

Being a safe adult: A summary guide to supporting LGBTIQA+ victims and survivors of child sexual abuse



Explore our interactive learning tool

Whether you're a teacher, coach, doctor, youth worker, or volunteer, this summary guide is for you. It offers simple but powerful ways to be a safe adult, so LGBTIQA+ young people feel seen, respected and supported.

Why this matters

All young people deserve to feel safe, seen and supported. LGBTIQA+ young people face unique risks and barriers when it comes to disclosing and recovering from child sexual abuse.

Many LGBTIQA+ victims and survivors navigate a world that doesn't fully see them, where disclosure feels too risky and support too uncertain. That is why your presence, response and commitment to being a safe adult can be life changing.

Understanding the unique challenges

- LGBTIQA+ young people are at higher risk of child sexual abuse, not because of who they are, but because of social stigma, isolation, and discrimination that increase vulnerability and reduce access to safety.
- Barriers to disclosure are unique and compounded for LGBTIQA+ victims and survivors. Fear of being 'outed', previous experiences of rejection, discrimination and stigma make disclosure more complex for LGBTIQA+ young people
- Assumptions can be harmful. Assuming heterosexuality or binary gender can silence LGBTIQA+ young people and make young people feel invisible or ashamed.
- Cultural background, disability, faith and mental health intersect with gender and sexuality, shaping how young people experience abuse and seek help.

Protective factors

- Every professional who works with young people can play a role in prevention and healing. Being a safe, inclusive, and trusted adult can make a significant difference in a young person's life.
- Inclusive, affirming spaces are protective. When LGBTIQA+ young people feel seen, respected, and safe to be themselves, they are more likely to speak up, seek help, and begin to heal.
- Language, visibility, and belonging matter. Small acts—like using a young person's chosen name and pronouns, displaying inclusive symbols, or challenging homophobic or transphobic language, can help build trust and safety.
- Trauma-informed, identity-affirming care is essential. Understanding the impact of both abuse and societal stigma is key to supporting LGBTIQA+ young people with compassion and respect.
- Inclusive sex and consent education can help prevent abuse. When young people see themselves reflected in education about relationships, bodies, and boundaries, young people are better equipped to understand abuse and seek support.

You don't need all the answers. But you do need to be someone who listens, learns and affirms.

Steps to being a safe adult

1. Know the difference between grooming vs. safe adult behaviour

Grooming behaviour	Safe adult behaviour
Create secrets	Encourage open and safe communication
Cross boundaries – give gifts, single out young people for special attention	Maintain clear professional boundaries – respect young people's autonomy
Exploit trust	Use trust to empower
Target vulnerable people	Actively include and affirm all young people
Use power to control	Use power responsibly and transparently
Isolate the young person	Encourage healthy relationships
Safe adults stay alert to grooming behaviour and never assume, 'It couldn't happen here' or 'Not with these young people'. Child sexual abuse can happen anywhere, by anyone. Educate yourself on <u>grooming behaviour</u> .	

2. Pause and reflect

- Would an LGBTIQ+ young person feel safe disclosing to you? How would they know you are a safe adult?
- Your lived experience shapes your views. Reflect on how myths and stereotypes may influence your practice

3. Inclusion is protective

When young people feel seen, respected and safe to be themselves, they are more likely to speak up.

Actions you can take:

- Be open, honest and willing to learn.
- Use inclusive language.
- Display visible signs of inclusion (e.g. rainbow flag, pronouns in signature, inclusive posters).
- Speak up against discrimination. When young people hear homophobic, transphobic, or other discriminatory remarks, this will signal to young people that they are not in a safe space.

4. Build trust without expecting a disclosure.

You don't need to know someone's sexuality, gender, or trauma experiences to be supportive. Create space for conversations, with no expectation or pressure to disclose.



5. Responding to a disclosure of child sexual abuse

How you respond matters:

- Stay calm. It is normal to feel discomfort when hearing a disclosure. But your role is to prioritise the young person's safety over your discomfort.
- Believe the young person. It takes courage to disclose.
- Validate their feelings. Acknowledge the young person's courage and emotions.
- Let the young person lead. Disclosure is a process – the young person decides how much they share.
- Take action. Ask the young person what they want to do. If your legal or organisational obligations differ from the young person's wishes, explain these carefully and respectfully.
- Follow up. Check in after the disclosure. That shows the young person you care.

Never 'out' a young person. Keep the focus on the young person's safety and the abuse they have disclosed, not on their sexuality or gender.



6. Taking care of yourself

- Seek support. Disclosures can be emotionally challenging. You deserve support too.
- Be mindful of your own experience. If you are part of the LGBTIQ+ community or a victim or survivor yourself, notice when your own experiences may be reactivated and seek support when needed.
- Debrief with trusted colleagues or supervisors. Find safe, appropriate spaces to process your experiences.
- Prioritise joy and creativity. Make time for things that replenish and ground you.



7. Connect young people to support

Support doesn't end with one conversation. Share information about support and services so young people know what support is available.

Useful support services:

- **QLife** – 1800 184 527 - counselling & peer support for LGBTIQ+ people of all ages.
- **Rainbow Network** – an education resource hub for LGBTIQ+ young people.
- **Minus18** – young people focused on education and support.
- **Headspace** – 1800 650 890 phone counselling and online chats every day.

When LGBTIQ+ young people feel seen, believed and supported, healing becomes possible.