

Preparing LGBT+ volunteers for a role models event

This guide refers specifically to the specific aspects of an event about being LGBT+. For more general briefing guidance, take a look at our [Preparing your volunteers](#) pages.

Before deciding to run an event, make sure you are comfortable and confident in delivering what is often seen as sensitive subject matter, and have thought through how your students will act.

This document is aimed at those who feel comfortable facilitating a session about being LGBT+. If you would like to upskill yourself in this area, we recommend Stonewall's [Train the Trainer](#) courses.

The main thing to aim for is that the tone of the session should be one of respect, acceptance, and of the everyday. The role of the volunteer is to normalise their experiences and everyday life, and amongst other things, students may:

- Gain greater insight into what it's like to live a life which is not heterosexual or cisgendered (cisgendered: people who are comfortable identifying as the gender they were assigned at birth)
- Gain empathy into what it is like to be LGBT+
- Identify with the volunteer
- See the volunteer as a role model – not necessarily just LGBT+, but perhaps as someone who has come through hardship, or learned self-acceptance
- Understand that there are LGBT+ people in their own community

What if my volunteer is nervous about coming out in front of the students?

It's important that as part of the session, the volunteer explains their gender identification or sexuality to students. If that's something which might need explaining (e.g. 'non binary'), let them know they'll need to do it in terms the student will understand, so they should prepare something they are comfortable saying.

A volunteer should only do what they are comfortable with and if they aren't ready to articulate how they identify, perhaps another type of contribution might be best (e.g. making a video for your school to use in form time).

Explain to the volunteer why it's important that they share what they identify as. Experiences in the LGBT+ community vary widely and it's important that students don't think that being gay is the same as being trans. It also helps to set a tone of openness and honesty, and means that students won't waste time wondering about their identity during the session.

What if my volunteer is worried about the students' behaviour?

This is natural, and you should set the volunteer's expectations as to how you expect your students to react. Put their reactions into context: for instance, if you think students will laugh out of nervousness, explain that if they see them laughing, they may just be nervous.

Reassure the volunteer that you will be responsible for behaviour management and that discriminatory language of any kind is not tolerated in your school.

If you expect the students will ask questions which might be seen as personal or difficult, mitigate this by:

- Setting expectations with students beforehand, without making it seem like the event is a big deal
- Offering suggested questions to students or planting questions beforehand
- Prepare answers to the questions
- Give the volunteer guidance about how to answer tricky questions

Emphasise that even if the occasional student might react in a less than supportive way, this is part of the reason why you are having the event and just having the volunteer there is fantastic in itself.

What if a student says something offensive (on purpose)?

Deal with that the way you would deal with any similar incident.

What if a student says something offensive (by accident)?

Let them know that usually you wouldn't say something in those words, or ask that particular question. If it's an honest question, then help them rephrase and pose it again to the volunteer.

Keep the students and volunteer focussed on topic like:

- Acceptance of the person as a whole (without focussing on their body or relationship history)
- That this person may have come through hardship
- That this person has come to accept themselves
- That this person, and LGBT+ people the world over, aren't harming anyone and should be allowed to live lives without discrimination
- That the volunteer has come in particularly to see your students