



## *UP Skills for Work* Facilitator Guide: Facilitators supporting members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community

*UP Skills for Work* is a program that helps build skills for learning, work, and life.

This introductory guide has been created to support facilitators using *UP Skills for Work* resources with learners from the **2SLGBTQ+** community but who are not themselves members of the community. This guide can be used in addition to the free [online training](#) available for *UP Skills for Work* facilitators.

As a facilitator, it's important to understand the perspectives and experiences that adult learners bring to the learning environment. When you take the time to listen to and get to know learners, you gain a deeper understanding of what they want and need to succeed. As you read through this introductory guide, take time to identify what your next steps for learning will be.

In this guide, you'll find information about:

- creating an inclusive learning environment
- common barriers faced by learners from the 2SLGBTQ+ community in the workplace
- what to do if you make a mistake as a facilitator
- resources that can help your learners overcome barriers

## Creating an inclusive learning environment

An inclusive learning environment is one where everybody's needs and experiences are welcomed. Inclusivity encourages participation and collaboration. Learners are more likely to participate when they feel respected.

Here are some things to consider when using *UP Skills for Work* resources.

### Use inclusive language

The discussion-based framework in the *UP Skills for Work* resources provides starting points for meaningful discussions about developing skills. When facilitating discussions with learners, be mindful of using inclusive language. Here are some tips.

- **Avoid making assumptions.** It is harmful to make assumptions about a person's identity, name, or pronouns. When you make incorrect assumptions about a learner, they must either correct you or ignore the assumption, making them feel like they need to hide aspects of their life. Both situations are stressful and work against the goal of establishing an inclusive learning environment. If incorrect pronouns are repeatedly used, a learner can feel excluded. This can negatively impact engagement, participation, and learning. If you're not certain about someone's pronoun, you can use they/them until they have a chance to share their pronouns with you.
- **Provide opportunities to share pronouns.** When using the *UP Skills for Work* resources with a new group of learners, share your pronouns. This demonstrates allyship by helping to normalize the practice of sharing pronouns. It can encourage learners to share their pronouns, too. Ensure learners understand that sharing pronouns or any other personal information is optional, and they can opt out if they prefer.
- **Provide opportunities to share names.** Some learners may not use their legal name. It is good practice to give everyone the chance to tell you their name, rather than reading from a registration list, which might only have legal names.

- **Use gender-neutral language.** Avoid using language such as *ladies and gentleman* or *sir/madam*. Alternatives to *ladies and gentlemen* include *folks, people, learners, students, and you all*. If you have reason to refer to a learner's partner, refer to them as a *partner* or *spouse*, rather than a *husband* or *wife*, or *boyfriend* or *girlfriend*, unless you are told differently.

### Use trauma-informed instructional practices

Using a trauma-informed approach to facilitation is important, particularly when you are unsure about your learners' lived experiences. Many learners from the 2SLGBTQ+ community have experienced discrimination or violence in the workplace and other parts of their life. You should assume that at least one person in the room has experienced trauma.

- **Establish learning guidelines.** Provide opportunities for learners to share what they need for the learning environment to feel like a safer space. Co-create a list of guidelines with learners, including how to be respectful to one another during discussions and appropriate actions for violating the guidelines.
- **Build a trusting and collaborative learning environment.** The discussion-based framework used in the *UP Skills for Work* workbooks supports this goal by using open-ended questions that allow learners to guide the discussions. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. There are plenty of opportunities for active participation, but learners shouldn't be forced to participate or share.

Support learners' autonomy by encouraging them to identify their learning goals. Use the information at the beginning of each *UP Skills for Work* workbook about the skills and content covered to prompt learners into considering their personal learning goals for the session. Provide examples of specific and achievable goals.

Keep in mind that negative or limited prior experiences with education can impact a learner's willingness or ability to participate and engage in learning environments. If a workshop feels too much like a school environment, there's a risk of some learners disengaging entirely.

- **Be an active listener.** When you're an active listener, you respect other people's boundaries and preferences. Each learner has unique lived experiences. If learners feel comfortable sharing, it's important to take the time to listen respectfully and not offer opinions or judgement about their experiences. This will also help you identify what each individual learner needs to succeed. Make sure to thank learners if they choose to share.
- **Support a strength-based approach to learning.** Allow learners to focus on what they excel at. Each *UP Skills for Work* workbook includes opportunities for learners to reflect on and discuss their experiences and consider their next steps for learning. Be aware that this approach can take time and some learners may need additional support to recognize their own strengths. For some learners, you may need to reiterate that showing up for the workshop was itself an act of courage.
- **Skip, adapt, or extend activities and discussions when appropriate.** Use the *UP Skills for Work* resources in a way that works best for your learners. See the *UP Skills for Work* facilitator [online training](#) or [contact a Community Coordinator](#) for more information about adapting materials.

### **Commit to continuous learning**

This introductory guide has been written for facilitators who are not part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. It's important for all Canadians to understand the truth of Canada's history and its current relationship with the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Seek opportunities to learn, listen, and reflect on the realities of Canada's history and how the institutions in place today continue to marginalize people in the community. As a facilitator, it's crucial to understand how this legacy and present-day reality impacts learners in multiple aspects of their lives, including educational settings.

## Get to know your learners

Invest time in developing relationships with learners to build trust and understand their unique strengths and challenges. Every learner is a unique individual and has a preferred learning style. If a learner seems hesitant to participate, it could be for any number of reasons.

Some learners may also have a different communication style than you. For example, some forms of non-verbal communication are not universal, and some learners may not be comfortable making eye contact. This doesn't necessarily mean the learner is not interested or engaged.

One aspect of getting to know your learners is learning about and respecting their lived experiences. When using *UP Skills for Work* resources, this includes understanding some of the challenges learners have likely already faced in the workplace or may face in the future.

## Common barriers in the workplace

While everybody's lived experience is unique, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community frequently encounter some common barriers in the workplace. Some examples of barriers are listed below though they may not all be relevant to learners. Keep in mind that barriers in the workplace can be due to multiple overlapping factors.

### Lack of representation

When members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community don't see other people from this community in their workplace, especially in leadership roles, it can lead to feelings of isolation and have a negative impact on confidence. A lack of representation in promotional material and content can also be alienating.

## The risk of disclosing identity

Negative experiences when disclosing their identity at previous workplaces or in other aspects of life can inform a person's decision about whether to disclose their identity at work. Choosing to disclose can put a person at risk of experiencing overt or covert discrimination from co-workers or leadership.

By not disclosing their identity, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community may feel like they can't be their authentic selves at work. This can be stressful, too, as they may always worry about what parts of their personal life are considered safe to share.

## Discrimination and bullying

Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community often face discrimination in many parts of their life, including the workplace. It's common for workplace policies and the wording of those policies to be rooted in **heteronormative** and **cisnormative** assumptions. For example, benefits packages may not be inclusive for all people and may omit support for fertility treatments, parental leave, and gender-affirming care for certain groups.

Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community often experience bullying or harassment from co-workers and/or leadership. **Microaggressions** are also common. Microaggressions are everyday remarks or actions that imply negative associations and insults towards an individual or group. Examples of microaggressions include using harmful terminology, being condescending, and making inappropriate jokes.

A co-worker or supervisor may say or do something casually, with no real intent to inflict harm, but the remarks or actions can have long-lasting effects. Those impacted by microaggressions can feel unwelcome and emotionally exhausted. Many workplaces have policies in place to prevent and address bullying, but microaggressions might not obviously break any official rules. This makes addressing microaggressions in the workplace difficult.

Bullying, harassment, and microaggressions can negatively impact a person's self-esteem and their motivation in the workplace.

## Correcting co-workers

Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community may experience frustration or awkwardness if they must repeatedly educate or correct co-workers and leadership on their identity, name, or pronouns. This is very common for people who don't use she/her or he/him pronouns.

Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are often leaned upon in organizations that have reconciliation or diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies. While it's positive they are recognized for their insights, this reliance can become burdensome. They may find themselves shouldering the responsibility of training and educating other staff.

## Hiring practices

Standardized hiring practices at many organizations can exclude members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. For example, the traditional interview process can perpetuate biases surrounding how a person is expected to look and present themselves in an interview.

## What to do if you make a mistake

As a facilitator, you'll likely make mistakes from time to time. Perhaps you accidentally use an outdated term or incorrect pronoun. Think about your mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.

Decide if you should address the mistake in front of the group or in private on a case-by-case basis. If the mistake occurs in front of the group, you may wish to openly acknowledge the error and take responsibility in front of the group. In some situations, it may be better to acknowledge your mistake and apologize privately and directly to the person involved to avoid embarrassing them.

Here are some suggestions for what to do if you make a mistake.

- **Take responsibility.** An important first step when you make a mistake is to acknowledge it. Don't be defensive. Explain that you understand why what you did or said is a problem. Avoid making excuses for why you made the mistake.
- **Apologize.** Be sincere and specific about what you did wrong, but don't over-apologize. Respectfully correct yourself or if you don't know the proper correction, thoughtfully and politely ask for clarification.
- **Learn from the mistake.** Every mistake is an opportunity to learn. Take time to reflect on the mistake you've made and what caused it. This will help you avoid making the same mistake in the future.

## Other resources

When you take the time to understand your learners and their unique needs and experiences, you have a better understanding of how to support their growth by choosing relevant instructional approaches and resources. Visit [upskillsforwork.ca](https://upskillsforwork.ca) for more information about resources in the *UP Skills for Work* program that you can use with your learners to support the development of key workplace and life skills.

## Extension activities

*UP Skills for Work* offers a series of activities that expand on content in the core workbooks. Examples of activity topics that may be relevant to your learners include setting boundaries, understanding your rights at work, and dealing with microaggressions. Visit [upskillsforwork.ca](https://upskillsforwork.ca) to download activities.



## Glossary of terms

Here are some terms that are helpful to know when you're working with 2SLGBTQ+ learners. For more definitions related to 2SLGBTQ+ communities, see [The 519's Glossary of Terms](#).

### **2SLGBTQ+**

An acronym that stands for Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans, queer, and other identities

### **Cisgender**

A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth

### **Cisnormativity**

The assumption that everyone's gender identity corresponds to the gender assigned to them at birth and that everyone accepts this as "the norm"

### **Heteronormativity**

The assumption that all people are only attracted to people of a different gender than theirs and that everyone accepts this as "the norm"

### **Microaggressions**

Remarks or actions that imply negative associations and insults towards an individual or group

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