



# STORIES TO SKILLS

## LGBTQ+ VIGNETTES FOR INCLUSIVE CARE

Project lead:  
Richard Vytningu



Economic  
and Social  
Research Council

University of  
Hertfordshire **UH**



# Welcome

## An introduction to this toolkit

We are delighted that you have chosen to use this toolkit in your training.

The ten stories collected here are intended to spark discussion about what it means to communicate sensitively with LGBTQ+ people of different generations.

By developing our communication skills, we aim to build a more inclusive environment for professionals and public alike.

These vignettes have been co-produced with LGBTQ+ people, and are based on real stories.

# IncludeAge

These stories have been created as a result of reflecting on life course interviews conducted as part of the IncludeAge project (2022-26), funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and led by Judith Sixsmith.

IncludeAge sought to develop understanding of how LGBTQ+ people aged 40+ currently living in Britain experienced inclusion and exclusion across their lives, in different places and spaces, including online.

A separate, spin-off project (2024-25), also funded by the ESRC and led by Richard Vytņiorgu, co-produced these vignettes as starting points for discussion with trainee healthcare practitioners and educators.

They can be used by anyone.



# Guidance

## How to use this toolkit

Case study vignettes are a powerful educational tool that can foster empathy, critical thinking, and inclusive practice in healthcare settings. This guidance outlines how to use them effectively in group learning environments.

### 1. **Establish a safe and respectful space**

- Begin by creating a supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing thoughts and asking questions.
- Emphasise confidentiality and mutual respect: all contributions are valid, and curiosity is encouraged.
- Set clear ground rules to ensure discussions remain inclusive, non-judgmental, and constructive.

# Guidance

## How to use this toolkit

### 2. Clarify the aims of the session

Use the toolkit to outline the session's objectives. These include:

- **Understanding intersectionality** Raise awareness of the concept of intersectionality and the layered complexity of individuals' lives. Remind attendees that people are not two-dimensional; their identities intersect in ways that shape their experiences. Healthcare professionals must develop empathetic, nuanced understandings—especially of LGBTQ+ individuals.
- **Exploring the impact of LGBTQ+ identities on care** Highlight how LGBTQ+ identities can influence healthcare experiences. Acknowledge the evidence that these experiences are often negative, and stress the importance of improving them through inclusive, person-centred care.
- **Aligning with professional ethics and best practice** Reinforce the importance of respectful and inclusive care as outlined in professional codes of conduct.

# Guidance

## How to use this toolkit

### 3. Present the vignettes

- Decide whether to present the vignettes to the whole group or divide attendees into smaller groups, assigning different vignettes to each.
- This decision should be based on group size, time available, and desired depth of discussion.

### 4. Facilitate peer discussions

Encourage thoughtful dialogue using the indicative questions provided with each vignette. These may include:

- What challenges is the person in the vignette facing?
- What historical or contemporary factors might influence their feelings or experiences?
- As a professional, how would you ensure this person feels understood, respected, and valued?

Ensure discussions remain focused, supportive, and reflective. Use active listening and gentle prompts to deepen engagement.

# Guidance

## How to use this toolkit

### 5. Tailor the vignettes to practice contexts

- Adapt the vignettes to reflect the participants' areas of practice (e.g., adult care, older people, children and young people).
- Alternatively, use vignettes outside their usual focus demographic to broaden understanding and foster empathy for diverse lived experiences.

# CONTENT

12

**Em**

Age 15

13

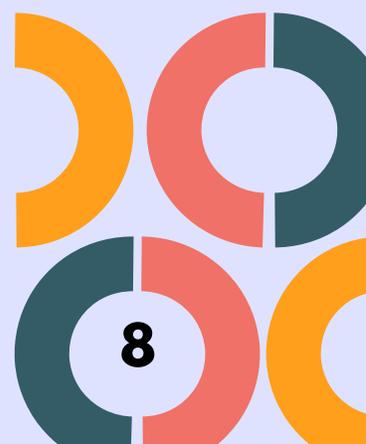
**Avery**

Age 18

15

**Ananya**

Age 21



# CONTENT

16

**Jeanna**

Age 30

17

**Stephen**

Age 45

19

**Adam**

Age 51



# CONTENT

21

**Kareem**

Age 59

22

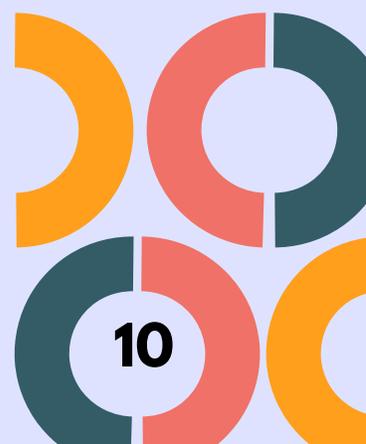
**Meryl**

Age 66

24

**Linda**

Age 75



# CONTENT

## 26

**James**

Age 92

## 27

**People**

Meet the people involved in producing this toolkit

## 28

**Further resources**

Useful links to find out more about inclusive LGBTQ+ communication



Em is 15 years old, White British, and identifies as non-binary; they are also neurodivergent. Before they came out as non-binary, they identified as a girl, although never really felt as if they fitted in as a girl. Em now goes to a large secondary school in Lewisham (London), but they are struggling to make friends and feel excluded from friendship groups. Em also receives mixed messages from teachers about how inclusive the school is to LGBTQ+ identities as well as neurodivergent people. Some teachers have also speculated whether Em's non-binary identity is connected to their autism. Meanwhile, at home, Em is often 'deadnamed' by their parents and use their birth name when communicating with educational and health professionals. This contributes to their feelings of exclusion, leading Em to feel pessimistic about their future.



- What kinds of challenges does Em face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Em feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Em, how would you ensure they felt understood and valued?

# AVERY

Age 18

Avery is an 18 year old, trans femme who identifies as pansexual. She is of White Irish origin. She lives with her family in a working-class town in the north of England. Avery began questioning her gender identity around the age of fourteen, but the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted both her education and her ability to explore her identity in a safe and supportive environment. Remote learning meant significantly fewer social connections and minimal access to support at school. As a result, Avery struggled to stay engaged with school and missed key academic and social milestones.

Recently, Avery started dating a cisgender man who has been supportive of her transition. They appear to be a cisgendered, straight couple, which has brought unexpected challenges for Avery in how she experiences and expresses her queerness. Although Avery is open about being pansexual and trans femme, being in a relationship that others perceive as “straight” often makes her feel invisible or as though her queerness is questioned. Within some queer spaces, she also feels judged or excluded, as if her relationship makes her less authentically part of the LGBTQ+ community or that because she is pansexual people assume that she is attracted to everyone.

At home, Avery’s family are trying to show their support but struggle with using the right language.

# AVERY

Age 18

- What kinds of challenges does Avery face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Avery feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Avery, how would you ensure she felt understood and valued?



# ANANYA

Age 21

Ananya is a 21-year-old British Asian young person who has just completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Brighton. She has recently moved back in with her two sisters, her parents and her maternal grandmother in West London.

Whilst at University, Ananya found independence, acceptance and a thriving activist community. She was deeply involved in LGBTQ+ societies and climate justice campaigns, focusing particularly on the intersections between racial justice, gender identity, and environmental issues.

Ananya identifies as bisexual and has been in a relationship with her girlfriend for the past year. She has yet to introduce her partner to her family because she hasn't 'come out' to them yet. Her strong political views sometimes cause tension at home, where these topics are often avoided or misunderstood.



- What kinds of challenges does Ananya face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Ananya feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Ananya, how would you ensure she felt understood and valued?

# JEANNA

Age 30

Jeanna is 30 years old, White Irish, and bisexual. She is a keen cyclist. However, she received life changing injuries during a cycle race accident and spent months in hospital recovering from an acquired brain injury. Some hospital staff were quite difficult with her, especially when her lesbian friends visited. Prior to her accident, Jeanna played in several LGBTQ+ sports teams, but is no longer able to do any of these, and her social life is quite limited. She lives with her wife in a small flat, accessed by a lift, but with little room for her wheelchair. She has been able to go back to work on a hybrid basis, but Jeanna's employer is about to increase the number of days it requires her to work in the office.

- What kinds of challenges does Jeanna face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Jeanna feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Jeanna, how would you ensure she felt understood and valued?



# STEPHEN

Age 45

Stephen is 45 years old, White British, and gay. Stephen grew up being bullied for his gender nonconformity or effeminacy, always feeling out of place according to his 'local standards' of working-class masculinity. He has often been seen as too 'thin', too 'delicate', too 'sensitive'. He was read as gay before he realised it himself, while at the same time he was eroticised and sexualised by other men. Through his life, Stephen has navigated homophobia and effeminophobia (fear of effeminacy in men), not only from straight people, but also from other gay men, leading him to feel excluded even within certain gay male spaces. Now a lawyer in his mid-40s, Stephen is financially comfortable, having 'bought safety' and relocated to north Oxford.

He is also at peace with his visibility as an effeminate gay man, and is drawn to the arts, Anglo-Catholic ritual, and interior styling, as ways to belong as 'that kind of gay'. However, Stephen still feels nervous when encountering overtly 'macho' male healthcare practitioners, who may misunderstand him or intimidate him to the extent where Stephen doesn't disclose key aspects of his health.

# STEPHEN

Age 45



- What kinds of challenges does Stephen face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Stephen feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Stephen, how would you ensure he felt understood and valued?

# ADAM

Age 51

Adam is 51 years old, Black British, and is a heterosexual trans man. Adam transitioned in his late 30s, after being deeply involved in radical lesbian communities in London. Growing up, Adam felt an almost total lack of cultural representation of gender and sexual minorities. Section 28 had an enormous impact in further eliminating cultural and social visibility of LGBT+ people, and Adam vigorously campaigned against it during his first job in a local authority, in the late 1990s.

Having transitioned successfully, he is aware that his ability to 'pass' as a man, combined with his relationship with a woman, mean that he is somewhat distanced from more mainstream LGBTQ+ communities. Other people see Adam and his partner and 'see' a 'straight couple', unaware of the journeys each took to get to the place they're now in.

Moreover, Adam receives mixed signals from other Black people he encounters: some applaud his movement into a more heteronormative dynamic, while others are more suspicious about his status as a trans man.

# ADAM

Age 51

- What kinds of challenges does Adam face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Adam feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Adam, how would you ensure he felt understood and valued?



# KAREEM

Age 59

Kareem is 59 years old, originally from Saudi Arabia, and openly identifies as a gay man. Although Kareem has been in the UK for 30 years, there are still times when Kareem feels excluded. Kareem works as a paediatric nurse in a local hospital, is single, and lives alone. Although Kareem has been a nurse all his working life, as a gay male nurse, he sometimes feels stereotyped by staff and patients. Additionally, as a practising Muslim, Kareem sometimes finds patients uneasy around him, but he doesn't say anything to his line manager. He feels patients don't know what to say to him. As a result, when he feels discriminated against, he doesn't know if it's because of his age, his sexuality, his ethnic background, his religion, or his occupation.



- What kinds of challenges does Kareem face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Kareem feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Kareem, how would you ensure he felt understood and valued?

# MERYL

Age 66

Meryl is 66 years old, White British, and identifies as a bisexual trans woman. Meryl began to transition socially, often only for short periods at a time, when she was 57 and took early retirement from her job as a civil engineer. Previously, she was married to a woman, and has two grown-up children with her ex-wife, whom she sees regularly. When Meryl expressed her intention to transition full-time to live as a woman, Meryl's wife left her and they have subsequently divorced. Meryl is content with social transition, and is not seeking medical transition.

Meryl is happiest when she's chatting with cisgender women, or going shopping with them, or simply being a 'lady who lunches'. While she recognises the need for LGBTQ+ activism, she keeps a distance from LGBTQ+ specific spaces, and has mixed feelings about the motives for other trans women's transitions.

At 66, Meryl is beginning to think about her older age as a trans woman, and is now involved in Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) groups in health and social care research, which helps her feel included, noticed, and valued as a trans woman. Meryl's main ambition in this work is to ensure that engagement with LGBTQ+ people is genuine, not tokenistic.

# MERYL

Age 66



- What kinds of challenges does Meryl face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Meryl feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Meryl, how would you ensure she felt understood and valued?

# LINDA

Age 75

Linda is 75 years old, White British, and identifies as a lesbian. She lives in a small market town in Cornwall with her wife, Sandy, who is bisexual (previously they had a civil partnership). Linda is now retired, although she was formerly a social worker and advocated for specialist training to support social workers to work with LGBTQ+ people.

However, recently she has had to give this campaigning work up. A few years ago, her wife was diagnosed with early onset dementia, and she now finds herself pushed into the role of Sandy's carer, to the point that people often forget that she is first and foremost Sandy's wife, not her carer.

This has led to her feeling increasingly invisible as a lesbian. In healthcare settings, staff often assume that Sandy is Linda's daughter or niece, given the age difference between them, while Sandy's children from a previous marriage treat Linda dismissively. Linda now feels increasingly excluded and depressed.

# LINDA

Age 75

- What kinds of challenges does Linda face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included Linda feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with Linda, how would you ensure she felt understood and valued?



# JAMES

Age 92

James is 92 years old, White British, and homosexual; he strongly dislikes the word 'queer', and doesn't routinely use the word 'gay' about himself, although he doesn't mind other people calling him gay. He lived with his partner, John (80), in their own house in Crystal Palace for over 50 years. The property and garden now need attention to prevent further weather damage and uncontrolled growth. Sadly, John died last year and most of their friends have moved away or also died. James has no family but gets on well with his neighbours who pop in most days and often walk his dog. He doesn't get out much, as his mobility isn't good and he is afraid of falling. He is likely to need help at home in the near future, but is worried about people coming into his home who may not accept him.



- What challenges does he face?
- What kinds of historical or contemporary issues might impact how included James feels?
- As a professional, if you came into contact with James, how would you ensure he felt understood and valued?

# PEOPLE

**Lots of people contributed to the making of this toolkit**

Dr Richard Vytنيorgu

Dr Julia Petty

Kathleen Tripp

Sallie Johnson

Rory Finn

Phil Eaglesham

Sarah Brazel-Terris

Pat Scrutton

Professor Judith Sixsmith

Illustrations by Joel Cooper

# RESOURCES

**Follow the links to find out more about communicating sensitively with LGBTQ+ people**

**ABC of Inclusive LGBTQ+ Inclusive Communication:**

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/nmpc/assets/research/projects/abc-lgbt-inclusive-communication.pdf> - a guide for health and social care professionals

**Gendered Intelligence:**

<https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/page/good-practice-tips-for-working-with-young-trans-people> - provide a free toolkit for working with trans and non-binary people

**GLMA Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equality**

<https://www.glma.org/resources.php>

**LGBT+ Foundation (Pride in Practice)**

<https://lgbt.foundation/help/pride-in-practice/>

**LGBTQ+ terminology:**

<https://www.gires.org.uk/resources/terminology/>

# RESOURCES

**Follow the links to find out more about communicating sensitively with LGBTQ+ people**

## **National Library of Medicine - Cultural Competence in the Case of LGBTQ+ Patients**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK563176/#:~:text=Advertise%20practices%20as%20accepting%20of,the%20care%20of%20LGBTQ%20patient>

## **NHS Employers - Supporting your LGBTQ+ Workforce**

<https://www.nhsemployers.org/articles/supporting-your-lgbtq-workforce>

## **OUTPatients Resources**

<https://outpatients.org.uk/resources-for-professionals/> - resources for professionals working with people in the LGBTIQ+ community affected by cancer

## **Stonewall:**

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources>

# Contact

For more information about the toolkit, or about the IncludeAge project, please contact Dr Richard Vytنيorgu, or follow the link to the project website.

✉ [r.vytنيorgu@herts.ac.uk](mailto:r.vytنيorgu@herts.ac.uk)

📍 [www.includeage.co.uk](http://www.includeage.co.uk)

