

WHAT TO SAY & WHAT NOT TO SAY

WHEN AN LGBT PERSON FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY SEEKS YOUR HELP



If your work has to do with human rights for LGBT people, chances are that at some point you will be contacted by someone from another country who asks for help. They may say that they are in danger, or need to get out of their home country. How you reply could mean the difference between life and death for them. This sheet presents some of the lessons learned by people who have been getting and answering these kinds of requests for help.

Remember

1. Unless you have lived through the kind of situation the person is telling you about, and have personal experience in that environment, you can understand very little about the challenges they are facing.
2. People in desperate situations are likely to jump at any sign of hope, even if it is unrealistic. This can lead them to trust you more than they should, and could place them at great danger.
3. It is natural for you to want to make the other person happy by being optimistic, even to the point of being unrealistic or reaching beyond your knowledge. Resist that temptation.
4. People in desperate situations – brought on by persecution, extreme poverty, or traumatic experiences – will do whatever they need to do in order to survive. This can lead them to twist the truth. Your knowledge about what the person's true situation is will often be limited – don't take it personally.

DO

- A. Let the person know that you are listening attentively, and that you care. Every request will be different. Getting the details you've been told correct in your reply shows you're listening.
- B. If you are a person of faith, give spiritual affirmation. For example, you might say "I am praying for you," or "God loves you and will give you strength to face what you are facing."
- C. If you know and trust a person who has been through a similar experience in the same culture, ask the help-seeker if you can introduce them. Make sure the person you refer to is aware of the information in this guide.
- D. Provide accurate information about how refugee and asylum systems operate, if they are interested. See www.lgbt-fan.org and click on "Resources."
- E. Reinforce the point that only they can make the decisions that are right for themselves.
- F. Emphasize that seeking asylum in another country is almost always a dangerous, time consuming, and lengthy process with an uncertain outcome.
- G. Be very cautious about sending money.
- H. Tell the person about resources that might be of help, if you know of any. See www.lgbt-fan.org and click on "Resources" for more information.
- I. Consider the comprehension and language level of the person writing, and use an appropriate level when replying.

DO NOT

- A. Make overly optimistic predictions about how a situation might work out.
- B. Give advice about things you don't understand thoroughly, or give information unless you are sure it is accurate.
- C. Share identifying information about the person with anyone, especially in writing. The person could be very worried about what would happen if others knew about their situation. They need to decide what information to share, with whom, and how.
- D. Use your relationship with the person seeking help in order to satisfy your own interests. This is not about you – it is about them.
- E. Provide money or other assistance directed towards helping the person get to the U.S. for the purposes of applying for asylum, as this could open you to charges of immigration fraud.

***This information sheet has been produced by the
LGBT Freedom & Asylum Network***

LGBT-FAN is a national coalition dedicated to helping people who are seeking safety in the United States because of persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity in their home countries.

***For more resources or to get involved visit
www.lgbt-fan.org***

