



# Rainbow Space

## In Service Delivery Central Canada

Sept. 2004

Volume 1, Number 1

**“The Safe Space Program is designed to provide a non-threatening way to send the message that homophobia and hostility will not be tolerated within RBC.”**

### **How to be supportive of GLBT employees:**

- ? **Don't assume everyone is heterosexual.**
- ? **Don't permit homophobic jokes or comments.**
- ? **Treat the subject positively.**
- ? **Display your Safe Space sticker.**

## Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of *Rainbow Space* newsletter for SDCC. This newsletter will be distributed on a regular basis to highlight specific issues related to the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered (GLBT) community within RBC, and to highlight the importance of sexual preference as one of RBC's primary diversity elements.

While we acknowledge that sexual orientation is a very personal subject for many individuals, and some may not agree with the focus on the GLBT diversity dimension, it is important to remember that RBC supports an inclusive work environment for all employees. This is not about changing people's values or beliefs – it's about living our RBC values by ensuring all employees and clients feel welcome, visible and inclusive.

## The Safe Space Program

The Safe Space Program is being introduced within Service Delivery Central Canada to help foster a safe and inclusive environment for GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered) individuals. Diversity is one of our core values at RBC, and the belief is that if our GLBT employees can feel comfortable in the workplace, they will perform at their best.

Many employees simply do not know the facts about GLBT employees, while others are openly hostile. Therefore many GLBT employees feel the need to conceal their sexual orientation & anything in their personal life that may reveal it.

Because employees do not know which of their colleagues that they can trust to discuss personal issues, many end up feeling isolated. On the other hand, managers and employees who are supportive of this important diversity issue often don't know how to show their support for GLBT colleagues.

The Safe Space Program is a voluntary program that is designed to provide a non-threatening way for employees to send the message that homophobia and hostility will not be tolerated within RBC.

### **How Can I Be Supportive?**

Don't assume everyone is heterosexual. About 10% of the population, including within RBC's employees, is gay or lesbian. Few of them fit the popular stereotypes of behaviours and appearance. Likewise, it's not safe to assume that people who do fit these stereotypes are gay or lesbian.

Don't permit homophobic comments or jokes. These are harmful and don't belong in the workplace. Let co-workers know that you find them offensive.

**“The RBC "Safe Space" is a visible, non-threatening way to show that your desk, cubicle, or office is a "safe place" for gay men, bisexuals, transgendered and lesbians. It is completely voluntary”**

**Points to consider before displaying your Safe Space Sticker:**

- ? **Can I provide a safe space for my GLBT co-workers?**
- ? **Can I treat issues with understanding and strict confidence?**
- ? **Can I understand how these issues relate to the workplace?**

Use inclusive language. Instead of asking if a co-worker is married, ask if they're in a relationship. Terms such as "significant other" and "partner" are more inclusive than "girlfriend" or "spouse."

Treat the subject positively. When gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues are discussed, make it clear that you are supportive of all aspects of diversity.

Respect the privacy of the individual. Keep in mind that lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men may not be ready to "come out of the closet," even if you're trying to be supportive. They may feel threatened if your efforts to reach out appear to be aimed specifically at them.

**What Do I need to Understand?**

Display an RBC "Safe Space" sticker. This sticker was created as a visible, non-threatening way to show that your desk, cubicle, or office is a "safe place" for gay men, bisexuals, transgendered and lesbians. Traditionally, this symbol is comprised of a pink triangle, a widely recognized gay-positive symbol, surrounded by a green circle, the international symbol of acceptance. In Service Delivery Central Canada we will adopt a more modern symbol – a triangle in rainbow colours. The rainbow colours are a representative symbol of the diversity of the GLBT community.

Voluntarily displaying this sticker shows gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered co-workers that they can feel safe with you, and shows unsupportive co-workers that you won't tolerate homophobia.

**Before displaying the Safe Space sticker, what should I consider?**

- ✗ Can I provide safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered colleagues?
- ✗ Can I treat any issues raised with understanding and strict confidence?
- ✗ Can I understand how issues affect the well being of my workplace colleagues?

**What else should I know?**

- ✗ I am not expected to have the answers to every question.
- ✗ I am not expected to be a counsellor or trained to deal with crisis situations
- ✗ I am not obligated to disclose personal information about myself.
- ✗ Others will not assume that I am intolerant or incorrect if I do not post the Safe Space decal – it is a voluntary program.
- ✗ I will not be expected to participate in political activities.

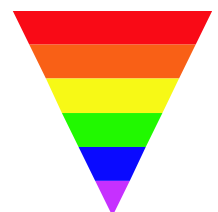
To obtain your Safe Space sticker, contact your centre's diversity committee, or any of the SDCC GLBT Advisory Board members listed on the next page.

---

## **The Rainbow Triangle**

The rainbow triangle incorporates two different symbols that have come to be recognized as symbols of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender pride and self-esteem.

During the Nazi regime, a pink triangle was used to label gay men, and a black triangle was used to label lesbians or other "anti-socials". In the late 1970s, the rainbow flag was developed to represent not only pride in having survived and thrived in a world that has often been a hostile place, but also pride in the extraordinary diversity of the community. There is no gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender "lifestyle" – there are only gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people, and each one is unique.



**SDCC GLBT  
Advisory Board  
members:**

**Jacki Challenger**  
Executive Sponsor

**Tammi Lisson**  
Sr Mgmt Champion

**Barb Blake**  
BSC

**John Giovannetti**  
BSC

**Eve Hammond**  
BSC

**Chris Killam**  
Cash Ops

**Carrie Hankinson**  
CM&R

**John Bervas**  
PSC

**Dean Gray**  
OSC

**Rob Cleugh**  
SBCD

**Jolanta  
Kedzierski**  
Regional Rep

## Terminology

**Sexual Orientation** – An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectionate attraction to individuals of a particular gender.

**Heterosexual orientation** – Attraction to individuals of the opposite gender.

**Homosexual orientation** – Attraction to individuals of one's own gender.

**Gay** – Refers mainly to men with a homosexual orientation (may also refer to women).

**Lesbian** – Refers to women with a homosexual orientation.

**Bisexual** – Someone who is attracted physically and emotionally to people of either gender.

**Gender identity** – One's internal sense of being male or female.

**Transgendered** – A person whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity based on their sex. For most people there is no conflict between gender identity and their physical sex.

**Two-spirited** – An aboriginal term used to describe people who embody both the male and female spirit. Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered aboriginal people are reclaiming this term.

**Homophobia** – Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals.

**Heterosexual ally** – A heterosexual person who supports and honours sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic and heterosexist remarks and actions of others.

**Transsexuals** – People who pursue gender reassignment through the use of hormones, surgery, and/or changes in identity, to live as a gender other than the one assigned to them at birth.

**Cross dressers or transvestites** – People who wear clothes and assume the identity of a gender other than that assigned to them at birth.

**Intersexuals or hermaphrodites** – People who are born with genitals of both sexes (ranging in degree); often an infant who is born intersexed will be surgically altered to represent one gender. Unfortunately, this is done before the child has had a chance to express which gender he or she is or would choose to be.

## The SDCC GLBT Advisory Board

The SDCC GLBT Advisory Board has a **mandate** which includes three primary objectives:

- ✍ To act in an advisory capacity to the regional diversity committee – not as a separate distinct body.
- ✍ To assist in the development of an inclusive work environment for GLBT employees within SDCC.
- ✍ To identify activities that will enhance understanding of GLBT issues, in order to collectively make our work environments more inclusive for GLBT employees.