

Suggested Roommate Intervention Strategy

Stages of Intervention

Presentation of the Problem

Conflict or potential conflict between LGBT and straight roommates may come to the residence hall staff in several ways. These include:

1. The LGBT student comes out to the RA
2. The LGBT student comes out to the roommates who then go to the RA
3. The straight student suspects his/her roommate of being LGBT and goes to the RA
4. The RA suspects a floor resident of being LGBT and goes to the Assistant Master or Director of Studies
5. The LGBT student experiences difficulty in the room or on the floor and seeks out the Assistant Master or Director of Studies
6. The residence hall staff is contacted by an agency who is working with the LGBT or straight student
7. Parents of the students involved contact the University
8. There are rumors about a LGBT person living in the hall
9. Any number of other potential ways exist

Information Gathering

Depending on the original source of information (i.e. the parties involved or a third party) the specifics and the actual issues need to be determined. A critical issue is whether a room is in conflict or not. The RA is a very important source of information and the person who will most likely seek out the information as to room conditions and student feeling/reactions.

Contact with the Student

Once a conflict situation or roommate problem is identified, it is necessary to discuss the situation with the LGBT and straight students separately. The purpose of this meeting is to:

1. Determine the student's perception of the problem
2. Allow the student to express his/her feelings about the issue
3. Provide basic factual information to the straight student about sexuality and coming out and for the LGBT student provide information about the reaction and concerns of the students/hall mates
4. Develop a trusting and supportive relationship with each person involved
5. Decide upon future action to resolve the conflict

General Considerations

LGBT Students

1. Homophobia is easily seen and felt. You must feel comfortable and demonstrate acceptance and understanding before you can be trusted
2. Your approachability will depend on you; establish a relationship with campus or community LGBT groups
3. Follow the ground rules for counseling LGBT people which is enclosed

Straight Students

1. Don't underestimate the intensity of their emotions. Remember that college aged students are in the process of establishing their own sexual identity, and someone close to them coming out could be threatening to them and their sexuality.
2. Demonstrate acceptance of their feelings but gently challenge their beliefs. Role model appropriate behavior, language, and feelings.

Time Frame

1. This is a slow process, which requires much patience and energy. Do not try and hurry the students along, and give them time to adjust.
2. The time to begin dealing with the issue of LGBT concerns is RA training. Take a proactive approach. Prepare your staff for the possibilities and realities of this type of situation and let them explore their feelings. This will help staff members grow and develop as RAs and as people.

Multiple Rooms Facing This Issue

Once all rooms have been through the previously described process, all those involved can meet to discuss issues and find support from others experiencing similar concerns. A fishbowl technique can be used to have the gay and then the straight students discuss their needs/issues that still need to be addressed. Following the fishbowl, the needs/issues brought up can be discussed further.

Resident Assistant Concerns

Staff members need continuous support and understanding from each other. They must have the space and opportunity to explore their own feelings and concerns.

What if my Roommate is Gay or Lesbian!!!

In the residence halls

In a residence hall environment, we interact daily with a wide variety of people. Statistics have shown that at least 10% of the general population consider themselves to be lesbian or gay, and many more consider themselves to be bisexual. It is very likely that you will meet individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) during your time at Princeton. This page was developed to hopefully answer some of the questions you may have. Remember, you may ask these questions of your Residence Life staff as well.

Why do they flaunt their sexuality?

What people do in their own bedrooms is their own business, but I saw two guys walking across campus holding hands. One of the worst forms of oppression for a human being is to be denied emotional expression. Curiously, it is called "expressing love" when heterosexuals hold hands, but "flaunting" when gays and lesbians express their love. How would heterosexuals react if they could not hold hands, kiss, dance together, go to romantic dinners, or be married? Gays and lesbians who are open with their affections are not trying to shock others, but are just doing what is natural to them and others.

What should I do if a friend tells me that he or she is gay? What does that say about me?

Most LGBT people who "come out" would like the same sincere acceptance and encouragement you might want when you tell a friend something special about yourself. Because of many people's "homophobic" attitude (fear and derision of same sex relationships), many gays are afraid of rejection from their friends. You might first honestly ask yourself how you feel about this news and then discuss it as a caring friend.

Some people who find out a close friend is LGBT wonder, "What does that mean about me?" This is a natural reaction. What it probably means is that your friend trusts you very much. However, liking someone gay does not make you gay any more than liking someone smart makes you smart.

If my roommate "comes out" to me, does that mean that he or she thinks that I'm gay too? Is it a proposition for sex?

There is a big difference between "coming out" and "coming on." As discussed above, most gay people who come out want to be accepted, not hassled. Sometimes a gay person might "come on" to you, tell you they are attracted to you, or want an intimate relationship with you. You can handle it in the same manner that you would handle a heterosexual approach. Gay love is as serious and legitimate as heterosexual love. Again, you should discuss it with your friend.

Suggested Roommate Intervention Strategy

Stages of Intervention

Presentation of the Problem

Conflict or potential conflict between LGBT and straight roommates may come to the residence hall staff in several ways. These include:

1. The LGBT student comes out to the RA
2. The LGBT student comes out to the roommates who then go to the RA
3. The straight student suspects his/her roommate of being LGBT and goes to the RA
4. The RA suspects a floor resident of being LGBT and goes to the Assistant Master or Director of Studies
5. The LGBT student experiences difficulty in the room or on the floor and seeks out the Assistant Master or Director of Studies
6. The residence hall staff is contacted by an agency who is working with the LGBT or straight student
7. Parents of the students involved contact the University
8. There are rumors about a LGBT person living in the hall
9. Any number of other potential ways exist

Information Gathering

Depending on the original source of information (i.e. the parties involved or a third party) the specifics and the actual issues need to be determined. A critical issue is whether a room is in conflict or not. The RA is a very important source of information and the person who will most likely seek out the information as to room conditions and student feeling/reactions.

Contact with the Student

Once a conflict situation or roommate problem is identified, it is necessary to discuss the situation with the LGBT and straight students separately. The purpose of this meeting is to:

1. Determine the student's perception of the problem
2. Allow the student to express his/her feelings about the issue
3. Provide basic factual information to the straight student about sexuality and coming out and for the LGBT student provide information about the reaction and concerns of the students/hall mates
4. Develop a trusting and supportive relationship with each person involved
5. Decide upon future action to resolve the conflict

A basic premise must be set forth in those meetings which is that all effort will be made to resolve the conflict and that terminating roommate relationship is not an acceptable option (unless the safety of the LGBT student is in danger).

Roommate Negotiation

The roommates are brought together to begin the process of negotiating a resolution to the conflict. In this process, it is important to set the ground rules by which the discussion will operate. The emotion which will be present will require the facilitator to very carefully guard against name calling, verbal and non-verbal blocks to communication and attempts to blame one another for the problem. Issues, which may be addressed in this session, are:

1. Homophobia
2. Debunking myths
3. Acknowledging the difficulty of the situation and the emotions which exist
4. Acknowledgement of the value system each holds
5. Each person's ability to handle this situation as an adult (implying the expectation they do and that parents are not needed to help resolve the issues)
6. Specific points for negotiation may include
 - a. Visitation issues
 - b. Appropriate expressions of affection in the room—appropriate to be defined
 - c. Behavior or public expression of gayness (i.e. verbal expression, posters, publications, etc.)
 - d. Conscious rejecting/hostile behaviors (i.e. verbal statements, invasion of persona property, hazing)
 - e. Techniques to deal with non-roommates who attempt to become involved in creating conflict
 - f. Strategies to handle future conflict issues

The facilitator should use conflict management techniques during all interactions with roommates. It is very important that the facilitator be seen as neutral in the process. Both sides of the issues must feel a sense of trust and acceptance from the facilitator. It is suggested that a roommate contract be the end result of the negotiation process.

Follow-up

The RA must keep close tabs on the progress of the room. This can be done formally through scheduled meetings or informally. The RA's role remains one of support and monitor. The RA needs to make efforts to keep personal contact with both straight and LGBT students, in order to continue the sense of support and trust. It will also be possible through this contract to assess the success of the intervention and need for continued attention.

What if my Roommate is Gay or Lesbian!!!

In the residence halls

In a residence hall environment, we interact daily with a wide variety of people. Statistics have shown that at least 10% of the general population consider themselves to be lesbian or gay, and many more consider themselves to be bisexual. It is very likely that you will meet individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) during your time at Princeton. This page was developed to hopefully answer some of the questions you may have. Remember, you may ask these questions of your Residence Life staff as well.

Why do they flaunt their sexuality?

What people do in their own bedrooms is their own business, but I saw two guys walking across campus holding hands. One of the worst forms of oppression for a human being is to be denied emotional expression. Curiously, it is called "expressing love" when heterosexuals hold hands, but "flaunting" when gays and lesbians express their love. How would heterosexuals react if they could not hold hands, kiss, dance together, go to romantic dinners, or be married? Gays and lesbians who are open with their affections are not trying to shock others, but are just doing what is natural to them and others.

What should I do if a friend tells me that he or she is gay? What does that say about me?

Most LGBT people who "come out" would like the same sincere acceptance and encouragement you might want when you tell a friend something special about yourself. Because of many people's "homophobic" attitude (fear and derision of same sex relationships), many gays are afraid of rejection from their friends. You might first honestly ask yourself how you feel about this news and then discuss it as a caring friend.

Some people who find out a close friend is LGBT wonder, "What does that mean about me?" This is a natural reaction. What it probably means is that your friend trusts you very much. However, liking someone gay does not make you gay any more than liking someone smart makes you smart.

If my roommate "comes out" to me, does that mean that he or she thinks that I'm gay too? Is it a proposition for sex?

There is a big difference between "coming out" and "coming on." As discussed above, most gay people who come out want to be accepted, not hassled. Sometimes a gay person might "come on" to you, tell you they are attracted to you, or want an intimate relationship with you. You can handle it in the same manner that you would handle a heterosexual approach. Gay love is as serious and legitimate as heterosexual love. Again, you should discuss it with your friend.

If I accept my LGBT roommate, will he or she bring in lots of LGBT friends and push me out?

A formerly taboo subject will be out in the open. You may feel uncomfortable from a lack of experience dealing with gay people who are not "closeted." The LGBT friends should respect non-LGBT people just as LGBT people expect to be respected. Visits by LGBT folks are a good opportunity to learn about this large and diverse segment of the population. However, be cautious about presuming that all your roommate's friends are LGBT. His or her best friends may be straight.

Won't my friends or parents think I'm gay if I have a gay roommate or friend or defend equal rights for gay people?

Defending equal rights for gays is often a courageous stance to take. Some people may conclude that such a person has a vested interest to do so. It is up to you whether you feel that the people you are defending are worth the risk of occasional accusations or assumptions by others. Remember that a word from heterosexual friends and allies in defense or support of gay rights can go a long way to help change people's minds.

Now that I know my roommate is gay, I don't feel comfortable about nudity, dressing, showering, etc.

More than likely, you have been living together long enough to trust each other. There is no reason for the trust to diminish now. Your roommate has been gay or lesbian all along! Bear in mind that gays are not always comfortable with non-gays, either. Gay people, just like straight people, are attracted to certain types of folks. Most gays and lesbians are not sexually interested in heterosexuals, just as the reverse is true.

This information was developed and published by the University of Georgia Residence Life Staff and adapted from a brochure from The Ohio State University.

Taken from the UCLA LGBT web site: www.saonet.ucla.edu/lgbt/support_roommate.html