Have you heard about the same-sex marriage postal vote? With so many people talking about the issue, you might feel isolated or confused by everything you’re hearing. During this time, it’s important to remember to look after yourself and to ask for help if it becomes too overwhelming.

In light of all the emotional distress being caused by the protracted and harmful debate surrounding marriage equality, ACON has put together these resources to help everyone within our communities, particularly younger members who often find themselves most vulnerable to hate speech. See the Stay Strong PDF flyer.

What’s the deal?

The government is going to run a voluntary postal vote by the public (not a compulsory plebiscite) to see how many Australians support marriage equality. The postal vote will take place between September and November 2017, unless the High Court finds either that the government isn’t authorised to spend the money needed to conduct the vote, or that the Australian Bureau of Statistics doesn’t have the authority to collect the information.

The ballots will be sent out from 12 September. Australians are strongly encouraged to return their forms by 27 October, with a final return date of 7 November. The result will be announced on 15 November. The question the public will be asked to respond to will be: ‘Do you support a change in the law to allow same-sex couples to marry?’ Following the announcement of the vote, there has been an increase in negative conversations and opinions on same-sex marriage, especially in the media.

How can this debate affect me?

The discussion around whether same-sex relationships are legally equal to heterosexual ones can bring up distressing
and negative emotions. You should never be made to feel that you are less than anyone else. And you shouldn’t have to put up with being bullied about your opinions, gender identity or sexuality at university, in your workplace or anywhere else.

**How to look after yourself**

If you’re a member of the LGBTQI community, remember, you are not alone. Eighty-one per cent of young people aged 18–24 support marriage equality (Galaxy 2012). Approach LGBTQI services and counsellors if you want additional support.

- **Look after yourself if you get involved in the debate.** While you shouldn’t feel pressured to do so, volunteering your time to the cause (by sharing or handing out flyers) can be a good way to feel a part of what’s going on and to connect with other like-minded people. Be sure to listen and debate respectfully and keep yourself emotionally and physically safe.
- **Monitor your social media.** If your Facebook feed starts to get cluttered with abusive voices, feel free to unfollow any people and publications whose views you find disrespectful. If you start getting overwhelmed by the amount of information, consider taking a break from all the media coverage.
- **Practise self-care.** When anything tough is going on, it’s important to take care of yourself, because that can be when we’re most vulnerable. Take time out to socialise and to do things you enjoy; eat healthily, take some exercise and get enough sleep; and practise relaxation techniques if you’re feeling stressed.
- **Talk to someone you trust.** You don’t have to bottle up your feelings. Sharing them with a parent, trusted friend or counsellor can help if you’re feeling isolated and alone. Tell your trusted support person how they can help you. Maybe you only need them to listen to you in a non-judgemental way, to help you find relevant support services or to check in regularly to see how you’re doing. If you have same-sex parents, remember that other people’s opinions don’t change how your parents feel about you or how much your family loves you.
- Remember that you’re not alone. The LGBTQI community is incredibly resilient, strong and courageous.

**Contacts**

*If you have experienced discrimination or abuse* it is really important that you let someone know. It is not something you have to live with on your own. You can speak to a counsellor at CAPS or call Twenty10 on (02) 8594 9555 (10am – 6pm Monday to Friday) twenty10.org.au or The Gender Centre Inc on (02) 9519 7599 (9am – 12pm, 1 – 4.30pm, Monday to Friday) gendercentre.org.au

**Extract from Reach Out**

**More support**

- ALLY support network at UNSW
- ACON support resources
- Reach Out support contacts
- UNSW Newsroom