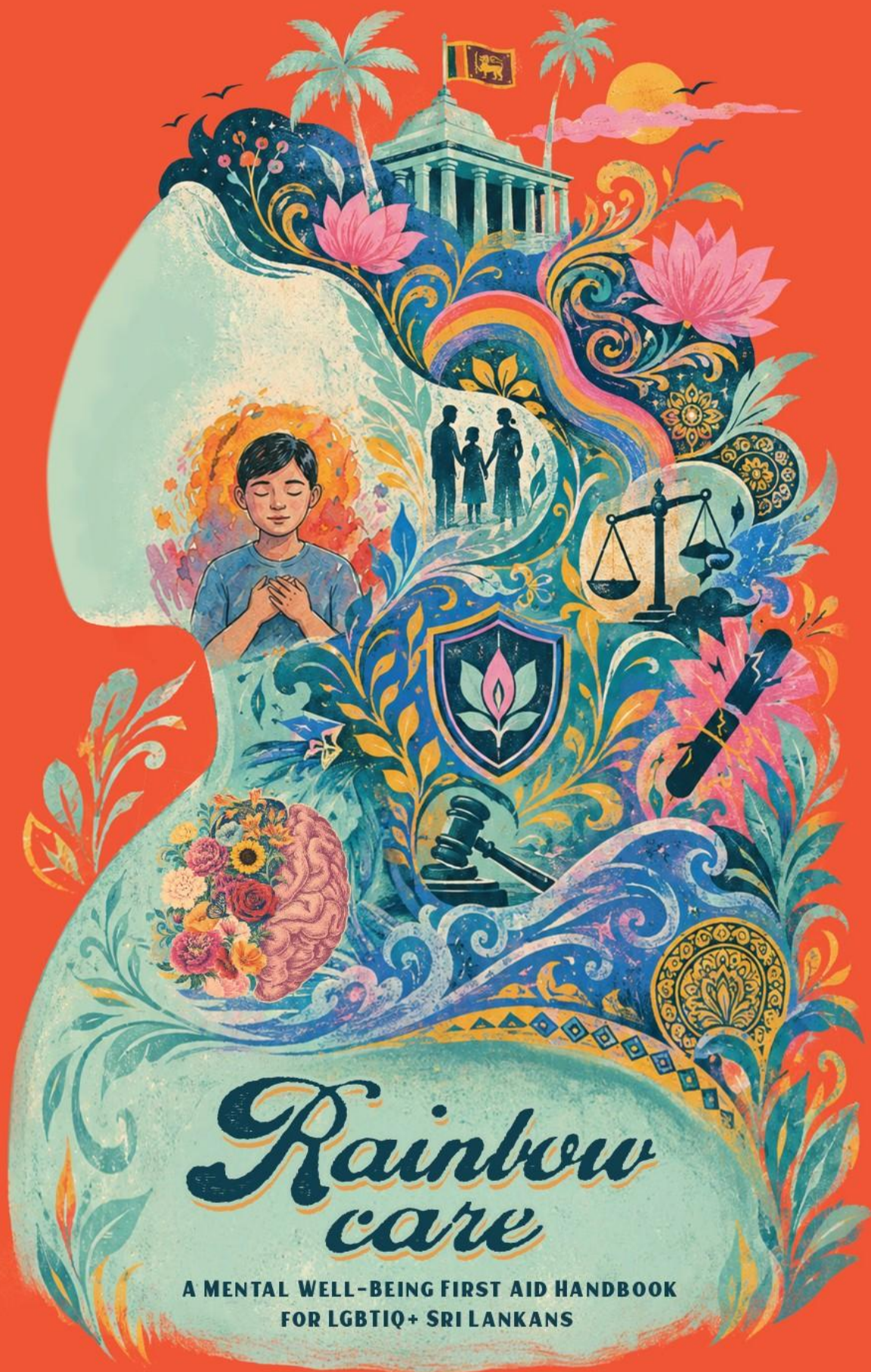




Rainbow care

**A MENTAL WELL-BEING FIRST AID HANDBOOK
FOR LGBTIQ+ SRI LANKANS**

RAINBOW CARE

A Mental Well-Being First Aid Handbook for
LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans

Dr. Pabasari Ginige



Rainbow Care: A Mental Well-Being First Aid Handbook for LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans

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This handbook was coordinated and produced by Équité, with the vision of strengthening community-based mental health support systems and promoting dignity, safety, well-being, and inclusion for all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics. Équité also actively contributed to shaping the content of this handbook, grounding every chapter in the lived realities and expressed needs of the communities it serves.

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Finally, we thank every person who continues to stand in solidarity with LGBTIQ+ communities and advocates for compassionate, non-judgmental, and accessible mental health support in Sri Lanka.

Together, we can create a safer and more supportive Sri Lanka for everyone.

Équité Team

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CHAPTER 01

INTRO DUCT ION

Welcome to Rainbow Care!

Sometimes, the hardest part is not being truly who you are. It is feeling not understood and unseen. In Sri Lanka, many LGBTIQ+ individuals tend to hide who they are. They do so to stay safe, to be accepted, or simply to be loved. Behind many smiles, there are stories of silence and fear. There are stories of courage and hope too. This book was born from those stories; from the quiet struggles shared in whispers; from the strength it takes to face each day in a world that does not always understand and does not tell you that;

You are enough.
You are not broken, sinful, or wrong.
Your feelings make sense and your identity is real and valid.
You deserve safety, dignity, and care.
You do not have to walk your life journey alone.

Who is this book for

We write this book with deep empathy and understanding to empower **every LGBTIQ+ person in Sri Lanka**. It is a guide for self-healing and mental well-being. You deserve to live with pride, safety, and peace. This book is a reminder that you are not alone and that you matter. May these pages help you find comfort, courage, connection, and your unique place in this world.

We also write this book for the **allies of the LGBTIQ+ community**; for those who want to support, even if they are still learning how. It is for friends and family who care deeply; for teachers and employers who want to create safe spaces; for health workers, police officers, journalists, and religious and political leaders who wish to serve all their communities with equality, respect, and care. Anyone can be an ally. You just need the willingness to understand and the heart and courage to act. In Sri Lanka, too many LGBTIQ+ individuals still face rejection, fear, and silence. Your voice, your kindness, and your solidarity can save a life.

We also write this book for **those who are struggling to understand the LGBTIQ+ people**. Maybe you find it confusing. Maybe you grew up hearing things that made you afraid or unsure. Maybe you are threatened, for the safety of your children or your culture. We are afraid of things we do not know. That is understandable. That is human nature. This book is for those who do not know enough but get paranoid and defensive, nevertheless. It is an invitation to open hearts and minds; for those willing

to listen, to explore, to understand, and to see the human being before the label. Change begins when we let both science and compassion guide us. Studies show that when even one accepting adult stands with an LGBTIQ+ person, their risk of self-harm drops by more than 40%. You can be that one person!

Why this book

This book will guide you through how to:

- Care for your own mental well-being as an LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankan
- Recognise when someone in the LGBTIQ+ community is struggling
- Listen with empathy and without judgment
- Support an LGBTIQ+ person who may be in crisis and help keep them safe
- Connect them to the right services and trusted helpers
- Respect their privacy and honor the trust they place in you
- Take care of yourself while you care for them.

The book will also guide what the larger community can do to improve the mental well-being of LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans.

What this book is about

This book is designed to equip you with practical self-help strategies that support your mental well-being as you move through the everyday challenges and pressures faced by LGBTIQ+ people in Sri Lanka. It is also about how friends, peers, and allies can offer first-level emotional support or be a first mental health responder until professional help is available.

What this book is not

This book is not a replacement for professional mental health care. This book should not be used to diagnose yourself or anyone else. This is not a medical book, and it cannot tell you what mental health condition a person has. Only a qualified doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist can do that properly. The guide should not be taken as the final word about someone's mental health.

This book should also not be used instead of professional help. It does not replace counselling, therapy, or medical treatment. It cannot decide how serious a problem is or what kind of treatment someone needs.

How this book can be used

You can use this book in many ways.

There is no one way to go through it. You can read it from start to finish or choose the sections that speak to what you need right now. Think of this book as a tool kit: you do not have to use every tool at once to get a job done, but you choose the tool or tools most fitting for the job. Similarly, when someone in the LGBTIQ+ community needs support, you will know exactly what section to reach for.

You can use it to identify when someone may need support - Many people experience emotional pain in silence. This book shows you how to recognise signs of stress, sadness, or anxiety in yourself or others, so you can respond right with care and compassion.

You can use it to take care of yourself - It includes practical tips and small strategies to manage stress, lift your mood, and build confidence as an LGBTIQ+ individual or an ally. Even a baby step can make a real difference in daily life. Think of it as a gentle companion, something to return to whenever you need guidance, comfort, or grounding ideas to soothe yourself.

You can use it to find safe and understanding support - You will find suggestions on where to seek help from in the chapter on finding support; the people and services who are welcoming and sensitive to LGBTIQ+ needs; LGBTIQ+ friendly people and organizations. Reaching out for help is an act of courage.

You can use it to build awareness and understanding - If you are a teacher, counsellor, or a community worker, you can share parts of this book as printable handouts or well-being tips in your work, in discussions, or in training sessions. This book can help start honest conversations in schools, workplaces, and community spaces about understanding, acknowledgement, inclusion, respect, and mental well-being of LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans.

However you choose to use it, we hope this book reminds you that every Sri Lankan deserves to live with safety, understanding, and dignity. Together, we can help create a kinder and more accepting Sri Lanka: one correct conversation, one act of compassion, and one open heart at a time. This book will walk with you.

The making of this book

As a mental health professional, for over two decades, I have witnessed the pain, courage, and strength of LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans. I too have often faced scorn and stigma for standing in solidarity with them. Those challenges have only deepened my resolve to be there for them and remind me why this work matters and made me say yes to be the chief author. This book reflects and draws on my experience in that 23 year long journey.

I wrote this book in collaboration with Équité, a local NGO dedicated to equal rights and LGBTIQ+ activism in Sri Lanka. While I served as the main author, Équité has been instrumental in shaping the content, flow, and spirit of this work. Their rich lived experiences have given me the insights that transformed the book into a truly useful and reader-friendly practical guide. The commitment and contribution of the Équité team have made the task not only meaningful and rewarding but joyful too.

We conducted a community survey with 122 LGBTIQ+ members across Sri Lanka and analyzed their responses that shaped the chapters of the book. We gathered insights from 25 key stakeholders in 2 workshop settings. One workshop was held before the task and the other after the final draft. The draft was shared among them all. The feedback was allowed and edited the content suitably. You can see the list of the stakeholders at the end of the book. Their extensive experience, both lived and observed, was deepening and strengthening the content of the book.

We consulted international guidelines, local and international published research on LGBTIQ+ and mental health. The technical correctness of the content was a key goal we had throughout the book.

We also used as resources the diverse, sometimes supportive, sometimes critical voices shared on mainstream media and social media. Every opinion, idea, and challenge helped shape this work into a more inclusive and authentic reflection of the community it represents.

Written with honesty and care, the book blends science, compassion, and lived experience. This book is more than a handbook. This book offers what the LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans needed but could not find so far, until now. It is a testament to years of struggle, learning, and success, even on a small scale. A step toward making mental health support real and accessible for every LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankan.

CHAPTER 02

LIVED REALITIES

Mental Health of LGBTIQ+ Sri
Lankans

Across Sri Lanka, many LGBTIQ+ people live with courage and quiet strength. Their stories carry both beauty and pain. They laugh, love, dream, and hope like any other Sri Lankan; yet too often, they face struggles and carry concerns that others do not see.

"I can't be myself."

"What if my parents find out?"

"I'm constantly on guard."

"There is no safe place for me."

These issues can have a heavy toll on their mental well-being. This chapter names what many feel, but rarely hear spoken.

We will explore:

The lived challenges and the mental health responses to lived challenges by LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans in this chapter.

LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans have to live with many challenges specific to them, apart from the challenges common to cis Sri Lankans.

1. The Lived Challenges

Let us explore some of the main challenges that not only disturb the mental well-being of the LGBTIQ+ individuals but may also lead to mental health disorders.

Being LGBTIQ+ is not a mental illness. Being LGBTIQ+ does not cause poor mental health either. Mental health issues often come from how the world treats them.

Constant Fear of Rejection

Family rejection or pressure to change to please family

Many LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans love and respect their families and fear disappointing them. Some families do understand and accommodate. But some don't. The bullying and harassment come from the family itself for some LGBTIQ+ individuals, unfortunately. Name-calling and ridicule at family gatherings are constant and painful for them. Such bullying sometimes even leads to physical violence. Some are pressured to "change," marry, or behave differently to keep peace at home. Trying to please family while hiding one's true self can cause stress, sadness, and a feeling of being trapped.



Pressure to marry and the hidden harm

Many are pressured to marry to protect family honor, social image, or tradition. Often, this pressure causes distress and fear. Some LGBTIQ+ individuals keep silent and marry while hiding their true identity, hoping to keep peace and avoid the pain of disappointing their families.

But this silence has a cost. Living a life that is not true to yourself can cause deep sadness, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Over time, it can harm mental health and self-worth. At the same time, the person who enters the marriage without knowing the truth may also be deeply hurt. They may feel confused, betrayed, and unfairly trapped in a situation they did not choose. In these situations, everyone suffers.

Worry about being outed before they're ready

Some LGBTIQ+ people are scared that others will find out about their identity and out them without their permission. The outing can come from gossip, social media, or someone they trusted. Living with this worry can make a person anxious and always alert.

Trying to fit into social expectations

Society often expects people to behave in certain ways based on sex, gender, orientation, or marriage norms. LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans may force

themselves to act “normal” just to avoid questions or judgment. This constant acting or faking can be emotionally draining and exhausting.

Feeling they must hide who they are just to stay safe

Safety is at risk for many LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans. Many hide their identity to avoid bullying, violence, or discrimination. While hiding may protect them physically, it can hurt emotionally. Not being able to be yourself can lead to loneliness, ongoing stress, and low self-worth, among many other key negative experiences.

Religious and Cultural Pressure

In Sri Lanka, religion and culture play a big role in daily life and family values. Some LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans are raised being told that who they are is wrong, sinful, or against tradition. Hearing this again and again can cause self-doubt, guilt, shame, and fear. Many feel torn between their faith or culture and their identity. They feel like outcasts in their own communities.



Stigma and Discrimination



Discrimination at home, school, at the workplace, or in healthcare facilities based on stigma from some cultural and religious views and not having an adequate understanding of the LGBTIQ+ community due to a lack of awareness may lead to,

Internalised stigma leading to shame and conflicts

Internalised shame happens when LGBTIQ+ people slowly start to believe negative messages they hear from society, family, religion, or media about their gender identity or sexual orientation. Even when no one is openly attacking them, these harmful ideas can live inside their mind.

A person may:

Feel that something is "wrong" or "bad" about who they are and try to hide their true self out of fear or guilt. This can lead to 'Identity Concealment' or hiding one's identity. That can cause feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression.

One can feel torn between their identity and family, cultural, or religious expectations, leading to confusion and self-doubt.

Constantly criticise themselves or feel unworthy of love and respect, resulting in low self-esteem.

Bullying, Harassment, Violence

LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans are subjected to these constantly. It can be in real life or online. The bullying and harassment can be physical, verbal, and psychological. Research shows that the LGBTIQ+ community faces bullying in their own homes, schools, universities, or communities; practically wherever they go and live.



Lack of Awareness and Myths

Myths and false information about the LGBTIQ+ community can harm their mental well-being by causing stress, fear, shame, and loneliness. When these myths are repeated, not only others but they themselves may start to believe them, as discussed above.

Not having enough resources in Sinhala and Tamil to gain knowledge can be a reason for poor knowledge. Some may know the scientific facts, but they would rather let their long-standing queerphobic attitudes drive them. Some others use the LGBTIQ+ community as a political weapon to create and spread myths deliberately.

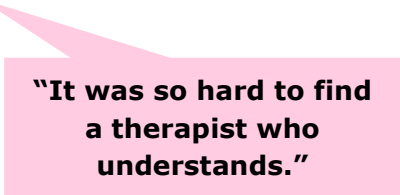
Criminalisation and Lack of Legal Protection

In Sri Lanka, the laws relating to LGBTIQ+ people are not only not supportive but also can negatively affect mental well-being. Some laws still treat same-sex relationships and diverse gender identities as unacceptable, which creates fear, stress, and insecurity in everyday life. Because of this, many LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans worry about safety, discrimination, and being treated unfairly, and may avoid seeking help or speaking openly about their lives. The lack of clear legal protection also makes it harder to feel accepted and valued as equals, which can increase anxiety, loneliness, and emotional distress.

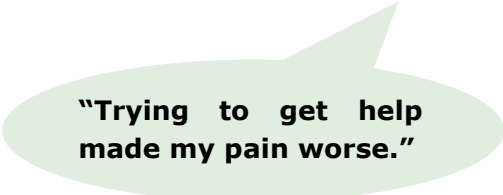
Lack of Safe Services or Safe Spaces

The LGBTIQ+ community is diverse with specific needs. Lack of a proper system to cater to these needs of LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans is a known reality. There is also a lack of sensitivity among some care providers. These are identified stressors for the LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka.

Here is what some LGBTIQ+ community members have said during the survey we conducted before writing the book.



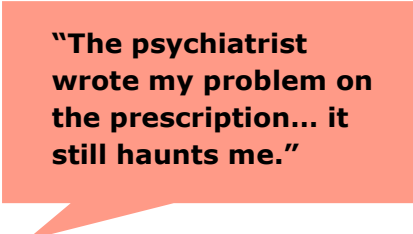
"It was so hard to find a therapist who understands."



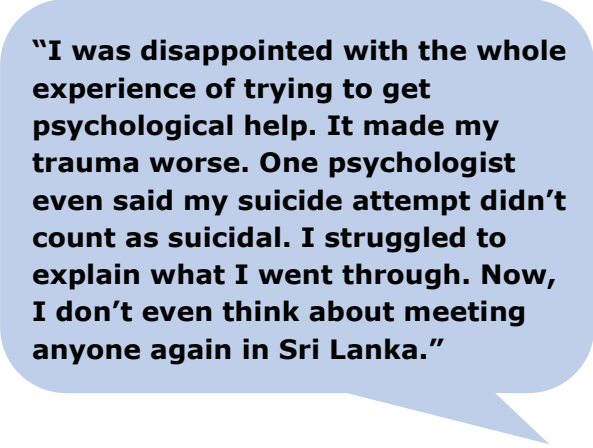
"Trying to get help made my pain worse."



"Very limited access to LGBTIQ+ services."



"The psychiatrist wrote my problem on the prescription... it still haunts me."



"I was disappointed with the whole experience of trying to get psychological help. It made my trauma worse. One psychologist even said my suicide attempt didn't count as suicidal. I struggled to explain what I went through. Now, I don't even think about meeting anyone again in Sri Lanka."

LGBTIQ+ people have different needs within their community itself. The services should be able to cater to each unique set of needs.

"We are lacking psych post evaluation for people who have already gone through the gender transition process."

"The available LGBTIQ+ service providers do not help closeted individuals."

Some of the stressors come from financial problems and the way our health system works in Sri Lanka.

"Therapy is expensive in Sri Lanka."

"Having an LGBTIQ+ friendly therapist (non-expensive) would have helped me a lot."

The following statements were shared with me when working with LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans all these years.

"What have I done to deserve this harassment, doctor? I was brought in front of the assembly and ridiculed for texting a boy I loved."



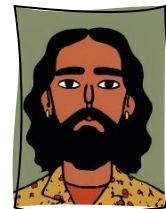
A teenage school boy



Lesbian nurse from a government hospital

"Doctor, I am not living, I am dying little by little, daily."

"I went to have my birth certificate changed. The subject clerk asked me to remove my shirt. He called all the other clerks too, to see what I have under the shirt. I felt sick."



A trans man

"Doctor, I walked to the sea that day never to return...but my Karma was larger, I was rescued."



A trans man

When a person lives for a long time without safety, understanding, or belonging, the mind and body respond.

Understanding why mental well-being suffers is the first step. Let's move on to the next step of the chapter, where we will see how it suffers.

2. Mental Health Responses to Lived Challenges by LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans

These day-to-day challenges build pressure because you are,

- always being alert
- learning to suppress parts of yourself
- living with uncertainty
- carrying shame that doesn't belong to you
- and the mind and body naturally react.

Each person's reaction to these challenges depends on many things. For example, the personality or your unique self, the support system, and the capacity to reach out for resources. But repeated and ongoing exposure to the challenges can become traumatic for anybody, no matter how strong that person is.

Let's explore the common mental health responses of LGBTIQ+ individuals to the lived challenges they experience in Sri Lanka.

Stress, Distress, and Crisis

Stress is a normal reaction to challenges, or in other words, stressors, and often improves with rest or support.

Emotional distress is when feelings like sadness, fear, anger, or loneliness become overwhelming and difficult to manage. It can affect how you think, feel, sleep, work, and relate to others. A person may feel stuck, exhausted, or unable to cope with everyday



tasks. These feelings are real and deserve attention, even if others may not be able to see them.

Offering understanding, listening without judgment, and helping someone feel less alone can reduce distress and prevent it from worsening.

Emotional distress is a natural response to difficult life experiences. It doesn't mean a person is weak or broken. Anyone can experience distress at different times, especially when facing rejection, fear, loss, or constant pressure. With support and care, emotional distress can ease.

A **crisis** is a situation where a person feels overwhelmed beyond their ability to cope and may be at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others.

A mental health crisis often involves:

- Feeling completely trapped, hopeless, or out of control.
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm.
- Severe panic, fear, or emotional distress that does not settle.
- Losing touch with reality (for example, confusion, behaving as if in a trance, extreme agitation, hearing or seeing things others don't).
- Being unable to carry out basic daily activities or keep oneself safe.
- Being unable to attend to essential needs like eating or drinking.

In a crisis, usual coping skills are not enough. The person needs urgent support, not advice or judgment. Safety becomes the priority, and help from trusted people, crisis services, or emergency responders may be needed.

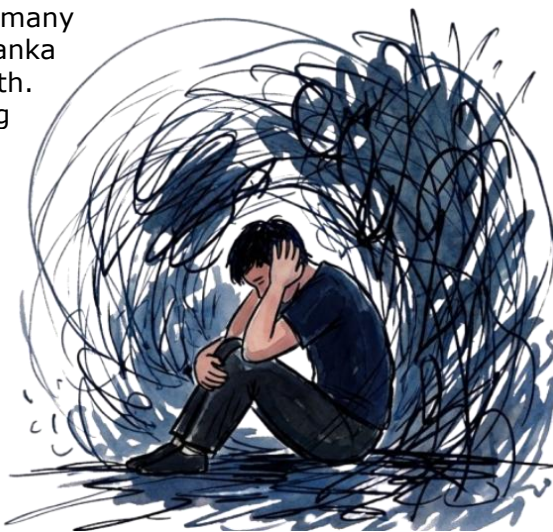
Recognising a crisis early can save a lot of damage or even lives, especially for LGBTIQ+ people who may already face isolation, stigma, or fear of seeking help.

Minority stress - This needs a special mention. When one is in any minority group, minority stress is experienced due to constant specific challenges that the minority group is experiencing, apart from the everyday challenges everybody faces. LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans belong to a sexual minority group. They experience minority stress, the extra, ongoing stress LGBTIQ+ people are subjected to, on top of everyday life stress because of stigma, discrimination, and the need to stay safe in a society that isn't always accepting.

Stress, distress, and crisis involve the following personal reactions in LGBTIQ+ people.

Fear

Fear is a key reason why many LGBTIQ+ people in Sri Lanka struggle with their mental health. Many live with the fear of being rejected by family, judged by society, bullied, or harmed. Some are afraid of being found out before they are ready, or of losing their job, home, or relationships. Living with this fear every day can make a person feel tense, worried, and tired all the time. Over time, it can lead to anxiety, sadness, trouble sleeping, and feeling hopeless. Fear also makes people hide their feelings and avoid asking for help, which can make mental health problems feel even heavier.



Loneliness and Isolation

LGBTIQ+ individuals may withdraw from others, believing no one will understand. They will spend long periods alone and feel invisible in crowds.



Anger and Emotional Outbursts

Sudden anger, irritability, shouting, crying, or emotional shutdown when living day-to-day life may be common when facing stigma and discrimination. This anger can be expressed in real life or online.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a common experience that many LGBTIQ+ people cannot avoid having. As discussed above, there are many reasons why LGBTIQ+ people may have anxiety. When people are anxious, it is shown in their body, thinking, feeling, and behaviour.



The bodily signs of anxiety are:

- Fast heartbeat
- Sweating more than usual
- Shaking or trembling
- Tight chest or trouble breathing
- Headaches or dizziness
- Stomach pain, diarrhea, or feeling nauseous
- Feeling tired but unable to relax
- Muscle tension or body aches

Anxiety causes changes in thoughts:

- Constant worrying
- Thinking something bad will happen
- Overthinking small things
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fear of losing control
- Negative thoughts about yourself

Anxiety also causes changes in feelings:

- Feeling nervous or on edge
- Feeling scared for no clear reason
- Feeling irritable or easily annoyed
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling restless or unable to sit still

Anxiety causes changes in behaviour too:

- Avoiding people or places
- Not being able to stay still but moving about constantly
- Wanting to escape situations
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in eating habits
- Checking things again and again
- Seeking reassurance often

Panic Attacks

Panic attacks happen in extremely anxious situations. The hallmark of a panic attack is that the symptoms come in the body with associated mental symptoms. For example, some may experience attacks of chest pain or chest tightness, fast breathing, dizzy spells, shaking, or thumping of the heart out of the blue. They will feel intense fear of something dangerous happening to them. Something like a heart attack. Some may feel like losing control and going crazy.



Anxiety may need professional attention if it lasts for many weeks, affects work, study, relationships, gets worse, and causes frequent panic attacks, leading to the avoidance of normal day-to-day activities.

Depression

Depression is another commonly identified result of ongoing internal struggles of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Depression is more than feeling sad transiently. A sadness that doesn't fade. An emptiness that doesn't leave and, most importantly, a hopelessness that lasts. It is a condition that affects how a person thinks, feels, and lives day-to-day. Among LGBTIQ+ individuals, depression can be associated with rejection, discrimination, fear of being "outed," family pressure, or violence.

Let us see what the common signs of depression are.

A person may:

- Feel sad, empty, or numb most of the time
- Feel hopeless
- Have a loss of interest in things that once brought joy
- Feel tired all the time or have very low energy or have no energy to go on
- Feel cut off, unseen, or unloved
- Have low self-esteem and confidence
- Have trouble sleeping or sleep too much
- Eat much less or much more than usual
- Feel worthless, guilty, or like a burden to others
- Feel suicidal and have death wishes
- Have difficulty concentrating or making decisions

- Withdraw from friends, family, or community
- Get angry, or keep silent, which hides pain
- Use alcohol or drugs more than usual to cope
- Engage in risky sexual activities as a way of relief

If any of these symptoms are too many, too serious, or if there are safety concerns, it is a sign that the person needs professional help from a counsellor, psychologist, or a doctor. We all, at some point in our lives, may experience many of these symptoms. But if they last longer and are so severe, one may need help.

Suicidal thoughts go hand in hand with depression.

Suicidal thoughts are a medical emergency. Take them seriously!

Here are the warning signs of suicide.

A person may:

- Talk, in person or online, about wanting to die or not wanting to exist
- Say things like "Everyone would be better off without me."
- Feel trapped, hopeless, or see no future
- Give away personal belongings or say goodbye suddenly
- Search online for methods of suicide
- Become unusually calm after a long period of distress

Staying silent or ignoring the signs can be dangerous. **Deliberate Self-Harm (DSH)** is another identified condition in distress or a crisis. Deliberate self-harm means intentionally hurting one's own body to cope with emotional pain. It is not attention-seeking and does

not always mean the person wants to die. Many people self-harm to feel relief, control, or release from overwhelming feelings.

Common forms of self-harm:

- Superficial cutting, scratching, or burning the skin
- Taking overdoses of pills
- Taking "poison" - household chemicals like disinfectants, sanitizers, mosquito coils, and rarely agro chemicals

- Hitting or punching oneself
- Banging head
- Biting, pulling hair, or interfering with wound healing
- Taking harmful drugs like party pills, cannabis, and excessive alcohol
- Having unsafe sexual activities with strangers

You can suspect whether someone may be self-harming. These are some signs,

- Unexplained cuts, burns, or scars (often on arms, thighs, or stomach)
- Wearing long sleeves or covering up, even in hot weather or with makeup
- Blood stains on clothes or tissues
- Spending long periods alone in bathrooms or bedrooms
- Talking about feeling numb, empty, or overwhelmed
- Strong shame, secrecy, or fear of being judged

**Self-harm is
a sign of deep
emotional
distress,
not weakness.**

Punishing, threatening, or shaming makes it worse. With understanding, support, and professional help, people can recover.

Substance Abuse

Some LGBTIQ+ people use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs to escape sadness, shame, or anxiety when trying to cope with stress, fear, discrimination, rejection, or emotional pain. Substance use may begin as a way to feel relaxed, accepted, or numb difficult feelings, but over time, it can become harmful and hard to control.

The following are the key symptoms to detect that one is having a problematic use of substances:

- Feel pressure to drink or use drugs to fit in or feel safe in social spaces
- Need more alcohol or drugs to feel the same effect
- Have trouble stopping even when it causes problems
- Miss work, studies, or responsibilities because of substance use
- Feel guilt, shame, or secrecy about their use

Substance abuse can worsen mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. It can also affect physical health, relationships, and personal safety.

Substance abuse is often a response to ongoing stress of stigma and discrimination. It could also be due to depression and anxiety. With understanding, non-judgmental support, and professional help, recovery is possible. Safe spaces, healthy coping skills, and acceptance can reduce the need to rely on substances to cope.

Trauma-Related Reactions

Trauma happens when a person goes through events that feel deeply frightening, painful, or unsafe, and the mind and body struggle to recover. For many LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans, trauma may come from bullying, family rejection, violence, harassment, forced secrecy, religious shaming, or fear of arrest or exposure.



After trauma, people may experience trauma-related reactions, such as:

- Flashbacks of unwanted memories of what happened. (Flashbacks mean: reliving past abuse. Experiencing flashbacks may show freezing, blank stares, confusion, or sudden fear.)
- Nightmares or trouble sleeping
- Feeling constantly on edge, alert, or unsafe
- Bodily symptoms of anxiety (see above under anxiety)
- Sudden fear, panic, or emotional numbness
- Avoiding people, places, or conversations that remind them of the trauma
- Dissociation: Feeling disconnected from their body, surroundings, or reality

When these reactions last a long time, are intense, and start to affect daily life, it may be called **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**. PTSD or any trauma response is not a weakness or a failure. It is the mind's natural response to extremely overwhelming experiences.

With understanding, safe support, and the right help, trauma reactions can ease. Healing is possible, and no one has to face trauma alone.

The shame comes from discrimination and social pressure, not from who you are.

Acceptance, safe spaces, supportive relationships, and professional mental health support can help people heal from internalised shame, build self-respect, and nourish mental well-being. Help is there even within an imperfect system.

**It is important to remember –
Being LGBTIQ+ is not an illness or a moral failure.**

The next step is learning how to respond with care; first to self, and then to others.

CHAPTER 03

NURTURING MENTAL WELL- BEING

LGBTIQ+ Self-Care

Now that we have explored the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ people in Sri Lanka and their responses to them, this chapter focuses on what you can do to care for your own mental well-being.

Mental health struggles do not mean you are weak. They are often a natural response to stress, fear, stigma, rejection, or isolation. You deserve support, care, and dignity just like anyone else.

This chapter will guide you through:

- Simple ways to protect your mental health.
- How to cope when things feel overwhelming.
- What to do if you are in a mental health crisis.

WHY YOUR MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Living in a society where you may feel judged, misunderstood, or unsafe can slowly wear you down. Over time, this can affect your sleep, mood, confidence, relationships, and hope for the future. Your mental well-being matters because you matter. Taking care of your mental health is not selfish. It is necessary.

Everyday ways to protect your mental health

These are simple but powerful steps you can take, even in difficult environments and times.

Build a support system

Try to surround yourself with people who respect and accept you as you are.

This could be:

- A trusted friend
- A supportive family member

- An LGBTIQ+ group
- An online community where you feel safe

Find your safe circles and build genuine connections. Stay connected in ways that feel safe. Connection does not always mean being open to everyone. A trusted friend, an online support group, a counsellor, or a chosen family member can help reduce loneliness. Even brief, meaningful contact can make a difference.

Even one supportive person can make a big difference.

Seek out spaces where you can be yourself without fear; community groups or trusted NGOs such as Équité, as well as small, supportive friend circles both online and offline. In these spaces, you can speak openly, be heard, and find mutual support.

Support one another emotionally and professionally. Build informal mentorships where experienced queer professionals, lawyers, doctors, teachers, artists, and others can guide younger LGBTIQ+ people, helping them build confidence, stay safe, and navigate life with dignity. Together, these connections create strength, resilience, and a sense of belonging.

Talk to Someone You Trust

Talking helps. You don't need to explain everything perfectly. You don't need solutions right away. The person you talk to does not need to have all the answers; just listening with care can ease a lot of pain.

This could be:

- A friend
- A family member or relative
- A teacher or lecturer
- A counsellor
- A peer supporter

Seek professional help when possible. Ask for help when you need it. Emotional pain is not a personal failure. Seeking mental health support is a sign of strength and self-respect.

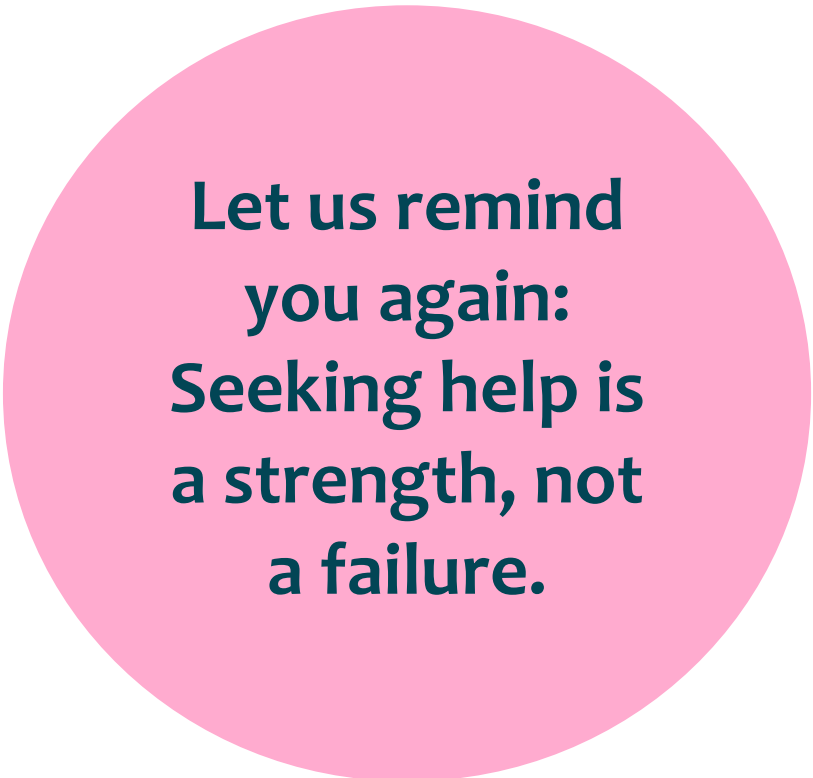


If you can, reach out to a counsellor, psychologist, or doctor who is respectful and inclusive.

If money is a problem:

Look for NGOs or community organisations that offer free or low-cost services. (see Chapter 06 on Finding Support at the end of this book).

Ask a trusted ally to help you find or contact a counsellor if you feel too low or anxious to do it alone.



**Let us remind
you again:
Seeking help is
a strength, not
a failure.**

Practice Self-Care



**Self-care is not a luxury.
It is a must.**

Take care of your well-being. Your mental health is important. You deserve peace and happiness, just like anyone else. You cannot wait till all LGBTIQ+ problems are sorted in Sri Lanka to enjoy life.

Rest without guilt. Rest is not laziness; it is recovery.

Make a nice meal you like.

Laugh with people who see you.



Take breaks from news, social media, and conflict when you feel overwhelmed. You don't have to be updated on current affairs if it costs you your mental peace.

Sleep, breathe, and allow your body to slow down when it needs to.

Be kind to yourself about survival choices.





Go to a salon and get hair or nails done if you can afford.

Buy something nice for yourself if you have some extra money. It does not have to be an expensive gift. You can even do window-shopping if that helps!

Hiding, coping quietly, or moving slowly does not mean you are weak.

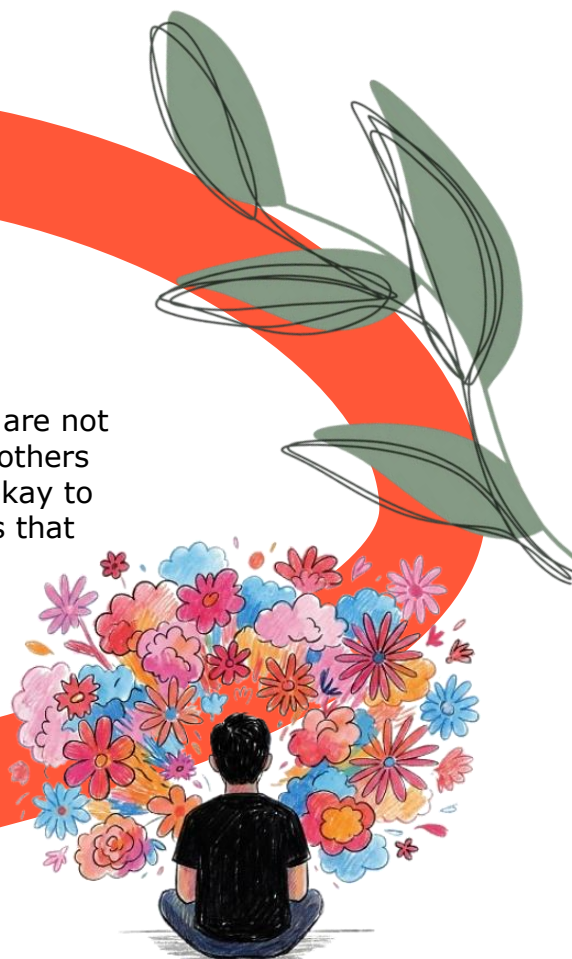
You are doing the best you can in a challenging environment.

Find joy in small, everyday ways. Joy does not need permission from society.



Protect your emotional boundaries. You are not required to explain, defend, or educate others at the cost of your mental health. It is okay to walk away from conversations or spaces that feel unsafe or hostile.

Enjoy music, art, movement, or nature, even in simple forms.





Coming out

Coming out is not something you owe anyone. It is a personal decision.

In Sri Lanka, many people face strong social and family pressure. Because of this, your safety and mental health must come first. You do not have to tell everyone. You do not have to tell anyone until you feel ready. Some people choose to share their truth with just one trusted person. Some choose to wait. Both choices are valid.

Before coming out, it helps to think about your safety.

Where will you live?

Who will support you?

How will you cope if the response is painful?

If coming out could lead to harm, rejection, or homelessness, it is okay to wait. Waiting does not mean denial. It means self-protection.

Support can come from friends, community groups, or helplines. You do not have to carry this alone.

Gentle Reminder!

**Your identity is
real and valid,
even if it is not
spoken aloud.**

Daily Grounding Exercises & Well-Being Practices

You may not always be able to change your surroundings, but you can learn ways to steady your mind and body, even during stressful moments. Grounding your body when emotions feel overwhelming can be very helpful.

Eat regularly and drink enough water. Physical care supports mental strength.

Feel your feet on the ground. Whether you are standing, sitting, or travelling in a bus or train, notice the feeling of the floor beneath you. This reminds your body that you are safe at this moment.

Pause and breathe slowly. Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth, counting slowly to four. Do this 5 times.



Quiet moments during morning tea, evening tea, or prayer time can be grounding.

Name 5 things you can see, 3 things you can hear, and 1 thing you can feel. This helps bring your mind back to the present.

Use familiar, calming routines.

Write or think
one kind
thought about
yourself each
day, even if it
feels small.



Spending a few
minutes with plants,
trees, or the sky can
help reduce stress.
Nature is a free and
powerful healer.

Move your body
gently. Walking,
stretching, or
simple exercises
at home can
release stress.



You are not weak
for struggling.
Many LGBTIQ+
people carry
hidden burdens
in silence.

When fear, shame,
or sadness returns,
Remind yourself:
*"These feelings are
a response to
stress and
discrimination.
They do not define
my worth."*

Lighting a lamp,
sitting quietly,
listening to soft
music, or
chanting/praying in
your own way can
bring calm, even if
your beliefs are
personal or private.

Have a gentle affirmation practice

You do not need to fully believe these words for them to help. Just reading them is enough to begin. You may write it on your phone, a piece of paper, or keep it in your heart.

Take one slow breath in, and one breath out.

Choose one sentence that feels even a little comforting.

Say it quietly, or in your mind, once or twice a day.

***I AM A HUMAN BEING FIRST,
DESERVING OF RESPECT.***

***I DO NOT HAVE TO EXPLAIN MY
EXISTENCE TO ANYONE.***

***I AM NOT ALONE, EVEN WHEN I FEEL
LONELY.***

***MY IDENTITY DOES NOT TAKE AWAY
FROM MY VALUES OR MY CULTURE.***

I CAN TAKE LIFE ONE DAY AT A TIME.

I AM ALLOWED TO PROTECT MY PEACE.

***THERE IS NOTHING SHAMEFUL ABOUT
WHO I AM.***

Accept yourself

You are not broken. You are human, and you are enough. Your identity is real and valid just as it is. Read stories or watch others who have walked your path, and you'll see that you are not alone. There are LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans who have accepted themselves and found their place in society. They are ordinary people. If they can, you can too.

Rising Beyond Obstacles: Stories of Courage and Hope in Sri Lanka

Across our island, quiet revolutions are happening every day. In classrooms, clinics, courtrooms, studios, and small village homes, people are learning to live as their truest selves bravely, beautifully, and without apology.

Some have taken the stage, sharing their art, their music, and their truth with a country that is slowly learning to listen. Their songs and performances don't just entertain; they invite empathy, understanding, and pride in being different. They are accomplished singers, dancers, actors, media personalities, and entrepreneurs who are from the LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka.

Some others have found their voices through law, medicine, politics or advocacy, the professionals who use their training and credibility to open doors for those who were once told to remain silent. Their work proves that inclusion is not a Western idea but a deeply human one that belongs in Sri Lanka too.

Some have transitioned with dignity and courage, standing tall in the face of misunderstanding. They are the activists who show that gender diversity is not a new trend but a part of our natural human diversity; ancient, resilient, and deserving of respect.

Their stories light the path forward toward a Sri Lanka where no one has to hide to be safe or shrink to be loved. Because when one LGBTIQ+ person rises beyond stigma, the whole community rises a little higher.

When things start to feel too heavy

There may be times when:

- You feel constantly tired or numb.
- You lose interest in things you once enjoyed.
- You feel trapped, ashamed, or hopeless.
- Fear and worry take over your thoughts.

These are signs that you may need extra support, and that is okay. Everybody needs extra support in life.

What to do if you are in a crisis

Sometimes emotions can feel too heavy to hold on our own. There may come a moment when it all feels like too much. When it does, please remember this, you don't have to carry it alone. Support is always within reach.

If you are in crisis,

Pause and breathe

Take a few slow, deep breaths from your diaphragm. This will calm you down for some time, till you feel relaxed to move on to the next steps.

Reach out

Call or message someone, a friend, a counselor, or a helpline. You don't have to talk about your pain right away; even small talk, a chat about the weather, your pet, or a movie you recently watched can help you feel distracted and less alone until you have a more permanent answer.

Leave unsafe spaces

If someone is threatening or hurting you, move to safety if you can.

Remove harmful objects

Stay away from anything you could use to hurt yourself.

Write it down

Sometimes words on paper, or a voice note on your phone, can carry what your heart can't say aloud. If you feel like you can't talk to anyone, even writing to yourself can help, such as journaling. Putting your feelings into words can ease the weight on your heart and help you feel heard.

Yes, unloading into words helps. But you may have to make sure you do it safely, so nobody else will read and misuse them.

Find help

See the Helplines and Resources chapter for support services in Sri Lanka.

You may notice someone else from the LGBTIQ+ community, a friend, family member, or colleague who is struggling. The next chapter focuses on how to support others in need.

CHAPTER 04

BEING THERE FIRST

Mental Health First Aid for
LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans

We all know physical first aid; if someone faints, you help them sit or lie down; if someone cuts themselves, you help stop the bleeding and call for help. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) works the same way but for the mind. It's the first help you give when someone is mentally distressed.

This chapter will cover:

- What Mental Health First Aid is
- What it is not
- Why it matters
- The ALVEE action model
- How to protect yourself while helping others
- Real-life practice scenarios

What Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Is

MHFA is something you do for another person. It is not only for emergencies. It can be used early, when someone is starting to struggle, as well as during a crisis. The earlier we respond, the better the outcome.

MHFA teaches us how to notice signs of distress such as sadness, anxiety, withdrawal, or fear, and listen with patience and empathy. It educates us to make sure the affected person is safe and to guide them towards the right kind of help, especially if they might be thinking about harming themselves.

MHFA is for everyone. You don't need to be a doctor, a counsellor, or an expert. You could be a friend, a family member, a teacher, a co-worker of the LGBTIQ+ people, or even someone they just met. What matters most is your willingness to help, your understanding, and kindness.

What MHFA is Not

MHFA is not about providing therapy, diagnosing, or solving everything. It's about showing up with care, compassion, and courage when someone needs support the most. It is about helping the person take the next safe step.



Why MHFA Matters

For many LGBTIQ+ individuals living in Sri Lanka, everyday life can come with extra challenges; The stigma, discrimination, or simply not feeling accepted for who they truly are. These experiences can take a heavy toll on one's mental health well-being. We discussed these in Chapter 2.

MHFA gives the confidence and tools to recognize when others are in distress, respond safely, offer support and hope, and reduce harm.

As more of us learn these skills, we create communities that are more inclusive, more united, and stronger; a space where everyone feels seen, valued, and safe to be themselves.

The ALVEE Model – MHFA Action Steps

You can use the mnemonic ALVEE to remember what to do in MHFA. It is based on the international MHFA model ALGEE and adapted for this guide.

A **APPROACH, ASSESS, ASSIST**

L **LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGING**

V **VALIDATE FEELINGS**

E **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT**

E **ENCOURAGE GETTING HELP**

Let us walk through the steps.

A - Approach, Assess, Assist

Look at the situation. Is it safe to go near the person?

If it feels safe, approach them gently.

Ask them how they are. Be kind and open.

"Are you ok?"

"Can I help?"

If they seem to be in acute danger (trying to overdose, hurt themselves), skip in between steps and call help - a crisis line or reach a trusted person. (Refer to the chapter on Finding Support.)

L – Listen Without Judging

Active Listening is a skill. We are often too quick to speak before we have truly listened. We tend to give advice prematurely. We often compare others' experiences with our own. We forget that each person's journey is unique, and generalising does not help.

Let them talk. Avoid,

Interrupting their talk

"Wait, will you..."

"Yes men, life is like that noh"

"Oh my god, what do you want to do now?"

"Don't worry about that. Shall we talk about the next step?"

Judging them

"Man, you can't be weak like this noh?"

"Don't think like that. It's a sin to think about taking your own life!"

Minimising their pain

"Come on, being called a name is not the end of the world, right?"

Comparing with your own experiences

"I've gone through worse when I came out, but I didn't think of stupid things like suicide."

Every person is different. Every struggle is different, and so is every pain.

Giving quick advice

"Don't worry machan, tell your parents straightaway. They will eventually accept you are gay."

Often, we say things like this. They may come from a good place, but they don't help. Sometimes they may even make things worse.

Instead, listen actively

Helpful responses include,

"Ok ...hmm.."

"I'm listening."

"Oh..then what happened ?"

"Tell me more....."

or tune in reflecting

"Oh, it must have been tough...."

"That sounds really hard."

"Oh, I see..."

Simply nodding your head is better than a wrong comment.

V – Validate their feelings

In our culture, we often tend to say, ***"Don't think about it now, Forget it," "Let's move on,"*** when someone is upset or struggling. But this can be taken as dismissive. The distressed person feels that no one is really listening to them. They feel ignored, misunderstood, and not taken seriously. *"He/she doesn't take what I say seriously."*



Validation is recognizing and respecting someone's feelings as real and important, instead of brushing them off. It is simply telling someone that you "get" what they feel or think.

Validation doesn't mean you agree with the person in need. It does not equal approval too. For example, if the person is talking about harming their own life, you obviously do not agree or approve of that. Do you? It

means you acknowledge the pain behind it. Showing and letting the person know their feelings are real without dismissing their feelings and thoughts.

It is all about telling the person:

"I see what you're feeling. It's real. You're not imagining it; you are not being nonsensical when you feel the way you feel."

Common invalidating statements

Below are examples of responses that invalidate someone's feelings and suffering, alongside better alternatives.

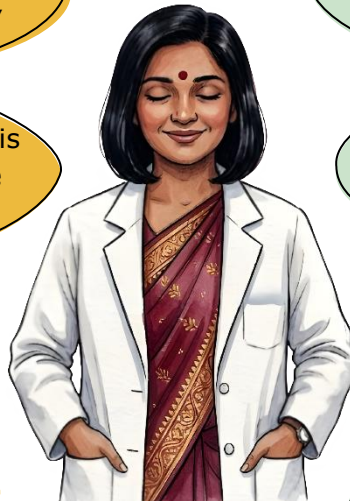
Don't Say

"Yes, I understand, but now forget about all that, let's move on."

"Aiyo that is how life is men, there are worse scenarios than this."

"Just try to think positively."

"Don't say nonsense like that."



Instead Try

"I can see how much this hurts. It sounds like you've been through a lot."

"Yes, I understand what you're feeling is real and true."

"It makes sense that you feel this way."

"Yes, looks like you are in a lot of pain / you are hurting / suffering a lot."

Validation helps people feel heard and less alone.

E – Emotional Support

You can help someone feel less alone, even just for a little while. What you can do – be there, online or in person, until more long-term support is available.

Say:

“You’re not alone.”

“Mental health problems can get better.”

Remind them of their strengths. The person may have resilience, though it feels like there is no way out at the time.

“You’ve come this far. That means something.”

Encourage them to:

- Talk to someone they trust, such as a friend, family member, or religious leader.
- Join a support group or online community.
- Talk to a doctor or counsellor if things feel too heavy. Remind them that mental health struggles can improve.
- You’re helping them build a support circle, not be their only support.
- Encourage connection with others, not dependence on you alone.

E – Encourage Getting Help

Sometimes just talking isn’t enough. If needed, help them take the next step:

You can offer to call the friend or the family member of their choice, if it helps.

You could suggest they talk to a doctor, counselor, or any mental health service provider if you think the person needs more than just talking to a friend or a family member.

You can say:

"I know a good counselor who helped a friend of mine. Want me to connect, you?"

You can also suggest joining a support group. It can help in the long run too. You may give useful information or support lines.

Help them build a support system which can be useful, rather than having just one support person: friends, family, someone the person respects, like a religious leader, or a teacher.

Suggest community support options: NGOs or government hospitals, clinic-based local community organisations.

Help them find a counselor or therapist. There may be private and state sector-trained counselors known to you from Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops. You may even be able to match the right counselor based on the background of the person. For example, a government clerk may be directed to a social services department counsellor who was trained at a workshop run by an NGO known to you. Similarly, a police constable may be helped by a trained Police Officer. Give them the contact phone numbers.



"I trust this counsellor who has helped a friend / a client of mine successfully. He/she would know the way to help you. I can link you with the counsellor if you want."

Help them make a call and offer to go with them if that helps.

(Please refer to the chapter on Finding Support.)

How to protect yourself while helping others

Supporting someone can be powerful, but it can also be emotionally heavy. Your own safety and well-being are just as important. It is important to ensure your own boundaries and safety. Your safety is non-negotiable.

Know your role

You are not a therapist. You're offering initial support, not treatment, including therapy. Your job is to offer first support, not solve everything.

Set boundaries early

Boundaries start with understanding your limits. Use clear phrases like:

"I'm here to listen, but I'm not a counsellor."

"Let's find someone who can help more deeply."

If someone is depending on you too much, gently say:

"I care about you, but I can't manage this alone. Let's get someone who can help us both."

Know when to step back

Be alert for red flags:

- Ongoing talk of suicide or self-harm?
- Aggressive or violent behavior: Are there weapons or dangerous items nearby?(knives, firearms, logs, bottles, rocks)
- Can the person kick, bite, or push you?
- Signs of psychosis (talking to oneself, suspicious, not making sense in talk or behaviour)

Ask yourself: Is it safe to approach?

- Is the person's behaviour volatile and unpredictable?
- If in doubt, get help immediately.

Know who to call

Have a plan for how and when to involve. Have the support contacts ready.

For example: Ambulance 1990 or mental health crisis line - 1926, a trusted counselor or contact as mentioned in the chapter Finding Support.

Check yourself about taking on their pain or emotional baggage.

After the conversation: Use grounding techniques to check in with yourself.

Ask yourself:

"How do I feel?"

Do something grounding: drink water, go for a walk, rest.

Be careful if they become too attached to you and rely on only you for help.

Respect privacy, but don't promise secrecy

Say:

"I'll keep this private unless I think you're in danger, then I have to get help."

This protects both of you.

Use assertive communication

Speak with clarity and compassion.

Don't be afraid to say:

"I need to take a break now."

"This conversation is getting too heavy for me to manage alone."

"We should involve someone trained to help further."

Follow the ALVEE Framework

The action plan helps you stay structured.

Don't get stuck just listening forever.
Moving forward helps them take steps towards safety and support.

Take care of yourself too

After tough conversations or situations, talk to someone you trust.

Ongoing training and peer supervision help maintain boundaries and avoid burnout.

If you're a teacher, healthcare worker, or frontliner, or if you're giving MHFA as part of your job, make sure to document serious incidents and follow your workplace policies. You may have to escalate it to higher authorities.

Join training programs or support groups for MHFA givers. Refer to the resource guide.

Don't be afraid to take a break or say no when you need to.

Physical Health Concerns and Help for LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans

LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans have the same physical health needs as other Sri Lankans. However, some LGBTIQ+ people may need extra health care because of their bodies, medical treatment, or life experiences.

Some LGBTIQ+ people, especially transgender people, may be using hormone treatment or may have had gender-affirming medical procedures. These treatments are important and help them live well, but they need proper aftercare, regular medical check-ups, and check-ups on mental well-being. Due to stigma, discrimination, and fear of being treated badly, many LGBTIQ+ people do not go to a doctor on time or do not continue follow-up care. Some have faced bullying, harassment, or discrimination from healthcare workers, which makes them afraid to seek safe and respectful medical help.

Long-term stigma, discrimination, and violence can lead to mental health disturbances that may show up as physical symptoms. Therefore,

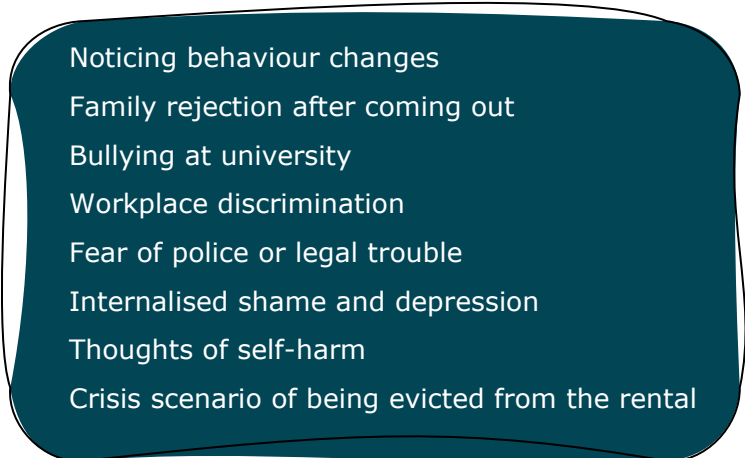
LGBTIQ+ individuals may complain of frequent headaches, stomach pain, tiredness, or trouble sleeping. The ongoing discrimination and marginalization can also directly harm physical health by increasing the risk of heart conditions and blood pressure. Mental and physical health are interconnected, and looking after mental well-being is very important for good physical health.

If any LGBTIQ+ person in Sri Lanka has a physical health problem, it is important to guide them to get help. Useful support services are listed in the chapter on Finding Support.

Look at the following real-life experiences and how MHFA can be used to support each community member in need.

Real-life scenarios – MHFA Practice sessions

Examples include:



- Noticing behaviour changes
- Family rejection after coming out
- Bullying at university
- Workplace discrimination
- Fear of police or legal trouble
- Internalised shame and depression
- Thoughts of self-harm
- Crisis scenario of being evicted from the rental

Each scenario demonstrates:

- How to assess
- How to listen
- How to validate
- How to support
- When and how to refer

1. Noticing a change in behaviour

Your lesbian friend has been very quiet, skipping work, and looks sad and tired most of the time.

MHFA outline

Assess, Approach, Assist.

You:

"Hey, I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately. Are you okay?"

(You're gently starting the conversation and showing concern.)

Listen without judging.

Validate.

You:

"That sounds really hard. I'm really sorry you're feeling this way."

If they say they've been feeling really down or miserable,

Ask:

"Are you feeling so bad that you've thought of hurting yourself?"

because people may not volunteer information on self-harm or suicidal intent.

Give emotional support.

You:

"You're not alone. Lots of people go through this and things could get better with help."

"This isn't your fault. There are ways to feel better."

Encourage getting help.

You:

"Is there anyone in your family or a friend you trust that you can talk to?"

"Would you want to come hang out sometime or go for a walk? You don't have to do this alone."

"Would you think about talking to a counselor or a doctor? They can really help."

"I can go with you if that would make it easier."

"I can call a helpline/a counselling service for you if that helps you."

2. Family Rejection After Coming Out

A 24-year-old gay friend of yours tells his parents about his orientation. His parents stop talking to him and threaten to kick him out of the house if he does not *"stop the nonsense without insulting the family"*.

Ask and assess how the friend feels. He may feel sad, scared, alone, ashamed, and angry.

Listen without judging or blaming.

Validate his problem and how he feels.

Emotionally support him.



Say:

"I'm really sorry this is happening to you. You don't deserve this."

Encourage support to find a temporary place if he has to move out. Help him feel safe with a trusted friend, relative, or a safe volunteer.

Encourage support from a trusted counsellor or LGBTIQ+ support group.

"I know this counsellor who talks to families about the science behind same sex attractions."

3. Bullying at University

A transgender student is teased, called names, and laughed at by classmates, and lecturers ignore it.

Ask and assess. Take the bullying seriously. You may have to use your common sense and see whether the student is ready to open up with you.

"Hey, I'm John, and I cannot help noticing the bullying. Are you ok? How are you taking it all?"

A sensitive, respectful approach like that will be an invitation to let you in. The open question that follows will let the student talk and express feelings with more ease.

Listen. The student may perhaps pour his or her heart out.

You may ask gently,

"What do you think about the response of the lecturers?"

You can share that you don't think turning a blind eye is right, if the student is reluctant, not knowing how you feel about it all.

Validate his problem and how he feels.

"Hmm, I can only imagine how distressing it is to face this daily."

Emotionally support him.

Say:

"I'm really sorry this is happening to you. You don't deserve this. They have to be stopped."

"This is not your fault."

Encourage support. Help them feel safe in the university. Encourage not facing this alone.

Be a friend or encourage to have a friend of his or her own. Help them identify safe people, a lecturer, a batchmate, or a boarding mate.

Encourage breaks and self-care. Little things that make you feel happy and grounded. Doing a hobby: handicrafts, painting, listening to music, walking on the beach or even in the backyard, having a cup of tea, watching a movie. (You may refer to chapter 3 on self-care)

Refer to a counsellor or LGBTIQ+ support group.

"I know there is a club in the uni that watches out for the well-being of the students. Can I give you a contact person?"

Write to the university authorities with the consent of the student in the safest possible way.

4. Workplace Discrimination

A gay workmate is passed over for promotions and hears jokes about his sexuality at work. He comes to you to talk.

The person may feel stressed, worthless, and fearful of losing the job. He may also feel frustrated and angry.

Listen calmly and validate feelings. Acknowledge the unfairness.

Suggest keeping records of incidents and saving the relevant emails.

Encourage emotional support:

- Remind them their identity is not the problem.
- Encourage him to practice stress-relief steps that suit him, like regular exercise.
- Suggest even changing the company to a more LGBTIQ+ friendly organization, if possible.

- Encourage support from trusted colleagues, human resources department, if available or suitable helplines. Some legal helplines may direct him to more specific actions he can take.

5. Fear of Police or Legal Trouble

A same-sex couple avoids going out together because they fear harassment or arrest. They passingly share their fears with you.

Listen. Let them talk about their fears without dismissing them. The couple may be in constant fear, anxiety, and hyper-alert.



Validate their feelings. Say:

"It makes sense you feel scared in this situation."

Encourage emotional support. Suggest some grounding techniques to be used in extreme fear. (Slow breathing, focusing on surroundings, soothing self-talk,

"I am going to be okay. I am not doing anything wrong."

Remind them that there are many activists, professionals, and organizations working hard to make a positive change in the laws and mindset of law enforcement. Also, remind them that some police officers are more educated and aware of the issues now.

Share information about safe places to hang out or trusted organisations and pro bono lawyers to seek help in legal trouble.

6. Internalised Shame and Depression

A bisexual person believes they are "wrong" because of religious or cultural messages and feels depressed.

Listen without judging. The person may feel guilt, self-hate, sadness, and low energy.

Validate. It is quite understandable why she feels so low in the local setting. It is not helpful to say:

"It's all in your head. Snap out of it. There are so many bi s in the country and they don't think like you."

Provide emotional support. Gently challenge harmful beliefs with kindness.

Say:

"You have done nothing wrong. This is how you are. Many people feel miserable and low because of how they were raised in society."

Encourage support. Practice small positive actions. (rest, talking, journaling). Encourage them to get into a support group.

Suggest professional help if sadness lasts long or worsens.

7. Thoughts of Self-Harm or Suicide

A queer youth says,

"I don't see a future for myself. Sometimes I wish I weren't alive."

Obviously, the person is overwhelmed, trapped, and hopeless.

Assess - Take it seriously and stay calm.

Listen carefully and do not panic or lecture.

Validate and give emotional support. Say:

"I'm really glad you told me. That is brave of you."

Encourage immediate support from a trusted adult, counsellor, or crisis helpline.

Stay with them and help them get support if they are in danger.

8. Crisis of Being Evicted

A young lesbian woman lives in a rented unit in Colombo. Her house owners discover that she is a lesbian and that her girlfriend visits her at home. Because of strong cultural stigma, the owners tell her to leave the house immediately. She feels shocked, scared, and humiliated. She does not know where she will sleep that night with no money or a close person to call for help. In deep distress, she calls the LGBTIQ+ helpline, crying and feeling overwhelmed.

A – Acknowledge distress and ensure immediate safety

The hotline worker gently checks how distressed she is and whether she is safe right now.

They ask simple, calm questions without panic or pressure.

They stay steady and reassuring.

"I'm really glad you called. I want to understand how overwhelmed you're feeling right now."

"Are you somewhere safe at this moment?"

L – Listen without judgment

The worker lets her tell her story in her own words.

They do not interrupt, argue, or question her sexuality or choices.

They listen for emotions like fear, shame, anger, and helplessness.

"Take your time. I'm listening."

V – Validate feelings and experience

The worker clearly names and validates her emotions.

They affirm that the discrimination she faced is wrong.

"What happened to you is unfair and very painful."

"Anyone in your situation would feel scared and shaken."

"You did nothing wrong by being yourself."

E – Encourage emotional support with calming and grounding techniques

The worker helps her slow down emotionally so she can think more clearly. They use simple grounding, without forcing techniques.

"Let's pause for a moment and take a slow breath together."

"You're not alone right now. I'm here with you."

Grounding line (can be repeated):

"You are safe right now. You are heard. This moment will pass."

E – Encourage getting practical help next

The worker gently helps her think about one small next step, not everything at once.

They explore immediate options such as temporary shelter, trusted contacts, or community support.

"We can look at one step at a time."

"Would you like me to help you think about where you can stay tonight?"

They remind her that support exists and that asking for help is a strength. You may refer her to an available safe house/convent/any suitable accommodation.

Closing reassurance for the caller

"You deserve safety, dignity, and respect."

"This situation does not define your worth."

"We will take this one step at a time, together."

9. Substance Use Becoming a Problem

A 26-year-old who identifies as queer works as an admin officer in the private sector. Over the past few months, friends have noticed that he has been drinking alcohol almost every day. He says alcohol helps reduce stress and helps with sleep. Recently, he has been missing work, feeling tired, and becoming more withdrawn.

Friends became really concerned that he would be fired or face some other trouble if he continued drinking like that.

How to Help

Assess and, if in physical danger, ensure immediate safety

Make sure the person is in a safe place. If they appear unwell, confused, or at risk of harm, seek medical help 1990 (Suwaseriya).

Listen without judgment

Speak calmly and with care. Avoid blame or criticism. Let him talk about what they are feeling. Avoid giving medical advice. Do not tell them how much to drink or how to stop. Focus on support and safety.

Validate stress and feelings

Recognise that discrimination, fear, and isolation can increase stress and substance use.

Encourage healthier support

Suggest speaking to a trusted person, counsellor, or healthcare provider who is LGBTIQ+ friendly.

Encourage getting practical help

Refer to the chapter on Finding Support to get queer-friendly services on alcohol and drug abuse, and help him to get in touch with them.

The same first aid approach can be helpful in any substance of abuse. Kind, respectful support and connection can help reduce harm and encourage recovery.

Key takeaways:

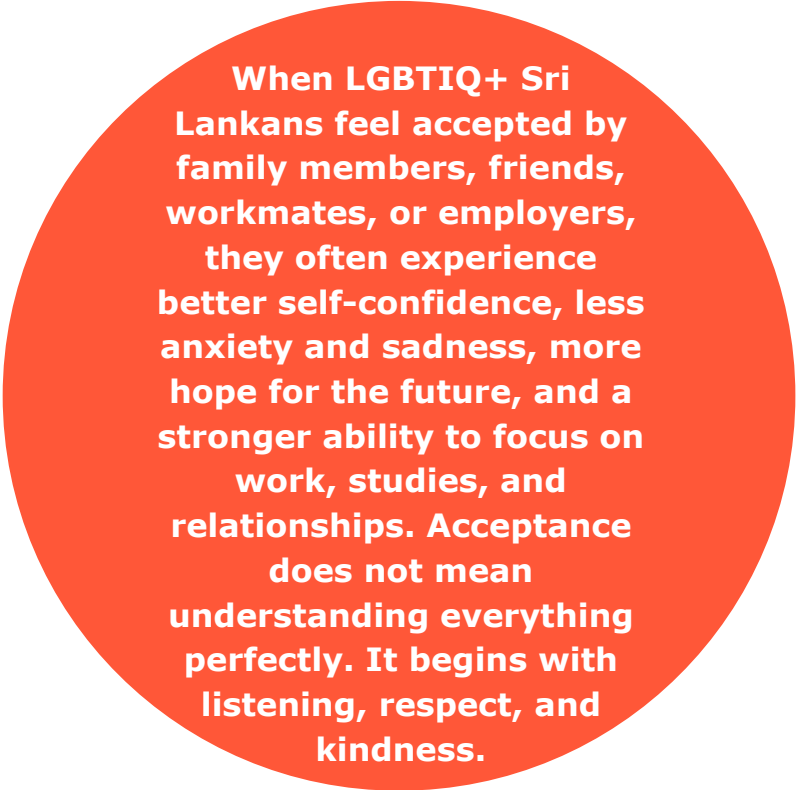
You don't have to be an expert to make a difference. Sometimes, being there and genuinely listening and caring is all that matters to an LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankan.

CHAPTER 05

INCLUSIVE SRI LANKA

Strengthening LGBTIQ+
Mental Well-Being Together

Each and every one of us has a part to play in making Sri Lanka a safe and welcoming place for the LGBTIQ+ community so that their mental well-being will not suffer. Change doesn't always need to be big; it can start with small actions in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. When we treat each other with respect and understanding, we help build a country where everyone can live with pride and dignity.



When LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans feel accepted by family members, friends, workmates, or employers, they often experience better self-confidence, less anxiety and sadness, more hope for the future, and a stronger ability to focus on work, studies, and relationships. Acceptance does not mean understanding everything perfectly. It begins with listening, respect, and kindness.

In this chapter, we'll see what each of the following can do to bring about this change.

- The LGBTIQ+ community in Sri Lanka
- Families
- Friends and Allies
- Workplaces
- Communities
- Government and Authorities

What You Can Do as an LGBTIQ+ Person for an Inclusive Sri Lanka

Change begins with you. If you find it difficult to accept yourself, others will find it even harder. Build strength and pride from within.

Be you

Know your worth. Remind yourself that being LGBTIQ+ is not an illness, sin, or a crime. It's part of the natural diversity of human beings. Be proud and open about who you are when it feels safe. Your story matters. Being open and honest, even in small ways, helps others see that LGBTIQ+ people are part of everyday Sri Lankan life.



Being out and proud in simple ways

A pin or a bracelet on you, a sticker or a small rainbow in your social media bio can quietly but powerfully signal visibility, solidarity, and pride,

**if you feel
safe to do
so.**

Learn about your rights, health, and available community support

Change begins with knowledge. Understanding who you are and the language that describes your identity helps you speak about yourself with clarity and confidence. When you are informed, you are better able to educate others calmly and accurately.

Where possible, use respectful Sinhala and Tamil terms. When you use English words such as "*gay*" or "*transgender*," take a moment to explain their meaning in simple, culturally familiar ways.

When you encounter misinformation, respond calmly and factually. For example, you might say:

“According to the World Health Organization and modern psychology, being gay or transgender is not a disease. It is a natural variation of human identity.”

Your Basic Rights Matter

All people in Sri Lanka, including LGBTIQ+ individuals, have the right to personal safety, protection from violence, fair treatment by police and courts, access to healthcare without discrimination, and the right to seek help if threatened or harmed.

Transgender people may also change gender markers on official documents through existing administrative processes, following medical and legal steps.

Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is a circular issued by the Ministry of Health, which is needed to change the National ID, Birth Certificate, and other legal documents. Trans individuals can work with a psychiatrist specialist as per the recognized health guidelines and obtain the GRC.

A FINAL MESSAGE OF HOPE

The legal system in Sri Lanka is not yet fair or complete for LGBTIQ+ people. But the law does not take away your dignity, your humanity, or your right to safety.

Grow in confidence, lean on your community, and make your voice matter.

Share your stories. One of the most powerful ways to humanize the conversation about LGBTIQ+ lives is through personal stories; what

it means to be a good friend, child, parent, teacher, or colleague. Stories allow people to see real human beings, not stereotypes.

There are inspiring YouTube discussions featuring LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans who have made a mark in the country. Listen, be inspired, and share your own story if you feel comfortable. Every story contributes to visibility, understanding, and change.

Speak up when it feels safe.

You don't need to respond to every insult or attack, but when the moment allows, use your voice to set the record straight, in a classroom, workplace, or online space. Even a few calm and honest words can shift how people think and break down stereotypes. It may not change everyone, but by speaking up, you stay true to yourself and show that silence isn't the only option. Your courage can inspire others to do the same.

Lead by example.

Live with kindness and respect, even in difficult moments. How you respond to LGBTIQ+ hatred, both in real life and online, truly matters.

Anger and frustration are completely understandable. However, reacting with aggression can sometimes frighten or alienate people who are unfamiliar with LGBTIQ+ lives, especially those who are still learning. When all they see is anger, they may stop listening to the message behind it.

Responding with calm, dignity, and clarity is often more powerful. It protects your credibility, helps others relate to you, and opens the door to understanding. There are wiser, more effective ways to challenge hate and stand your ground.

Let us look at some practical ways to face hatred against LGBTIQ+ members.

Responding to LGBTIQ+ hatred: calm, smart, effective

Remember, your safety comes first. There are times to respond, times to step away, and times to get help. These options help you maintain dignity, win hearts, and protect yourself.

In-person hatred

First check, is it safe?

If you feel physically threatened, leave the place and get to safety. Call someone you trust or a help line (refer to the chapter on Finding Support) if needed.

Short, firm boundaries.

Use simple, calm lines that set a limit without escalating.

"That's not okay. Please don't speak to me like that."

"I won't accept hate speech. If you continue, I'll leave."

"We don't use that language here. Please stop."

Tone - steady, calm, not shouting. Body language - relaxed, hands visible, don't point.

Name the behaviour, not the person.

Point out what they said, not attack their worth. This keeps the other person from feeling cornered.

"That's a terrible thing to say. We all deserve respect."

"That comment was hurtful and discriminatory."

"Calling people names because of who they love is not acceptable."

Short education; simple facts, one or two lines.

Keep it brief. People may need just one clear sentence to reconsider. When the situation feels safe, and the person might listen, try the following.

"People's identities are real. We deserve respect like anyone else."

"Being LGBTIQ+ is not a choice, and it is how we are born."

Redirect to shared values.

This really works if the hate comment comes from ignorance or out of habit! Use common Sri Lankan values (family, respect, faith, kindness) to build connection.

"I am a son/daughter, brother/sister, friend, lover, just like you. We all want to be safe and respected."

"I hope we can show the compassion our religion teaches."

Use questions to slow the person down.

Questions invite thinking rather than defense. They can open a quieter, more human conversation based on facts and not myth.

"Why do you feel that way?"

"What do you think will happen if your teenage son hangs around with a gay friend?"

"Have you met someone who is LGBTIQ+?" "Have you listened to that person?"

De-escalation phrases when anger is high.

If someone gets loud, use neutral, calming phrases.

"I don't want to fight. Let's talk calmly."

"I can leave if you can't speak respectfully."

Just leave if you realize the other person is not ready to listen rationally.

"Okay. Looks like we are getting nowhere here. I choose to leave."

Online hatred: practical steps

Pause. Don't reply when you're upset.

If you do reply, keep it short and factual.

"That language is harmful. Please stop."

"I'm blocking you for harassment. This has been reported."

Use facts or links only when you know the source. Long lecture threads rarely change minds.

Use blocking, muting, or reporting tools to stop harassment.

Screenshot threats or hate speech for evidence before deleting.

Report hate speech. Follow the reporting threads. It is there to be used.

Don't engage when threats escalate.

If false accusations or doxing happen, tell platform support and consider legal help. (Please refer to the chapter on Finding Support)

Bring allies, amplify them, or escalate.

Get others involved when it's unsafe, or when a workplace or school is ignoring abuse.

Ask your allies to,

- Speak up in groups where LGBTIQ+ people might be dismissed. Sometimes, a friend or respected figure carrying the same message changes minds faster.
- Correct jokes, name-calling, or misinformation calmly.
- Support complaints at work or school.
- Report to management, school, or relevant authorities if harassment continues. Some people in Sri Lanka lost their jobs when the social media users stood up against insulting Facebook posts on women, for example, on a few occasions in the recent past. The public can be brought to see the inhumane side of harassment. Public outcry can be powerful.

When the family and the close circle are hostile

Start with one calm conversation.

"I love you and I want us to understand each other."

Name how their words affect you.

"When you say..... I feel hurt."

Offer a simple fact and tell them what you want from them.

"I'm the same person. I want your support/you to understand me/not to ridicule me"

**"I'm the same person you know.
I need your love, not your judgment."**

If it's dangerous, prioritise your safety and find supportive relatives or groups.

When you are targeted in the workplace

You can use any fitting line above, and also be firm.

"This behaviour is discriminatory and against our policy. I'm reporting it." - if practical.

Self-care after any confrontation:

Please refer to chapter 3 to see how to look after your mental well-being.

In summary of responding to hateful comments: Don't fuel the stereotype of "aggression". If you feel angry, take a few slow breaths before replying. Anger is valid, but showing controlled calm helps others who are not LGBTIQ+ relate to and take you seriously.

Small acts add up - You do not need to change everyone. Each calm correction, each boundary set, and each ally who speaks makes public space a little safer. Lead by example: kindness, steady words, and clear limits are powerful tools against hate.

What Family Members Can Do for an Inclusive Sri Lanka

Love and acceptance begin at home.

Accept and support your LGBTIQ+ family members with care and respect.

Learn the facts about gender and sexuality. It is natural to get fearful about things you don't know. The understanding reduces fear.

Use respectful language.

"My son is gay" instead of an uneasy "my son is ...you know..., a bit different."

Protect your child or relative from stigma and bullying by being a voice of love for the LGBTIQ + community.

To speak up against hurtful comments against the LGBTIQ+ community, say:

"It is not ok to hurt someone just because they are different."

"My daughter has transitioned to her preferred gender. It's he now, and I love him and support him the same way."

Positive Lived Reality with Family Support

A young lesbian woman from Colombo described how her life changed when her elder sister supported her.



"My parents did not understand at first. But my sister reminded them that I was still the same person. Knowing that at least one family member stood by me helped me feel safe in my own home."

Even one supportive family member can reduce fear and emotional pain and help an LGBTIQ+ person feel less alone.

What Allies Can Do (Friends, Professionals, Educators) for an Inclusive Sri Lanka

Standing together with your queer friend/client/student means a world to them.

Listen to and support your LGBTIQ+ friend without judgment.

Using microphysical skills to show support and inclusiveness.

Micro physical skills are small body actions that show care, respect, and safety. These include eye contact, body position, touch, and personal space. When used correctly, they help LGBTIQ+ people feel accepted and supported.

EYE CONTACT

Keep gentle and respectful eye contact while talking.

Do not stare or look judgmental.

If the person looks uncomfortable, reduce eye contact.

Eye contact shows that you are listening and respecting them.



BODY POSITION AND POSTURE

Sit or stand at the same level as the person.

Keep an open posture (arms relaxed, not crossed).

Face the person, but do not lean too close.

This shows openness, safety, and equality.

TOUCH (VERY IMPORTANT: CONSENT FIRST)

Never touch without permission.

Always ask first, for example:

"Is it okay if I hold your hand or give you a hug?"

Respect the answer, even if they say no.

Some people may have trauma or fear related to touch.



Hugging can be comforting, but only if the person agrees.

Keep hugs short and gentle.

In public places in Sri Lanka, hugging may make some people feel unsafe, so be careful about the place and privacy.

HUGGING

RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE

Keep a comfortable distance.

Do not block their movement or stand too close.

Let them control how close they want to be.



APPROPRIATE TOUCH

If allowed, simple actions like a light touch on the shoulder or holding a hand can show care.

Avoid touching sensitive areas or standing too close.

Touch should always feel safe and respectful, not forced.



FACIAL EXPRESSION AND TONE

Use a calm, kind facial expression. You do not have to pretend. Just a true smile will soften your face :)

Speak in a soft and respectful tone.

Avoid laughing, whispering, or reacting with shock.



In Sri Lanka, public displays of affection can be risky for LGBTIQ+ people. Always think about their safety, not just your intention. What feels supportive in private may not feel safe in public. Support is about making the person feel safe, not about what you want to do. Always follow consent, respect, and choice.

Use respectful language.

Don't use labels like "these people" or "that type." Say "LGBTIQ+ individuals", "friends", or "community members."

Respect chosen names and pronouns. If you are not sure, just ask politely,

"How may I address you?"

Create safe and respectful spaces in your friend circles; WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other groups included.

Don't laugh at or spread jokes that target someone's gender or orientation.

Listen when someone shares their feelings; don't judge or interrupt.

Make sure everyone gets a chance to talk and be heard.

Use your voice to promote equality and inclusion.

Correct others gently when they use derogatory words, not to shame them, but to educate.

Speak up when it counts.

If someone is being left out.

Against bullying, teasing, or hate speech.

When religious figures spread misinformation, respond respectfully with facts and compassion.

"Our faith teaches love and compassion, not rejection."

Compliment and support the queer members in the team for their ideas and efforts, not just appearances.

"Wow, this report is brilliant! Well done!!"

Include LGBTIQ+ issues naturally in general discussions on mental health, education, and justice; not as "special topics," but as part of Sri Lanka's human landscape.

Share posts or stories that promote kindness, fairness, and diversity.

Show visible support.

Display a small rainbow symbol in your clinic, classroom, office, or social media. It tells someone silently,

"You're safe here."

Wear an accessory with rainbow colours to support LGBTIQ+ friends. A small wristband may make your queer friend breathe a little easier at a party!

Vote for and support leaders who commit to equality, not fear-based campaigns.

Work with policymakers as individuals and organizations.

Help bridge understanding between older generations and youth; often misunderstanding, not hatred, drives stigma.

Reduce minority stress (refer to Chapter 2 of Lived Realities) by learning the correct facts, talking openly in safe spaces, questioning and correcting wrong information, and supporting each other with kindness and understanding. Having supportive friends, community, and professional help when needed can make a big difference.

If you are not an ally and cannot bring yourself to have anything positive about the LGBTIQ+ community, you can stay without hurting the community.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE, INFLUENCE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

Words matter. When influential roles in society, such as religious leaders, educators, doctors, lawyers, teachers, journalists, influencers, and other respected voices express wrong facts, make ridiculing jokes or hurtful comments that belittle and insult LGBTIQ+ people, online or in public forums, it causes real harm. These words travel far and often deepen fear, shame, and isolation. Personal beliefs do not need to be publicly expressed in ways that hurt others. Using the LGBTIQ+ community as a tool to gain political advantages also harms the LGBTIQ+ people who are already vulnerable. Respectful language is not about politics or ideology; it is about basic human dignity. With influence comes responsibility, and kindness should never be optional. If you cannot do good, at least do no harm.

Positive Lived Reality: Friends and Chosen Family

Sometimes acceptance comes not from relatives, but from friends who become a chosen family. A transgender man shared:

"My friends used my name and stood beside me in public. They corrected others gently. Because of them, I learned that I deserved respect."



Chosen families often provide understanding, protection, and emotional safety when family support is limited.

Physical micro skills that often help LGBTIQ+ individuals more than you think. Small physical actions can offer comfort when used carefully and respectfully. Always be guided by the person's comfort and consent.

If appropriate, ask before touching, for example,

"Would it help if I sat closer?" or "May I give you a hug?"

Never assume physical contact is welcome. Respect personal space at all times.

Offering a tissue, water, or a seat can show care without words. Sitting calmly nearby, maintaining a gentle posture, and using a soft tone of voice can help someone feel safe.

These small actions, when done with permission and sensitivity, can reduce distress and show genuine support.

What Workplaces Can Do for an Inclusive Sri Lanka

Workplaces can be a source of daily stress or a place of dignity and safety.

Equality on the job is the right thing. If Sri Lanka is to upgrade as a country, internationally recognized civilized workplace policies are needed.

Encourage fair treatment and equal opportunities for all employees, including LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Create anti-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Respect names, pronouns, and privacy.

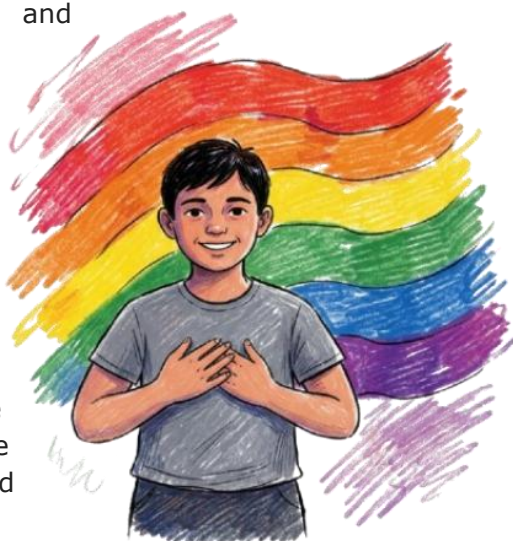
In more inclusive and multicultural countries, organizational emails carry the preferred pronouns in email signatures. So, there is no confusion whether to refer to someone as he, she, or they. We have seen companies bringing in inclusive policies to ensure a safe working environment for LGBTIQ+ individuals. They can take more steps forward.

Provide awareness training for staff and management.

Work with willing professionals and organizations.

Celebrate Pride Month events as a routine.

It will deliver a strong and powerful signal to the whole workforce. Nobody who takes part in a small pride celebration as a company policy will insult a fellow workmate. That person would get to know the queer fellow worker better. The workplace will learn to include and respect.



Display of rainbow flags, wrist bands, and other ornaments in workplaces will give the message of acceptance and safety to LGBTIQ+ workers.

It will send a strong signal that the workplace subculture is LGBTIQ+ friendly by default.

Positive Lived Reality: Acceptance At Work

A gay man working in the private sector shared:



"My manager did not ask personal questions. He simply said, 'If anyone gives you trouble, tell me.' That made me feel safe enough to focus on my job."

Small acts of respect at work can greatly improve mental well-being.

A Workplace-Supported Gender Transition

A transgender man worked at a garment factory before his transition process wanted support at work for the process. With his permission, the situation was discussed with the company's CEO. The CEO was understanding and willing to learn about transgender and transition. He realized that as the hormone treatment continued, the physical changes would become noticeable.

To protect the trans individual's privacy and well-being, the company arranged for him to move to another company within the same group, in a different area.

There, he was able to start work as a man from the beginning. This support helped him transition smoothly and showed how caring leadership can make a positive difference in a transgender person's life.

What the Communities Can Do for an Inclusive Sri Lanka

Building safe and welcoming spaces for LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans can make a huge change for the country as well as them. Sri Lanka could be given credit as a country of inclusion and respected diversity.



Schools and youth groups can teach respect and inclusion from an early age.

Higher education institutes can have discussions and open dialogues.

Local activist groups can host workshops or awareness events.

Community and religious leaders can upgrade their knowledge and treat their LGBTIQ+ devotees with the same compassion the religion teaches.

Mass media and social media can share positive, respectful stories.

Artists can open up the hearts and minds of Sri Lankans to understand and embrace diversity through films, tele dramas, novels, poems, and any creative means.

Rainbow symbols can be demonstrated at community spaces. For example, a small sticker on the library bookshelves or a flag hoisted during Pride Month. So, the community knows it is a safe place for queer Sri Lankans.

What the Authorities Can Do for an Inclusive Sri Lanka

There are old colonial-era laws in the Penal Code that criminalise certain same-sex sexual acts. These laws are written in broad and unclear ways and can affect people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

Although arrests and prosecutions are uncommon, the existence of these laws can create fear and confusion.

Sri Lankan law does not recognise same-sex marriage or same-sex partnerships. Marriage laws apply only to heterosexual couples.

These laws do not make it illegal to be LGBTIQ+. They do not allow violence, harassment, blackmail, or forced treatment. It's written in our Constitution that no one should be treated differently because of who they are and what they like. During elections, leaders promise to respect LGBTIQ+ rights. True leadership means protecting all citizens, not just the popular ones or the majority.

Here's what the government can do to make things right for LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans.

Legislation and Policy

Protect LGBTIQ+ rights through fair laws and policies.

Old colonial laws still criminalise same-sex relationships. The government can repeal or reform these laws so that no one is punished for who they love. Legal protection doesn't harm society; it simply allows people to live freely without fear. Even an animal deserves *avihimsa*, why not the citizens in the country?

Decriminalize same-sex relations: reform outdated sections of the Penal Code that violate dignity and privacy.

Enforce anti-discrimination laws in employment, education, healthcare, and housing.

Support gender recognition laws for trans and non-binary citizens.

Stand firm on equality.

Equality should be in action, not only on paper. The Constitution already talks about non-discrimination. The government must clearly say that this includes sexual orientation and gender identity. Equality is not a Western idea; it's a basic human value and part of

our own Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu teachings of compassion and justice.

Support the mental health and well-being of LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans.

LGBTIQ+ people often face stress, bullying, and rejection. The government can help by funding counselling, helplines, and youth programs. This is about saving lives and building healthy citizens.

Ensure equal access to healthcare, especially mental health and HIV prevention, without bias.

Support health, education, and employment programs for LGBTIQ+ people. Living may be tough for Sri Lankans. But it is even tougher for LGBTIQ+ Sri Lankans with the added burden of unique issues, mainly due to societal stressors.

Encourage workplaces and schools to be inclusive.

Through circulars and awareness programs, ministries can guide schools and workplaces to stop bullying and discrimination. Students and workers should feel safe, no matter what their identity is.

Recognize Pride and diversity events as part of national life.

Give room for the rainbow community to showcase their contribution to the country as dignified Sri Lankans.

Public Education and Awareness

Train teachers, health workers, police, and media professionals on LGBTIQ+ inclusion and respectful communication.

Encourage national campaigns highlighting stories of love, courage, and community, not propaganda against the community or panic.

Promote scientific understanding: use mental health and human rights frameworks, not misinformed religious or cultural fear or malicious political intent, to guide policy.

Train government servants, administrators, police, health workers, and teachers to treat everyone with dignity and respect. Simple workshops and clear instructions can help prevent a lot of harassment and

misunderstandings. There are organizations with content specialists willing to provide the training.

Listen to everybody.

Government leaders should talk directly with the LGBTIQ+ community, their allies - friends, doctors, lawyers, their organisations, NGOs, and human rights organisations. Listening to and talking with all help create fair policies that match real needs.

Show courage, not fear.

Some will always disagree. But a strong authority doesn't hide when things get difficult. When leaders speak calmly and confidently about equality, people will listen. Standing for justice is not political suicide; it's moral leadership.

Promote unity and kindness.

The message from the top matters. When leaders talk about respect and compassion for all citizens, society follows. This is how we build a Sri Lanka where everyone belongs; Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Tamil, Sinhala, queer or straight; all under one flag.

In today's world, acceptance and equality are becoming universal values embraced by many faiths and leaders. When the Pope acknowledges LGBTIQ+ rights, respected Buddhist monks speak for inclusion, and some political leaders are open about their gender and orientation, it shows that compassion and respect for all people transcend religion, culture, and politics. In South Asia, Nepal's Supreme Court has recognised same-sex and gender rights, setting an example for the region. The global and religious leaders, guided by the UN, now call for compassion and respect for LGBTIQ+ people. Decriminalising love, ending discrimination, and ensuring safety for everyone is not just justice, it's humanity.

The “Little Things” That Create Cultural Change

Small Actions	Big Impact
Using respectful pronouns	Builds trust and safety
Displaying a small rainbow symbol	Signals inclusion silently
Reading or sharing a queer-positive story	Challenges stereotypes
Smiling, greeting, and including LGBTIQ+ people naturally	Dismantles stigma
Watching and recommending LGBTIQ+ inclusive films or local art	Normalizes diversity
Teachers addressing bullying gently but firmly	Saves lives
Clinicians asking open, nonjudgmental questions	Restores dignity
Allies publicly celebrating Pride Month	Encourages others to do the same
Saying “we are all human” in family or temple discussions	Changes hearts
Displaying a rainbow sticker in offices, schools, or temples	Signals visible allyship and local support
Including a short slide or open discussion on LGBTIQ+ inclusion during teacher-training workshops	Creates safer schools where queer youth feel seen
Adding inclusive language (“all guests welcome”) on hotel or guesthouse materials	Strengthens Sri Lanka’s queer-friendly tourism culture
Health clinics using intake forms with non-binary or self-defined gender options	Improves access to care and reduces shame

Small Actions	Big Impact
Local businesses allowing staff to list pronouns on name badges or email signatures	Normalizes respect in everyday interactions
A monk or layperson saying "No one should suffer because of who they love" at a community event	Builds compassion within religious and cultural settings
Including queer stories (ex: Frangipani or Paangshu) or local films in youth clubs or film circles	Inspires empathy and dialogue
Simply wishing "Happy Vesak!" or "Happy New Year!" to a queer neighbour	Shows acceptance through everyday kindness
Sharing verified LGBTIQ+ resources from Sri Lankan organisations on social media	Amplifies accurate information and reduces myths
Inviting queer speakers or artists to local school or temple cultural days	Makes inclusion visible and meaningful
Supporting youth groups or NGOs that run Pride or awareness events	Helps sustain community change

WE PROPOSE A VISION FOR AN

INCLUSIVE SRI LANKA.

A SRI LANKA WHERE,

BEING QUEER IS NOT WHISPRED ABOUT,

BUT RESPECTED.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS PREACH COMPASSION,

NOT FEAR, SHAME, OR GUILT.

SCHOOLS TEACH KINDNESS AND

CRITICAL THINKING, NOT PREJUDICE,

FOR THE SAKE OF THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF

LGBTIQ+ SRI LANKANS

AND MERE HUMANITY.

CHAPTER 06

FINDING SUPPORT

Referral to Resources and
Key Services

Mental Well-Being Hotlines

CCC Line - Suicide Prevention Hotline	1333	Toll-free, 24/7, 3 languages
Lanka Life Line	1375	24/7, 3 languages
National Institute of Mental Health	1926	Toll-free, 24/7
Women In Need	0775676555	24-hour hotline
Family Health Bureau – Mithuru Piyasa	0702611111	
Sri Lanka Sumithrayo	0707308308	Counselling services
Family Planning Association (FPA) – Alokaya Counselling Center	0779895252	

List of Government Hospitals

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Mulleriyawa New Town

Telephone: +94112578234 - 7

Day Treatment Centre:

+94112578556

Dementia Hotline:

+94113140844

Website:

<https://nimh.health.gov.lk/>

National Hospital Sri Lanka (NHSL)

Colombo 10

Phone: +9411-2691111

(Psychiatry Clinic – 10)

Psychiatry Clinic Phone:

0768185153

0768185154

Website:

<https://shorturl.at/nl7GQ>

Navodaya Hospital

Embilipitiya Town, Embilipitiya

Phone: 077 747 0460

Email:

admin@navodayahospital.lk

Teaching Hospital,

Peradeniya

Phone: 0812388001

Email: perahospital@gmail.com

Website: [https://peradeniya-](https://peradeniya-hospital.health.gov.lk/)

[hospital.health.gov.lk/](https://peradeniya-hospital.health.gov.lk/)

Colombo South Teaching Hospital

B229 Hospital Rd, Dehiwala-
Mount Lavinia

Phone: 011 2 832950

011 2 832990

Website:

<https://www.csth.health.gov.lk/>

Colombo North Teaching Hospital, Ragama

Phone: +94 112959261 – 4

Email: info@example.com

Website:

[https://www.cnth.health.gov.lk/
contact.html](https://www.cnth.health.gov.lk/contact.html)

District General Hospital – Gampaha

Office of the Regional Director of
Health Services,

Kachcheri Complex.

Phone: 033 – 2222874

033 – 2225738

Email:

[info.rdhs.gp@healthdept.wp.gov.](mailto:info.rdhs.gp@healthdept.wp.gov.lk)

[lk](mailto:info.rdhs.gp@healthdept.wp.gov.lk)

Website:

<https://rdhsofficegampaha.org/>

National Hospital Galle (Karapitiya Teaching Hospital)

Karapitiya, Galle

Phone: 0912 232 267

Teaching Hospital Batticaloa

Hospital Lane, Batticaloa

Phone: 0652 222 261

Email:

ictthbatticaloa@gmail.com

District General Hospital Vavuniya

Hospital Circular Rd, Vavuniya

Phone: 0242 222 761

National Hospital Kandy

60, 4 William Gopallawa

Mawatha, Kandy

Phone: (+94) 812 222261

Email: dirnhkandy@health.gov.lk

Website: <https://nhkandy.org/>

Teaching Hospital Jaffna

Hospital Road, Jaffna

Phone: 021 222 2261

Email: thjaffna@gmail.com

Website: <https://thjaffna.lk/>

LGBTIQ+ Organization Hotlines**Équité**

Hotline: 0718766750 / 0717033298

Email: equitesrilanka2019@gmail.com

Website: <https://equitesrilanka.org/>

Websites for Mental Health Services

PrideMantra – Sri Lanka's Largest LGBTIQ+ Therapy Provider

Website: <https://lgbtqiacounseling.com/sri-lanka/>

Government Hotlines

Suwaseriya Ambulance Service 1990

Victim and Witness Protection Authority 0112779879

Government Information Center 1919

Ministry of Women & Child Affairs 1938

National Child Protection Authority 1929

When Threatened in Cyberspace

Prathya by Hashtag generation (online violence) (LGBTQI+ friendly)

Phone: 0777955900

Website: <https://hashtaggeneration.org/>

Stakeholders

Dr. Janaki Vidanapathirana - Consultant in Community Medicine, Director-Planning, Ministry of Health

Dr. Vino Dharmakulasinghe - Consultant Venereologist, National STD AIDS Control Program, Ministry of Health

N. B Adhil Suraj Vimukthi - Executive Director of Équité, Policy Consultant on Gender, Human Rights, and Law

H.K.M. Thushara Manoj - Chairperson, Équité

Buddhika Erandi Jayasinghe - Psychotherapist

Supeshala Rathnayaka - Assistant Student Counsellor, University of Colombo, Professional psychological counsellor and lecturer in Sociology and Psychology

Menaka Herath - Director Education & Special Programs, Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka

Pradeep Chandana Gunarathne - Occupational Therapist, MHPSS Practitioner

Hema Ranawake - Assistant Director, Counselling, The Family Planning Association Sri Lanka

Dylan Abeyweera - Psychological Counsellor

W.A.D.N Kumari - Nursing Officer

Jayanganee Wijayawardena - Recruitment facilitator / Let'sTALK project -Trainer

Harinda Fonseka - Sri Lanka Sumithrayo and gudppl - Deputy Director of Public Engagement | Founder & CEO of gudppl

Renuka Jayasundara - Women Deputy Inspector General of Police, Women And Child Bureau

Ranjan Lamahewa - Assistant Superintendent of Police, Sri Lanka Police

W.A. Ajith Rohana - Senior Superintendent of Police, National Police Academy

S.A.H Subasinghe - Coordinator, Know4sure.lk, National STD AIDS Control Program, Ministry of Health

S. Sutha – Director of Vavuniya Pride

M. Sakuni Mayadunna - Executive Director of Trans Equality Trust of Sri Lanka

Dimithri Wijesinghe – Chairperson of Women's Solidarity Network / LBQ persons' rights

Rithika Dissanayake - Transgender Rights Activist, Heart to Heart Sri Lanka Organization

Saheshi Nuradha Jayasekara - Transgender Rights Activist, Nuravi Foundation

Misha'ari Weerabangsa -Delete Nothing, Co-Lead, Programs

Anuhas Sandaru - LGBTIQ+ Human Rights Activist

H. Wathsala K. Herath - Human Rights Activist, Trainer

Susith Nimantha Siriwardhana – Researcher, Lecturer, & Program Executive Officer, Équité

Ruvindya P.M. Senaratne – Assistant Project Officer, Équité

P.G Isuru Somawardena - LGBTIQ+ rights activist, Senior Project Officer, Équité

R. Sadurshan - LGBTIQ+ rights activist, Assistant Project Officer, Équité



A MENTAL WELL-BEING FIRST AID HANDBOOK
FOR LGBTIQ+ SRI LANKANS



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