

HOW TO MAKE YOUR J-SOC LGBTQ+ INCLUSIVE

WHAT IS A SAFE SPACE?

The term safe space refers to places created for **individuals, that is conducive to their physical and mental well-being, to come together to communicate regarding their experiences with marginalization.** The term 'safe space' indicates that people in the space will not tolerate violence, harassment, or hate speech. A safe space is typically meant for marginalized populations to have a space.

TIPS TO ENCOURAGE A SAFE SPACE:

- If you don't know how somebody identifies, first **pause and ask yourself whether this information is necessary.** When it is appropriate and/or relevant, it is often perfectly acceptable to ask in a non-threatening way. People may not want to label themselves with a gender identity or sexual orientation. Everyone does not have to fit into the box or category.
- **Respect** how people name and identify themselves
- **Use gender neutral language** (e.g. ask a person if they are dating anyone instead of asking if they have a girlfriend or boyfriend).
- **Challenge stereotypes**, create opportunities to discuss these assumptions with others.
- Don't expect LGBTQ+ people to educate you; **take initiative and learn.**
- **Create dialogue** (e.g. talk about the importance of LGBTQ+ rights and the realities of oppression)

LANGUAGE

Language is incredibly important when creating a safe space. There are several steps you can take to ensure your J-Soc is as welcoming and inclusive as possible.

- Language in general, but especially in the LGBTQ+ community, is ever evolving. It is vital to take clues from your campus LGBTQ+ community about the evolution of language on your campus and in the general community.
- It is also important, especially with words that had previously been used with negative connotations, that you are sure of their current meaning and connotation, and how they are used in your campus' LGBTQ+ community.
- The non-specific word 'queer' can also be useful when talking about sexuality and gender in history. We know that for some it has negative associations – historically it has been used derisively as well as for self-identification. However, the Oxford English Dictionary reports that from the late 1980s, 'queer' started to be reclaimed as a neutral or positive term. It is now used to capture the complexity and fluidity of sexuality and gender, with the intention of including all experiences and identities rather than defining and limiting them. It is in that spirit of inclusivity that we use the term 'queer'.
- When dealing with language it is generally recommended to use terms that are descriptive rather than prescriptive (i.e. describing the situation instead of judging or dictating appearances or behaviours).

DEALING WITH CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

It is imperative that you have policies in place to deal with challenging situations before they arise.

How would you handle a member misgendering another? Homophobic comments? How would your reaction differ if the challenging situation is perpetrated by a society member, a committee member, or someone external? By setting out processes to deal with these situations before they happen, you can ensure everyone feels safe and protected at Jsoc. Make sure to consult with UJS and your SU when developing this policy as well!

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WHAT IS AN ALLY?

An ally is a person who supports marginalized, silenced, or less privileged groups without actually being a member of those groups. This person creates a safe and welcoming environment and will often directly confront and challenge systems of oppression.

The Human Rights Campaign offers the following definition of an ally to LGBTQ+ people:

"An ally is someone who is not gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ) but personally advocates for LGBTQ equal rights and fair treatment. Allies are some of the most effective and powerful advocates for the LGBTQ movement. These allies have proven invaluable personally and politically, and are increasingly important in the fight for LGBTQ equality. Indeed, their voices often have been heard while those of LGBTQ people have been ignored."

Being an ally is a process, not a single action. It requires not just a willingness to stand up for others, but also a commitment to learning, examining cultural norms and expectations, and to creating change.

HOW TO AVOID BEING OFFENSIVE WHEN YOU DON'T MEAN TO BE:

Regardless of how familiar you are with LGBTQ+ identities, everyone makes mistakes from time to time. Here are some key pointers:

- Don't Assume Everyone is Straight—This is often seen in the assumption that romantic/sexual partners are always of different genders.
- Don't Tokenize People—Tokenizing is when one member of a minority groups is expected to represent that group at all times or in all things. **Remember: each LGBTQ student is required to represent only themselves, not the larger group.**
- Avoid Labeling—It is vital to use the words people choose to describe themselves. A good rule of thumb is to only use the labels that the person has already used to describe themselves.

FOR MORE INFO

www.ujs.org.uk/liberation

HOW TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME:

- Develop programs and Shabbat service to educate and sensitize students about gay and lesbian issues. Consider having a panel of students at an oneg to discuss how LGBTQ+ issues affect their university and personal lives.
- Phrase your J-Soc publicity in a way that is inviting to all people.
- When planning singles' activities, recognize that not all single students are looking for a partner of the opposite gender.
- Make sure that LGBTQ+ students are honoured and included at services (i.e., opening the ark, reading a prayer or other passage, or lighting the Shabbat candles).
- Make sure that LGBTQ+ students are represented on committees and are encouraged to participate fully in leadership. (if they're not, ask why)
- Create a list of community resources serving the LGBTQ community.