

Ally Week Educator Guide

Thank you for taking the time to learn about GLSEN's Ally Week! Launched in 2005, Ally Week is a student-powered campaign dedicated to encouraging students, school staff and others to be allies to LGBT youth. Ally Week 2016 is taking place **September 26 – September 30**.

From GLSEN's 2013 National School Climate Survey, we know that schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBT students – many of whom commonly hear homophobic remarks and face verbal and physical harassment and even physical assault because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

- 71.4% of LGBT students heard "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "that's so gay") and 64.5% heard other homophobic remarks (e.g., "dyke" or "faggot") frequently or often at school.
- 74.1% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 36.2% reported being physically harassed and 16.5% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- 55.2% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 22.7% reported being physically harassed and 11.4% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their gender expression.

In addition, we know that many LGBT students miss classes or entire days of school rather than face a hostile environment.

- Nearly one-third of LGBT students (30.3%) missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Students with greater numbers of supportive staff had a greater sense of being a part of their school community than other students.

School-based victimization denies students their right to an education. Ally Week serves to bring these issues to light, with particular attention on the actions that allies can take to combat anti-LGBT name-calling, bullying and harassment in schools. Participating in Ally Week is an effective way for educators to show their support for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

This year, GroundSpark is offering free streaming of the award-winning documentary *Straightlaced—How Gender's Got Us All Tied Up*. Directed by Academy Award winner Debra Chasnoff, this feature-length film explores the pressures that ALL teens face when it comes to dealing with gender norms and sexuality. The students in the film identify as straight, LGBTQ, and other identities—but what they all have in common are their challenges and courage when it comes to making sense of gender pressures. *Straightlaced* is a dynamic conversation-starter. Watch the trailer [here](#) and sign up for your free stream [here](#).

Ally Week Frequently Asked Questions

What is an ally?

An ally is a person who takes demonstrable action supporting members of a group with which they do not identify. GLSEN's Ally Week focuses on allyship for LGBT youth, who face disproportionate bullying, harassment and discrimination in K-12 schools. All educators can be allies to LGBT youth, and LGBT youth can be allies to one another, as well as to members of groups whose identities they don't share. For example, cisgender LGB students can always learn more about being allies to transgender or gender nonconforming students, and white LGBT students can learn about being allies to LGBT students of color.

What is Ally Week?

Ally Week is a student-organized GLSEN program in which students hold a national conversation about the meaning of allyship. Ally Week is for everyone: straight and cisgender allies to LGBT youth are encouraged to learn about what actions they can take to support their LGBT peers, educator allies use Ally Week as an opportunity to teach lessons about compassion and diversity, and LGBT youth can learn about how to support one another's overlapping, intersecting identities.

What happens during Ally Week?

During Ally Week, students organize activities at school that focus on encouraging and enhancing allyship toward LGBT youth. GLSEN recommends holding an [Ally 101 workshop](#), which outlines the basics of being an ally to LGBT youth. In addition, GLSEN has provided a list of [actions](#) anyone can take to support LGBT youth, including LGBT youth of color, trans and gender nonconforming youth, and LGBT youth with different abilities.

Who started Ally Week?

In 2005, members of GLSEN's Jump-Start National Student Leadership Team came up with an idea to celebrate allies committed to ensuring safe and affirming schools for all, and to encourage students to take action to support LGBT students. The idea turned into the first Ally Week celebrated in schools nationwide in October of that year.

What is GLSEN?

GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established nationally in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

How Can I Support Ally Week As An Educator?

Ally Week is a student-led action, but you can still be involved. As an educator you have the opportunity to help students gauge the appropriate actions for Ally Week in the context of your school community. Having knowledge of the school's policies and procedures, you can offer suggestions on how students can develop effective Ally Week activities. You can also help students negotiate with administrators and other students who may oppose Ally Week.

1. **Support Students' Ally Week Efforts:** Attend your school's GSA or organizational meetings leading up to Ally Week. Offer to take on tasks and help students with their organizing efforts. Work with other educators to secure space for students to display Ally Week information as well as securing time and space for an auditorium or staff presentation. During Ally Week, students will be interacting with their peers. In some instances, students' peers could respond with name-calling and bullying. Use these as teachable moments to model support for LGBT students and allies by intervening and insisting that your school be a safe space for ALL.
2. **Be a Visible Ally to LGBT Students:** Show LGBT students you are an ally by creating a safe and inclusive space in your classroom or office. To learn how to be an ally to LGBT students, read [GLSEN's Safe Space Kit](#). The Safe Space Kit outlines ways to show visible support for LGBT students, educate about anti-LGBT bias and advocate for inclusive changes in your school.
3. **Connect with GLSEN and Other Educators Like You:** Connect with other educators supporting students' Ally Week efforts. You can join the GLSEN Educator Forum group on Facebook as well as sign up for [Educator Network emails](#) to discover more resources and ideas from like-minded educators. Engage in the online conversation about allyship by using the hashtags #MyAllies and #AllyWeek.
4. **Discuss Ally Week with Students:** Dedicate some class time during Ally Week to discuss anti-LGBT bias in schools and the need for allies. Engage your students in discussion using the following questions:
 - How safe do you think our school is for LGBT students? How do you know?
 - Why do you think it's important to be an ally to LGBT students?
 - Who can be an ally?
 - What are some examples of things people can do to demonstrate being an ally in our school?
5. **Talk About Ally Week with Colleagues:** As an educator, you have the unique opportunity to engage other school staff. If possible, invite a student leader to make a presentation on the importance of supporting LGBT students. Provide your colleagues with this Educator Guide and GLSEN's Safe Space Kit and discuss the need for allies at school.
6. **Continue the Conversation:** Ally Week should not be the only time you discuss LGBT individuals in the classroom. Incorporate LGBT history, themes, and events into lesson plans you are already teaching. Get started with GLSEN's [LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum Guide for Educators](#).