**The LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice**

The LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice have been developed to support you to play your part in creating non-discriminatory, comfortable, safe, and welcoming workplaces for LGBTQIA+ people.

Those people could be speech and language therapists, support workers, and possibly other non-speech and language therapy colleagues. They could be speech and language therapy students on placement. They could be LGBTQIA+ people accessing speech and language therapy, their partners, other family, and friends. Whoever they are, we hope our zones of practice can play a role in making their lives better.

You can use the zones of practice to reflect on where you are personally. You can also use them in team discussions, where you feel comfortable and safe to do so, to reflect where your team and service are. It is important to note, the zones of practice are an aid to learning and growth. The examples we use are not the final word. You personally and/or your colleagues and teams may also have examples that fit each of the zones.

We would welcome your feedback on these zones of practice. Please email [Peter Just](mailto:peter.just@rcslt.org) and [Jess Davies and Kate Boot](mailto:sltpridenetwork@gmail.com).

**Becoming not being**

The LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice are based on [Andrew Ibrahim’s Becoming an anti-racist: fear, learning, growth framework](https://twitter.com/AndrewMIbrahim/status/1269423199273525250?lang=en) and [Kerry Murphy’s neurodiversity-affirming zones of practice](https://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/NEURODIVERSITY-ZONES.png).

Becoming LGBTQIA+ affirming is precisely that: a process of becoming rather than a state of being. Wherever we are in the zones of practice, we can all do better, always.

It should be noted at the outset that some people, even some LGBTQIA+ people, find discussing LGBTQIA+ issues uncomfortable or feel unsafe doing so. This is natural. It is something that needs to be worked through. For some people, this may involve conscious and/or unconscious bias. It is what our LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice is designed to help address. We hope the zones of practice will support people to want to move beyond their comfort zone, to become curious, to learn, and eventually to grow in their understanding, and empowered in their response to LGBTQIA+ issues.

It should also be noted that for a variety of reasons some people with LGBTQIA+ identity may never feel comfortable or safe sharing this identity in or out of the workplace. That is also fine. We hope that by everyone moving through the LGBTQIA+ zones of practice, behaviours will be displayed, and environments created, that are comfortable, safe, and welcoming for LGBTQIA+ people, even if their identity is not and never will be publicly known.

It should also be noted that there will be other ways to become LGBTQIA+ affirming too. Our zones offer examples of how people can become more LGBTQIA+ affirming. They are not the final word on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. But they are informed by the experience and expertise of LGBTQIA+ SLTs, support workers, and students.

**Privilege and bias**

Central to being more LGBTQIA+ affirming is a recognition of the privileges that being white, cisgender and heterosexual give certain people. White, cisgender and heterosexual people do not, typically, need to think about how their racial safety, gender identity, and sexual orientation impacts on their daily life. For example, in the use of public toilets, fitting rooms, changing rooms, housing, jobs, and holiday destinations. Cisgender and heterosexual people do not, typically, have to wonder if their voice is going to be mimicked, or lead them to being ridiculed, or result in assumptions being made about them. For many LGBTQIA+ people, all these things, and many more, are everyday considerations.

As per the [Equality Act 2010](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents), race encompasses colour, nationality [(which includes citizenship)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/equality/equality-act-2010/your-rights-under-equality-act-2010/race-discrimination) or ethnic or national origins. It is important to note, therefore, that some white people – for example those from the traveller community or people who are Jewish – may also experience racism and racial discrimination. So, we have to be conscious of, and actively opposed to, all forms of racism, whether overt, insidious or structural, if we are to be truly LGBTQIA+ affirming and inclusive of all.

Allied to the privileges enjoyed by white, cisgender and heterosexual people is the unconscious bias they may have. This bias can, with or without intent, negatively impact on LGBTQIA+ people. Assumptions rooted in this unconscious bias can be made, and then acted upon, about LGBTQIA+ colleagues and/or people who are accessing speech and language therapy services, their partners, other family, and friends. This bias can also lead to microaggressions, or worse, being displayed to LGBTQIA+ people, whether colleagues or people having speech and language therapy.

It should also be noted that not all bias is unconscious and not every discriminatory act is accidental.

[Find out more on the role of privilege.](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2021/06/22/how-to-create-lgbtq-inclusion-in-the-workplace-recognising-the-role-of-privilege/)

**Intersectionality**

It is also important to recognise and acknowledge the intersectionality between LGBTQIA+ issues and other areas. These can include race, disability, and/or neurodiversity. They can also include socio-economic background, age, and vocation. These other forms of intersectionality may affect LGBTQIA+ people in various ways, including if and how they express their LGBTQIA+ identity in the workplace and/or to their families and friends. In recognising and acknowledging the importance of intersectionality, we also need to adjust our behaviours, working practices, and services accordingly, if we are to be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people, and to those who have another intersectionality, if not more than one. Indeed, it should be recognised that some people may have multiple intersections so a manager may need to support the same employee from a range of standpoints, including LGBTQIA+, disability, race, or neurodiversity.

**Tips for use**

The LGBTQIA+ affirming zones of practice are designed to encourage reflection and discussion. This is applicable to both individuals and to teams. For individuals, the zones are relevant to you both as a person and as a professional. For teams, they are relevant to the staff who work in services and the people accessing those services.

The zones are not designed to make judgements about people or teams. For instance, saying ‘I don’t know’ does not mean you do not want to know something. It simply means you recognise your lack knowledge about something. In addition, we recognise that discussing these issues can be uncomfortable for some people. As highlighted above, that is fine.

The purpose of the zones of practice is to promote a recognition of potential lack of knowledge, curiosity about issues, learning about things, and making things better for ourselves and for others.

You can use the diagram and the material in this document to support yourself and your teams to reflect, discuss, and propose and take action.

***Elements***

* You can take each of the elements in turn and reflect and discuss where you and your team is in relation to that.
* You can encourage discussion and identification of examples of that element in action.
* You can encourage discussion of examples of behaviours/actions that could improve on that element so it could be moved from one zone to another.

***Examples***

* You can take each of the examples listed below and reflect and discuss which zone that belongs in.
* You can also reflect and discuss what actions you individually and collectively could undertake to improve on that example, enabling it to be moved from one zone to another.

**Comfort zone**

If you are in the comfort zone, **you do not know** why LGBTQIA+ issues are important.

**Elements of comfort zone – I don’t know…**

1. what pronouns mean to LGBTQIA+ people
2. why these issues are relevant to me
3. my language can impact on others
4. about LGBTQIA+ visibility events
5. what previous name/dead name means
6. the history and context of LGBTQIA+ identity
7. I have to listen to LGBTQIA+ people’s experiences
8. what a safe space for disclosure is
9. I should attend equality and diversity training
10. being new to certain topics is ok
11. I have privileges and biases
12. about intersectionality
13. why LGBTQIA+ people need representation
14. the relevance to children and young people

**Examples of comfort zone behaviours**

1. I see homophobic or transphobic jokes as 'banter' – for example, I don’t know that saying ‘oh, that’s so gay’ can be derogatory
2. I laugh if I misgender someone and do not know that misgendering people in the workplace can have a negative effect on them
3. I do not know why Pride events are held
4. I do not have to think about my gender and gender identity in everyday life, for example, in using public toilets, fitting rooms, changing rooms, applying for a job, renting a house, or booking a holiday in a place that might not be safe for LGBTQIA+ people
5. I do not use people’s pronouns or assume I know someone’s correct pronouns
6. I think that because I have someLGBTQIA+ friends I am not homophobic or have unconscious bias
7. I think LGBTQIA+ identity is a choice, a phase, or a trend
8. I think that as I do not know any non-binary people these issues are not relevant to me
9. I assume everyone else is heterosexual and/or cisgender so I ask, ‘When are you going to start a family?’
10. I do not know that services and the language used in team meetings can be heteronormative and cisnormative
11. I think that because I am not transgender, I do not have to use pronouns in my email signature
12. I think that the ‘they, them’ pronouns are too difficult to use so I only use ‘she, her’ or ‘he, him’
13. I automatically use heteronormative and/or cisnormative language and do not know the impact this might have on non-cisgender people
14. I assume someone’s partner is of the opposite gender
15. I think I cannot be expected to remember what all the letters in LGBTQIA+ mean
16. I disregard others’ perspectives
17. I repeatedly use a person’s previous name/dead name
18. I think transgender is a topic relevant only to speech and language therapists working in voice
19. I think gay and lesbian people just had a bad experience in a straight relationship
20. I refer to a female trans voice patient as ‘the man in a dress’
21. I refer to children and young people’s opposite sex friends as ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’ when I would not do the same with adults
22. I use stereotypical language about LGBTQIA+ people, such as ‘they’re so dramatic’

**Curious zone**

If you are in the curious zone, **you think** LGBTQIA+ issues are important, but **you’re not sure about them or how to act on them**.

**Elements of curious zone – I’m not sure…**

1. why I need to be an ally
2. about pronouns’ significance to LGBTQIA+ people
3. how to listen to LGBTQIA+ people’s experiences
4. why some environments are uncomfortable or unsafe for LGBTQIA+ people
5. how intersectionality affects LGBTQIA+ people
6. how to actively engage with the issues
7. what adjustments I need to make
8. being new to certain topics is ok
9. what my privileges and biases are
10. about the relevance to children and young people

**Examples of curious zone behaviours**

1. I ask questions of my LGBTQIA+ friends that I would not ask other friends
2. I start to engage with LGBTQIA+ media
3. I use correct pronouns, but add ‘or whatever’ or other dismissive language when speaking of them
4. I don’t understand how to take part in conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues, or don’t feel comfortable or safe taking part in them
5. I exaggerate my apology if I have misgendered someone or used a previous name/dead name
6. I don’t understand why LGBTQIA+ people need to feature in our professional resources, such as our media, assessment forms, or speech and language therapy materials
7. I use humour to defend past or current beliefs
8. I don’t understand why policies and practices need to change to be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people and unconsciously resist them
9. I observe Pride and other visibility events, but don’t understand their significance to LGBTQIA+ people
10. I acknowledge variance, but then belittle it, for example by saying, ‘They identify as a penguin, next they’ll want to marry a dog’
11. I avoid asking LGBTQIA+ colleagues about their lives because I don’t feel comfortable doing so
12. I avoid having conversations about the needs of LGBTQIA+ people who communicate differently or with difficulty
13. I tell people that I have LGBTQIA+ friends, but that I don’t want to know what they do
14. I use the word ‘but’, for example, ‘He’s gay, but he’s lovely’
15. I think I am fine with people’s LGBTQIA+ identity, but then I don’t like seeing two people of the same gender kissing or holding hands
16. I use people’s correct pronouns to their face, but use the wrong ones behind their backs
17. I know pronouns are important to trans and transgender people, but I don’t feel comfortable using or asking about them
18. I may go to LGBTQIA+ events, but I don’t understand how to actively support LGBTQIA+ rights in the community

**Learning zone**

If you are in the learning zone, **you are beginning to understand** why LGBTQIA+ issues are important, and you are **actively learning about them**.

**Elements of learning zone – I’m learning…**

1. the importance of getting people’s pronouns right
2. the impact of my language
3. about LGBTQIA+ resources
4. being new to certain topics is ok
5. to openly acknowledge and adjust for my privileges and biases
6. how to support LGBTQIA+ people
7. that intersectionality can affect LGBTQIA+ people
8. how to listen to LGBTQIA+ people’s experiences
9. how to be an ally and active bystander
10. about the relevance to children and young people

**Examples of learning zone behaviours**

1. I’m beginning to understand not to ask my one LGBTQIA+ friend for all the answers
2. I actively research the reasons why LGBTQIA+ issues matter and how best to support LGBTQIA+ people accessing speech and language therapy
3. I’m actively following social media accounts of LGBTQIA+ advocates
4. I’m becoming more aware of why as a cisgender person it is important I use pronouns in my email signature
5. I’m beginning to know how to apologise when I make mistakes about LGBTQIA+ issues, including misgendering people, without making it about me
6. I’m starting to understand that not all LGBTQIA+ people are the same, and that not all of them have made, or wish to make, their identity public and the reasons for that
7. I attend equality, diversity, and inclusion training and am starting to adjust my behaviours accordingly
8. I research how cultural difference and diversity might impact on LGBTQIA+ people, including those accessing speech and language therapy
9. I’m starting to understand how to be humble when one of my privileges or unconscious biases is challenged and to understand that it is fine to feel uncomfortable
10. I consciously use inclusive language, but sometimes I forget when I am talking to a group of people or writing an email in a hurry
11. I’m starting to feel comfortable asking the opinions of LGBTQIA+ colleagues and listening to their stories
12. I’m beginning to understand how to make a session or space inclusive for, and led by, LGBTQIA+ people and not just cisgender and/or heterosexual people
13. I’m learning about the resources available from charity partners about the conditions the LGBTQIA+ people I work with have and how best to support them

**Growth zone**

If you are in the growth zone, **you understand** why LGBTQIA+ issues are important, and **you act on them**.

**Elements of growth zone – I…**

1. lead on LGBTQIA+ inclusion
2. am an ally and active bystander
3. use the pronouns people ask me to use
4. am LGBTQIA+ affirming
5. listen to LGBTQIA+ people’s experiences
6. actively engage in discussions
7. advocate with and for people
8. am compassionate with people in the other zones of practice
9. identify and remove barriers to inclusion, safety, and participation
10. do not aim or claim to speak for the community
11. acknowledge and actively adjust for my own privileges and biases
12. adjust for the intersectionality between LGBTQIA+ issues and other areas
13. recognise and challenge non-inclusive behaviours
14. promote equity for LGBTQIA+ people
15. know being new to certain topics is ok
16. support children and young people’s understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues

**Examples of growth zone behaviours**

1. I identify and advocate for changes to service and professional practice that will make them more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people
2. I work with and for LGBTQIA+ colleagues, LGBTQIA+ people, and charity partners to campaign for better lives for LGBTQIA+ people with communication and swallowing needs
3. I actively engage with LGBTQIA+ social media accounts, including through commenting on and sharing material
4. I use my pronouns in my email signature and on my ID badge
5. I use curiosity as a way to work out how I can help people feel less defensive and to develop their acceptance
6. I keep abreast of current issues and actively engage with efforts to improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ people, including colleagues and those having speech and language therapy
7. I do not treat peers as a curiosity
8. I surround myself with more informed people and aim to constantly be learning
9. I actively ask LGBTQIA+ people how they want their experiences to be referred to and shared
10. I continue to challenge my own and others’ assumptions and biases and acknowledge that we are all learning all the time
11. I have boundaries with cheap humour, and where I feel safe I call people in
12. I make recommendations of how support for LGBTQIA+ people can be improved
13. I champion and lead research on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people
14. If I don't know, I sensitively ask, rather than avoid topics of discussion
15. I am comfortable being uncomfortable
16. I consistently use a range of pronouns and identities in any training and resources I develop to reflect diversity
17. I do not accept 'the IT system doesn't allow for it' or similar barriers to respecting people's titles/genders/pronouns if it impacts on colleagues and/or people having speech and language therapy
18. I champion appropriate support for the end of life care for LGBTQIA+ people
19. I feel comfortable providing consultation to LGBTQ+ individuals who are distressed
20. I make room for pain and don’t sweep it under the rug
21. I show allyship by getting involved with LGBTQIA+ positive groups and projects
22. I ask LGBTQIA+ colleagues about their families
23. I challenge stigma and humour in bad taste and aim to educate the joke maker
24. When I challenge people, I do it in a way aimed at not inducing shame so that there is an opportunity for growth and discussion
25. I seek out learning from other health, care and education professionals about their experiences
26. I know it is none of my business to ask someone what they do in the bedroom
27. I am a leader who is a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and I actively use my position of power to create comfortable and safe environments that encourage people to challenge the status quo
28. I accept how other people identify without question
29. I take full accountability and apologise for any past homophobic or transphobic behaviour