

PUBLICATION

The Importance of LGBTQ Allyship During the Holidays

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National Coming Out Day (October 11)

Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20)

Trans Awareness Month (November)

Day of Silence (Second Friday of April)

Trans Awareness Week (November 13-19)

LGBT History Month (October)

Pride Month (June)

Why does it matter?

Why do they need their own holiday(s)?

Why do they have to be so "in our face" about it?

I don't know about you, but I heard and saw a lot more of these comments in person and in response to social media posts on the heels of National Coming Out Day this past October and during all of Pride Month this past June. It's honestly something I have heard a lot of in the last few years, but this year it stung a bit more than usual. It made me question humanity, compassion, and the overall selfishness of today's society.

Human beings in general carry baggage with them constantly. As you are reading this, you can probably recall an instance where someone shamed you for something. It could be a recent event or something that happened during your childhood. Whether or not you are aware of it, you carry the influence of that instance with you daily. But, depending on your circumstances and privilege, the weight of that influence may vary. While reading the remainder of this piece, I ask that you put yourself in the shoes of someone more marginalized than you.

Many individuals in the LGBTQ community are rejected or removed from their families just for expressing their identity. Indeed, 1.6 million young people experience homelessness every year and 40 percent of them identify as LGBT, according to the *Washington Post*. For many in the LGBTQ community, feelings of guilt surface around the holidays about not wanting to spend time with family members because of the stigma and judgment that often goes hand-in-hand with family gatherings. Research shows that LGBTQ people are more likely to experience these symptoms year-round, but numerous mental health providers have said that the holiday season, especially returning home, can exacerbate these symptoms. In fact, the National Alliance on Mental Illness has found that when compared to people who identify as heterosexual or cisgender, LGBTQ individuals are three times more likely to experience a mental health condition. They are two and a half times more likely to experience depression, anxiety and substance misuse/abuse, [according to the Kaiser Family Foundation](#).

Of course, the hope would be that all family members, especially during the holidays, would accept their loved ones for who they are, regardless of their sexual orientation, religion, race or political views, but for many, this is not reality. Unfortunately, the holiday season does not change the fact that some returning home may encounter family members and friends who lack compassion and empathy for (or even mistreat) those who

identify as LGBTQ. And while some LGBTQ individuals may choose not to return home for the holidays, the season can still trigger emotions for them, as the meaning of family often comes up during this time. While individual experiences vary, LGBTQ and non-binary identifying people have reported feelings of tension and stress during the holiday season. Common struggles range from anxiety and depression, to feelings of rejection for freely expressing their authentic selves. For these individuals, going home for the holidays is not always a time of bliss, but rather a painful reminder of moments of their 'otherness' within their families.

So, what can business owners, managers and coworkers do to help our LGBTQ counterparts feel safe and included during the year-end holiday season? Well, it all starts with compassion and empathy.

Holidays like National Coming Out Day and Pride Month increase visibility and assist with changing the heteronormative script that society has written. It slowly helps to eliminate the minority stressors that our LGBTQ neighbors carry with them daily which, in turn, helps make holidays like Hanukkah and Christmas more enjoyable. Try as we might, we cannot erase the hatred and homophobia that exists in society, but we can take small steps in our words, our language and our awareness that will ultimately make a difference.

Change starts with knowledge. Acceptance is spurred by growth. And empathy is a powerful tool in all of it. If you feel led, extend an invitation to your holiday table. Curate a safe space within your walls and encourage those around you to do the same. Holidays are hard for many different reasons, but with the help of our village, including our colleagues and coworkers, they don't have to be.