

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Intake + Engagement for Elder Justice Professionals

“No matter how old we are, justice requires that all people are equal and full members of our communities, and the safety and dignity of all its members are preserved, including older adults.”

– Elder Justice Coordinating Council

Many older people navigate a range of health, social, and economic concerns as they age. For older LGBTQ+ adults who have experienced historical harassment, stigma, and discrimination, these challenges can be even greater. Limited access to affirming, accessible, and culturally competent aging services compounds difficulties in aging. This is especially true for older LGBTQ+ people, many of whom are alone and lacking supports, and are often invisible within aging and elder service domains.

LGBTQ+ elders:



2x more likely to live alone



4x less likely to have children than their heterosexual, cisgender peers



70% fear having to “re-closet” when seeking elder housing



53% report feeling isolated from others



41% report having a disability, compared to 35% of heterosexual elders

According to a national survey:

- **65%** of older transgender respondents felt that they would have limited access to care as they age
- **55%** feared that they would be denied medical treatment

Aging and elder justice service providers are frequently unaware of or indifferent to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ elders. A lack of knowledge and understanding of the experiences of older LGBTQ+ people can inhibit the provision of essential resources and deprive LGBTQ+ elders of core medical, housing, and social supports. Training providers in LGBTQ+ competent engagement is essential.

By asking clients about their sexual orientation and gender identity during intakes, assessments, interviews, and service planning, elder justice network providers will start to build the knowledge base to better serve the needs of older LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ inclusive engagement is a necessary step in not only providing appropriate, person-centered resource referrals that meet individual needs, but in promoting the safety and dignity of LGBTQ+ communities.

This tip sheet is designed as a first step in engaging with LGBTQ+ communities. Providing education and training to all staff will help instill cultural awareness and confidence in asking questions about client sexual orientation and gender identity.

The context, person, and type of interaction will inform the questions to ask and responses to provide. Sample LGBTQ+ inclusive questions for elder justice professionals are provided below.

Circumstances

Examples of Engagement

At the introductory meeting:

- Normalize using pronouns
- Use the opportunity to correct or confirm any demographic information provided to you from a third party

“Hi, I’m Detective Lokus. My pronouns are she/her. What is your name and what are your pronouns?”

“How would you like me to address you?”

“The report I have indicates you are a man and married to a woman. Is that correct and do you have anything to add?”

When discussions of interpersonal, romantic, or sexual relationships occur:

- Use this opportunity to clarify or allow for further discussion
- Be mindful of assumptions and indicators that confirm those assumptions (example: Not asking about sexual orientation because of an assumption that someone is female and hearing a name that is feminine.)

“You said wife, and I want to make sure I don’t assume. Do you identify as Lesbian, Gay, Heterosexual, Bisexual, or something else?”

“How do you describe your relationship or partnership with this person?”

“How do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation? You can choose to decline and I want to respect that. Knowing this about you helps me know more about the situation.”

“Do you have a romantic or sexual relationship with this person?”

When discussing the person’s original concern or reason for your services:

- Take the opportunity to ask about sexual orientation and gender identification if applicable (example: If there is a 3rd party involved, is this person a spouse, roommate, adult child?).
- Take the opportunity to identify supportive people who may be of assistance and could possibly mitigate risk. (example: Do you have a family, including chosen family, have you started dating someone new?)

“How do you identify your relationship with that person?”

“Do you have any concerns about your personal safety at home? What are your concerns?”

“Tell me about your relationships with the people you live with.”

Circumstances

Examples of Engagement

When someone challenges why you're asking:

- Validate by paraphrasing their challenge and share reasons behind asking

"I ask everyone these questions. It helps me avoid assumptions and offer appropriate resources tailored to your needs and what might be comfortable for you."

"No disrespect intended. I ask everyone and share my pronouns too. It's just how we do things here."

After client identifies their sexual orientation and/or gender identification:

- Ask them about the resources they are seeking and solicit their input on their preferences and values

"What types of services are you looking for?"

"Where would you feel the safest and most comfortable?"

Following are resources that support staff development related to LGBTQ+ cultural awareness and engagement:

- [SAGE National Resource Center on LGBTQ Aging](#)
- [National Center on Elder Abuse](#)
- Academy for Professional Excellence, Adult Protective Services Workforce Innovations:
 - [APS Training Video: Asking Inclusive Demographic Questions](#)
 - [Transfer of Learning \(TOL\) activities and resources to practice engagement of LGBTQ+ individuals](#)
- [SAGECare - LGBTQ+ Trained and Credentialed Providers](#)
- APS Technical Assistance Resource Center webinar recording: [Asking Inclusive Demographic Questions - How To Do It and Why It Matters](#)



This document was completed for the National Center on Elder Abuse in partnership with SAGE and APS Workforce Innovations, and is supported in part by a grant [90ABRC0002] from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or HHS policy. LAST REV. FEB 2023