

# RESPONDING TO ANTI QUEER BEHAVIOR - A GUIDE FOR ALLIES

Safety & Wellness Guides for Queer Zimbabweans

Anti-queer behavior, including homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and general discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, can be harmful and distressing to ALL community members no matter who it is directed at. However, as an ally, your response can play a significant role in creating safer, more inclusive spaces. This guide outlines strategies for responding effectively to anti-queer behavior in a way that both supports queer individuals and promotes education and empathy.

## STAY CALM AND COMPOSED

- **Avoid Confrontation:**

When confronted with anti-queer remarks or actions, it's important to stay calm and avoid escalating the situation. Keep your emotions in check, even if the behavior is hurtful or triggering.

- **Take a Deep Breath:**

If you're caught off guard, take a deep breath before responding. This helps you stay focused and clear-headed in your response.

## CHALLENGE THE BEHAVIOUR, NOT THE PERSON

- **Focus on the Action, Not the Identity:**

It's more effective to address the behavior rather than labeling the person as "bad" or "evil." For example, instead of saying, "You're homophobic," say, "That comment is hurtful and disrespectful to LGBTQIA+ people."

- **Use "I" Statements:**

This avoids sounding accusatory. For example, say, "I don't agree with that," or "I find that offensive," rather than directly attacking the individual.

## EDUCATE AND PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES

- **Ask Thoughtful Questions:**

Challenge misconceptions by asking questions that prompt reflection. For example, "What do you mean by that?" or "Have you considered how that might make someone feel?"

- **Use Facts and Data:**

Share accurate information to counter myths and misconceptions. For example, explain that sexuality is not a choice, that queer people face unique challenges, and that people come in many identities and are all deserving of human rights

- **Offer Resources:**

If you feel the conversation is productive, offer articles, videos, or books that explain identities and experiences in a respectful way. This can help the person learn and grow beyond the immediate conversation.

While it is not anyone's responsibility to educate those adamant on queer phobia, being in community with people of all backgrounds and experiences means we must be open to conversations that can spread and facilitate love - and sometimes that includes learning from and teaching others.

## USE HUMOR CAREFULLY

- **Defuse Tension:**

Sometimes, humor can lighten the mood, but be cautious. Avoid making fun of the person exhibiting anti-queer behavior, as this can deepen hostility. Instead, use humor to call out the absurdity of the comment. For example, you can use sarcasm like, "Oh, wow, that's an outdated opinion," in a light, non-hostile tone.

- **Don't Make Jokes About Queerness:**

It's essential that humor doesn't come at the expense of queer individuals. Making jokes about queerness reinforces negative stereotypes.

## SET BOUNDARIES

- **Don't Tolerate Hate Speech:**

Let the individual know that anti-queer language and behavior are not acceptable. For example, "I don't think comments like that are okay, and I'm not comfortable with that kind of language."

- **Limit Exposure:**

If the behavior continues or escalates, set clear boundaries. You can say, "I don't want to be around this kind of conversation," or "I won't engage in discussions that involve hate speech."

## SUPPORT QUEER PERSONS AROUND YOU

- **Be There for the Person Affected:**

If the anti-queer behavior targets someone you care about or someone in the group, check in with them. Offer emotional support and validate their feelings. Let them know they are not alone.

- **Sign Post Resources and Safe Spaces:**

Help the individual connect with support groups, counselors, or safe spaces where they can find validation and care.

## ADDRESS THE BEHAVIOUR PRIVATELY (WHEN APPROPRIATE)

- **Have a One-on-One Conversation:**

If the situation allows, approach the person privately to discuss the behavior. Publicly confronting someone may make them defensive, but a private conversation might help them reflect more thoughtfully.

- **Use Empathy:**

Approach the conversation with empathy, recognizing that some people may not fully understand the impact of their words or actions. Help them see how their behavior affects others.

## KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

- **Choose Your Battles:**

Sometimes, a situation may not be conducive to productive conversation. If the person is unwilling to listen, is being aggressive, or continues the anti-queer behavior, it might be best to disengage. Say something like, "I'm not going to participate in this conversation," and leave the situation.

- **Protect Your Wellbeing:**

Responding to anti-queer behavior can be emotionally taxing. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or unsafe, it's okay to step away and seek support.