



# Sexual Misconduct and Safety in A.A. Workshop

September 14, 2024



# I Am Responsible

I Am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.



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# Ask It Basket

- You can scan the QR code to the right
- The QR will continue to be on every slide
- Scanning it now gives you to a chance during the presentation to anonymously ask questions.
- During the presentation we will read any questions and try to answer them.



# Survey is Still Open

- The Survey results will be reported live later in the presentation. You still have time to take the anonymous survey.



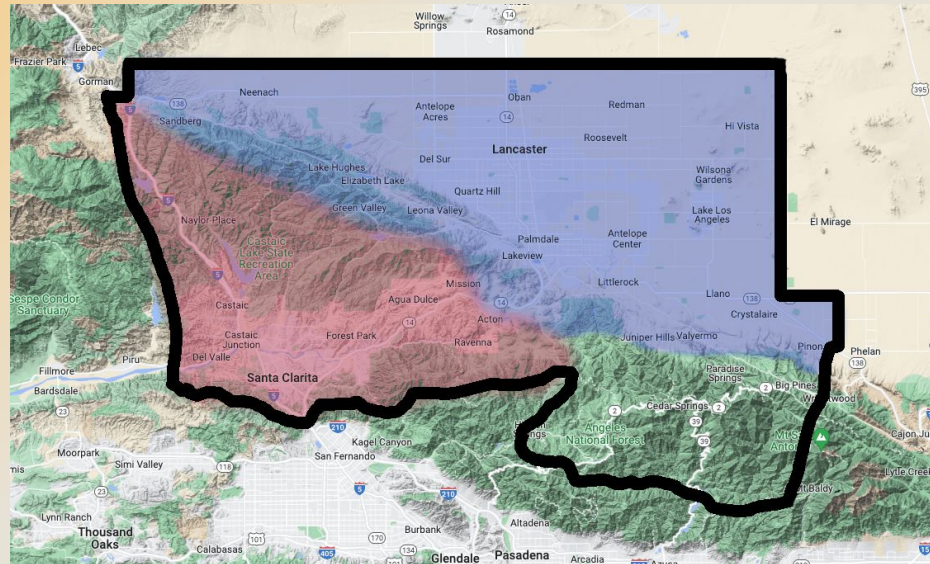
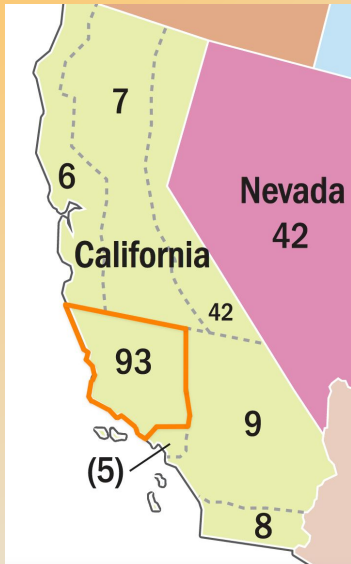
# General Service Representatives

- The Presenters are GSRs (General Service Representatives) from Your Area 93 and District 7.
  - Judy F., GSR- Rafters
  - Carissa J., GSR- Women's Bean Bag Toss, Stepping Stones, SCV
  - Leslie M., GSR- Daily Reflections, Stepping Stones, SCV
  - Malik R., GSR- Rainbow Group, in the AV
  - Doug W., GSR- Just for Today, Stepping Stones, SCV



# Area 93, District 7

- This workshop is presented by the Area 93, District 7
  - This is your Area and District!
- Six areas in California. There are 93 areas in the US and Canada.
- District 7 is composed of two valleys- The SCV and the AV



# Overview

- **Safety First:** Address concerns to create a safe meeting space. Prioritize emergencies—don't hesitate to call 911.
- **Primary Focus:** Keep A.A.'s main goal—helping alcoholics achieve sobriety—at the forefront to minimize issues. (Tradition 5)
- **Core Principles:** Love and tolerance guide us; respect and understanding are key (BB pg. 84)
- **Creating a Safe Environment:** Foster respect and support within the group to prevent inappropriate behavior and protect A.A. members.



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# Subjects Covered

Autonomy and Group Action

A.A. Membership

Dealing with Disruptions

Group Safety and Unity

A.A. and the Law

Safety and A.A. in the Digital Age

Emergencies

Keeping the Focus on Our Primary Purpose

What Can Groups and A.A. Members Do?

Personal Action on Unacceptable Behavior

Medications

Group Action

Groups and Meetings

Show Survey Results

Resources for A.A. Members and A.A. Groups

Experiences (as time permits)

Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity



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# The Traditions



- **From the Big Book, pg. 563 “Our A.A. experience has taught us that:”**
- “Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.” —**Tradition One** (Long Form)
- “Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.” — **Tradition Three** (Long Form)
- “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.” — **Tradition Four** (Short Form)
- “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” — **Tradition Five** (Short Form)
- “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.” — **Tradition 12** (Short Form)

# Safety is an Important Issue Within A.A.

- **A.A. as a Community:** A.A. groups are **spiritual** communities focused on sobriety, but societal challenges can arise.
- **Fostering Respect:** By creating an environment of respect and support, groups can help victims of inappropriate behavior and prevent future incidents.
- **Reflecting Society:** Issues from the outside world can appear in A.A. meetings. Building trust is essential for ensuring safety.
- **Primary Purpose:** A.A. meetings should be safe spaces where alcoholics can focus on sobriety, fulfilling the group's mission to help those still struggling.



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# Autonomy and Group Action

- **Tradition Nine:** A.A. isn't organized as an institution; members and groups ensure safety.
- **No Central Authority:** A.A. operates without a governing body; behavior is guided by group conscience (Tradition 4).
- **Group Initiatives:** Many groups actively work to minimize distractions and disruptions, focusing on member safety. May add a Group Conscience on behavior (e.g., no cross-talk, etc.)



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# A.A. Membership

- **A.A. membership** has never been contingent on any specific behavioral or moral standards—beyond those based on common sense, courtesy, and the enduring values of kindness, love, and tolerance.
- **A.A.'s Third Tradition** states that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. This openness helps define our character as a diverse Fellowship, but it also requires us to be mindful of group and individual safety.
- However, some people come into **A.A. without a clear understanding of what constitutes appropriate behavior** in meetings or around other members. A person can be sober in A.A. but may still not fully grasp what is acceptable behavior.



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# Dealing with Disruptions

- **Maintaining Balance:** Most groups balance spontaneity and structure, but disruptive individuals can threaten unity and safety.
- **Impact of Disruption:** Confrontational or aggressive behavior can shift the meeting's focus, hindering A.A.'s mission to help members stay sober.
- **Group Responses:**
  - **Plans in Place:** Some groups have procedures to address disruptive behavior, protecting the group's welfare.
  - **Clear Expectations:** Chairpersons (Secretaries) often set behavior expectations at the start of meetings.
  - **Taking Action:** Groups may announce that illegal or disruptive behavior won't be tolerated and may ask disruptive members to leave. Authorities can be contacted if safety is at risk.



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# Group Safety and Unity

- **Common Issues:** Groups address issues like sexual harassment, threats, bullying, financial coercion, intolerance, and pressure on outside issues (e.g., politics, religion, hygiene, clothing).
- **Group Guidelines:** Some groups create guidelines to maintain safety. Inappropriate behavior can be addressed directly or discussed at business meetings to form a group consensus.
- **Last Resort:** Disruptive members may be asked to leave temporarily to protect the group's welfare and unity.
- **Safety First:** If safety is threatened or laws are violated, calling authorities is appropriate and doesn't violate A.A. Traditions.
- **Serious Concerns:** Inappropriate behavior, like unwanted sexual attention or targeting newcomers, may require law enforcement or professional help.
- **Victim Support:** Victims can report issues to the group through a sponsor or trusted friend, allowing the group to address the situation and ensure a safe environment for sobriety.



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# A.A. and the Law

- **Legal Responsibility:** A.A. membership does not exempt anyone from local laws. Members are still “citizens of the world” and subject to legal regulations.
- **Group Guidelines:** Many groups, through group conscience, have set guidelines on when to involve authorities and handle issues legally.
- **No Tolerance for Illegal Acts:** A.A. groups are not obligated to tolerate illegal behavior, and any illegal activity at meetings is subject to the same laws as outside the meetings.
- **Common Issues:** Groups have encountered illegal acts such as violence (fights), theft, embezzlement, and drug sales.



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# Some Legal Experience

- Alcoholics Anonymous and SCV Central Office was once sued. A family was upset that A.A. did not help enough and want to hold A.A. responsible.
  - Outcome?



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# Resources for A.A. Members and A.A. Groups



- Box 4-5-9 October 2010 edition
- A.A. SMF-209 Safety and A.A.: Our Common Welfare.
- Service Material "Safety Card for A.A. Groups" (F-211)
- Service Material "Safety and A.A. Flyer" (F-228)
- A.A. Pamphlet "Questions & Answers on Sponsorship." (P-15)
- A.A. Pamphlet "The A.A. Group ... Where it All Begins" (P-16)
- A.A. Pamphlet "The A.A. Member – Medications and Other Drugs" (P-11)
- A.A. Pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" (P-47)
- A.A. Guidelines "Accessibility for All Alcoholics" (MG-16)

(See Handout)

AA Membership Survey 2022

# Safety and A.A. in the Digital Age

- **Impact of the Internet:** The same safety principles that apply in-person also apply online, on the phone, and on social media.
- **A.A. Traditions:** Traditions governing in-person meetings apply equally to virtual settings. Many groups address safety and anonymity in their opening announcements.
- **Preventing Cyberbullying:** Some virtual groups create service positions to handle online safety and adjust security settings to protect against “trolls.”
- **Anonymity:** Taking photos at A.A. meetings violates Tradition 11, which protects member privacy and ensures a safe, confidential environment.



# Prescribed Medications

- Our PRIMARY PURPOSE and focus in AA is on our COMMON PROBLEM and our COMMON SOLUTION, as outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.
- From pg. 133 of the Big Book: "...this does not mean that we disregard human health measures. God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists and practitioners of various kinds. Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons."
- The important point to remember is that WE ARE NOT DOCTORS! And, even if "we" are, we are most likely not serving as an individual A.A. member's personal physician!
- A.A. members do not have the right to require others in the fellowship to disclose, curtail, or cease the used of medications prescribed by and taken according to physician direction.
- An A.A. approved pamphlet entitled, "The AA Member: Medications and Other Drugs," is available and addresses this issue in depth.



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# Emergencies

- **Potential Emergencies:** Injuries, accidents, fires, and other emergencies can happen during meetings.
- **Preparation:** Groups can create emergency plans and procedures, often with input from landlords or local authorities.
- **Immediate Action:** In an emergency, addressing the situation takes priority over the meeting. Don't hesitate to call emergency services.



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# Keeping the Focus on Our Primary Purpose

- **Shared Solution:** Our common experience as alcoholics and the A.A. solution can help reduce negative behaviors. “Love and tolerance” is our guiding code.
- **Importance of Safety:** Safety is essential for effective meetings, enabling members to focus on recovery and sobriety.
- **Guided by Traditions:** Handling situations with good judgment and common sense, in line with the Twelve Traditions, is key.
- **Staying on Purpose:** Business ventures, investments, or services for fees are **outside** the scope of A.A. and should be recognized as such.



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# What Can Groups and A.A. Members Do?

- **Groups and A.A. members** can discuss the topic of safety to raise awareness within the Fellowship (meetings) and work together through sponsorship, workshops, and meetings to create the safest possible environment for newcomers, as well as other members or potential members.
- This **topic** can also be shared and explored among groups at the **district** or **area** level.



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# Personal Action on Unacceptable Behavior

- **Direct Communication:** If someone's behavior is inappropriate, it can often be resolved by addressing the issue directly and explaining that the conduct is offensive.
- **Right to Challenge:** Any member has the right to challenge unacceptable behavior and ask for it to stop.
- **Support and Preparation:** The person experiencing the behavior can seek support from their sponsor or another member to prepare for the conversation. If needed, they can have the conversation with support present.



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# Group Action

- **Seeking Help:** If a direct approach fails or isn't appropriate, seek assistance from the group secretary or a trusted servant. Safeguarding issues need to be taken seriously.
- **Informing the Accused:** The person accused should be informed of the complaint promptly.
- **Involving Others:** For serious or complex situations, mature members from outside the group may be involved.
- **Group Decisions:** The group conscience may decide on temporary exclusion for unacceptable behavior. Re-admittance will also be determined by the group conscience.
- **Reporting:** In some cases, it may be necessary to report safeguarding issues to local authorities.



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# Groups and Meetings

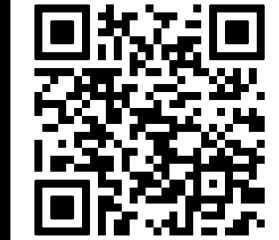
- **Home Group:** Members are encouraged to choose a home group where strong bonds of fellowship can help prevent offensive behavior
- **Responsibility Statement:** Consider creating and sharing a Responsibility Statement within the group to set clear expectations
- **Addressing Issues:** If safeguarding issues arise, members have a responsibility to ask for the behavior to stop immediately.
- **Educating Members:** Explain the dangers of unacceptable behavior during or after meetings
- **No Tolerance for Offense:** Offensive behavior should be challenged and stopped to prevent it from continuing or spreading



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# Show Survey Results

Results



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# Personal Experiences

1. Unclear Understanding of Appropriate Behavior upon Entering A.A.
2. Boundary Challenges with Long-time Members
3. Addressing Unhealthy Behavior—13th Stepping
4. Breach of Confidentiality and Anonymity in a Meeting
5. Avoiding Gossip and Focusing on Principles
6. Mixing Professional and Personal Lives within A.A.
7. Sponsoring within Boundaries and Knowing the Limitations of a Sponsor
8. Issues revolving around prescribed medications.



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# Unclear Understanding of Appropriate Behavior upon Entering AA



**Experience:** When I first joined Alcoholics Anonymous, I didn't understand what appropriate behavior was. I struggled with control, violence, and unhealthy sexual behavior, which made me afraid of physical touch.

**Solution:** It's important for members to know they don't have to hug anyone if they're uncomfortable. Hugs are common in AA, especially during celebrations, but setting personal boundaries is okay. I didn't want men to hug me until I felt safe, and this still holds true today.

# Boundary Challenges with Long-time Members

**Experience:** As a meeting secretary, I faced pressure from long-time members who expected hugs, despite my discomfort. One member criticized me for offering a fist bump instead of a hug, saying I should hug people in my role. Another member asked me out for coffee, which I declined.

**Solution:** Setting boundaries is essential, no matter your position. It's okay to refuse physical contact or invitations that make you uncomfortable. I discussed these issues with my sponsor and stood firm in my boundaries. AA promotes respect for everyone's boundaries, even if it makes others uncomfortable.



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# Addressing Unhealthy Behavior—13th Stepping

**Experience:** In A.A., I've heard the term '13th stepping,' which refers to members targeting vulnerable newcomers for inappropriate or sexual relationships. This behavior is harmful and shows a lack of emotional and spiritual health.

**Solution:** It's important to call out '13th stepping' as predatory behavior and not allow it in A.A. Members should feel safe and supported, and this behavior goes against the goals of recovery and growth. Openly discussing it helps raise awareness and promotes emotional and spiritual maturity within the community.



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# Breach of Confidentiality and Anonymity in a Meeting

**Experience:** During a meeting, I shared a personal story about dating another AA member, without naming him. Despite keeping it vague, someone shared my information with him. I found out at another meeting, and this breach of confidentiality left me feeling threatened and vulnerable.

**Solution:** I called my sponsor, who advised me to review the 10th Step in the 12 & 12 and to remind the group about Tradition 12 (anonymity) and the importance of confidentiality. Although I was nervous, I addressed the group, stressing the phrase, "Who you see here, what you see here, let it stay here," to reinforce the need for privacy.

**Suggestion:** Be cautious when sharing deeply personal information in meetings. My rule is: 'Share the message in the meeting, but save the mess for your sponsor.'



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# Avoiding Gossip and Focusing on Principles

**Experience:** After my confidentiality was breached, several members tried to gossip and speculate about who shared my information. Although I could have joined in, I chose not to. What mattered to me wasn't finding out who did it, but protecting the principle of safety and trust in A.A. meetings.

**Solution:** I stayed focused on the real issue—the violation of A.A.'s Tradition of anonymity—rather than getting caught up in gossip. By keeping the focus on principles, we help maintain the integrity of the program.



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# Mixing Professional and Personal Lives within AA

**Experience:** During my sobriety, I became resentful and fearful about my job. My sponsor, who owned a business, offered me a job. At the time, I didn't realize this was a violation of A.A. traditions. The mix of professional and personal relationships created conflict, which eventually ended our sponsorship.

**Solution:** It's crucial to keep A.A. relationships separate from professional life. AA traditions stress that the program should stay non-professional and focused on recovery. Through this experience, I learned the importance of maintaining boundaries and avoiding business ventures within the A.A. community.

**Suggestion:** Many of us enter the program in need, and while experienced members may want to help, offering employment crosses a boundary and goes against AA traditions. It can also prevent newcomers from building self-esteem by finding work on their own.



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# Sponsoring within Boundaries and Knowing the Limitations of a Sponsor



**Experience:** I've had the privilege of sponsoring women. However, I honor the Responsibility Statement. While I don't sponsor men, I stay engaged and build relationships with men and women, so I refer men to male sponsors.

**Solution:** Sponsorship comes with clear boundaries. My role is to guide sponsees through the Big Book and be an example of a healthy, sober individual. I am not their parent, therapist, or financial advisor. When outside issues like medications or legal matters arise, I refer them to professionals. I encourage sponsees to seek divine guidance and continue working the steps.

**Suggestion:** Sponsors should clearly define their role from the start—guiding sponsees through the Big Book and A.A. principles. Sponsors are not responsible for addressing outside issues. By maintaining these boundaries, sponsors can be effective.

# Understanding Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

- Definitions: Key Definitions
- Sexual Orientation Spectrum: The Spectrum of Sexual Orientation
- Gender Identity Spectrum: The Spectrum of Gender Identity
- Pronouns and Respect: The Importance of Pronouns
- Intersectionality: Understanding Intersectionality
- Creating Inclusive Spaces: How to Create Inclusive Spaces
- Closing Thoughts: Embracing Diversity



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# Key Definitions

**Sexual Orientation:** Describes an individual's pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to others.

- Includes not only sexual attraction but also emotional and romantic connections.
- Example: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Heterosexual, etc.
- It is important to recognize that sexual orientation is not a choice or a behavior, but an intrinsic part of who a person is.

**Gender Identity:** A person's deeply held sense of being male, female, a blend of both, or neither.

- Gender identity may align with a person's assigned sex at birth or differ from it.
- It is an internal sense of self that may or may not be visible externally.
- Examples: Cisgender (aligning with assigned sex), Transgender (not aligning with assigned sex), Non-binary (not exclusively male or female), etc.



# The Spectrum of Sexual Orientation

**Heterosexual (Straight):** Attraction to the opposite gender (e.g., a man attracted to women).

**Homosexual (Gay/Lesbian):** Attraction to the same gender (e.g., a man attracted to men, or a woman attracted to women).

**Bisexual:** Attraction to more than one gender. Often misunderstood, bisexuality does not imply equal attraction to all genders.

**Asexual:** Experiences little to no sexual attraction to others. Asexual people may still engage in romantic relationships.

**Pansexual:** Attraction to individuals regardless of their gender. Pansexuality recognizes that attraction transcends binary gender distinctions (e.g., male/female).



# The Spectrum of Gender Identity

**Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

- Example: Someone assigned female at birth who identifies and lives as a woman.

**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth.

- Example: Someone assigned male at birth who identifies and lives as a woman.

**Non-binary:** A person who does not identify strictly as male or female. They may identify as both, neither, or fluctuate between genders.

- Non-binary individuals often use they/them pronouns, but not exclusively.

**Gender Fluid:** A person whose gender identity changes over time. They may feel more aligned with different genders at different times.

- Gender fluidity challenges the fixed notion of gender.

**Agender:** A person who does not identify with any gender at all. They may feel that gender is irrelevant to them.



# The Importance of Pronouns



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## Common Pronouns:

- **He/Him:** Typically used for individuals who identify as male.
- **She/Her:** Typically used for individuals who identify as female.
- **They/Them:** Often used for non-binary individuals or when a person's gender is unknown.
- **Ze/Zir:** Some people prefer gender-neutral pronouns like these.

## Why Pronouns Matter:

- Using the correct pronouns is a basic way of respecting someone's identity.
- It validates their experience and reduces feelings of alienation or invalidation.
- Misgendering someone (using the wrong pronouns) can cause emotional distress and harm.

# Understanding Intersectionality

**Intersectionality:** Describes how different parts of a person's identity (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status) intersect to shape their experiences.

- Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, this concept recognizes that people face multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination or privilege depending on their intersecting identities.

## **LGBTQ+ and Other Marginalized Identities:**

- A person's experiences in the LGBTQ+ community may differ based on race, socioeconomic status, ability, and more.
- For example, LGBTQ+ people of color may face both racial and LGBTQ+ discrimination.



# How to Create Inclusive Spaces

**Use Inclusive Language:** Avoid making assumptions about gender or sexual orientation. Terms like "partner" instead of "husband/wife" can be more inclusive.

**Respect Pronouns:** Ask for and use people's correct pronouns. Misgendering can be harmful.

**Support LGBTQ+ Communities:** Become an ally by standing against discrimination and promoting policies that support equality, such as workplace protections, access to healthcare, and safe spaces in schools.



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# Embracing Diversity

## Key Takeaway:

- Sexual orientation and gender identity are central aspects of a person's identity.
- Understanding these concepts fosters empathy and builds stronger, more inclusive communities.

## Call to Action:

- Continue learning about sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Be open to listening and asking questions respectfully.
- Actively support LGBTQ+ individuals and communities by advocating for their rights and inclusion.



# Closing

- Questions



This presentation is available online at:

**[area93district7.org](https://area93district7.org)**