

# BEYOND ALLY-SHIP: THE CLINICIAN'S GUIDE TO LGBTQ+ AFFIRMING PRACTICE

(AND WHY IT'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS)

## Why this Guide, Why now?



While **40% of LGBTQ+ youth considered suicide last year, 60% didn't access care**, often citing poor past experiences with therapists. Among those who had seen a therapist, nearly 80% reported at least one harmful or invalidating interaction.

**This disconnect between need and trust isn't just a public health crisis – it's a call for clinicians to deliver truly affirming care.**

### **This guide will show you how to :**

- Understand the clinical and economic benefits of delivering affirming care
- Avoid common clinical missteps with LGBTQ+ and trans youth
- Build therapeutic relationships rooted in safety, trust, and identity affirmation

1

## Economics of Affirming Care

“You will make more money by accepting more people [Affirming care] doesn’t take more work. It’s just more clients, more trust, and more fun.”

— Jay Nakhai, LICSW

### It pays to be affirming.

Multiple organizations, including Whitman-Walker Health and Howard Brown Health, have reported a tripling in revenue and major growth in patient volume after becoming LGBTQ+ affirming.

**Inclusivity isn’t just good care — it’s good business.**

“If your referrals are slowing down, consider serving trans people. Want more clients?

Start here.”

— Jay Nakhai, LICSW

**Word of mouth referrals are powerful.** Participants from a gender health equity study stated: “A lot of the time when it comes to healthcare within the trans community it really comes by word of mouth. If someone is already going or utilizing these services and having a positive experience, they’re gonna tell other people about it.”

2

## What LGBTQ+ Want You to Know

### They want to be seen, heard, and understood

**24% of transgender patients** have had to teach their providers about their health needs, causing them to feel frustrated, unsafe, and exhausted.

They also feel **rejected when told their care is “too complex” for the provider**, and as a result, afraid to be open, fearing disbelief or rejection. You don’t need a certification to support trans clients, just compassion, affirming care, and a willingness to learn.

“I’ve had a lot of providers who weren’t exclusionary, but they were afraid. They treated trans care like this untouchable thing — like they’d get in trouble for misgendering me. But trans people are some of the kindest, most patient people I’ve ever met.”

— Finn Griffin, MyAtlas



3

## Clinical Competence

You don't have to be an expert.

"I've met providers who panic and refer out, saying 'my god, they're trans.' As if it requires some mystical training. It doesn't."

— Jay Nakhai, LICSW

### Common Pitfalls to Avoid:

- ★ "I don't have training in that" → feels like rejection.
- ★ Misgendering or deadnaming in sessions
- ★ Assuming sexual orientation based on appearance
- ★ Ignoring contextual stressors like housing insecurity, anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, or family dynamics

## Your Office as a Beacon of Acceptance



"Therapeutic rapport deepens when clients know it's safe. When they see a small pin or symbol in my office, it opens conversations that would never otherwise happen."

— Jay Nakhai, LICSW

Your space and online presence shape how clients see you. Small changes—like flags, inclusive staff training, or gender-neutral bathrooms—send a clear message: this is a safe, affirming place.

## 💡 Test Yourself! Is Your Practice LGBTQ+ Friendly?

- Do you document and consistently use clients' pronouns in your EHR?
- Do all staff receive regular training in trauma-informed care?
- Is inclusion visible in your forms, signage, bathrooms, and website?
- Do you avoid language that questions or pathologizes identity?
- Do you refer only to providers who offer affirming, competent care?
- Do you have a process for collecting and acting on client feedback?
- Do clients report feeling safe, respected, and understood in your care?

## Final Thoughts & Resources

**Affirming practices earn trust—and referrals. LGBTQ+ clients don't need niche care; they need providers who listen, affirm, and stay open. With safety and respect, your practice grows in impact and community.**

### Resources for Your Practice

- ★ [Inclusive Intake Form](#) – Collect pronouns, chosen names, and gender identity with care.
- ★ [Email Template for Trans Referrals](#) – Sample language for respectful, affirming care coordination..
- ★ [AFSP](#), [HRC](#), [Trevor Project](#) – Mental health, crisis, and suicide prevention tools for LGBTQ+ youth.
- ★ [LGBTQIA Health Education Center](#) – CME-accredited trainings from Fenway Health.
- ★ [National Coalition for LGBTQ Health](#) – Policy, research, and inclusive care guidelines.
- ★ [Language Dos and Don'ts](#) – Quick tips for affirming, accurate, and bias-free communication



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1

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START THERAPY—WITH NO OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS