overview

Describing approximately 1% of the population (MacInnis and Hodson, 2012, p 726) asexuality is a sexual orientation in which one is “not compelled by a sexual drive to engage in sexual acts” (Bedley, 2009, p. 18). Like most genres of sexuality, asexuality exists on a spectrum (Bedley, 2009, p. 8). Asexual persons may engage in sexual activity for various reasons, such as fulfilling the needs of a partner or for reproduction, whereas others may be entirely celibate. Asexuals may experience arousal (though without desire to find a sexual partner) and may even masturbate depending on their own preferences (AVEN).

Asexual relationships emphasize emotional connections over sexual ones, and in romantic terms, asexual and sexual relationships are no different (Bedley, 2009, p. 14). Rather than privileging sensual *pleasure*, asexual relationships may focus on *fulfillment* of an emotional, intellectual, or spiritual nature.

Terminology

Asexual: describes a person who does not experience sexual attraction.

Allosexual: describes a person who does experience sexual attraction (is not asexual).

Demisexual: describes a person that does not experience sexual attraction unless they have already formed a strong emotional bond with the person.

Gray-Asexual: A gray-asexual may infrequently experience sexual attraction, or experience low sexual attraction. The “gray” suggests that they fall someone in the “gray area” between asexuality and allosexuality.

Homo/hetero/bi/pan romantic: though lacking sexual interests, asexual persons can, and often do, form attractions and loving, healthy relationships. The term “romantic” is often used to replace “sexual” in standard terms of orientation. An asexual who is romantically and emotionally attracted to members of the same

gender could then be considered “homo-romantic.” Some asexuals may also be a-romantic.

Aromantic: describes someone who does not experience romantic attraction.

Celibacy/Abstinence: a state of refraining from sexual activity which may or may not be tied to an asexual orientation. It should not be confused with asexuality, however, as many asexual persons may engage in sexual activity for various reasons, and many celibate persons are not asexually oriented. Celibacy is generally used in terms of behavior as opposed to orientation.

Specific Challenges

A 2011 study by MacInnis and Hodson demonstrated significant prejudice against asexual persons, even more severe than those against homosexuals and bisexuals (p. 731). More than the other sexual minorities tested, asexuals were perceived as “deficient” in terms of human nature and emotions (p. 739). Stereotypes against asexuals may define them as cold, repressed, or emotionally distant (AVEN).

Relationships can be difficult for asexuals, given that most of the population expects romantic relationships to involve sexual contact. In relationships between sexual and asexual persons, it is up to the couple to determine their needs as a couple and negotiate if, when, and how much sex to engage in. Asexuals who are uncomfortable with sex altogether should never be encouraged to submit to unwelcome sexual encounters.

Like much of the LGBT community, harassment, violence, and “corrective” rape are also issues which asexual persons face (Mosbergen, 2013).

In addition to facing discrimination from heterosexist camps, asexual individuals often find themselves being overlooked or even discriminated against within the GLBT community as well. This can lead to a profound sense of isolation for asexual individuals, who may feel like outsiders even among other sexual minorities.

Resources

Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) – <http://www.asexuality.org>

Bisexual/Pansexual



Overview

There is some overlap between bi- and pan- sexual, though there is disagreement among various bi/pan communities as to whether the two can be used synonymously or not. They share in common a deviation from rigid gender-based attractions which are present in the hetero/homo sexual divide. Bi/pan sexuals may feel preference for one gender (or gender presentation), or may find themselves equally attracted to either/all genders.

Terminology

Bisexual: describes a person who is attracted to both genders

Pansexual: describes a person who is attracted to all genders (male, female, intersex, transgendered, non-gendered, etc.)

Specific Challenges

Prejudice against bisexuals can come from both hetero- and homosexual circles. Stereotypes include beliefs that bisexuals are promiscuous and unable to maintain monogamous relationships, that they are confused about their sexuality (or in denial of their homosexuality), and that they are responsible for the spread of AIDS to heterosexual populations (Safe Zone@ UAHuntsville, p. 7).

A 2011 study by MacInnis and Hodson revealed that people polled were least willing to rent to/ hire bisexuals of all the sexual minorities (p. 733). A 2014 study by Feijun Luo, Deborah M. Stone, and Andra T. Tharp indicates that students who have sexually engaged with members of both sexes are the most at risk for physical dating violence (p. 66).

Resources

The American Institute of Bisexuality (AIB) – <https://bisexual.org/>

Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian/Queer



Overview

While the LGBT community is strikingly diverse, many different forms of sexual/gender minorities identify themselves under the blanket term “gay.” Though the term “homosexual” has fallen out of use in preference or “gay” or “gay man/lesbian,” (Safe Zone, UAB, p. 34) homosexuality remains the standard term for same-sex attraction. Specifically, however, homosexuality denotes an attraction to individuals of one’s own sex.

Terminology

Gay: specifically, describes homosexual men. More generally, the term may also be applied to lesbian, bi/pan-sexuals, transsexuals or anyone who identifies with the “queer” community.

Lesbian: describes homosexual women.

Queer: once (and sometimes still) used as a derogatory term of homosexual men, the term has been reclaimed by with some of the LGBT community with pride. In academic circles “queer studies” has become an academic niche, similar to gender studies. The term is especially regaining popularity among LGBT+ youth.

Homophobia: the irrational fear and intolerance for people of homosexual orientation (or of homosexual feeling within oneself).

Heterosexism/Heteronormative/Heterocentric: involves the supposition of the inherent superiority/normalcy of heterosexuality. Carries with it the assumption that everyone one meets is heterosexual.

Specific Challenges

The results of a 1999 survey of the Birmingham area indicate that 44% of those polled had experienced anti-gay abuse within their family. 49% experienced anti-gay hate acts in school, and 48% in the workplace. 15% were fired because of

their sexual orientation. 31% reported having been the targets of physical abuse due to their sexual orientation (Safe Zone, UAB, p. 9). Pervasive discrimination and harassment places gay persons at greater risk for depression, anxiety, (Botswick et. Al, p. 35), as well as substance abuse, and sexual/physical abuse (Safe Zone@ UAHuntsville, p. 40). LGBT students can be up to 4X more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers (Trevor Project, p. 3).

On a systematic level, LGBT individuals face legal discrimination in various ways. There are no federal laws which protect LGBT individuals from workplace discriminations, and in 29 states there is no law protecting employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation (<http://www.hrc.org>). In only 23 states can gay/lesbian couples jointly adopt, while 8 states have distinct obstacles to adoption by same-sex couples (<http://www.hrc.org>).

GLBT youth from intolerant backgrounds may be put at a higher risk of homelessness if they come out to their families. While 5% of the youth population identify as LGBT+, LGBT+ youth comprise 40% of homeless youth.

Resources

The Trevor Project - <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) - <http://community.pflag.org/>

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) - <http://www.glsen.org/>

Polyamorous



Overview

Polyamorous individuals are those who have “a relationship orientation that assumes that it is possible [and acceptable] to love many people and maintain multiple intimate and sexual relationships” (qtd. in Barker, 2004, p. 75). Those who engage in polyamory usually employ codes which insist upon the knowledge and consent of all partners. The distribution of one’s relationship needs across multiple partners is seen as taking unrealistic pressure off of any one partner, and for some can lead to greater overall emotional fulfillment than they experience in monogamous relationships (Mitchell, Bartholomew, and Cobb, 2014, p. 330) which can contribute to the overall wellbeing of their primary relationship(s).

Terminology

Polyamorous: describes one whose relationship orientation allows for love and intimate/sexual interaction with more than one partner.

Ethical non-monogamy: describes a polyamorous system in which all involved parties are aware and consenting to the non-monogamous state of their relationship(s).

Primary: In some polyamorous arrangements, one has a primary partner to whom is given deference in regards to other partners. Often one’s “primary” is expected to hold a long-term or lifelong position with the partner.

Secondary/Tertiary etc.: In arrangements that involve one primary partner, additional partners may be referred to as “secondary.”

Triad: describes a relationship in which three people are involved with one another.

Quad: describes a relationship in which four people (usually two couples) are all involved with one another.

Specific Challenges

Polyamory violates strong norms in Western culture which promotes strict monogamy. In one survey, 43% of polyamorous individuals polled reported having personally experienced prejudice based on their sexual orientation (Mitchell, Bartholomew, and Cobb, 2014, p. 329). In society, polyamory is often equated with infidelity or cheating, seen as something evil or weird (Barker, 2004, 81).

Within relationships, the very nature of polyamorous activities can cause strain, emotional distance, instability, and conflict within primary relationships (Mitchell, Bartholomew, and Cobb, 2014, p. 330). Additional relationships can have a positive or negative effect on primary relationships, and navigating the needs of two or more partners can be a challenge for the polyamorous individual.

Transsexual/Transgender/Gender Queer



Overview

Transsexualism is a condition in which one's gender identity does not conform to one's birth gender. Transwomen may report a sense of feeling as though they are a woman trapped in a man's body, or vice versa for transmen. Gender identity is not necessarily related to sexual orientation, and is not uncommon for a heterosexual man to transition into a lesbian transwoman, or for a lesbian to transition into a heterosexual transman.

Terminology

Gender Identity: refers to the internal sense of one's gender, apart from the physical markers of chromosomes or genitals.

Gender Queer/Non-Binary: describes a gender-variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders.

Gender Fluid: describes a gender-variant person whose gender identity is not fixed and may shift along the gender spectrum from day to day.

Drag/Drag Queen/Drag King: Drag is a performance art that explores and plays with gender, usually in hyperbolic ways. Drag performers often do not possess an internal gender identity that corresponds to their drag persona, but they may.

Transition: the act of transitioning from one gender presentation to another through surgery, hormones, or both.

MtF (Male to Female): refers to an individual who was born male and transitioned to female.

FtM (Female to Male): refers to an individual who was born female and transitioned to male.

Cisgender: refers to one whose gender identity corresponds to the sex of their birth

Gender Dysphoria/Gender Identity Disorder: describes a state of distress related to disassociation from one's birth gender. Note that not all transgender individuals will experience this distress even if they disassociate with their birth gender.

Stealth: refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in public about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successfully passing.

Passing: achieving a presentation of one's desired gender that is normative enough to not be questioned by the general public.

Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS): a medical procedure performed to bring one's physical body more closely in line with one's internal gender identity.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT): the administration of hormones (usually estrogen for transwomen, testosterone for transmen) in order to more closely align one's physical condition with one's gender identity.

Transvestite: an outdated, blanket term for those who wear clothing of the "opposite" gender. This may not be related to transsexualism perse, but can also be related to curiosity, entertainment, fetish, or any other of a number of motivations.

Specific Challenges

In addition to societal bigotry, transsexuals experience (especially in the pre- or early stages of transition) a sense of internal struggle with their own bodies (Riley, 2013, p. 58). Transwomen/men may struggle to conform to social gender norms, both of their birth gender and their internal gender identity. Transition often brings about a sort of second adolescence in which the individual must relearn social roles, as well as determine which traditional gender roles do or do not work for them. Those in transition may swing between the pendulum of hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity before settling into a more natural expression of their own natural gender identity (Riley, 2013, p. 59).

Treatment for transgendered persons can be extremely expensive. A long process of psychological therapy is usually required before SRS will be administered. In many cases, neither SRS nor HRT are covered by insurance for transgendered peoples. The expense of treatment can make many transsexuals vulnerable to exploitation, especially as they are in high demand in the porn and sex industries.

Transgendered people are among those highest at risk for suicide. A staggering 41% of transgendered people reported attempting to take their own lives (Trevor Project, 3). Transgender reports of experienced violence reveal that as many as 60% of transsexuals have experienced physical violence, and as high as 46% been victims of sexual assault attributable to their gender expression (Sciacca, et al, 2012, p. 453).

The use of public restrooms can be especially problematic and even dangerous for transsexual peoples. Some trans persons experience a desperate anxiety about passing as their desired gender. Transsexuals can also experience discrimination from within the larger LGBT community itself.

Resources

North Alabama Gender Center – info@free2be.org
Tamara Pellant, LPC (Counselor working with the local trans community) -
tpellant@hiwaay.net

Intersex



Overview

The intersex condition involves physical anomalies in genitalia, chromosomes, or secondary sex characteristics from the majority of male and female bodies. An estimated 1 in 1500-2000 births involve intersex characteristics. Parents of intersex babies are often convinced of the medical necessity of surgical intervention, despite the fact that intersex conditions are not life threatening (MacKenzie et al, 2009, p. 1776). Some medical professionals even assert this surgery as a parental obligation despite the fact that genital surgery can result in a lifetime of complications, such as pain and nerve damage (Morland, 2012, p. 26 and 23). Those who have a sex assigned to them at birth have no say in their gender identity, and sometimes struggle to conform to their assigned role as they grow up. Isolation from peers and society as a means of protection is a common experience for intersex children (MacKenzie et al, 2009, p. 1779). In adulthood, developing intimate relationships can also be challenging or avoided altogether.

Those interviewed for the MacKenzie study expressed disapproval of unnecessary surgical intervention on intersex children, as the “surgical erasure of difference did not produce normalcy for the participants of this study” (p. 1780). Modern movements on behalf of intersexed persons stress the importance of informed consent of the individual, insisting that “parental distress must not be treated by surgery on the child” (www.insa.org).

Terminology

A-gender: describes a person who is internally ungendered

Intersex: describes the condition of individuals born with physical gender ambiguities. The term “intersexual” is not typically used.

Hermaphrodite: an old, mythological term for intersexed persons. The term is no longer commonly used and is considered offensive in many intersex circles.

Disorders of Sex Development: a controversial medical term used to describe intersex anatomy.

Specific Challenges

A 2009 study by MacKenzie et al. found that intersex individuals struggled with the silence surrounding their condition. Though most were aware that they were different growing up, none surveyed had their condition explained to them, even as they went for multiple surgeries. As children, they learned that their conditions were something unspeakable (p. 1778). Intersex children are often treated with a policy of intentional nondisclosure which leads to a sense of uncertainty, confusion, and shame.

Individuals who have had genital surgery may experience loss of sensation or sexual ability.

Resources

Intersex Society of North America - www.isna.org

Chapter 2: Coming Out

*adapted from the Safe Zone@UAHuntsville training manual.

What is “Coming Out?”

The term “coming out” (of the closet) refers to the lifelong process of the development of a positive sexual/gender identity. This long, difficult struggle often means having to confront homophobic attitudes and discriminatory practices along the way. Individuals may first have to overcome their own internal homophobia as part of the process of recognizing, accepting, and sharing their sexual/gender identity.

Coming out is not a single event but a lifelong process. Because society tends to assume that everyone is heterosexual, LGBT persons go through this process repeatedly throughout the course of their lifetime.

Risks of Coming Out

The coming out process does carry significant risks, especially for those in less accepting communities. Relationships may change in negative ways, and support systems may be lost. Younger individuals may be thrown out of their parent’s house, or lose financial support of their families. Harassment and discrimination are also possible, in many cases with no legal protections. LGBT individuals may be terminated from their jobs, denied housing, or denied insurance.

Benefits of Coming Out

In addition to the risks, coming out also offers a number of benefits. Individuals who come out will at last be able to live openly and may develop improved self-esteem by being honest with themselves and others. Relationships may change in positive ways, such as closer, more genuine relationships with friends and family. Access to the LGBT community and support groups will also be more accessible, and the stress of hiding their identity will be lessened. Additionally, people who come out may experience empowerment to help change misconceptions about LGBT people among their friends and family.

The Role of a Safe Zone Advocate in the Coming Out Process

Coming out is an extremely personal decision each individual has to make based on her/his own situation and comfort level. Closeted individuals should never be

pressured to come out—they know their situation better than you do—and the fact that one is not ready to come out does not reflect poorly on one’s sense of courage or commitment to LGBT causes. For people who choose to come out to an Advocate but not to their peers or others, it is extremely important that Advocates maintain confidentiality. Advocates should provide a safe, welcoming presence which allows students to progress at their own pace in the coming out process, and offer support and encouragement for struggling students.

Risks of being a Safe Zone Advocate

Simply by publically affiliating with the LGBT+ community, heterosexual allies may find themselves targets of similar stigma experienced by the LGBT+ community. Others may speculate about your own sexual orientation or gender identity, and you may become the subject of gossip or the object of hostility. Colleagues who find sexual/gender differences immoral may question your own morality or character. It is even possible that LGBT+ people may not trust you right away or may question your motives.

Chapter 3: What to Expect and What is Expected of You

Within the LGBT community, especially among LGBT youth, a number of difficulties and struggles are to be commonly experienced. Here are some of the concerns you can expect to encounter as an Advocate.

Mental Health Issues/Concerns

Isolation: LGBT individuals may feel isolated from their peers and families. This will be magnified if they have no other support system in place.

Low Self-Esteem: Due to the prevalence of negative misinformation about LGBT people, LGBT persons may internalize negative stereotypes. This can lead to shame and a negative self-image.

Depression: The combination of low self-esteem and isolation, along with various other encounters with discrimination, make LGBT individuals more prone to having issues with depression.

Anxiety: Being an invisible minority, LGBT individuals may experience anxiety over being “outed,” or coming out, and determining with whom they can safely share the reality of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Suicidal Tendencies: The combination of the previously described stressors can lead to despair and places LGBT individuals at a higher risk for suicide.

Substance Abuse: LGBT members are at increased risk for use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. This is presumably due to their use as coping mechanisms associated with the stress and anxiety which LGBT people face on a daily basis.

Social Concerns

Discrimination: LGBT individuals do not share the same protections as other minority groups in the United States. While it is no longer legal to discriminate based on race, ethnicity, disability, age, sex, or veteran’s status, no legal protections exist on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Friendships: The process of coming out can cause drastic changes in one's social network. Friends may be lost and/or gained during the process, leading to a sense of instability and isolation.

Family: LGBT persons often face rejection from their family unit. This can result in loss of financial support, being kicked out of their homes, or completely cut off from interaction with their families.

Domestic Violence: Same-sex couples are just as prone to relationship violence as heterosexual couples. Within same-sex couples, however, the social stigma of being homosexual can add to the level of control an abuser can exert over the victim. A victim who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity may be less likely to report violence or seek help for fear of being outed.

Bullying: LGBT individuals may encounter more negative attitudes, jokes, or taunting on account of their minority status.

Harassment: LGBT people may face harassment in many different forms. This can include verbal threats, property damage, or sexual harassment. Victims may be less likely to report harassment, again for fear of being outed.

Violence: Sexual/gender minorities may be targets of violence on account of their difference. They may be targeted because they are perceived as "weaker," less likely to fight back, or report the crime.

Your Role as an Advocate

One of your primary roles as an Advocate is to listen. You are not expected to know everything about the LGBT community, and preferences about terminology and behavior can vary from person to person. Allowing your students to express themselves and direct the terminology used to relate to themselves is advantageous in helping students to find their own voice. Ask questions, offer encouragement, and assist students in finding appropriate avenues of support to suit their individual needs. Offering your time and guidance are your primary duties as a Safe Zone Advocate. However, Advocates should not think of themselves as a counselor, but a sounding board, a supportive presence, and a means to connect students with proper support resources.

You are allowed to make mistakes. Kindness and humility are far more important than having all the answers.

If a student comes to you to report harassment, either from another student or a staff/faculty member, the incident should be reported as soon as possible to the dean of the respective school. For incidents involving violence or threats of violence, a report should also be logged with campus security. A transcript of Athens State University's Harassment and Discrimination Policy and Procedure can be found in the appendix of this manual. ASU's discrimination policy does include protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

When to Refer a Student to a Mental Health Professional

A key component of your role as an Advocate involves knowing your own limitations. While your role as a mentor is vital, you may encounter some situations which are simply beyond your expertise. The following provides some signs which may indicate the need for intervention from a mental health professional.

1. When a student states or demonstrates that they are no longer able to function in their normal capacity within their classes, i.e. a drop in grades or academic performance.
2. When a student can no longer cope with their day-to-day activities and responsibilities. A student may state that they are no longer going to classes, or they have been late for their job and may be fired soon if this continues.
3. A student expresses severe depression symptoms, such a sleep disturbance, sudden weight loss or gain, crying spells, fatigue, loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyable activities, or the inability to concentrate or complete tasks.
4. A student expresses severe anxiety symptoms, such as feelings of panic, shortness of breath, headaches, sweaty palms, dry mouth, or racing thoughts.
5. A student expresses suicidal thoughts or feelings.
6. A good guideline to use, if all else fails: if you are feeling overwhelmed or worried about a student, referring them to a mental health professional would probably be appropriate. Trust your instinct.

Intervening in the Crisis

Be sure to refer your student for counseling in a constructive, positive way. Coming to you in the first place took a great deal of courage on their part, so be supportive. Be honest about your own feelings. Feel free to admit that you are scared or unsure, and ask their permission to get additional help. Encourage them to speak to a counselor or hotline. Help them make the appointment, or engage in the initial call with them if necessary. When you part ways, communicate that you are not abandoning them; invite them to return anytime. Convey that counseling is a tool for their use which doesn't indicate any fault or deficiency on their part.

While Advocates are encouraged to use their best judgment in any given situation, some methods are discouraged by the Safe Zone program. The goal of an Advocate is to empower students, not to encourage over-dependence on you as an individual. While it is expected that a student will at times need a dependable presence, it is very important to maintain the balance necessary for an appropriate professor/student relationship.

Professionalism is of the utmost importance for the safety of you and your students. Therefore, you are encouraged to keep communication through the means already provided by Athens State University. Office hours, your office phone, and ASU email are the most appropriate channels for engaging with your students. Advocates are discouraged from providing personal contact information to their students, and face to face meetings should be conducted in public places, preferably on the Athens State campus.

Students who seek you out as an Advocate may be emotionally strained and prone to dependence. As an Advocate and an Athens State representative, you are responsible for setting and maintaining proper boundaries. Setting unrealistic expectations about your availability, expertise, or the intimacy of the professor/student relationship can put vulnerable students at risk for potentially dangerous disappointment and represents conduct unbecoming a Safe Zone Advocate. While getting highly involved with a distressed student may seem like the compassionate thing to do, in the long run it can prove dangerous for both you and your most vulnerable students.

Acquainting students with proper tools such as counselors, hotlines, and support groups will better serve students in the long run.

Tips for Responding to Homophobia

*adapted from the UAB Safe Zone Manual

Inform. People making homophobic comments are often 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.

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.

Acknowledge others. Make a point of acknowledging other's opinions. Point out that there are multiple beliefs on the issues and speak from personal experience.

Ask questions. Make sure you understand where the other person is coming from so you can approach the issue in an appropriate way.

Be “emotionally correct.” Getting angry or smug will not help anything. It is hard to fault someone for being polite and gracious. It is not enough to be politically correct, try to be *emotionally* correct as well. Combating homophobia is in the interest of those trapped within homophobic mindsets as well that the interest of sexual minorities.

Find common ground. Look for something you can both agree on. This offers a great starting point for discussion and forms a connection.

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.

Focus on behavior rather than belief. Even if an individual irrevocably does not approve of sexual minorities, emphasis may be placed on appropriate treatment of all people with human dignity and compassion.

Chapter 4: Resources and Contacts

Local Resources

Crisis Services of North Alabama - can provide emergency shelter and 24/7 phone counseling

Phone: (256) 716-1000

Toll Free: 1-800-691-8426

Free2Be– provides local LGBT support groups, resource referrals, and professional counseling. All services are free of charge. Also houses the **North Alabama Gender Center**, a Trans support group.

8210 Stephanie Dr. Suite A

Huntsville, Alabama 35802

Phone: (256) 886-1150

E-Mail: info@free2be.org

Athens Pride Coalition – provides local support groups, advocacy, and social opportunities for the Athens LGBT+ community.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/athenspridecoalition/>

Dr. Mitch Robertson, LICSW, PIP – a professional counselor in the Athens who works with the LGBT+ community.

600 South Clinton Street

Athens, AL 35611

Phone: 256-414-9147

Athens State University Counseling Services – provides free counseling sessions to Athens State University students.

Lisa Philippart, LPC

Phone: 256-233-8144

Email: lisa.philippart@athens.edu

Location: Waters Hall, Room S103D

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Wednesdays 8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Healing Arts Center – Lisa Philippart, LPC, BCPCC, DCC – an LGBT-friendly counselor who also serves as a Christian counselor.

527 Fountain Row

Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: 256-326-0909
Email: urlifematters@hotmail.com
Web: www.urlifematters.org

Tamara Pellant, LPC – specializes in support for transgender individuals
603 Ward Ave.
Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: (256) 464-9755
Fax: (256) 774-7579

Thrive Alabama – provides HIV/AIDS testing, medical care, and social services in north Alabama.
600 Saint Claire Ave, Building 3
Huntsville, AL 35801
Phone: (256) 536-4700
Web: <http://thrivealabama.org>

Saint Timothy's Episcopal Church – an Athens congregation that is accepting of the LGBT community.
207 Washington St. E.
Athens, AL 35611
Phone: (256) 232-3541
Email: sttimothy.athens@gmail.com

Spirit of the Cross Church – a Huntsville congregation that ministers specifically to the LGBT community.
3015 Sparkman Drive NW
Huntsville, AL 35810
Phone: (256) 851-6914
Email: churchoffice@spiritofthecross.org
Web: <http://www.spiritofthecross.org>

Unlimited Ministries of Alabama – a Madison congregation that is open and affirming of the LGBT community.
101 Westchester Dr.
Madison, AL
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UnlimitedMinistriesAL/>

National Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – provides 24/7 phone or chat counseling

Toll Free: 1-800-273-8255

Web: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

The Trevor Project – provides 24/7 counseling for LGBT persons via phone, web, or text

Phone: 1-866-488-7386

Web: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

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Appendix

Non-Discrimination/Equal Opportunity Policy

Athens State University, as an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action. Athens State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, marital status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, disability, religion, genetic information, or veteran status in employment, or admissions to or participation in educational programs and activities. Inquiries or concerns may be addressed to the Office of the Vice President or Enrollment and Student Support Services, 300 N. Beaty St., Athens, AL 35611, 256-233-8175.

Harassment and Discrimination Policy and Procedure

I. Policy Statement and Purpose

In accordance with applicable law and the University's *Non-Discrimination/Equal Opportunity Policy*, Athens State University is committed to providing an environment free of harassment or discrimination to all individuals of the University community. Harassment or discrimination by anyone, whether in the classroom, the office, at a University-sponsored function, or during any activity within the scope of the authority of the University's administration, faculty, or staff, will not be tolerated. Employees or students found to participate in harassing or discriminatory behavior will be subject to disciplinary procedures as appropriate, up to and including termination or expulsion.

This policy will be interpreted so as to avoid infringement upon First Amendment rights of free speech. The University must be mindful of the tradition of academic freedom that includes the free exchange of ideas inherent in an academic community. A determination as to whether discrimination or harassment has occurred will be based upon the context in which the alleged conduct occurs.

This policy applies to all employees, students, applicants, vendors/contractors, visitors, and all others conducting official business with the University or participating in any activity within the scope of the authority of the University's administration, faculty, or staff. This policy defines the process by which an individual who has a valid complaint concerning harassment or discrimination (the "**complainant**") may pursue resolution of the matter.

The University is committed to maintaining **confidentiality**, to the extent practicable and appropriate, of persons who make a complaint or provide information in conjunction with an investigation under this policy. An individual's requests regarding the confidentiality of reports of harassment or discrimination will be considered in determining an appropriate response; however, such requests will be considered in the dual contexts of maintaining a working and learning environment free from harassment or discrimination and the due process rights of the alleged offender. **Some level of disclosure may be necessary to ensure a complete and fair investigation; therefore, absolute confidentiality cannot be assured or guaranteed.**

Retaliation is a very serious violation of this policy and should be reported immediately. Retaliation refers to any adverse action that would deter a reasonable person from reporting, testifying, or otherwise cooperating with an investigation or proceeding concerning alleged violation of this policy.

Retaliation against individuals who report possible violations of this policy, or who cooperate with an investigation by the University or any law enforcement agency, is strictly prohibited. Retaliation is an independent basis for disciplinary action, regardless of the outcome of the underlying complaint.

For the purposes of this policy, “**business day**” is defined as any day the University is officially open, regardless of whether classes are in session.

These procedures do not replace the right of a person who believes he/she has been subjected to harassment or discrimination to pursue other options or remedies available under state, civil, or criminal statutes and/or federal law.

A. Definition of Harassment

Harassment is conduct that is (1) unwelcome; (2) discriminatory on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, veteran status, or any other status protected by state or federal law; and (3) directed at a specific individual or individuals. Harassment violates University policy when it is sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent that it denies or limits, or is likely to deny or limit, a reasonable person’s ability to participate in or benefit from University programs, services, opportunities, or activities.

Harassment can include but is not limited to verbal or non-verbal communication, written or graphic communication, electronic communication, and/or physical conduct. Examples of prohibited harassment may include, but are not limited to physical harassment, such as touching, pinching, grabbing, or brushing against another person without their consent; and (b) severe, pervasive, or persistent insults, jokes or derisive comments relating to a person’s protected characteristic.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is harassment (as defined above) of a sexual nature. It can include verbal or non-verbal communication or physical conduct. It is prohibited by this policy when it is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent that it denies or limits or is likely to deny or limit a reasonable person’s ability to participate in or benefit from University programs, services, opportunities or activities. Examples of prohibited sexual harassment include, but are not limited to (a) repeated sexual solicitations toward a person who has indicated they are unwelcome; (b) conditioning favorable treatment in connection with any University program upon sexual favors; (c) threats of a sexual nature that do not rise to the level of sexual assault or domestic violence; and (d) severe, pervasive, or persistent insults or derisive comments related to sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation directed at a specific individual.

Whether sexual harassment is sufficiently severe, pervasive or persistent to violate this policy may depend on multiple factors. Thus, a person should not be deterred from reporting unwelcome sexual conduct simply because they are not certain whether it is severe, pervasive or persistent enough to constitute a policy violation. That is a determination for the University to make, and a person reporting harassment will never be penalized or retaliated against for any report made in good faith.

Violations or accusations related to sexual misconduct are subject to the provisions and

procedures of the University's *Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures*.

B. Definition of Discrimination

For the purposes of this policy, discriminations defined as any action resulting in illegal differentiation or adverse treatment of an individual based on his/her race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, marital status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, disability, religion, genetic information, veteran status or any status protected by law.

II. Procedures

A. Reporting a Complaint of Harassment (of a Non-Sexual Nature) or Discrimination

If the complainant is able and feels safe, he/she should directly inform the alleged offender that the comments or conduct are unwelcome and must stop. If the complainant does not feel comfortable confronting the alleged offender, or if the comments or conduct do not cease immediately, and the complainant is a student, the complaint should be reported to:

Terry Stepp, Title IX Deputy Coordinator
First Floor, Classroom Building
Phone: 256.233.8241

If the complainant is not a student, the complaint should be reported to:

Jerrie Smith, Title IX Coordinator
First Floor, Founders Hall
Phone: 256.216.3302

Athens State University strongly encourages anyone who feels they have been subjected to harassment or discrimination to report the incident within 180 business days of the occurrence, and preferably as soon as possible after the occurrence. The University can only take action against alleged offenders and protect the University from future incidents if occurrences of harassment and discrimination are reported in a timely fashion.

The University may take interim measures it deems necessary, as determined by the President or the President's designated representative(s), when a credible report is received and/or when an individual poses a potential threat to others. Interim measures will be taken within the context of other University policies and might include changes to class assignments for students or work assignments for employees.

Once the complaint is reported to the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator, the complainant can choose to proceed informally to resolve the complaint or to immediately begin a formal investigation and review of the complaint. **However, as detailed in the *Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures*, for allegations of sexual assault/violence informal resolution is not appropriate even on a voluntary basis and will not be used to resolve such complaints.**

B. Informal Steps to Resolve a Complaint of Harassment or Discrimination

In the informal process to resolve a complaint, the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator, appropriate University Vice President (depending on whether the alleged offender is a student, employee, or non-employee), and other University personnel as needed or requested by the complainant or alleged offender, will discuss and review the complaint with the complainant and with the alleged offender in separate consultations. In the interest of confidentiality, every effort will be made to limit the number of persons involved in the consultations. In most cases, individuals from outside the University will not be allowed to attend or participate in the consultations; exceptions will be at the discretion of the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.

The informal process typically includes an inquiry into the facts of the complaint, but does not involve a formal investigation. If it is determined that the complaint is valid and can be resolved immediately to the satisfaction of the complainant, the Vice President will take action to resolve the complaint.

If a complaint is resolved informally, no record of the complaint will be entered in the alleged offender's personnel file or student records. However, the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator will, in the form of a confidential file memorandum, record the fact of the complaint and the resolution achieved.

Means of resolving the complaint in the informal process may include advising the complainant and/or alleged offender about methods to resolve the concern, arranging for educational programs for individuals or groups, or intervening and/or mediating between the parties. However, the informal process **does not** require the complainant and alleged offender to meet or to resolve the complaint directly with each other.

If the matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant after the informal process, the complainant can choose to begin a formal investigation and review of the complaint.

C. Formal Investigation and Review of a Complaint of Harassment or Discrimination

1. Request. To begin the formal process, a request for a formal investigation and review must be submitted in writing to the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator and signed by the complainant. Complainants may ask the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator for assistance from other University personnel in completing their formal request when needed. The request must include:

- Date of report;
- Date and time of incident;
- Contact information for the complainant;
- Name and status (student, employee, other) of the alleged offender (if known);
- Description of the incident;
- Information on whether the incident was reported to any other University official or department, or any police agency.

In addition to the request, the complainant may also submit any supporting documentation related to the complaint. **Note:** It is the right of the complainant to withdraw a complaint by requesting so in writing to the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator at any stage of the process. Once withdrawn, however, the complaint may not be reinstated.

2. Investigation. The Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator will notify the President of the filing of the formal request as soon as is practicable. Within five (5) business days of the filing of the request, the President or a designee will notify all persons connected with the complaint of the filing of the formal request.

The Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Coordinator will coordinate a formal investigation of the complaint, in consultation with the appropriate University administrators as determined by the President.

The investigation process is not a formal legal procedure, but is an internal process for complaints to be addressed and resolved while maintaining the due process rights of the parties involved in the complaint.

In general, the investigation will include the following steps:

- a. Review of written statements and oral interviews with the complainant.
- b. Review of written statements and oral interviews with the alleged offender.
- c. Review of written statements and oral interviews with any witnesses with pertinent information related to the complaint.

In the interest of confidentiality, every effort will be made to limit the number of persons involved in the interviews. In most cases, individuals from outside the University will not be allowed to attend or participate in the interviews; exceptions will be at the discretion of the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator. However, if either party is permitted to have individuals from outside the University attend or participate in the interviews, the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator must extend this opportunity to the other party.

The investigation will be conducted as promptly as possible given the circumstances of the complaint, and will be completed in no more than sixty (60) calendar days of the filing of the formal request.

3. Report of the Investigation. Within fifteen (15) business days of the conclusion of the investigation, the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator will prepare a written report of the formal investigation. In general, the written report will include:

- a. Statements of the allegations and issues associated with the complaint.
- b. Positions of the parties involved in the complaint.
- c. Summary of the evidence and findings of fact.
- d. A determination by the investigating parties as to whether harassment or discrimination in violation of applicable law or the University's Non-Discrimination/Equal Opportunity

Policy has occurred. This determination will be based on the preponderance of the evidence –whether it is more likely than not that harassment or discrimination occurred.

The complainant and alleged offender will be informed promptly in writing when the investigation is completed, and of the determination of the investigating parties as to whether a statute or policy was or was not violated. The complainant will be informed of any actions taken to resolve the complaint that are directly related to the complainant, such as an order that the alleged offender not contact the complainant. In accordance with relevant University privacy policies, the complainant may generally be notified that the matter has been referred for disciplinary action against the alleged offender, but will not be informed of the details of the recommended disciplinary action without the consent of the alleged offender.

4. Resolution of the Complaint. The investigation report will be submitted to the President and the appropriate University administrator, depending on whether the alleged offender is an employee or student. In cases where it is determined that violations have occurred, sanctions or disciplinary actions will be the decision of the President and the appropriate University administrator pursuant to other applicable University policies.

When it is determined that violations have occurred, the specific findings of the investigation will be considered in determining remedies for individuals harmed by the harassment or discrimination. In cases where disciplinary action or sanctions may be taken against the alleged offender, such actions may include (but not be limited to) counseling or education relevant to the complaint, verbal or written reprimands, reassignment, suspension, expulsion, or termination.

Whatever the outcome of the investigation, the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator will provide both the complainant and the alleged offender sources of counseling, advocacy, or support upon request.

5. Retention of Records of the Formal Investigation. The Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator is responsible for maintaining records relating to harassment and discrimination investigations, reports, and resolutions. Records shall be maintained in accordance with University records policies, but may be maintained longer at the discretion of the in cases where the parties have a continuing affiliation with the University.

Any documentation concerning disciplinary action taken against the offender, whether the offender is an employee or student, will be maintained in the personnel or student record of the offender as appropriate.

6. Appeals will be considered only in those instances where a procedural error occurred during the original investigation, or where previously unavailable relevant evidence that could impact the outcome of the original investigation becomes available. Either party may request an appeal, to the President, on these grounds. If granted, the appeal will follow the same procedure as the original formal investigation and review process.

III. Responsibility for this Operating Policy

Policy Owner

As part of the initial approval of this policy by the President and subsequent to the original dissemination of the policy, the President has assigned the Vice President for Financial Affairs as the policy owner for the ongoing evaluation, review, and approval of this policy. Subsequent reviews and revisions to this policy must be in accordance with approved operating policy procedures and processes.

This policy will be reviewed every three years or more frequently as needed.

Responsibility for Policy Implementation

The President has assigned the responsibility of implementing this policy to the Title IX Coordinator or the Title IX Deputy Coordinator.