

Make your group friendly for older LGBT people

Hints and Tips from

outside the box

connecting equalities



What do we mean by LGBT?

LGBT is a term that includes a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. It is also a collective term for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex and transgender. It also includes people identifying with other terms including questioning and queer.

Gender and sexual orientation are two different things. There is sometimes confusion between the relationship between our gender and our sexuality. We all have a gender identity, such as being a man, woman, or nonbinary. We also have a separate sexuality or sexual orientation - such as, gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual - which is not based upon our gender.

“Our sexuality and our gender identity are a part of who each of us is. But please don’t make an assumption about which sexuality goes with which gender identity.”

“My partner and I have lived here a long time - everyone knows us and accepts us - but when I meet new people it is a lot harder. I don’t want to have to explain things.”

Why have LGBT friendly groups

People are living longer. By 2029 it is estimated that 40% of the population will be over the age of 50. In Scotland it is estimated that there may be around 100,000 people aged over 50 who identify as LGBT - a significant minority and an important part of our community with a range of skills and diversity.

Many older LGBT people have experienced discrimination during their lives, from public services and also from their local community, at school and work, and from family and friends. Older people and older LGBT people live in every community. Older LGBT people want to be involved with their communities, sharing and using their skills and experiences and making a difference to other people’s lives. People who are part of the LGBT community can also need more support as they get older, just like everyone else.

Organisations and groups can do a few straightforward things to become more LGBT friendly and welcoming. These things will help all the older people who come to your group and may encourage new members too.

“

Old attitudes take a long time to change. I enjoy going out and doing things... it’s fine with the people that know me but I’m still worried about new people I meet.

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Our tips for becoming more LGBT friendly

Leaflets and notices

Think about the language and images used on information that you produce about your group or organisations, like leaflets and notices to reach potential members.

- Use images of a wide range of people, and include images of single people, couples of the opposite sex or gender and couples of the same gender or sex.
- Don't assume everyone is heterosexual. Try to use gender-neutral language so instead of terms like wife and husband you could also use partner.
- You can also use signs that show people that you are LGBT friendly and welcoming. For example, a small rainbow or rainbow flag is often used.

Meeting new people

Being welcoming to new people joining your group and to people from different backgrounds is likely to mean that more people will get involved and will help out with things. People live their lives in many different ways. Try not to assume that everyone lives in the same way as you do or are in a heterosexual relationship. So instead of asking about partners, spouses and children, perhaps try asking open questions such as "who are the significant people in your life?" or "tell me about the important people in your life".

"My partner and I like taking part in our local community groups and we have made some good friends. But it can still be a bit awkward if we show any affection towards each other."

"I go regularly to a lunch club for old folks in my area. I really enjoy it and the food is great. But sometimes it's difficult because of the assumptions everyone makes... Do I make it clear or just keep quiet."

Ask people what they find helpful and welcoming

People experience life in different ways and have found different ways of dealing with things. If you ask a few people what works well for them you will be able to build up a clear picture:

"We got someone from an LGBT group to come and talk to us. They told us what things would help make our group more welcoming and friendly. We came up with a plan and made some changes. People now tell us how welcoming we are as a group - it doesn't get much better than that".

"A couple of our members told us what they found difficult and what helped them".

"We have found that once we get to know people, we have a lot more in common with each other than we had originally thought".

More information

LGBT Age is a project run for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people aged 50 and over in Greater Glasgow, Edinburgh and the Lothians. It offers a befriending service, volunteering and social opportunities and information sessions. There is a community capacity building project which offers advice to professionals working with older people.

<https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/older-people/>

LGBT Health and Wellbeing runs different groups and activities, online and offline. They also do tele-friending, and have an Age Action Group, which is a forum for people to work on issues affecting LGBT people age 50+ in Scotland.

<https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/>

West of Scotland LGBT Forum provides information and support to the LGBT community in Glasgow. <https://woslgbtforum.wordpress.com/>

Queer Families is an LGBTQ families peer support group based in Glasgow that creates a space for informal community, wellbeing, and addressing the barriers which families experience. <https://otbds.org/projects/queer-families/>

LGBT and getting older in Scotland today is one of the discussion papers from the Connecting Equalities project, informed by previous work from the Wisdom in Practice project. It explains the difficulties many LGBT people face and the way groups led by older people and care services can give good, inclusive support. <https://otbds.org/projects/connecting-equalities/>

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There is more about what we do at
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