

Guide to LGBTQIA+ Allyship for Mentors

The Guide to LGBTQIA+ Allyship for Mentors is intended for faculty and trainees in STEM. We point out issues and behaviors that are often observed in academic spaces and explore best practices for mentors of LGBTQIA+ folks. If these terms and ideas feel like uncharted territory, don't worry—you are not alone! We provide definitions for the terms used within the guide and strategies that you can use to contribute to inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ scientists in training.

Our hope is that this resource will initiate discussions about allyship in our communities and inspire others to add to this guide or generate their own. As you read through, reflect on the power and privileges that you hold and how you might use your position to foster safe and inclusive environments.

Defining key terms

Ally

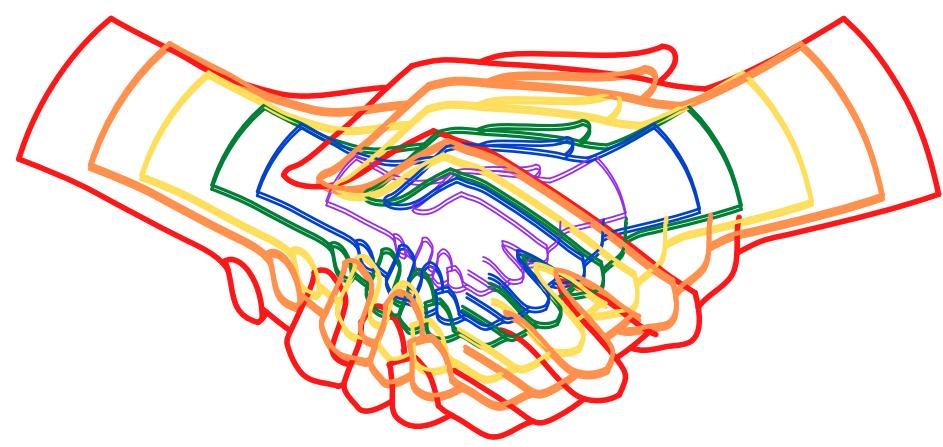
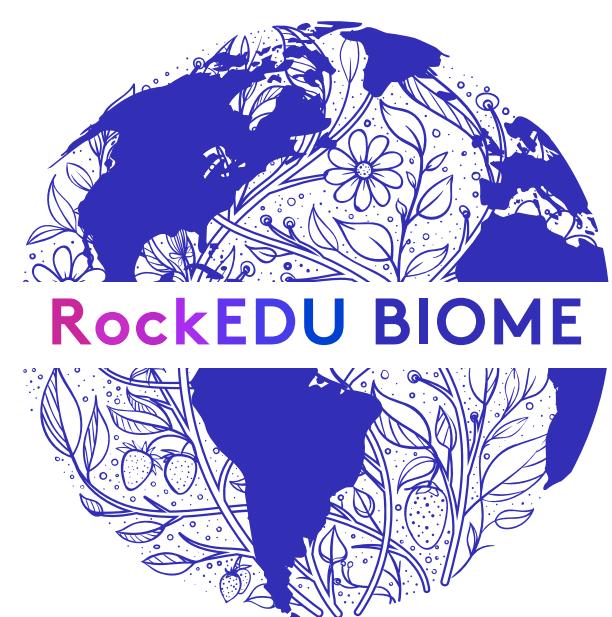
An ally is a member of the majority who advocates with and for a marginalized population. An ally recognizes when someone is being treated unfairly and takes a stand against it (Poirier et al., 2015). Allyship is key to overturning systems of oppression that keep LGBTQIA+ and other minority students from thriving as scientists in academia.

Microaggression

A microaggression is a subtle and often unintentional comment or action that is hostile and damaging to a member of a marginalized group. Common microaggressions against LGBTQIA+ individuals are 1) assuming someone's gender pronouns/using incorrect pronouns after they have been shared, 2) denial of the prevalence of homophobia or transphobia, 3) assuming that heterosexual relationships are the "norm".

Stereotype

A stereotype is a fixed oversimplification of a group of people. A common and extremely harmful stereotype is that all LGBTQIA+ individuals must express themselves in certain way to reflect their gender or sexual orientation. Identifying as LGBTQIA+ is much more than how someone presents themselves!



Guide to LGBTQIA+ Allies for Mentors

Defining key terms

Positionality

Your positionality refers to the social and political context that drives your identities and access in society (Misawa et al., 2010).

Cisgender

Cisgender means your gender identity aligns with your anatomical sex or sex assigned at birth.

Trans* and Transgender

Trans with the * refers to the large range of identities for individuals that do not identify as cis-men or women. A transgender person lives as a member of a gender that is not expected based on anatomical sex.

Transphobia

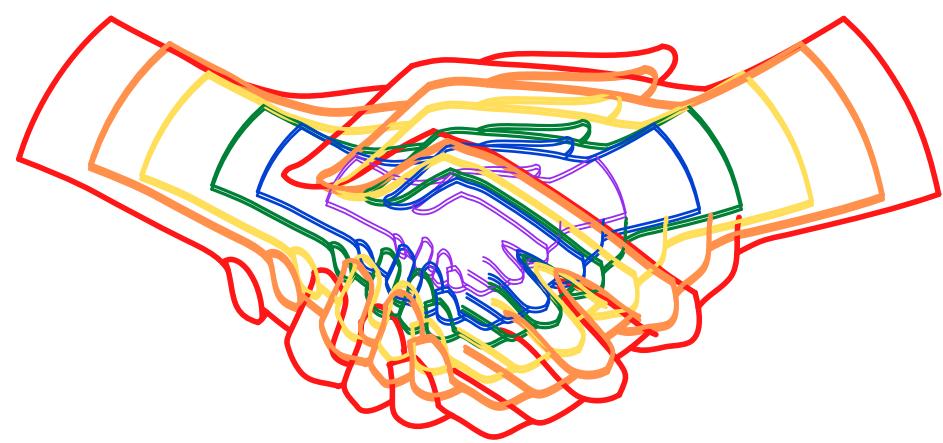
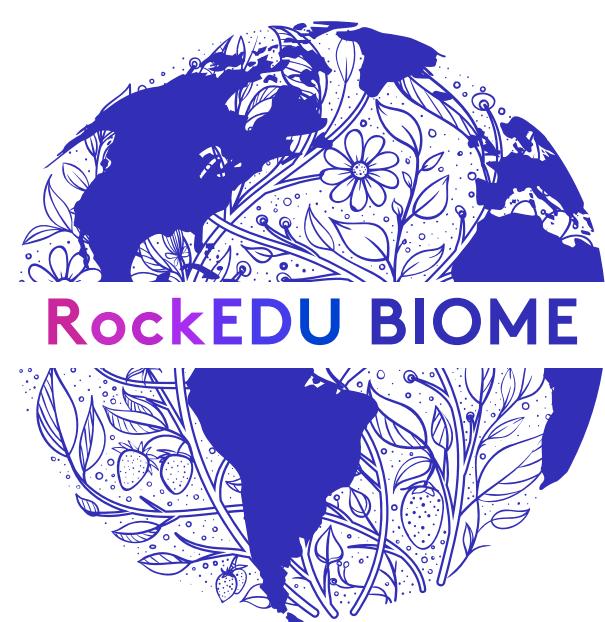
Transphobia is the discrimination against, fear, mistrust or hatred of trans people and often results in violent or deadly behavior. Transphobia exists within LGBTQIA+ communities and in general.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to the erasing and stigmatization of sexualities other than heterosexuality. Heteronormativity often includes the assumption that heterosexual relationships are the "norm" and that individuals should be masculine men or feminine women.

Coming out

Coming out is the process of accepting a gender or sexual identity and sharing with others.



Guide to LGBTQIA+ Allyship for Mentors

Checklist for understanding

- Understand the importance of facilitating safe and inclusive environments in science.

Part 1: Ways of being an ally
Part 2: The importance of visibility

- Articulate the implications of normative assumptions and the deficit model on academic ecosystems.

Part 1: Ways of being an ally
Part 3: Correct pronoun use and why it matters

- Identify personal strategies that can contribute to inclusivity in your immediate environments (labs, clubs, meetings etc.)

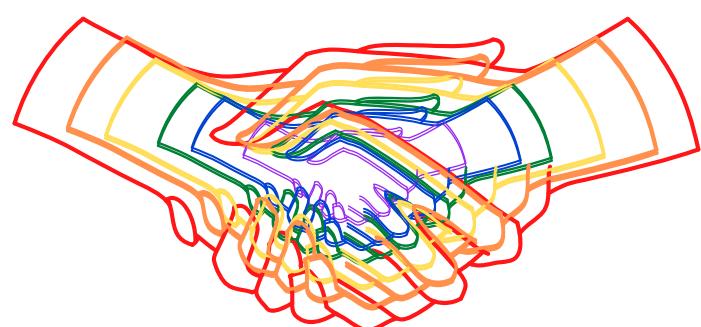
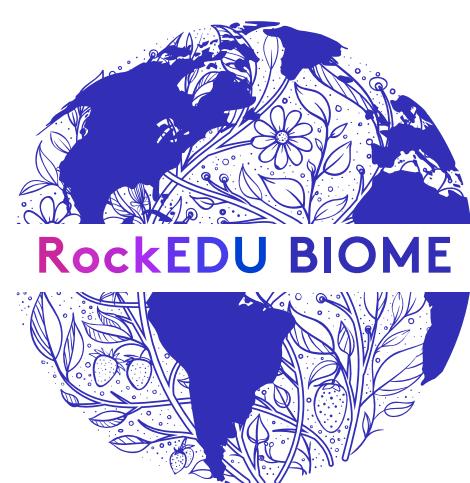
Part 4: Allyship in action
Part 5: Inclusion statement/reflection exercises

- Implement and share what you have learned!

Part 6: Anonymous testimonials & Resources

L G B T Q Q I P Z S A A

Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit (2S), androgynous and asexual



What are ways of being an ally as a mentor?

EXAMINE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

We often make subconscious assumptions that we share backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences with others. As a result, we are unaware that examples we use are less meaningful to trainees from other backgrounds. When you have the expectation that trainees have similar cultural backgrounds to you, come from economic privilege, have parents who attended college, or are heterosexual or cisgender it can make folks outside of the majority feel marginalized. Check in with your assumptions about your trainees!

There is no need for anyone to disclose their lived experiences here if they are not ready. There are ways to make everyone feel welcome without knowing how everyone identifies.

FIGHT THE DEFICIT MINDSET

The deficit model is defined as the perception that members of minority groups are different because they are deficient in important ways from the majority. In a mentor-protege relationship in academia, this can take the form of a one-way learning relationship, where the mentor invalidates the existing knowledge of their mentee and aims to "fix" their deficiencies. These kinds of relationships require that minority students assimilate to survive their environment.

For further information on the deficit model [click here](#)

RESPOND TO BIAS

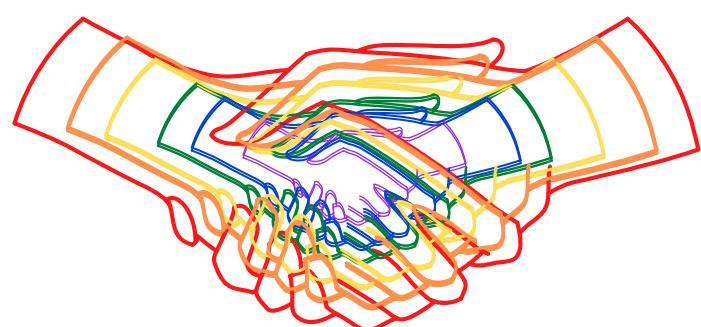
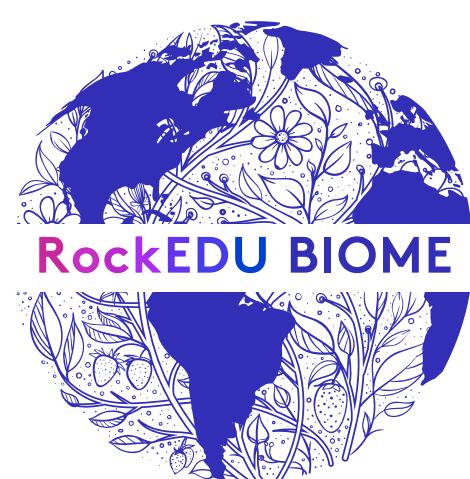
Microaggressions (a verbal or behavioral discrimination that can be indirect, subtle, or unintentional) are painful to receive and observe. They can also have a lasting impact on someone's mental health. An example of a microaggression against LGBTQIA+ folks would be to say "that's so gay" to refer to something odd or undesirable, or asking a transgender person about their gender reassignment surgery. Addressing microaggressions and biases are some of the most important things you can do as an ally! These moments can be intimidating and uncomfortable, but try not to freeze.

Keep in mind that your immediate response does not need to be perfect, just authentic.

Here are some key points to keep in mind when you notice microaggressions:

1. Silence of bystanders often communicates approval. A general rule is to speak up against discrimination in the moment, but sometimes you need to read the room to determine if speaking up in a public setting could do more harm than good. For example, it can be harmful to speak up in public when someone is misgendered, but they are not out to everyone about their gender pronouns.
2. Apologizing to the target afterwards can add to the insult. It signifies that the perpetrator's comfort is more important than the target's. Stick up for them in the moment!

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What are ways of being an ally as a mentor?

RESPOND TO BIAS (CONTINUED)

3. When bias comes from a boss, it is easy for people to assume that nothing can be done. The boss has all the power, right? As an employee, here are some examples of things you might say to stick up for a LGBTQIA+ co-worker:

- "A lot of different kinds of people work for you, and for this institution as a whole. We all come to work trying our best. What you just said doesn't honor the people that work hard for you."
- "We don't know who is gay and who is straight, who has gay relatives and who doesn't.. Your comment could really upset some people and distract them from their work."

4. Do not ask the target of the microaggression to fix the problem. Say you have noticed someone asking a transgender person for their former name or you notice someone using a transgender person's former name (this is called deadnaming). It is harmful to then tell the trans person how they could speak up for themselves in the future (signaling that you are not willing to speak up on their behalf.)

Addressing your own bias:

1. Ask clarifying questions! Be gracious and consider the moment as a learning opportunity. Say something like, "Please help me understand how I have offended you". Thank the person for pointing it out and ask for continued feedback.

2. When you mess up (and we all do), strive to reconnect and ensure that the moment does not inhibit your working relationship. "Is there anything I can do to repair our relationship.. I really want us to keep working together."
3. When you receive feedback, make a continuous effort to change your behavior.
4. Reading testimonials is a great way to identify microaggressions that you may be unaware of.

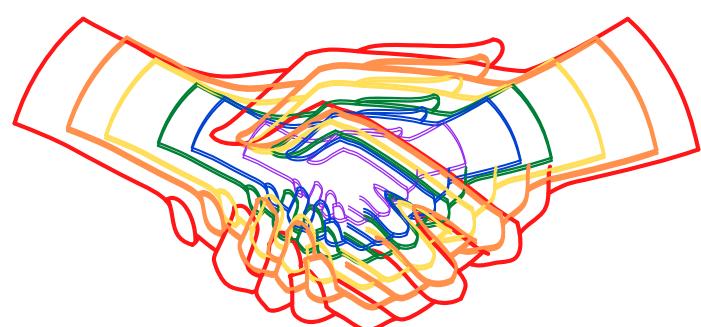
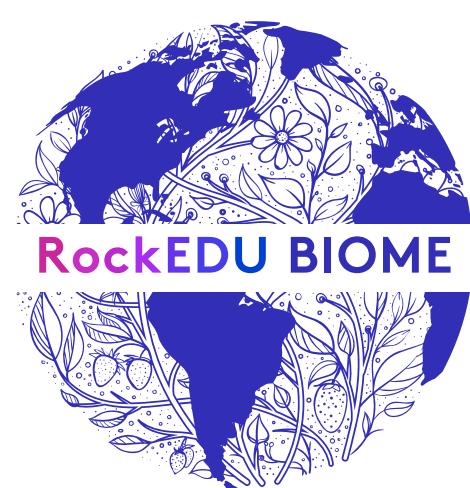
ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR POSITION

Our identities and access in society are shaped by our positions and power. This concept is called "positionality" (Misawa et al., 2010). Improving as an ally requires that you identify your own degrees of privilege related to race, education, income, ability, gender, citizenship and more. Acknowledging positionality allows you to recognize how students with certain intersecting social identities can have an increased risk of experiencing discrimination and disadvantage. An example is the intersection of being a gender and racial minority.

BE ACCOUNTABLE & ASK FOR FEEDBACK

It is important to recognize that allyship is a life-long learning process. Be critical of the practices you pass on to your mentees, ask yourself why you have certain standards for your mentees, and most importantly, recognize when there is a need for change.

Ask for feedback in 1:1 meetings with your trainees. Anonymous surveys/feedback forms are also a great way to check that people feel safe and included in lab. The anonymity may take the weight of confrontation off of people that are struggling.



What are ways of being an ally as a mentor?

SPEAK OUT AGAINST STEREOTYPES

Avoid fostering stereotypes that assign skills or weakness based on a person's race, education, income, ability, gender, citizenship etc. If you observe this happening, stand up against it!

THE WORDS YOU USE MATTER

Use inclusive language to show respect for the diversity of gender expression and lived experience. For example, it can be harmful to use masculine pronouns to refer to people of all genders. Using phrases like "as we all know" in lectures or meetings ,may be isolating when based on inaccurate assumptions about baseline knowledge. Note that as a mentor you have the power to shape the language of a whole lab.

Examples of non-gendered language: folks instead of ladies/gentleman, humankind instead of mankind, people instead of man/men, first-year students instead of freshmen.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES

Make sure you are providing important opportunities such as conference presentations, publications, and networking events to all of your trainees. Try to personalize those opportunities based on your students' strengths and interests.

ADVOCATE FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

Consider the power dynamic between mentor and trainee. Be sensitive towards your mentee by acknowledging that disabilities might look different than expected. This is a good opportunity to check in with your assumptions! Imagine how uncomfortable it can be for a mentee when they need to speak up to ask for money for lunch, a ride home, access to a building, or access to an appropriate restroom.

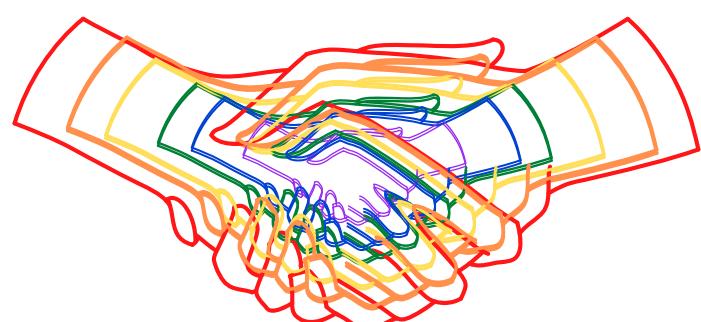
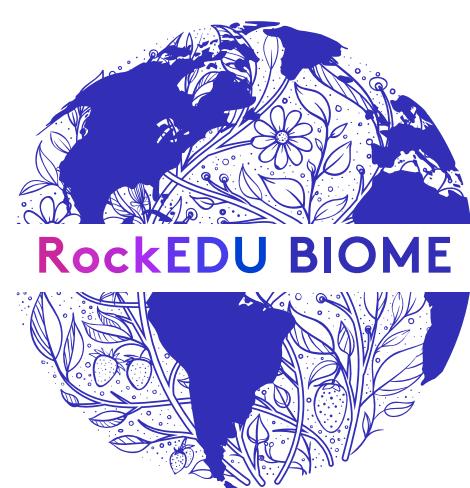
ASK QUESTIONS

Does your mentee need help getting to and from training sessions?

RockEDU provides metrocards for students from under-resourced schools and/or communities through the LAB Jumpstart program. It is also important to ensure that venues are accessible for disabled folks. Look out for things like access ramps, smooth ground, large doors, elevators and remote options.

Should I provide food for my meetings with mentees?

Folks might not be able to easily afford to pick something up at a deli nearby, or have special religious or cultural dietary requirements. Sending out a google form is a really easy way to normalize differences in dietary needs and take the onus off of the individual who needs the accommodation.



Considerations for students

ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

Mentorship is a two way street! It is important to reflect on your needs and anything that can affect your work in the lab. This can range from learning style to accommodations based on dietary restrictions. Voice your needs when you feel safe to do so.

If you are struggling to advocate for yourself, you are not alone. It can be helpful to find a third-party, whether that is a fellow student, co-worker, a mentor, a member of the RockEDU BIOME community, etc.

SEEK OUT NUMEROUS MENTORS

One person cannot fulfill your every need. Find allies where you can, whether that is in peers or folks further along in their careers.

Peer allies may be able to fill a need that a primary mentor cannot, for example, connections based on similar career stages.

LISTEN TO YOUR PEERS

It is important to recognize what you can do to help others and how you can advocate for them. In learning how to be an ally, we need to hear about and respect the lived experiences of other people.

BE VISIBLE IN YOUR ROLE AS A PEER ALLY

Everyone is impacted by gender and everyone wishes to be referred to by their correct pronouns. It is important to remember that a lack of investment on the topic of pronouns impacts the way others are treated. Ask folks for their pronoun and then use them. Share yours as well (in person, through email, over zoom, on name tags etc.)

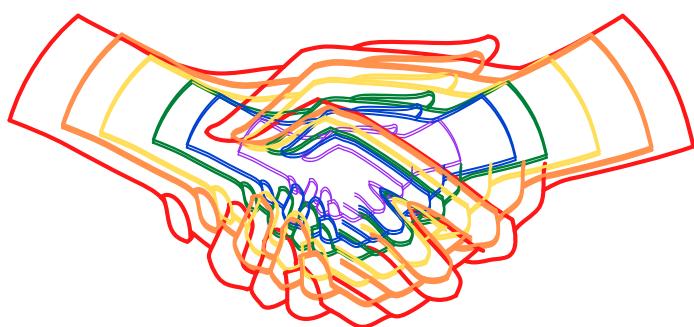
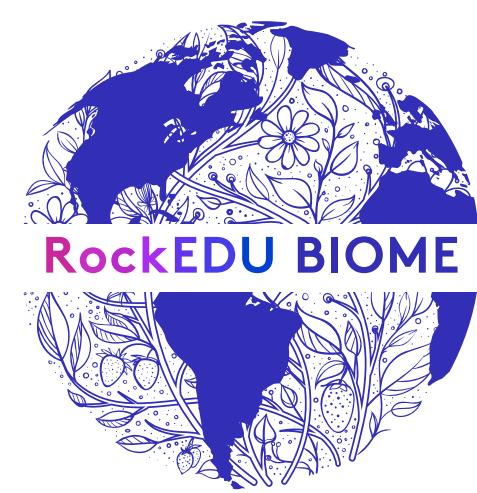
Share resources (like this guide!) and readings with your immediate communities.

Advocate for the needs of minority students. It can be difficult and exhausting for historically excluded people to make their voices heard. An example would be to ask for gender neutral restrooms or provide correct information when you hear myths or misperceptions about a marginalized group.

Despite good intentions, apologize when you make mistakes (we all make them).

Listening to podcasts is an easy way to learn about LGBTQIA+ experiences in STEM. Check out @LGBTQstemCast, @500QueerSci on Twitter.

Allyship Guide - Part 2: Visibility



The Importance of Visibility

Be visible in your role as an ally! This is extremely important for recruiting and retaining minority students. There are many ways to show that you are advocating for trainees from marginalized populations.

POST AN INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY STATEMENT ON YOUR LAB WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND/OR THE WALL IN YOUR LAB. SEND ONE TO YOUR CLASS WHEN TEACHING.

ASK TRAINEES TO SHARE THEIR PRONOUNS IF THEY ARE INCLINED. MODEL THE BEHAVIOR OF SHARING PRONOUNS AS A MENTOR.

WHEN TEACHING, TRY TO USE DIVERSE EXAMPLES. HIGHLIGHT RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY MEMBERS OF MINORITY GROUPS AND GIVE APPROPRIATE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. MORE IMPORTANTLY, ACKNOWLEDGE MINORITY RESEARCHERS THAT WERE OVERLOOKED.

BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT FUNDING AND DO NOT ASSUME STUDENTS HAVE ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF MONEY (E.G. SAVINGS OR FAMILY SUPPORT).

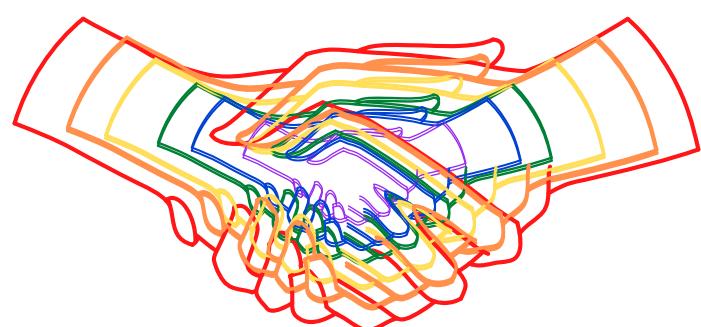
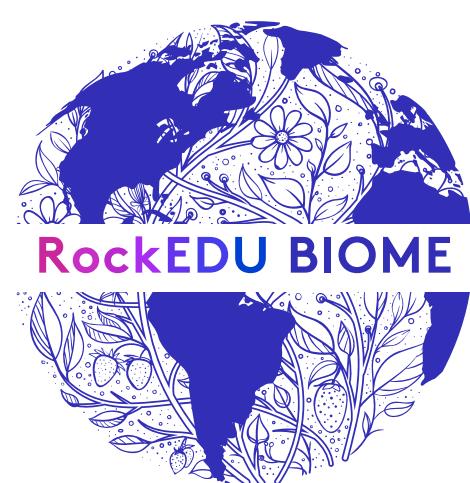
EXPLICITLY AND PERSONALLY TELL MENTEES THAT THEY BELONG IN THE SPACES THEY ARE NEWLY ENCOUNTERING. EMPHASIZE THE COLLABORATIVE NATURE OF SCIENCE, INSTEAD OF THE "LONE WOLF" STEREOTYPE. THESE THINGS CAN HELP INSPIRE CONFIDENCE AND COUNTERACT IMPOSTER SYNDROME. THAT'S IMPORTANT WHEN YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON/ONE OF THE ONLY PEOPLE FROM A HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED GROUP.

YOU CAN ALSO CONSIDER DOING SUBTLE THINGS THAT MIGHT NOT EVEN BE NOTICED BY MOST PEOPLE: WEAR A PRIDE PIN, OR POST AN ALLYSHIP STICKER IN YOUR WORKSPACE/ON YOUR LAPTOP.

CONSCIOUSLY MAKE SURE YOU ARE PRONOUNCING YOUR MENTEE'S NAME ACCURATELY - NAMES FROM CULTURES YOU ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH CAN BE MORE CHALLENGING TO PRONOUNCE. AS YOU ESTABLISH NORMS IN THE BEGINNING OF YOUR MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP, ASK YOUR MENTEE WHAT NAME THEY'D LIKE TO BE CALLED AND HOW TO PRONOUNCE IT (IF YOU ARE UNSURE). IT'S VERY DISHEARTENING TO BE CALLED THE WRONG NAME REPEATEDLY!

HAVE GRACE WHEN YOU MESS UP. EVERYONE MESSES UP! PICK YOURSELF BACK UP, ACKNOWLEDGE THE MISTAKE, AND MOVE AHEAD KNOWING EVEN MORE.
TRY NOT TO OVER-APOLOGIZE.

SHARE TRAININGS OR GUIDES WITH YOUR TEAM OR COMMUNITY. E.G. PERFORM AND SHARE TRAININGS LIKE THE SAFE ZONE PROJECT [HTTPS://THESAFEZONEPROJECT.COM/](https://thesafezoneproject.com/)



Using Correct Pronouns & Why it Matters

Common pronouns that we use to refer to people are he/him/his, she/her/hers, and they/them/theirs, but there are many more pronouns that people use. It is respectful and important to give people the opportunity to state their pronouns. For more information on the diversity of gender expression [click here](#).

WHY SHARE YOUR PRONOUNS?

You might ask, "Shouldn't we be able to tell someone's pronouns by just looking at them?". The answer is no! This mindset perpetuates the idea that it is alright to assume someone's pronouns based on one's perception. This can make folks outside of the majority feel marginalized. When you state or share your pronouns, you are demonstrating that you are not making these assumptions and have respect for the diversity of pronouns.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. Pronouns are used in place of someone's name. Give as much respect to pronouns as you would someone's name.
2. Every pronoun is valid, even if you have never heard it or used it before.
3. For many the term "preferred" is harmful. A person's pronouns are not about preference and using this term can insinuate that using correct pronouns for someone is optional.
4. For those that need to hear it: being trans is not a pathology, folks that present as masculine or feminine can have they/them pronouns, folks that present as masculine may also have she/her pronouns, and even biological sex is not binary.
5. Do not use the terms "Born a girl", "Born a boy", "biologically male" or "biologically female".
6. Do not refer to someone by their former name or use the term "biological sex". Instead, use "sex/gender assigned at birth".

WHAT ARE GENDER NEUTRAL PRONOUNS?

They/them/theirs or Ze/zir/zirs are common examples of gender neutral pronouns. These pronouns can be used to refer to someone whose gender is not known (if you learn this person's pronouns, adjust accordingly) or for someone who does not identify with he/him or she/her pronouns.

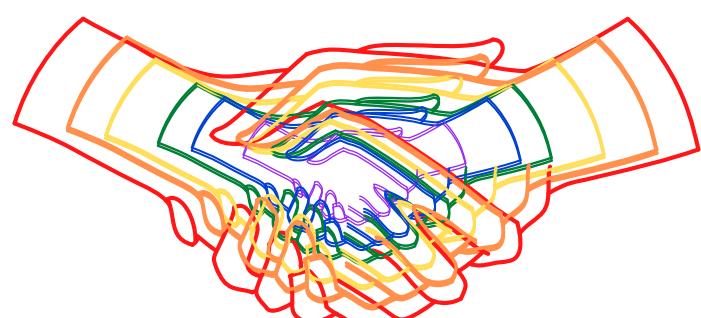
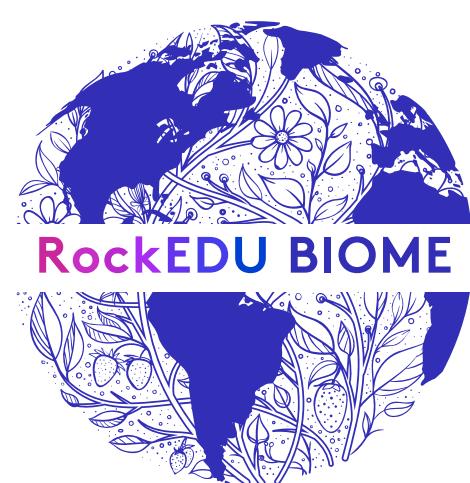
TRANS* COVERS MANY IDENTITIES

The asterisk at the end of trans is a common shorthand to refer to all the identities that fall under the term trans. The common denominator is that a trans* person is not a cisgender man or woman.

*: transgender, transman/woman, genderqueer, agender, transexual, two-spirit, non-binary, genderfluid, gender non-conforming, bigender, third gender, transmasculin, transfeminine, or androgynous.

TIPS FOR ASKING ABOUT SOMEONE'S PRONOUNS

- Offer your name and pronouns first. This can be an indirect way of showing interest in learning someone's pronouns without putting them on the spot.
- You can also explain why you are asking for someone's pronouns e.g. "I want to be sure that I introduce you correctly...".



Mentor-mentee scenarios that are harmful to minority students and how to change

Scenario

A head of laboratory has specific expectations for how a new graduate student should present their work, but has not communicated this effectively. The graduate student has now presented in a way that is not in alignment with the standards in the lab.

A mentor has placed high expectations on the research of their protege. The mentee questions their ability to achieve these goals and feels intense imposter syndrome.

A member of your lab uses they/them pronouns. They have come out to your lab, but are often misgendered by your head of laboratory.

A trainee has been outed to their community as LGBTQIA+ by a peer without their consent.

Harmful Response

The mentor assumes that the graduate student will learn as they go. After their presentation the mentor blames the graduate student for their mistakes.

The mentor leaves the mentee alone to deal with their insecurities.
Or
The mentee asks for help, but the mentor ignores or is too busy for this request.

Say nothing to the head of lab and hope that the person stands up for themselves.

Apologize to them afterward and suggest ways that they can advocate for themselves.

Pretend it never happened.
or

Confront the outed trainee in a public setting and ask them questions about how they identify.

Allyship in Practice

Define and communicate your expectations from the beginning and as the relationship evolves. Be willing to adjust your expectations!

Create intermediate reachable goals to empower your mentee.

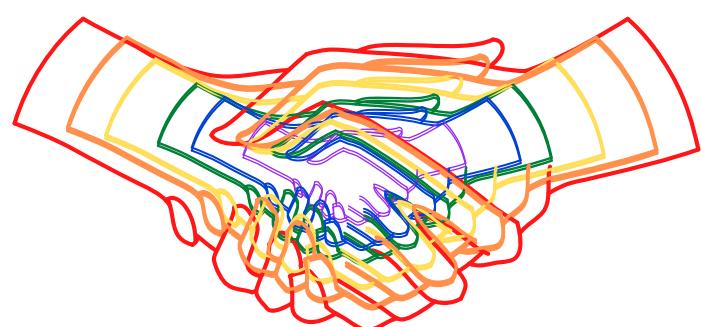
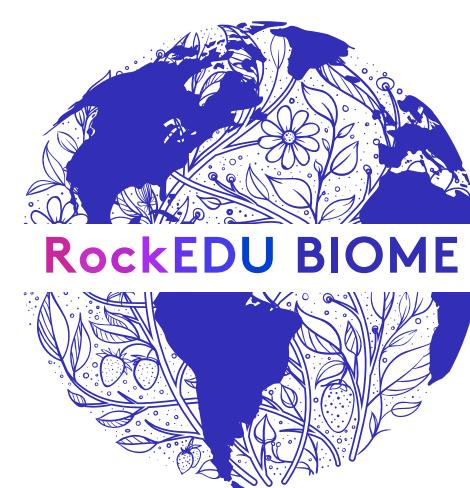
Help them mitigate their fear of failure by having a conversation about it.

Remind the head of lab of this lab member's pronouns when misgendering occurs.

If the behavior is not changed, bring the topic up in a 1:1 meeting with the head of lab.

Check in with the trainee in private to make sure they are alright!

Have a discussion with the peer that outed this trainee so they understand the implications of their actions.



Writing an inclusion statement and a reflection exercise

One way to be a visible ally is to post an inclusion statement on your lab website, social media, and/or the wall in your lab. If you are teaching, send an inclusion statement and request for gender pronouns to your class.

EXAMPLE INCLUSION STATEMENT:

It is our intention that people from all backgrounds and perspectives are respected in this community. We welcome individuals of all ethnicities, religious affiliations, backgrounds, beliefs, gender identities and expressions, national origins, sexual orientations, socioeconomic backgrounds, family education level, and abilities. The diversity that each person brings to this lab is an asset.

All members of this community are expected to contribute to an inclusive environment. Creating and sustaining a community requires trust, and we acknowledge that trust building is a never-ending process. We also acknowledge that learning involves taking risks, but that we need to feel safe and that we belong to do so. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. For those that wish to be addressed by an alternate name or gender pronoun, please let others know of your name/pronouns so that we can make appropriate changes.

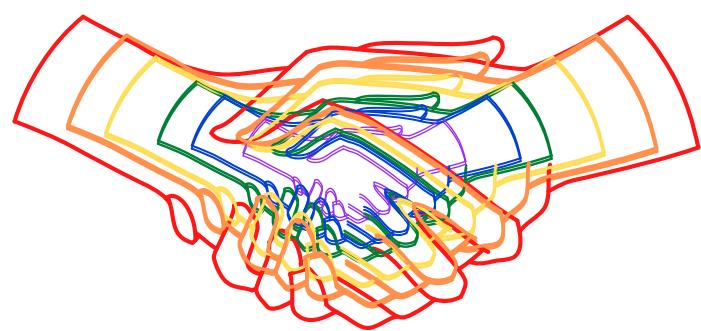
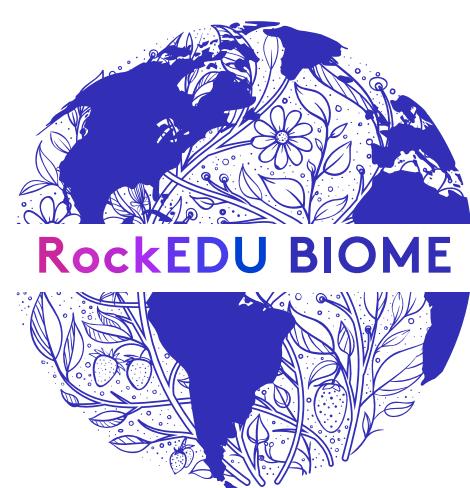
Try writing an inclusion statement of your own, but feel free to use this statement verbatim.

Please cite the "[RockEDU BIOME Guide to LGBTQIA+ Allyship for Mentors](#)" if you do.

REFLECTION EXERCISE:

Need help writing your own inclusion statement? Start by asking yourself the following questions...

1. What is my definition of "diversity"?
2. What different identities do I hold? How do these identities impact my role as a scientist?
3. How can I learn more about diversity from my colleagues?
4. What are my assumptions/perceptions of students from diverse groups?
5. How do I respond to my students/staff based on these perceptions?



Anonymous testimonials

In learning how to be an ally, we need to hear about and respect the lived experiences of other people. We asked folks from our community to share their allyship related experiences as a mentee or mentor.

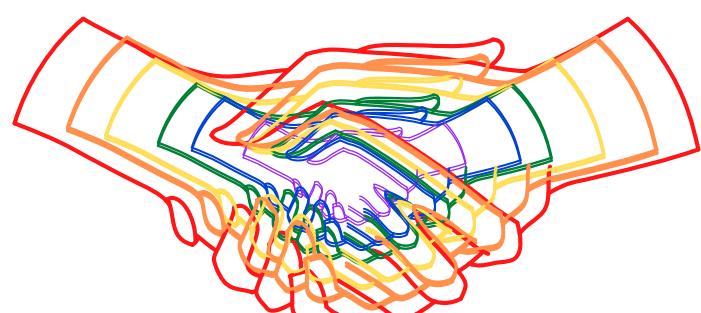
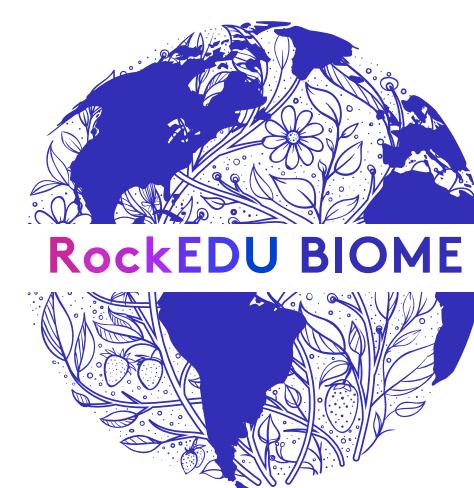
"I wish my mentors would acknowledge that coming out at work feels almost impossible. When I do come out it is a sign of great trust."

"I wish PIs would send out something like an anonymous survey to check that people feel safe and if they have suggestions about how to make the lab environment more inclusive. It might take the weight of confrontation off of people that are struggling."

"Some types of support I really appreciated were: 1) a mentor telling me their support was in no way conditional upon my sexual orientation after I came out to them (which had not been the case in my own family for a few years after coming out), and 2) another mentor telling me that it is entirely ok to place geographic limitations on where I decide to apply for faculty jobs, since there are parts of this country that are not safe for minority groups, including people with lived experiences similar to my own."

"My strategy to advocate for my mentees includes making time for discussion about their own career goals. This serves the purpose of helping me get to know them a bit better, and to learn more about what I can do to help them achieve their goals (e.g. supporting them in applications to grad school or other research/job opportunities; connecting them to others in my own professional network). I also make my own sexual orientation visible when it makes sense to do so (like talking about what my wife and I did on a given weekend if a student asks how my weekend was)."

"One easy thing to do is send development reviews for your trainees to fill out! Ask questions like how can I help you achieve your goals? How are you doing? Do you feel supported in your environment? How can I adapt or improve my mentoring style to better support you?"



Resources and Readings

Share resources with your peers, trainees, and mentors!

FUNDING FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

There are a number of funding opportunities for Latinx, African American, Native American, disabled, and LGBTQIA+ students in STEM.

Visit: <https://sciences.ncsu.edu/intranet/funding-opportunities-for-underrepresented-minorities-in-stem/>

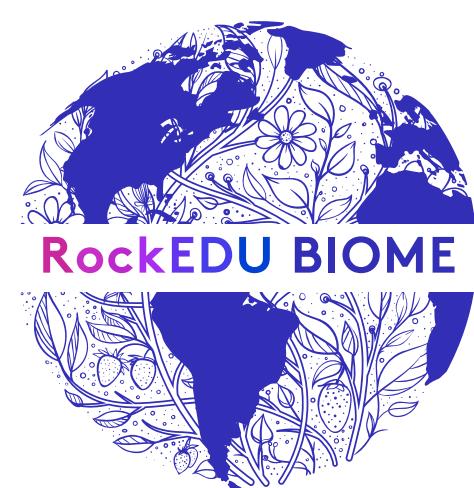
RESOURCES

- [Lambda legal \(nondiscrimination\)](#)
- LGBT National Help Center and Hotline - (888)-843-4564
- [National Center for Transgender Equality](#)
- [The Safe Zone Project](#)
- [The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](#)
- American Civil Liberties Union (LGBTQ Rights)
- [ASEE LGBTQIA+ Advocacy in STEM](#)

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