



How to Apologize to Someone in the LGBTQ+ Community

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Many members of the LGBTQ+ community have been on the receiving end of hurtful comments or actions based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Too often, these incidents remain unacknowledged and unresolved. Whether it was a big mistake or a small one, taking the time to understand it and apologize can help the individual begin to heal, and improve your relationship with them. Learning to apologize to someone you may have hurt is an important step in creating a safer and kinder society for everyone.

[A 2020 study](#) revealed that about 36% of the LGBTQ+ community reported facing discrimination; this number increased to 62% for transgender people and 69% for nonbinary people. Experiencing discrimination can be traumatizing and cause the person to avoid certain people, situations, thoughts, and/or feelings. They may hold back from coming out, silence their voice out of fear of being judged, or feel safe only in the comfort of their bedroom or behind the screen in online self-help groups. Whether the discrimination was intentional or not, the hurtful consequences are real and lasting.

So how do you start apologizing? Here are some suggestions to help guide you. Although following these guidelines does not guarantee any specific outcome, they do offer a way to start healing the harm caused by intentional or unintentional discrimination.

Guidelines for apologizing

1. Think of a person you may have hurt and a specific behavior that you want to apologize for. *“I think I may have hurt Jose’s feelings because I kept calling him ‘her’ instead of ‘him’ during a conversation. He told me he was transitioning to a man and I did not try to correct myself. He was more quiet than usual.”*

2. Start with expressing empathy and taking responsibility for how your behavior may have affected the person. Try to focus on your behavior without making excuses for yourself or shifting the blame. *“Jose, I wanted to say I am sorry for constantly calling you ‘she’ the other day and not correcting myself to use ‘he.’ It may have hurt your feelings or made you feel uncomfortable. I realize how much it means to you to be called by the right pronouns.”*
3. Explain how you plan to change your behavior so that the mistake is less likely to happen again. This shows that it is important to you to regain the person’s trust and improve the relationship. *“I am going to work on being more active in using your preferred pronouns as well as correcting myself if I use the wrong pronoun again. If you are comfortable with it, I would like you to call me out on it or give me a nudge if I forget.”*
4. Whether or not the person accepts your apology is their choice. Either way, your apology and your attempt to make amends reveal courage and compassion. By understanding how your actions affect others and apologizing, you take one step closer to creating a healing society in which we can all feel safer. This is something to be proud of.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA’s Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then “Resources” and then “Public Resources”. PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.