

About Prism's Safe Zone Allies Program

What is a Safe Zone Ally?

A Safe Zone is a welcoming, supportive and safe environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. A Safe Zone Ally is a person who promotes inclusion and understanding of all people, regardless of their orientation, identity, or expression.

Safe Zone Allies are not perfect, and they don't have all the answers. However, they have committed to 1) educating about oppression, heterosexism, transphobia, and homophobia; 2) combating these prejudices in our selves, in our community, and at Saint Leo; 3) providing a safe, confidential support network for members of the LGBTQ+ community; and 4) treating everyone with the dignity and respect they are entitled to as individuals.

Why does Saint Leo need a Safe Zone program?

From the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network's National School Climate Survey, we know that school is not always a safe place for LGBTQ students. Most LGBTQ students frequently hear anti-LGBTQ language and experience harassment related to their sexual orientation and gender expression, and the majority of LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school and are likely to skip class or even full days of school to avoid the anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying and harassment they face on a daily basis.

Labeling Safe Zones on campus makes a big difference. For many students, simply knowing that allies exist can be a source of support. Research shows that LGBTQ students with many supportive educators feel safer at school, skip fewer classes, and earn higher grades than students without supportive educators.

How can I become a Safe Zone Ally?

It's easy! Really, all you have to do is commit to listen to and learn from members of the LGBTQ+ community and be there to help them feel comfortable, welcome, and wanted here at Saint Leo. But to make things more official—and to help folks learn how best to make a difference, we offer monthly Safe Zone Ally training sessions both for students and for faculty/staff. Check our upcoming dates on Prism's EngageLeo events page (bit.ly/prism-events).

Each three-hour training session includes examination of the vocabulary of orientation, identity, and expression; an overview of the coming-out process and how difficult it can be; and discussion of various scenarios in which an Ally can help support LGBTQ+ community members.

At the end of the training session, participants have the option to sign a Safe Zone Ally Contract and commit to providing a safe and confidential network of resources for everyone in our community. Faculty, staff, and Resident Assistants who sign the Contract receive a Safe Zone Ally sign for their office/residence doors. Students who sign the Contract receive a Safe Zone Ally button, perfect for attaching to a backpack to show they bring support wherever they go.

When are the next training sessions?

We try to offer one faculty/staff training session and one student training session per month. Check with our events page on EngageLeo (bit.ly/prism-events) for the full list of what's currently planned. If your club, team, department, office, Greek organization, or large group of like-minded friends wants to schedule a special training session just for you, reach out to prism@saintleo.edu, and we'll be happy to work with you!

Who is already an Ally?

More people than you might think! Visit Prism's EngageLeo page (bit.ly/prism-engageleo) for the most up-to-date list of all trained Safe Zone Allies at Saint Leo. The list continually expands, getting updated after each Safe Zone Ally training session.

What meaning/symbolism does the Safe Zone Ally sign hold?

Prism's logo forms the top of our Safe Zone sign. You might recognize some of the components of that logo, which draws on several intersecting traditions and symbols. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says that we "are the light of the world," and that we are to let our light shine. Prism of Saint Leo University is so named because a light passing through a prism reveals the diverse components that, when combined, make the light bright and strong. In Prism, we value and celebrate the diversity of all our community's components.

The rainbow of colors produced by a prism are used to form the LGBT pride flag. This familiar flag first appeared in 1978, when it was flown during the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. The San Francisco artist Gilbert Baker designed the rainbow flag in response to a need for a symbol that could be used year after year. The different colors of the flag symbolize different components of the community: red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nature, blue for art, and purple for spirit. Notably, the shades of green and yellow used in Prism's logo are the official colors of Saint Leo, showing that we build on the values of our institution.

The blank space in the center of Prism's logo forms a downward-pointing triangle, which is a nod to the gay pink triangle and lesbian black triangle. The history of the pink and black triangles began in Nazi Germany during World War II. Each prisoner in the concentration camps wore some symbol, often a colored inverted triangle to designate their reason for incarceration. The pink triangle was for homosexual men. The black triangles were used to designate prisoners with "anti-social" behavior, including lesbians. In the 1970s, gay liberation groups resurrected the pink triangle as a symbol for the gay rights movement. Similarly, the black triangle was reclaimed by lesbians and feminists. While Prism itself doesn't exist to fight for gay or lesbian rights, we acknowledge the work of our predecessors which allow us to meet freely today.

Below the Prism logo, the Safe Zone sign clearly shows that the space it labels is a safe space for conversations about orientation, identity, or expression. Each Safe Zone sign includes a four-year date range. Every four years of being a participant, we ask Safe Zone Allies to re-certify, ensuring they learn of any updates in terminology, laws, social movements, and local resources so our Allies have the best and most relevant information possible.

The last line on the Safe Zone sign declares that an Ally supports the LGBTQ+ community of Saint Leo University. This commitment to our students, our colleagues, and our core value helps ensure a healthy learning environment and strengthens our entire institution.

Look for the Safe Zone sign on a growing number of office doors throughout Saint Leo University!

