

Options for Responding Assertively to Minority Stress and Life Stress

This is a list of actions you can try. If some do not help in your situation, they may still guide you toward other actions that fit you better. These actions and options are explained in many different resources and throughout the LGBTQIA+ Peacebuilding Book Project.

A long list of options can feel overwhelming. Take your time as you go through them. When possible, choose one or two skills to learn and practice during calmer times so you feel more prepared during times of stress. As your skills and confidence grow, you can add one more to keep strengthening your self-confidence, trust in yourself, and sense of effectiveness.

What do you need to live in ways that are true to who you are and to feel less impacted by stress and minority stress? Where would you like to feel more secure: within yourself, in your relationships, or in your communities?

Options for Personal Resilience and Self-Protection

- **Improve your relationship with yourself.**
 - This means responding to yourself with kindness and respect (“turn toward yourself”) instead of being hard on yourself (“turn against yourself”) or ignoring yourself (“turn away from yourself”). Increase how often you “turn toward” yourself and decrease how often you “turn against” and “away” from yourself.
 - A satisfying and peaceful relationship with oneself involves more “turn toward” behaviors and fewer “turn against” and “turn away” behaviors.
 - **“Turn toward” behaviors** can include noticing how you feel and what you need; respecting your limits; living your values; being curious about your thoughts, feelings, and reactions; treating yourself with kindness, generosity, and understanding; accepting yourself, even when you make mistakes; encouraging yourself to learn from your mistakes; validating yourself when others do not; nurturing your needs and interests; advocating for yourself; and protecting yourself from harm and unfair treatment.
 - **“Turn against” behaviors** can include being critical, mean, and frustrated with yourself; blaming or attacking yourself when things go wrong; pushing past your limits; and feeling shame, embarrassment, and hostility toward yourself.
 - **“Turn away” behaviors** can include ignoring or minimizing yourself and your needs and limits; avoiding your internal experiences; focusing on others’ experiences, opinions, needs, and expectations; using distraction and numbing to stay disengaged from yourself; and giving up on yourself.
- **Build self-awareness and self-acceptance.**
 - Figure out who you are (and who you’re not) by trying new things, learning, thinking about your experiences, and making choices that feel right for you.
 - Over time, keep updating how you understand yourself and build self-trust as you live your values, take care of your needs, face new situations and ideas, grow your relationships, and move through different stages of life and changes in the world.

- Accept and grieve the parts of yourself and your life that you lost, or never got to have, so you can understand what hurts, what you can and cannot control, what beliefs need to be revised, what you wish had been different, and what will never be. When you name these losses, it can help you notice what you need now, what you need to adjust to, and where to put your energy so you can take care of yourself in the present and future.
- **Validate yourself and stay internally motivated.**
 - Build your sense of self separate from others (called *self-differentiation*)
 - Increase your ability to notice and be aware of your thoughts, feelings, values, needs, limits, and interests so you can make choices that reflect who you are, even when others think and act differently.
 - Build emotional regulation skills. Practice calming your emotions enough to think clearly, use facts and reasoning, and stay emotionally close to others while still making your own decisions.
 - Take responsibility for yourself and respect others' responsibility. Acknowledge your own reactions and needs and allow other people to manage their reactions and needs without taking them on as your own and trying to control others.
 - Develop an internal focus of control.
 - Believe your choices and actions can influence your life. Notice how your actions affect what happens next.
 - Choose values that matter to you and bring benefit just by acting on them in the present, not mainly because of rewards, approval, or future results.
 - Plan time to act on your values and interests and express them in daily life.
 - Use your agency and power to work toward your goals.
 - Ask if your beliefs are fair and completely true. Ask if your expectations and goals are realistic and fit your current ability and energy level.
 - Appreciate your efforts, even when things are hard or you make mistakes or goals are not reached.
 - Meet your needs assertively.
 - Clarify and grow your sense of meaning and purpose in life.
 - Appreciate your strengths, gifts, uniqueness of being, and way of thinking.
 - Appreciate and care for your body.
 - Pay attention to your body's signals to respect your needs and limits.
 - Move your body regularly to build strength, endurance, and mobility.
 - Make decisions about substance use that create safety and comfort in your whole life.
 - Navigate the maze, obstacles, and barriers of healthcare.
- **Appreciate all the different parts of who you are.**
 - Build identity pride, strength, and cohesion by noticing your different identities and how you are similar to and different from others.
 - Honor all parts of yourself as equal to others, including identities that others may ignore or judge.
 - Resolve identity conflicts in ways that fit you.

- Build cultural pride, humility, and strengths by exploring your heritage and what your unique identity means to you.
 - Connect your sexual and romantic orientations, gender expression, body, and relationships to cultural values, wisdom, traditions, language, and supportive relationships.
 - Balance investing in family, culture, and communities and your own path.
 - Understand stigma and oppression as reasons for resilience, not as examples of personal or community failure.
- Build a positive self-generated sexual and gender identity.
 - Get to know and understand your sexual, romantic, and gender self.
 - Develop self-acceptance and personal comfort about being a sexual and gender minority person.
 - Understand your sexual orientation, romantic orientation, and gender expression objectively and factually.
 - Question unfair guilt, shame, and blame about your sexual and romantic orientations, gender expression, body, and relationships and build beliefs that match who you really are and support your well-being.
 - Explore your sexual and romantic self and how you want to express your gender in relationships that feel right to you, bring joy and satisfaction, and support your well-being.
 - Know your sexual and romantic values, desires, needs, limits, and preferred activities and choose which types of relationships fit you.
 - Express your sexual, romantic, and gender self in ways that fit you. Choose expressions that match your body, gender, values, relationships, comfort, safety, needs, desires, and life situation.
 - Honor your right to choose and consent. You can decide if you want sexual or romantic connections, and if you do, how you want to take part in them.
 - Develop your own queer identity, queer pride, and queer purpose.
 - Know the story and resilience of LGBTQIA+ communities and the roles that sexual and gender minority persons have contributed to society's development throughout history and currently.
 - Connect your sexual and romantic orientations, gender expression, body, and relationships to queer values, wisdom, traditions, language, and supportive relationships.
 - Question stereotypes and unrealistic, binary, and false expectations and biases of gender, romance, sexuality, bodies, and relationships and replace them with options that best fit you and others.
 - Experience minority-stress growth, queer resilience, queer joy/love, and the benefits of being a minority.
 - Greater self-awareness, identity pride, and self-confidence
 - Greater authenticity, communication, and intimacy with others
 - Greater sexual and gender freedom
 - Greater community connection
 - Greater empathy, awareness, and action around social inequities.

- Have hope in the future by imagining what it would be like to be confident in your gender presentation and that, eventually, others may accept and affirm your gender and their own.
 - Feel good about aging.
 - Recognize growing older as a chance to keep learning and a valuable part of your own growth and of human development as a whole.
 - Seek out positive thinkers and peers who understand aging as a meaningful and positive part of life.
 - Accentuate your comfort with your sexuality, body, and gender identity.
 - Accentuate the positive to develop resilience and boost fulfillment.
 - Connect with the people and support networks most meaningful to you.
 - Remember stressful events you coped with and repeat what worked.
 - Take care of your physical health and well-being.
 - Remember that you are the expert on your life.
 - Be an active member of your community.
 - Expand your boundaries of community or neighborhood.
 - Be an advocate.
 - Develop intrinsic spirituality.
 - Attend to your emotional health and triggers.
 - Prepare for the “inevitable.”
- **Build skills to protect your thinking and stay strong.**
 - Use distraction and avoidance when needed until you can learn and build skills to respond more effectively to mistreatment and emotional triggers.
 - Develop your Observer Self and practice being present.
 - ***Connect to your breathing:*** Pay attention to how you are breathing. Signs of stress may include holding your breath, breathing quickly, or breathing mostly in your upper chest. If you notice these patterns, try *gentle belly breathing*.
 - Let your breathing stay light and comfortable. As you breathe in, allow your belly and lower ribs to expand slightly. As you breathe out, let the breath leave naturally.
 - ***If you feel anxious or stressed,*** try making your exhale slightly longer than your inhale. For example, breathe in for about 4 seconds and breathe out for about 6 seconds. Some people relax more when breathing out through the mouth, like softly blowing through a straw.
 - ***If you feel shut down, numb, or spaced out,*** keep your breathing light and make your inhale slightly longer than your exhale. For example, breathe in for about 4 seconds and breathe out for about 3 seconds.
 - You can try “balanced breathing” by breathing in for 6 seconds and out for 6 seconds. Notice if this feels steady and supportive.
 - Adjust the timing in whatever way feels comfortable.
 - If you begin to feel dizzy, uncomfortable, or more disconnected, pause and return to your natural breathing. If focusing on your breath makes things worse, it is okay to stop and try another grounding skill, such as pressing your feet into the floor or naming a few things around you.

- Most people can practice gentle breathing safely. If you have a serious heart, lung, or blood pressure condition, consider checking with a health professional before starting new breathing practices.
- ***Relax your core, feel love, and expand your attention:*** Notice what happens in your body when you soften or drop your tongue, drop your armpits and shoulders, drop your breath into your belly and low back, let your legs hang, and drop your pelvic floor muscles. What happens in your body when you think of something that makes you smile or feel love or gratitude. Can you expand and widen this loving attention outward from this centered state? What do you notice happens in your body when you do each of these actions? Learning these body skills takes time and practice for many people.
- ***Practice mindfulness:*** Mindfulness means choosing what to focus on in the present moment. You can focus on what is happening inside you (like your breath or body sensations) or around you (like sounds or sights). When you notice your attention has drifted or find yourself judging, gently bring your focus back to the present moment and choose what to focus on.
 - If paying attention to certain body parts feels triggering or distressing, gently shift your attention to body parts that do not feel distressing. For some people, it can take time to identify areas of the body that do not hold shame and trauma.
 - Use your senses to connect to your body and the present moment. Notice what you see, hear, feel, touch, or taste, and name it without judgment. You can also choose to focus on one or more senses (for example, noticing only what you hear or feeling your back against the chair or both). Using one or more senses at a time can strengthen your ability to stay anchored in yourself and your experience.
 - Practice noticing your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations without judging them. This helps you become more aware and gives you more choice in how you respond.
 - *Judging* means deciding that you, other people, or situations are “good” or “bad,” or “right” or “wrong.” Examples include “I’m not good at this,” “That person is awful,” or “Nothing ever goes right.” When you notice yourself judging, pause and ask, “What are the facts?” Focus on what you know for sure and what you want to focus on, rather than on harsh or absolute conclusions.
- Shift from worrying to living with intention.
 - When you notice you are worrying or stuck in the same thoughts, pause. Name what is happening (for example, “A part of me is worried”). This can help you have some space from the thought.
 - Shift your attention to something you can control right now, like connecting to your breath, looking around and noticing your surroundings, doing a small action that supports your needs or values, or getting curious about your thoughts instead of believing them right away.

- Remind yourself that thoughts and feelings are not always facts and worrying only helps if you are working on a problem you can control.
- Strengthen and practice your problem-solving skills.
 - Improve your time management by planning your days, weeks, and months in realistic ways so you can set aside time to solve problems, meet your needs, enjoy your interests, and follow through on responsibilities.
 - Focus on problems that are in your control and where your choices can make a difference. This helps you use your energy on actions that matter now and for later, instead of getting stuck on things you cannot change.
 - Take actions to change the situation that you are in, if possible, or change your relationship and attitude to the situation. Choose situations that help you feel better about yourself and equal to others.
 - Divide overwhelming tasks into manageable actions and work through them one at a time.
 - Use your strengths and values to address problems.
 - Spend time thinking through different options and choose solutions that are realistic and workable for everyone involved.
 - Stay flexible and adjust your approach when something is not working.
 - Be able to manage your emotional reactions so you do not derail your ability to solve problems.
 - Develop a future orientation and explore positive possibilities.
 - Forward plan on how to respond assertively to discrimination, rejection, triggers, and general life stress.
- Build flexible thinking.
 - Notice your thoughts and feelings with kindness and curiosity instead of trying to stop or judge them.
 - When you notice negative or shaming beliefs about yourself, ask questions like “Is this a fact or an opinion?”, “Is this belief helping or hurting me?”, and “What is a more supportive belief I want to practice and reinforce instead?”
 - Spend more time feeding beliefs that help you feel strong, calm, and connected to yourself and others.
 - Build intellectual humility.
 - Be open to learning and changing your mind and beliefs over time.
 - Remember that nobody knows everything; we all make mistakes and misunderstand things, and we can update our beliefs when we learn new information.
 - Understand that believing your way is the only right way and universally best for everyone can be limiting and may harm others and yourself.
 - Seek learning from differing perspectives.
 - Learn to set aside your way of thinking so you can listen to and understand another person’s way of thinking, and then thoughtfully consider them together.
 - Pay attention to when you quickly reject ideas that challenge your way of thinking, and instead be willing to question your

assumptions, pursue accuracy and clarity, admit mistakes, and change your thinking.

- Recognizing how social status, privilege, and life experiences shape both your own and others' perspectives, actions, and needs.
 - Practice rethinking a stressful situation in an empowering way (for example, changing "I'm not good at this" to "I'm still learning" or "This activity isn't a good fit for me") so you can act with more confidence.
 - Develop *cognitive self-defense*: Notice whether a belief is a statement of fact ("The cat is on the couch.") or a statement of preferences ("This is a beautiful couch.") or a value statement ("I like a clean couch."). Evaluate if other people's reactions or judgments are about you, about them, and/or about social stigma.
- Build a *liberatory critical consciousness* by learning to notice problems, think about why they happen, take action, and be responsible and supportive as an ally, so that everyone can have a better life.
- **Build emotional self-protection and resilience.**
 - Use body-based practices to settle your distress. Try gentle belly breathing, grounding, gentle movement, or rest to help calm stress and ease or distract from inner pain or self-rejection.
 - Make space for play, joy, laughter, awe, and pleasure. Allow activities that bring lightness, enjoyment, wonderment, satisfaction, and/or comfort into your life.
 - Use humor to cope. Humor can help buffer stress, create perspective, and lessen the impact of unfair or abusive power and make the absurd parts of life feel lighter. Humor can turn heavy situations into relief and new understanding.
 - Practice feeling gratitude, appreciation, awe, and amazement to support well-being and deepen connection with life, others, yourself, and what matters to you.
 - Build emotional awareness and regulation. Learn to notice, accept, check beliefs, guide actions based on values and needs, and express emotions in healthful ways.
 - Practice self-acceptance. Name your thoughts and feelings and allow them to be there. Identify what you are feeling and give yourself permission to feel it. Gently ask whether the beliefs behind the feeling are accurate and helpful. Stay curious about what your thoughts and emotions may need from you to calm and resolve.
 - Practice self-compassion.
 - Practice mindfulness: Pay attention to your distress without getting stuck in it, so difficult thoughts and feelings do not take over your sense of self.
 - Practice self-kindness: Respond to your pain with gentle acknowledgment, acceptance, kindness, curiosity, or generosity instead of self-criticism, frustration, or trying to push distress away.
 - Recognize our common humanity: Remind yourself that suffering is part of being human and something we all share. Think about all the people in the world who suffer in the same way that you do. What would you wish for them? This broader awareness and understanding may help reduce feelings of isolation and beliefs about being broken and remind you that you are not alone in your struggles.

- Encourage yourself to take helpful action to reduce stress. This can mean using your energy to meet a need, communicate a boundary to someone, or make a change or take an action that supports your well-being.
- Use anger in constructive ways.
 - Use gentle belly breathing to calm and steady yourself and stay connected to yourself and others.
 - Use your anger in helpful ways. Let it support action toward goals that fit your situation. Use it to protect yourself or others, set clear limits, or move away from engaging in harmful relationships.
 - Notice self-rejection or rejection of others. Notice how negative self-judgment or blaming others increases physical tension and/or emotional pain and leads to harm and powerlessness not strength and resolution.
 - Check if your anger is assertive (when you treat yourself and others with respect and care and speak and act in ways that help both you and the other person meet your needs in healthy ways) or aggressive or passive-aggressive (when you want to hurt or put another person down, including trying to control or push others to get what you want, without caring about the other person's needs).
 - Check expectations. Notice whether your expectations are reasonable, realistic, and fair and within your control. If not, accepting the facts of reality and limits and redirecting your energy toward action to meet your healthful needs is often more helpful and effective.
- Work through emotional distress and past experiences.
 - Give yourself time and space to understand how earlier experiences still affect you today.
 - Identify and understand your triggers. Learn what situations, beliefs, and feelings activate strong reactions so you can respond in ways that support your sense of agency and strength.
 - Empower yourself to heal from trauma and insecurity. Address with care and patience times of abuse, pain, neglect, powerlessness, attachment, self-rejection, and internalized shame.
 - Question beliefs. Ask whether your thoughts, expectations, and stories you tell yourself are accurate, fair, realistic, and helpful for you and for others.
 - Use writing as a support tool. Write to express what matters to you, reflect on beliefs, clarify needs and limits, and make sense of difficult experiences. Writing can support self-acceptance, self-compassion, and self-direction over time.
 - Use evidence-based mental health treatments. Approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), and the Flash Technique can help past experiences feel less intense in the present.
- Practice grieving and letting go. Build skills to remain open and caring while facing loss, pain, and rejection. Accept and adapt to change and uncertainty and invest your energy in ways that fit who you are and what you need now.

- **Build spiritual self-protection and resilience.**
 - Build a secure spiritual connection to something bigger than you. Develop a trusting relationship with what you experience as sacred, such as a higher power, the divine, the universe, nature, or your life purpose and philosophy.
 - Live your values with empathy and grace. Let self-compassion, care for others, and kindness guide how you understand your purpose in life.
 - Create a personal spiritual practice. Develop practices that fit you and allow for meaningful and/or sacred moments in daily life.
 - Bring your spirituality together with your sexuality, romantic style, and gender expression. Build a spiritual sexuality and a sexual spirituality that support connection with yourself and others and affirms diversity and who you are in your relationships and body.
 - Affirm shared *sacred worth*. Remember that all people, including you and those you struggle with, are sacred, equal, and enough. We are all connected. Try to find the sacred in each moment, person, and interaction.
 - **Experience awe and wonder through nature.** Spend time in nature to support meaning, rejuvenation, health, connection with the sacred and others, and a sense of belonging.

Options for Relationship Resilience and Social Safety

- **Improve your relationship with others.**
 - This means responding to others with kindness and respect (“turn toward them”) instead of being hostile and/or hard on them (“turn against yourself”) or ignoring them (“turn away from them”). Increase how often you “turn toward” others and balance it with how often you “turn toward” yourself, while decreasing how often you “turn against” and “turn away” from others and yourself.
 - Satisfying and peaceful relationships with others involve more “turn toward” behaviors and fewer “turn against” and “turn away” behaviors.
 - **“Turn toward” behaviors** can include noticing how others feel and what they need; respecting others’ limits; being curious about other people’s thoughts, feelings, needs, interests, and reactions; treating others with kindness, generosity, and understanding; accepting others, even when they make mistakes; encouraging others to learn from their mistakes; validating them when others do not; nurturing others’ needs and interests; advocating for others and protecting them from harm and unfair treatment.
 - **“Turn toward” behaviors** are ways to connect with others in a caring and respectful way. These can include:
 - Notice how someone may be feeling and/or ask them
 - Think about what the person might need and/or ask them
 - Recognize and respect their limits and boundaries
 - Be curious about their thoughts, feelings, needs, limits, and interests
 - Treat them with kindness and fairness
 - Accept them, even when they make mistakes
 - Encourage them to learn and grow after a mistake

- Take time to understand their experiences and let them know their feelings make sense, especially if others do not
 - Support their needs and interests
 - Speak up and help protect them from harm and unfair treatment.
 - **“Turn against” behaviors** can include being critical, mean, and frustrated with others; blaming or attacking others when things go wrong; pushing past others’ limits; and feeling shame, embarrassment, and hostility toward others.
 - **“Turn away” behaviors** can include ignoring or downplaying other people and their needs, interests, limits, and experiences; avoiding other people’s experiences, interests, and limits; focusing mainly on your own experiences, views, interests, limits, and expectations; and using distraction or numbing to stay disconnected from others and yourself.
- **Build authenticity with others.**
 - Assess safety, support, and limits. Notice when people and situations feel like green lights for all of you, yellow lights for some of you, and red lights for none of you.
 - Notice when people and situations change from red, yellow, and green so you can identify who you can turn to and trust for support and when.
 - Evaluate others’ habits, ways of responding, skills, and current mood to understand and accept what’s possible and not for others.
 - Hide aspects of yourself when safety requires it. In unsafe settings or relationships, choosing sexual-normative or gender-normative behaviors to reduce risk is a protective choice, not a failure.
 - Validate yourself when hiding aspects of yourself. When others invalidate you, support your own safety and worth. Make it safer for yourself when others cannot.
 - Protect your energy. Limit how much time, effort, and care you give to people, situations, and activities that do not respect or support who you are, especially where unfair rules about gender, sexuality, bodies, and relationships are enforced.
 - Choose disclosure with intention. Decide why, if, when, what, and to whom you share parts of yourself, and how you want to participate in relationships.
 - Practice being genuine to support shared humanity and mutual connection.
- **Seek emotional support and build connections.** Connect with your family of origin when possible, and build relationships with your family of choice, partner(s), friends, peers, community leaders, pets, and/or mentors. Choose places and invest in relationships where you feel a sense of belonging and care and can be yourself.
- **Respond assertively to conflicts and microaggressions.**
 - Pick your battles. Avoid, disengage from, or create distance in some or all ways from aggressive or passive-aggressive behaviors to protect your well-being.
 - Check if fears match real risk.
 - Question the source of harm. When anti-LGBTQIA+ actions occur, remind yourself that they often come from misinformation, bias, or unfair judgment and not your inherent worth.

- Value what others may not. Hold onto and appreciate the parts of yourself that others fail to respect and understand.
 - Build verbal self-protection and resilience. Practice language and responses that help you protect your dignity and recover from harm.
 - Take action to protect yourself and/or others if you notice abuse or mistreatment.
 - Develop respectful conflict skills. Practice intellectual humility and learn ways to think relationally about yourself and other so that you can communicate and problem-solve during disagreements, keep conversations humanizing, and support the integrity and well-being of everyone involved.
 - Work toward shared solutions. Engage in dialogue, co-create safety guidelines, and support plans and outcomes that meet everyone's core needs.
 - Support education and awareness. When appropriate, share information about the effects of oppression and prejudice.
- **Learn physical self-defense to respond more effectively to physical attacks.**
 - **Live assertively by acting for yourself while staying connected to others.**
 - Build mutual empathy and consent. Develop skills to stay aware of yourself, the other person, and your shared connection at the same time.
 - Advocate for yourself and others. Act on your needs, limits, feelings, thoughts, interests, and values, while allowing others to do the same for themselves.
 - Communicate clearly and respectfully. Express your needs, feelings, thoughts, limits, and requests in ways that are kind, direct, and firm, and remain open and curious to hearing others share theirs too.
 - Support identity growth. Invest your energy in developing who you are and want to be and allow others the space to do the same.
 - Support safety and self-direction. Encourage social and personal safety, autonomy, diversity, and self-determination in yourself and in relationships.
 - Celebrate authentic ways of being. Take pride in your own authentic ways of relating and honor others' authenticity as well, sometimes called *pro-being pride*.

Options for Community Resilience and Mutual Care

- **Build family acceptance, harmony, and/or resilience.**
 - Do more “turn toward” behaviors and fewer that “turn against” and “turn away.” Peaceful and satisfying family relationships involve more actions that show care, listening, and support and fewer that attack, push them away, or ignore.
 - **“Turn toward” behaviors** can include noticing how family members feel and what they need; respecting their limits; being curious about their thoughts, feelings, needs, interests, and reactions; treating family members with kindness, generosity, and understanding; accepting family members, even when they make mistakes; encouraging family members to learn from their mistakes; validating them when others do not; nurturing family members' interests; advocating for family members and protecting them from harm and 2unfair treatment.

- **“Turn against” behaviors** can include being critical, mean, and frustrated with family members; blaming or attacking them when things go wrong; pushing past their limits; and feeling shame, embarrassment, and hostility toward family members.
 - **“Turn away” behaviors** can include ignoring or downplaying family members and their needs, interests, and limits; avoiding family members’ experiences, interests, and limits; focusing mainly on your own experiences, views, interests, limits, and expectations; and using distraction or numbing to stay disconnected from family and yourself.
 - Co-create shared family guidelines. Work together to develop norms that support safety, collaboration, and well-being for everyone.
 - Notice what helps and what harms. Learn how some behaviors and motivations make conflict harder and weaken health and identity growth, while others support clarity, connection, well-being, and resilience.
 - Connect your sexual and romantic orientations, gender expression, body, and relationships to your family’s wisdom, values, traditions, language, and supportive relationships.
- **Build your family of choice, support networks, and community.** Find and invest in people, relationships, places, institutions, and communities where you are supported in being yourself in ways that feel right and healthful for you.
 - Create or join inclusive spaces, if safe and possible. Seek online and in-person communities that honor intersectionality and allow you to express your whole self or more of yourself.
 - Choose communities that value all of you. Look for groups that respect you as a complete person, not just one part of your identity.
 - Notice whose identities are centered. Pay attention to whether a group favors one identity while minimizing or ignoring others, and how that affects your well-being and the community’s well-being.
 - Claim your place. Maintain your presence and worth within your family and community in ways that support your safety, dignity, well-being, and growth.
- **Build queer community connectedness, pride, and resilience.**
 - Connect with groups and communities that help you feel supported and strengthen purpose, hope, and meaning during stressful times, support recovery from challenges, and help you live positively as a sexual and gender minority.
 - Learn LGBTQIA+ history. Learn about LGBTQIA+ people to understand where the community comes from and why these experiences still matter today.
 - Engage with affirming media. Spend time with LGBTQIA+-affirming music, stories, films, podcasts, books, and other media to place anti-LGBTQIA+ messages and actions in context, remember you are not alone, and learn healthful ways to respond to minority stress.
 - Learn about diversity within the sexual and gender minority (SGM) community. Take time to understand the identities, backgrounds, cultures, and life stages within sexual and gender minority communities, and what people need to thrive.

- Participate in welcoming and inviting spaces if safe and possible. Join SGM/LGBTQIA-affirming organizations, groups, and events that support safety, diversity, dignity, well-being, and belonging.
 - Participate in community support if safe and possible. Access SGM/LGBTQIA support groups, whether peer-led, professionally supported, or informal.
 - Learn from others and offer support. Learn from people in the community and, when appropriate, serve as a positive role model for others who may benefit from your experience and care.
 - Support inclusion and equity. Respect both differences and shared experiences, and help create inclusion by sharing space, resources, and opportunities.
 - Think of people as unique individuals. Practice giving full attention to and staying present with each person's full experience of their gender, romantic style, sexuality, body, culture, and life history, and recognize every community member as a whole and complex person.
 - Build connections across generations and differences. Develop relationships and mentorships across age groups and differences to support learning, continuity, and mutual care and healing within the community.
- **Build work resilience and self-protection.**
 - Stay safe in hostile work environments.
 - Hide your full sexual, gender, and relationship identity using avoidance or creating a heterosexual, gender-normative persona.
 - Self-monitor and self-edit. Be careful about what you share, how you speak, and how you present yourself at work.
 - Limit personal sharing. Avoid topics or work events if they increase risk.
 - Focus on your work and building your career identity. Build confidence through your work skills, job performance, and career goals.
 - Test safety and share selectively.
 - Test the waters. Bring up topics about sexual and gender diversity casually or use small signals to gauge safety.
 - Share with trusted coworkers only. Choose colleagues who are known to be affirming of sexual and gender diversity.
 - Connect with work allies. Build relationships with supportive coworkers or ally networks when it feels safe.
 - Ask for ally support. If helpful, ask a trusted person at work to speak up and support you.
 - Stay connected outside of work. Keep in touch with friends, community, and support networks.
 - Use online support. Connect with online groups and/or social spaces for encouragement, understanding, and advice.
 - Build work connection and advocacy, if safe and possible.
 - Integrate your identities when possible. Find ways to bring together your work identity and personal identity safely.
 - Join or start an affinity group at work if safe. Participate in or help create an LGBTQIA+ employee group if available.

- Use internal supports. Contact DEI or Equal Employment Opportunity offices if your workplace has them.
 - Talk with a trusted leader. If available, speak with a senior staff member who has shown support and fairness. Talk with them about work discrimination.
 - Model respectful behavior. Address differences calmly and encourage respectful behavior from others and yourself.
 - Protect your rights.
 - Know your rights. Learn about workplace non-discrimination protections in your work organization and in your city, state, and country.
 - Document and report harm if you choose and can. Report harassment or discrimination if and when you feel ready and can.
 - Seek legal options if needed and available. Filing complaints or legal action is one option, not a requirement.
 - Leave hostile work environments, if safe and possible.
 - Make plans to find a job that fits your needs and priorities. Moving to a more supportive work environment can be an act of self-care.
 - Share feedback if you choose. You may name lack of inclusion during an exit interview if it feels safe.
 - Practice skills related to personal and social resilience and self-protection.
- **Stay safe and assertive in conservative religious and rural communities.**
 - Develop your autonomy. Build the ability to have your own thoughts and make your own choices while staying connected to others in healthful ways.
 - Seek common ground when possible. Look for shared values and win-win solutions between sexual and gender minority people and those who disagree, when it feels safe to do so.
 - Question harmful messages. Learn ways to neutralize anti-LGBTQ religious messages by checking facts, context, and impact.
 - Build coalitions. Connect with supportive faith-based groups and allies, locally and beyond, to strengthen shared goals.
 - Create support networks. Establish one or more networks of people who offer care, understanding, and practical support.
 - Stay connected across distance. Use travel or communication tools to keep relationships strong when people live far apart.
 - Manage disclosure thoughtfully. Decide why, when, how, and to whom you share personal information, based on safety and choice.
- **Take part in social justice, advocacy, allyship, and collective action.**
 - Share and gather resources. Help mobilize time, skills, information, and support to strengthen resilience and resistance within and between communities.
 - Build self-awareness about bias and privilege. Notice your own privileges, assumptions, and biased reactions, and choose language and actions that are humanizing and inclusive.
 - Imagine better futures together. Talk with people from different backgrounds about shared needs, options, and hopes for change.

- Support a *liberatory critical consciousness*. Help build shared understanding through learning, reflection, action, accountability, and allyship.
- Respond assertively to structural harm and oppressive language, actions, and policies.
 - Engage systems of authority. Communicate with leaders and institutions to encourage fair treatment and accountability and reduce prejudice.
 - Support how policy and systems can improve. Participate in peaceful protests, advocacy, and/or outreach that aims to influence decision-makers assertively.
 - Work with organizations for broader impact. Collaborate with groups that focus on long-term, structural change and well-being.
 - Promote safety and inclusion. Encourage perspective-taking, community dialogues, alliance-building, shared storytelling, shared responsibility, and shared repairing and reconciliation, if possible.
 - Join or create accountability groups to learn and connect more in relationships.
- **Build community assertiveness, collaboration, and growth: Build peace together.**
 - Satisfying and peaceful community relationships involve more “turn toward” behaviors and fewer “turn against” and “turn away” behaviors.
 - Build safe alliances between people from social majority and minority groups.
 - Co-create shared safety guidelines and find common ground that supports community well-being.
 - Encourage truce-building, community partnerships, networking, shared growth, and peacebuilding.
 - Support respectful, compassionate, and productive collaboration, including between people who disagree, especially in research, education, and policymaking.
 - Reduce prejudice and political misinformation, and support accuracy, community safety, and solutions that benefit everyone.
 - Teach empathy, respect for individual differences, intellectual humility, assertiveness, and critical thinking in schools.
 - Hold elected officials accountable when they spread misinformation.
 - Discuss and solve community issues with people who are affected and hold different identities and social positions than you (*Nothing about us/them without us/them*).
 - Reflect on how meeting the needs, concerns, and strengths of marginalized groups can strengthen the resilience of the wider community.

Reflection Questions for Self-Understanding and Personal Growth:

- What feels missing that would support your strength, safety, worth, and sense of control?
- What skills, behaviors, or coping strategies are you already using that you want to keep strengthening in yourself and others?
- What supports, people, or environments help you feel steady, safer, and less alone?
- What are your limits, and what boundaries help protect your energy and well-being?

- What values guide how you want to respond during stress, rejection, and loss?
- What helps your body, thoughts, and emotions settle when you feel overwhelmed?
- What choices do you still have in difficult moments, and how do you stay adaptable or flexible?
- What new options and skills are you curious about learning, and how might they support you and others?
- What has helped you grow through past challenges, and what would you like to reinforce or change?
- What helps you live in ways that feel true, healthful, and aligned with who you are while staying connected to others?

Outline from Harley, D., Michli, S., A., R., Stratton, S. P., Beckstead, A. L., Sandja, N. L., DiClementi, J., Donaldson, W. V., Metzler, C., Toft, A., Cannon, N., Brownfield, J., Sawyer, K., Gepp Torres, A., Hoy-Ellis, C., Le, P., Hovatta, N., Gorman, K., & Bennion, J. (2026). *Living true to yourself: Resilience skills for LGBTQIA+ people and people with a different or no label*. LGBTQIA+ Peacebuilding Project. <https://FindingCongruence.com>.