Lifelink Workwell

Supporting LGBTQ+ Employees:
A guide for employers

An introduction

An inclusive workplace isn't just about policies - it's about people. Supporting LGBTQ+ colleagues goes beyond compliance; it's about creating a culture where everyone feels safe, valued, and able to thrive.

Why does this matter in your workplace?

- LGBTQ+ employees are more likely to experience workplace discrimination, micro-aggressions, and exclusion.
- Two in five LGBTQ+ employees still feel the need to hide their identity at work[*]. Silence and fear come at a cost to both mental health and productivity.
- Poor support can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and disengagement, impacting both well-being and performance.
- Inclusive workplaces see stronger employee loyalty, higher engagement, and a healthier organisational culture.

Understanding LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ is an umbrella term that includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and others such as Intersex, Asexual, and Non-binary identities. Every experience is unique, and respecting this diversity is central to creating an inclusive culture.

Being aware of and using the correct pronouns, avoiding invasive questions about gender identity, and listening with openness helps avoid assumptions and builds trust.

Intersectionality and the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Employees

No one's experience exists in isolation. For LGBTQ+ employees, identity is often shaped by the overlap of gender, sexuality, race, disability, age, and other lived realities. These intersecting factors influence how individuals are treated, understood, and supported, both inside and outside of work.

Many LGBTQ+ people carry the weight of past trauma linked to rejection, discrimination, or stigma. These challenges can be compounded in the workplace, where individuals may face misgendering, exclusion, or the emotional toll of feeling unseen or unsafe.

A truly inclusive workplace recognises this reality. Embedding intersectionality into wellbeing strategies ensures that every employee, regardless of how their identities intersect, feels valued, supported, and able to thrive.

Protected characteristics and policies

Under the Equality Act (2010), sexual orientation and gender reassignment are protected characteristics. Employers are legally required to prevent discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

Ask yourself:

- Are our HR policies explicit in protecting LGBTQ+ employees?
- Do we offer clear guidance on transitioning at work?
- Are grievance procedures accessible and safe for employees to use?

A robust, proactive policy signals that inclusion is more than a tick-box exercise. Yet, over a third of employees have heard discriminatory comments made about an LGBTQ+ colleague*, and many remain unsure whether they can be themselves at work.

Spotting the signs of exclusion at work

As a leader or manager, you may notice behaviours or experiences that suggest an employee is not fully supported.

These may include:
- Withdrawal from team activities or conversations.
- Reluctance to share personal life details when others do.
- Experiencing or witnessing micro-aggressions (e.g., inappropriate jokes, misgendering).
- Reporting stress, low morale, or disengagement.
- Being overlooked for promotion or development opportunities.

One in three LGBTQ+ employees say they wouldn't feel comfortable reporting discrimination if they were bullied or harassed because of their identity**. Trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel right, it's worth checking in.

Building an inclusive culture

You don't have to be an expert, but you can make a significant impact on whether LGBTQ+ colleagues feel safe and valued.

Practical steps:

- **Educate:** Provide awareness training and resources to all employees.
- **Policies in action:** Embed inclusive language, flexible leave policies, and gender-neutral facilities.
- **Visible support:** Celebrate Pride and LGBTQ+ awareness days meaningfully, not just symbolically.
- **Leadership role-modelling:** Leaders who champion inclusion set the tone for the whole organisation.
- **Employee Voice:** Create safe spaces, such as staff networks or forums, for LGBTQ+ employees to share experiences.
- **Allyship:** Encourage colleagues to notice and respond to microaggressions, gently correct misgendering, and support peers. Allyship transforms
- inclusion from policy into lived experience.

Remember: Nearly a third of LGBTQ+ employees say they do not feel they can be themselves at work*, but inclusive leadership can change that.

Supporting mental health

Research shows that LGBTQ+ individuals are at greater risk of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation due to stigma, discrimination, and lack of support.

Employers can protect mental health by:

- Normalising conversations about wellbeing and mental health.
- Ensuring access to LGBTQ+-affirming support, such as counselling or Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).
- Addressing bullying or harassment quickly and firmly.
- Providing managers with training to respond appropriately and sensitively.

Half of LGBTQ+ people report experiencing depression, and three in five report anxiety[**].

Almost half of trans people have thought about taking their life[**], and gay and bisexual men are four times more likely to attempt suicide compared to the general population[***].

Employers can also consider offering wellbeing classes, workshops, or access to counselling as a proactive way to support those who may already be struggling. These opportunities can create safe spaces for reflection, skill-building, and recovery, helping individuals feel supported before challenges escalate.

These realities show how vital it is for employers to take action.

Responding to policy changes for transgender employees

Two-thirds of trans people reported experiencing depression in the last year, with nearly half having thought of ending their life***.

Recent policy changes have created uncertainty and anxiety for transgender employees. Employers play a key role in providing clarity and reassurance by:

- Staying informed on policy and legal changes.
- Clearly and quickly articulate what this means for your organisation, what will change and what the impacts will be. Plan for uncertainty and questions, and outline how you   will address them proactively and in a positive manner.
- Seek expert advice when required.
- Communicating transparently with staff about rights and support.
- Ensuring gender identity and expression are fully respected in the workplace.
- Offering tailored support for employees who are transitioning, or have transitioned.

What you can do as an employer

- Review and update your ED&I policy to ensure it actively protects LGBTQ+ colleagues.
- Invest in training for managers and staff.
- Lead with empathy and openness in conversations about identity.
- Recognise that inclusion is ongoing work and not a one-off initiative.
- Build a culture of allyship where employees stand up for one another.

You don't need to have all the answers, but by being proactive, compassionate, and committed, you can create a safer, healthier, and more inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees.

When employees feel accepted for who they are, they can bring their authentic selves to work, and that benefits everyone.

* Stonewall - New research shows almost 40% of LGBTQ+ employees still hide their identity at work (2025)
** Mental Health Foundation - LGBTIQ+ People: Statistics
*** Mental Health UK - LGBTQIA+ People's Mental Health
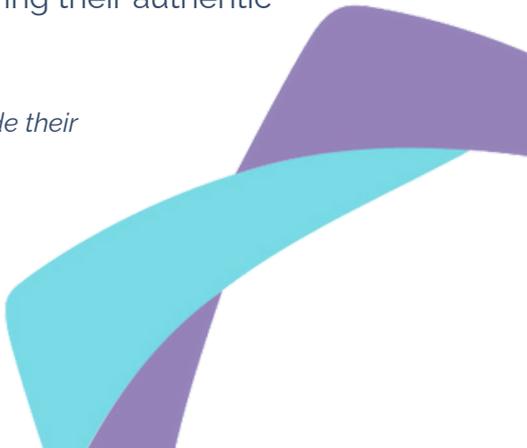
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