Things to Remember When Working with LGBT Students and Colleagues

1. Don't be surprised when someone comes out to you. Some people may not have had same-sex relationships in the past. Do not act shocked when an individual says that he/she is gay or a lesbian. Do not assume that their sexual orientation is “new” just because you were unaware of it.

2. Respect confidentiality. It is imperative that you can be trusted.

3. Be informed. Most of us are products of a homophobic society. It is important that you are aware of the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students and colleagues.

4. Examine your own biases. If you are uncomfortable with dealing with a particular issue, and know that you are unable to be open and accepting, refer the individual to another IWU Safe Zone member.

5. Know when and where to seek help. Know all available resources. Use your membership to the e-mail listserv, IWU Safe Zone website, this manual, other IWU Safe Zone members, etc. to ask for advice.

6. Maintain a balanced perspective. Sexual and romantic thoughts and feelings are only one part of a person's self. Do not assume that a person’s sexual orientation is the most important part of his/her identity.

7. Understand the meaning of "sexual orientation." Each person's sexual orientation is natural to that person.

8. Deal with feelings first. You sometimes can be helpful by just listening and allowing a LGBT person the opportunity to share feelings.

9. Be helpful, not forceful. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people need to move at the pace they feel most comfortable with. Do not try to force them to confront situations or come out before they are ready.

10. Remind them that they are not alone. Share with them that others on campus may be facing similar issues. Refer them to supportive groups like the IWU Pride Alliance—meets every Thursday night at 9pm in Evelyn Chapel.

11. Don't try to guess who is a LGBT person. Trying to categorize individuals based on mannerisms, appearance, etc. is inappropriate because it depends on, and reinforces, stereotypes. Moreover, some do not want to be labeled based on their sexual or romantic relationships.