

SAFE SPACE KIT

A Guide to Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
Transgender, and Queer Students in Your School



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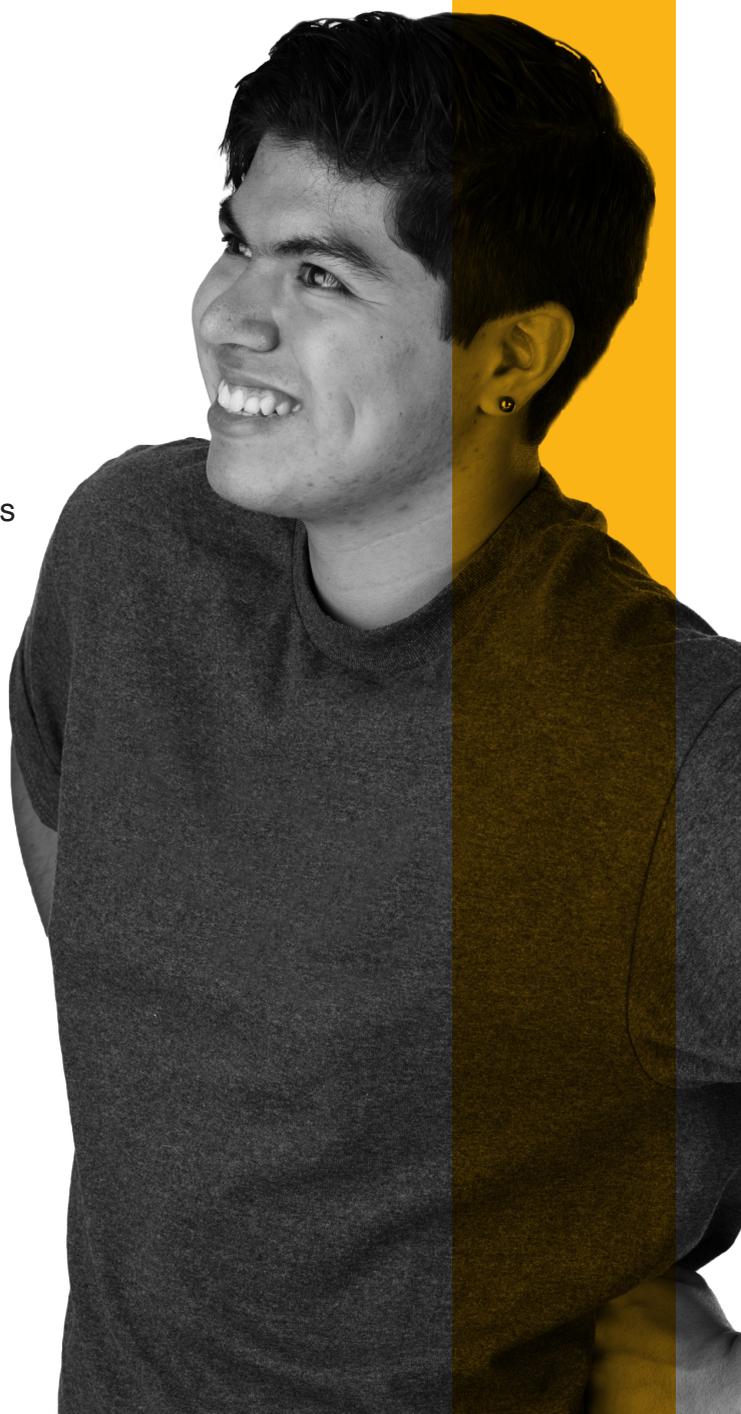
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WHAT IS A SAFE SPACE?

A safe space is a supportive and affirming environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. While we can never ensure that any space is going to be “safe” and affirming one hundred percent of the time, a safe space is a place, group, or community that is intentionally working to affirm LGBTQ people. From our *National School Climate Survey*, we know that a 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. Holding the dual position of controlling classroom environments, and often having a voice to advocate on LGBTQ students’ behalf to school administration, educators maintain an invaluable role in creating positive learning environments. They are also the direct actors in implementing LGBTQ content in class curricula or serving as a faculty advisor for students to formally organize supportive groups on campus. For many students, having adult allies in school to whom they can turn for support — or even the simple knowledge that LGBTQ allies exist at their school — can help create a welcoming and safe environment for students to learn.



WHAT DOES THE SAFE SPACE SYMBOL MEAN?

You might recognize some of the components of the *Safe Space* symbol, which features the LGBTQ pride flag and displays a community of triangles that honor the gay pink triangle and lesbian black triangle from Nazi Germany during World War II. These symbols were assigned to and then reclaimed by gay men and lesbians, respectively.

The LGBTQ pride flag, or the rainbow flag, was designed by Gilbert Baker and first appeared in 1978, when it was flown during the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Freedom Day Parade. The different colors of the flag symbolize different components of the community. At one time a black stripe added at the bottom symbolized a hope for victory over AIDS. In 2017, Philadelphia’s office of LGBT Affairs’ *More Color, More Pride Campaign* released a flag with black and brown stripes on top of the rainbow flag to symbolize the need to center the experiences of Black and Brown LGBTQ people within LGBTQ advocacy. We’ve followed this lead in adding black and brown stripes to the safe space symbol so that Black and Brown students can see this symbol and understand that the safe space being created has them in mind.

We’ve combined these potent symbols for the *Safe Space* stickers and posters. The emblem reminds us of the joy of the diverse, accepting community we hope to build through resources like the *Safe Space Kit*, as well as the struggle against oppression we face as we try to make that vision a reality.

WHO SHOULD PUT UP THE SAFE SPACE KIT STICKER?

Anyone can display a Safe Space Symbol to show their allyship to the LGBTQ community, and to promote LGBTQ visibility. You do not have to be an expert in LGBTQ identity to display a Safe Space Sticker. However, teachers who display the Safe Space Sticker should be prepared for students to approach them about LGBTQ identity. By displaying a Safe Space Sticker, you are telling students that you will listen to them, affirm their chosen or shared names, pronouns, or other identities, and can refer them to someone in the school who they can talk to more.

GLSEN requests that educators and school leaders who display our Safe Space Sticker to be prepared to:

- ▼ Act in allyship with the LGBTQ community in and outside of school.
- ▼ Have a student approach you to discuss their gender identity or sexual orientation, and be familiar with a student's right to privacy, where you do not disclose identity information to others.
- ▼ Affirm students' chosen names and pronouns in conversations.
- ▼ Learn, use, and affirm new identity and relationship terms and experiences.

HOW DO I USE THE SAFE SPACE KIT?

GLSEN recommends that you carefully read through the Safe Space Kit to gain an understanding of how to begin advocating for your LGBTQ students. This kit will provide you with practical ways to transform your school into a safer space for all students, particularly LGBTQ students, by supporting and educating students, sharing your knowledge with other educators and advocating for school-wide changes. The "Ask Yourself" questions throughout this guide provide an opportunity for you to consider your own experiences and beliefs about the information

provided and how it may relate to your own work in school. Once you have reviewed the guide, you will be ready to act in allyship by displaying the Safe Space posters in your office or classroom. You will also be better prepared to prevent and/or intervene in LGBTQ-based bullying and bias.

WHAT IS THE SAFE SPACE KIT?

The *Safe Space Kit* is designed to help educators create a positive learning environment for LGBTQ students. We believe that one of the most effective ways for an educator to create a safe space is to be supportive and act in allyship to LGBTQ students. The hard copy of the *Safe Space Kit* includes valuable information on adult allyship, 10 *Safe Space* stickers and 2 *Safe Space* posters along with a comprehensive list of resources and referral sources. The downloaded PDF version includes this information, a printable poster and printable stickers. By displaying the posters and stickers, you can make your allyship with LGBTQ students visible within the school community. In either form, the *Safe Space Kit* includes practical ways that you can begin advocating for LGBTQ visibility and create a safer school environment for all students.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE SAFE SPACE KIT?

- ▼ **Know the Issues** gives background information about LGBTQ students' experiences in school and anti-LGBTQ bias.
- ▼ **Support** describes specific actions you can take to be an effective advocate for LGBTQ students, some helpful "dos and don'ts" of adult allyship, and suggestions for interrupting anti-LGBTQ language.
- ▼ **Educate** discusses ways to bring LGBTQ visibility into your curriculum and inform other educators and school leaders about institutional supports for LGBTQ students, including policies for combating anti-LGBTQ bias and behavior.
- ▼ **Advocate** provides strategies improving school climate for LGBTQ students at your school.

Know the Issues



What is allyship?

In a society that stigmatizes those who are not a member of the majority or dominant group, it is important for those that have privilege to act in allyship. Acting in allyship is when an individual, sometimes a member of the majority or dominant group, speaks out and acts in solidarity with a person or group that is targeted.

Allyship works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly. This can come in various forms such as interrupting individual moments of bias, to asking for systematic changes to eliminate unfairness and relieve injustices.

In the LGBTQ community, acting in allyship is based on supporting and advocating for the rights of LGBTQ people in a heteronormative world. Acting in allyship can include educating others about the LGBTQ rights movement, staying up to date on the needs of the community, and being accountable in advocating

it might not be safe for LGBTQ people to be out or visible. LGBTQ-identified educators and school leaders can also use this guide to develop action plans for active allyship for LGBTQ students. Any adult within the school system can act in allyship with LGBTQ students by listening to how LGBTQ students envision safe and inclusive schools, and supporting their advocacy.

Note on Intersectionality: Sexuality and gender identities are related to the other identities that people hold and the privileges associated with those identities. Individuals in the LGBTQ community not only hold LGBTQ identities but are also people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, and people experiencing homelessness. Being LGBTQ is not a monolithic experience and neither are the needs to approach multiple forms of oppression within the community. Allyship consists of challenging the multiplicity of oppressive experiences, including racism, genderism, sexism, ableism, etc. that these students experience.

Why act in allyship with LGBTQ students?

Many students face bullying, harassment and name-calling coming from bias and discrimination. However, LGBTQ students face particularly hostile school environments and LGBTQ students with a variety of oppressed identities (e.g. LGBTQ students of color, LGBTQ students with disabilities) experience hostile school environments on multiple fronts. It's important that the adults in school systems take a proactive approach to bullying and harassment by setting up a culture of LGBTQ visibility and support. Your allyship for these students can make a difference in ways that will benefit the whole school climate.



ASK YOURSELF

- ▼ Have you seen examples of anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying or harassment in your school?
- ▼ How are students affected by anti-LGBTQ bias at your school?
- ▼ Did you see anti-LGBTQ bias in school when you were a student? How did it affect you?

for systemic changes that benefit those that are disproportionately experiencing harm. It is important for allies to demonstrate that LGBTQ people are not alone as they work to improve school climate, and to advocate when

In order to document the experiences of LGBTQ students, GLSEN conducts the *National School Climate Survey* every two years since 2001. From the survey we have learned that anti-LGBTQ language fills classrooms, hallways, school buses, gyms, and cafeterias. For example, findings from this report found that anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination negatively affected the educational outcomes of LGBTQ students, as well as their mental health. The report also showed that compared to their non-LGBTQ peers, LGBTQ students are twice as likely to have missed school in the past month due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable. Having educators advocating for LGBTQ students and amplifying their messages for safe and inclusive schools, can take some of the burden off LGBTQ youth.

In addition to the damage it can do to LGBTQ students, anti-LGBTQ bias also affects other members of the school community. Anti-LGBTQ behavior creates a hostile environment and an uncomfortable and unsafe space for everyone. Homophobia and transphobia can be used to stigmatize, silence and target people who are perceived as LGBTQ, but are not. If certain actions and behaviors are deemed to be

“ I have learned that harassment in schools is a norm. Kids would scream the term ‘faggot’ as they saw me in the halls. None of the teachers said a word, and that is what scared me... I don’t feel safe at my school because I’m gay.”

— 11th Grade Student, North Carolina

stereotypically “queer,” students may avoid them for fear of being targeted with anti-LGBTQ behavior. For example, a student who identifies as male may avoid drama class or wearing dresses and a student who identifies as female may decide not to wear ties or button-up shirts, just to avoid anti-LGBTQ bias. In order to protect all students and allow them the freedom



Anti-LGBTQ Bias in School

Hector was an 11-year-old, straight-identified, middle school student who just wanted to be himself. His classmates thought he was feminine for a boy and began teasing him and calling him names like “faggot” and asking him why he was gay. Hector told his mother about the bullying at school and she immediately went to the

principal’s office to have something done. Unfortunately, the school was not helpful and refused to take any action stating “it’s just boys being boys.” The other students knew his mother had spoken to the principal, which only increased the amount of bullying. Halfway through the school year, Hector told the school social worker that he couldn’t endure the constant bullying and harassment anymore, and that he was thinking about ending his life.

to reach their full potential, we must put an end to anti-LGBTQ bias and behavior in schools.

Research shows that having supportive school staff has a positive effect on a student’s educational experience. For example, LGBTQ students with supportive educators were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns and had higher grade point averages than LGBTQ students with no supportive educators. When school staff effectively intervene in harassment, LGBTQ students feel safer and are less likely to miss school.

Having supportive educators and school leaders can lead to students feeling safer and more included in school, resulting in a more positive and successful school experience. In addition to supporting individual LGBTQ students, those acting in allyship challenge anti-LGBTQ behavior and work proactively to ensure safer, more inclusive schools for all students.

Assessing Your Personal Beliefs: Dismantling internalized homophobia and transphobia

People aren’t born prejudiced, so where does it come from? From the moment we are born, we are inundated with messages, spoken and unspoken, about different types of people. Often we learn stereotypes and prejudices without even realizing it. Some of these messages may have been about ourselves and what we are “supposed to” or “not supposed to” be. All of us, LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ, have learned messages about LGBTQ people. What were the earliest messages you received about LGBTQ people and where did they come from? Were they positive, negative or neutral? Understanding the messages we receive can help us identify our own beliefs and biases that we can then challenge, helping us act in allyship better. Use the “Check Yourself” Exercise below to explore your own biases.

Check Yourself: Understanding Your Own Beliefs

Anti-LGBTQ bias and heteronormativity is all around us. Yet we tend to overlook the subtle biases — the anti-LGBTQ jokes, the exclusion of LGBTQ related-themes in curricula, even anti-LGBTQ name-calling. Subtle or not, bias has the power to hurt and isolate people. Your work as an educator committed to safe and supportive learning environments for all students includes recognizing and challenging your own anti-LGBTQ bias and dismantling any internalized homophobia or transphobia that you may hold. Answer each question honestly, and consider how these will affect your work in advocating for LGBTQ students.

1. If someone were to come out to you as LGBTQ, what would your first thought be?
2. How would you feel if your child came out to you as LGBTQ? How would you feel if your mother, father or sibling came out to you as LGBTQ?
3. Would you go to a physician whom you thought was LGBTQ if they were of a different gender than you? What if they were the same gender as you?

Check Yourself: Understanding Your Own Beliefs (cont.)

4. Have you ever been to an LGBTQ social event, march or worship service? Why or why not?
5. Can you think of three historical figures who were lesbian, gay or bisexual?
6. Can you think of three historical figures who were trans or nonbinary?
7. Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of LGBTQ people?
8. Have you ever interrupted anti-LGBTQ teasing or harassment? Why or why not?
9. If you do not identify as LGBTQ, how would you feel if people thought you were LGBTQ?
10. If you do identify as LGBTQ, do you share this identity with your students? Their families? Colleagues? Administrators? Why or why not?

Recognizing your own relationship to the LGBTQ community and personal beliefs about LGBTQ identity is an important first step in building a practice of allyship for LGBTQ students. Based on your responses to these questions, do you think you have internalized some of the anti-LGBTQ messages pervasive in our world? How might your beliefs influence your actions as an educator of LGBTQ students? The more aware we are of our own biases and their impact on our behavior, the easier it is to ensure that our personal beliefs don't undermine our efforts to support LGBTQ students.

Talking the Talk

We are a language-based society, and using language is the best way that we learn about new things. If you've ever seen a paint strip in a hardware store, think about how many words we use to describe shades of one color. And that's just paint, not people's identities! Inuit people have 50 different words for what we call "snow." That's because it's important to them. We need language to talk about gender and sexual identities because it helps people feel seen and validated when they fall outside of people's assumptions.

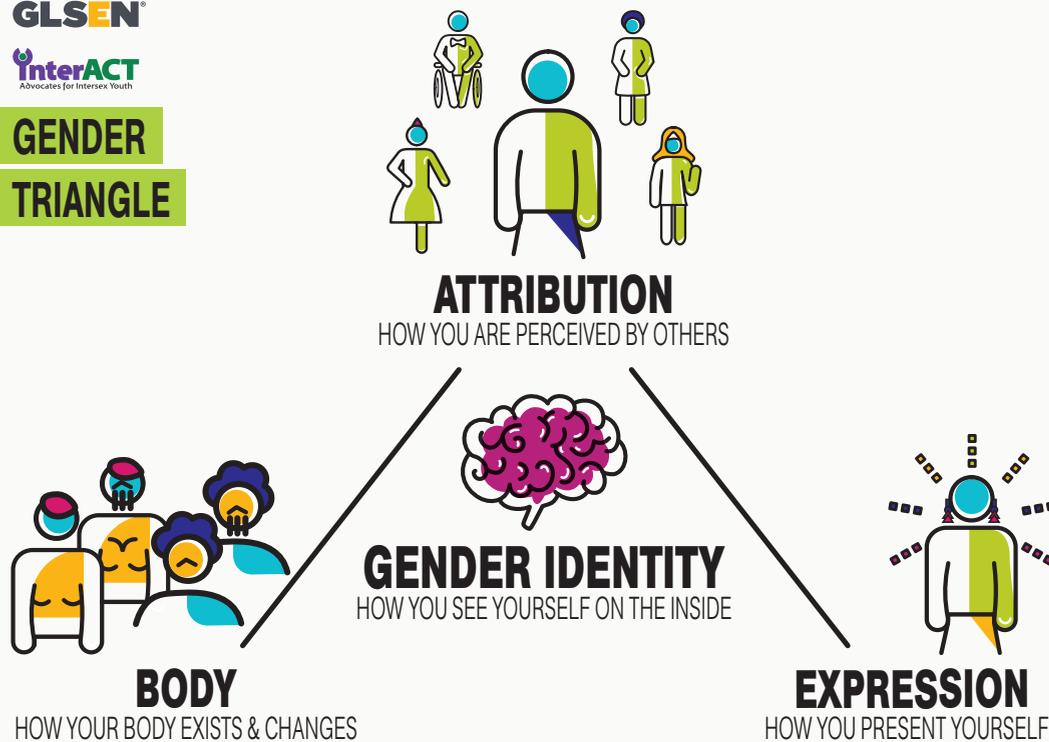
In addition, having the language to describe one's gender identity outside of the gender binary of "male/female" is liberating and creates community among people experiencing gender in similar ways. It can help people to find sexual

identities that expand outside of heteronormativity. We all have the right to have language to define and better understand ourselves.

Language is forever developing. The beauty of identity exploration is that folks are finding new ways to put words to their experiences every day. An important action to build allyship is to continually educate yourself on new and updated terms that LGBTQ students are using to define themselves.

The terminology that follows is a way to set a foundation for that knowledge. GLSEN continues to amplify current student experiences, identity terminology, and voices through our blog: www.glsen.org/blog.

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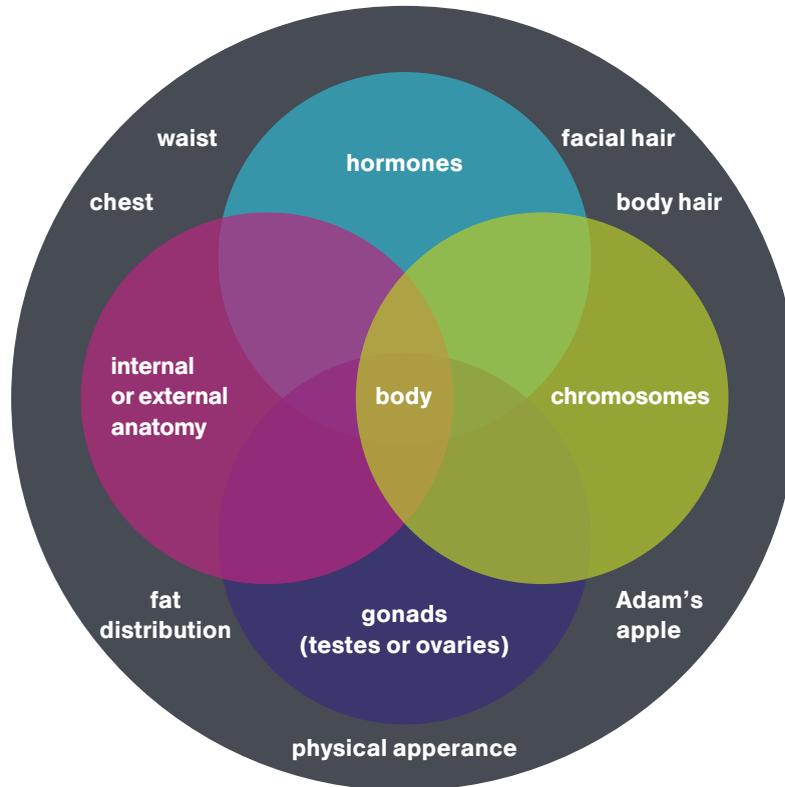
InterACT
Advocates for Intersex YouthGENDER
TRIANGLE

GLSEN and interACT developed the **Gender Triangle** as an educational tool to highlight the main components that revolve around gender identity—our bodies, how we use our bodies to express ourselves, and how the world around us reads our bodies based on the cultural and social codes of our time and place.

First, everyone has a **BODY**. And how our bodies exist and develop over time is unique. Although ideas about gender are often imposed on our bodies—facial hair attributed to manhood or chest development to womanhood—these physical traits do not always inform our identity. Instead, assumptions are made because of how others interpret our **BODILY CHARACTERISTICS**. Upon birth, we are typically categorized into one of two genders (boy or girl) depending on how our genitals are read. Throughout our lives, however, our many

bodily characteristics work together to create a unique path of development, causing some of us to grow really tall, and others to remain short, or some of us to grow hair under our armpits and legs, while others remain bare. While this development often happens on its own during puberty, this change can also be administered through medicine, such as hormone replacement therapy. Since our society often conflates our bodies (or genitalia) with our gender identity, it is critical that we allow space for people to self-identify. Some may feel that their bodies are distinct from their gender while others feel that the two are interrelated. Our bodily development is different, and so are our understandings of the relationship between our bodies and our genders. To learn about the different secondary sex characteristics and how they affect our bodies, study this Venn diagram from interACT:

SECONDARY BODILY CHARACTERISTICS



EXPRESSION is simply how we use our body to present ourselves. This includes the way that we talk, our mannerisms, how we interact with others, our clothing, accessories, hairstyles, what activities we enjoy, and much more! However, you should never use a person's presentation to guess their gender identity. This is important because our gender expression is often guided by our feelings of safety or acceptance. As a result, there can often be incongruence between how we identify on the inside and how we express ourselves on the outside. Expression of our gender or selves, whether that be through hair styles, makeup, or personal fashion, changes over the course of our lives.

ATTRIBUTION simply describes how we are perceived by others. This can change depending on the people you're around, the country

you're in, or even the time period in which you live. For example, although we might consider dresses to be stereotypically feminine, ancient Romans wore "togas" regardless of their gender, and a man wearing one would even be perceived as masculine. Due to cultural and generational differences, others' interpretations of our bodies may not always match our internal sense of self, which can also lead to uncomfortable interactions. **MISGENDERING** refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than the one you are. One way to acknowledge someone's right to self-identify is to ask for their **PRONOUNS**—the small words used in replace of names such as she/her, he/him, or they/them—rather than making an assumption. If you accidentally use the wrong pronouns for someone, make sure to correct yourself going forward.

Finally, **GENDER IDENTITY** sits the core of this triangle to demonstrate that gender identity is how you see yourself at your core. Everyone gets to decide their gender identity for themselves and this designation can also change over time. You may identify as a girl or boy, woman or man, or you might identify as agender, genderqueer, nonbinary, or just as a person. You may choose not to use any specific term to define your gender identity, or you may use a term today that you decide later doesn't fit. Everyone can identify however feels right to them, and our gender identity—as our internal sense of self—is indisputable.

The more all of these aspects align, the more you may identify as **CISGENDER** and experience **CIS-PRIVILEGE**. For example, if you identify as a boy with bodily traits and expression that are attributed to masculinity within your culture, then you experience privilege. Cisgender people often get to move through the world without thinking about gender, being misgendered, or feeling limited by gender stereotypes. Those who find tension among these four components, mainly the world's perception of their body and their internal gender identity, may identify as **TRANSGENDER**. Transgender often serves as an umbrella term for myriad other gender identities such as nonbinary, genderqueer, or agender. In working with youth, it's important to reflect on our own gender and consider the privileges we hold. Doing this is an important step towards understanding the many parts of our students' identities to ultimately create safer and more affirming schools for all.

Self-Reflection

Now that we've covered the main components that factor into gender identity, start thinking about how this all relates to you as an individual. The following questions will encourage you to self-reflect on your own gender in order to think critically about how each of these elements manifest around you:

- ▼ Take a moment to think about your gender identity. How do you identify today? Is this the same as when you were a child?
- ▼ Self-expression can be really fun when we give people the space to explore what feels good to them. There are so many different ways to present and express ourselves to the world! What are some ways you are expressing or showing your gender today? How might this change on a different day or in a different setting?
- ▼ There are gender stereotypes that try to tell us that people who identify as girls or boys should act or dress a certain way; i.e. "girls like dresses" or "boys don't cry." These stereotypes can make people feel bad for the things they like to do, and erases people who may identify or express themselves outside of the binary of masculinity/femininity or gender altogether. What are some ways that you break gender stereotypes attached to the norms attributed to your gender?
- ▼ The attribution of our gender identity by others is dependent on factors like culture, language, and age. How does attribution change depending on what spaces you're in and who you're around? Can you think of moments when you may have read or addressed someone in a way that may not have honored how they identified on the inside?

“One of the greatest challenges we face on a daily basis is not what the students do to one another. In fact, sadly, it is what is said by some of my colleagues about the students.”

— Alternative High School Educator, Ohio

How much LGBTQ-related terminology do you already know? On the left is a set of LGBTQ-related terms, on the right are definitions of these terms. To test your knowledge, select the matching definition for each term. Then check the *LGBTQ Terminology Review* at the end of the guide for more LGBTQ-related terms and definitions.

ASK YOURSELF

- ▼ Which terms were you most familiar with? Which were you unfamiliar with?
- ▼ What terms are you most comfortable using? Are there any terms you are uncomfortable using? Why?

ANSWER KEY: 1=B, 2=O, 3=J, 4=E, 5=D, 6=I, 7=K, 8=M, 9=G, 10=A, 11=P, 12=L, 13=N, 14=F, 15=H, 16=C

1. **Sexual Orientation**

2. **Lesbian**

3. **Gender Identity**

4. **Gender Expression**

5. **Trans or transgender**

6. **Gay**

7. **Gender
Non-Conforming (GNC)**

8. **Asexual**

9. **Bisexual**

10. **Transphobia**

11. **Homophobia**

12. **Queer**

13. **Genderism**

14. **Intersex**

15. **Bodily characteristics**

16. **Nonbinary**

A Hatred or fear of those who are perceived to break or blur stereotypical gender roles, often expressed as stereotyping, discrimination, harassment and/or violence.

B The inner feelings of who a person is attracted to emotionally and/or physically, in relation to their own gender identity. Some people may identify as “asexual,” “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “straight,” and many more.

C An umbrella term for people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman or masculine/feminine. Nonbinary people are often included under the trans umbrella, but not all may identify as transgender. Other genders that may be included under the nonbinary umbrella are genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender.

D An umbrella term describing people whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth or by society.

E The multiple ways in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others. This includes, but is not limited to, the way that we talk, our mannerisms, how we interact with others, our clothing, accessories, hairstyles, and activities we enjoy.

F People who have any range of bodily characteristics that may not fit typical expectations for “male” or “female” development.

G A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to two or more genders, often used to describe people attracted to “genders like theirs” and “other genders”

H Physical traits that compose one’s body; i.e. *primary* characteristics such as chromosomes, genitals, internal reproductive organs, hormone levels, and *secondary* characteristics such as facial hair, chest development, etc.

I Someone, who can be transgender or cisgender, who is generally attracted to someone of the same gender.

J A personal conception of oneself as may include, “man,” “woman,” “androgynous,” “transgender,” “genderqueer” and many others, or a combination thereof.

K A descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify in this way may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

L An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. While it was historically used as a derogatory slur, it has been reclaimed and used as an inclusive term among many LGBTQ people today.

M A person who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual, emotional). These individuals may also identify as “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “heterosexual,” and many more.

N The systematic belief that people need to conform to their gender assigned at birth in a gender-binary system that includes only female and male.

O Someone, who can be transgender or cisgender, who generally considers themselves a woman or femme who is attracted to other women and/or femmes.

P The irrational fear of or aversion to homosexuality or lesbian, gay or bisexual people.

Support



O

ne of the key ways to act in allyship is to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students in your school. This section describes the dos and don'ts of

being an ally and four main ways you can be supportive:

Be visible.

Support students who come out to you.

Respond to anti-LGBTQ language and behaviors.

Support student clubs, such as GSAs/Gender and Sexuality Alliances.

Be Visible

One of the most important parts of acting in allyship with LGBTQ students is demonstrating your allyship through supportive actions. Even if students don't come to you directly, research shows that just knowing that there is a supportive educator at school can help LGBTQ students feel better about being in school. Making yourself visible can be as simple as displaying a sticker. It can also be as involved as demonstrating and modeling supportive behaviors. Below you will find some suggestions of how to make your allyship with LGBTQ students visible.

MAKE YOUR SPACE VISIBLE

Make your classroom or office visible as a safe space for LGBTQ students. This will help students identify you as someone to come to for support and your space as one where they will be safe.

▼ **Post Safe Space materials.** Display Safe Space stickers or posters in your classroom or office. This will let students know that it is a safe space and that you are supportive of LGBTQ students.



▼ **Display LGBTQ supportive materials.** Post supportive materials such as quotes from famous LGBTQ icons, information about the LGBTQ community or materials from LGBTQ organizations. You can find famous LGBTQ icons to teach about during national holidays and months of celebration at www.glsen.org/gsa. It is important to

remember that LGBTQ icons can also be included throughout the year beyond Black History Month, Women's History Month, Native Heritage Month, etc. You can also find more LGBTQ historical moments at www.glsen.org/lgbtqhistory. Along with signs for national holidays and months of celebration already in the classroom (e.g., Black History Month or Women's History Month), display information about LGBTQ History Month in October, LGBTQ Pride Month in June or GLSEN's Ally Week in September.

MAKE YOURSELF VISIBLE

Making your allyship visible will allow students to easily identify you as a supportive educator.

▼ **Wear a visible marker.** Wear a supportive button or wristband or even a simple rainbow bracelet. These will let students know that you are a supportive ally without saying a word.

▼ **Let other educators know.** In an ideal world, all educators would be supportive allies to LGBTQ students. But the reality is that you may be one of only a few at your school. Let other educators know that you are an ally and share with them the important role they too can play in supporting LGBTQ students.

LET YOUR ACTIONS SPEAK FOR YOU

Sometimes your actions can speak louder than any button or poster. Here are simple actions you can take that will let staff and students know you are an ally.

▼ **Make no assumptions.** When engaging with students, or even other staff and parents, do not assume you know their sexual orientation or gender identity. Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual or fits into your idea of gender roles — be open to the variety of identities and expressions. In our society, students constantly receive the message that everyone is supposed to be straight. Show students that you understand there is no one way a person “should” be.

▼ **Use inclusive language.** Through casual conversation and during classroom time, make sure the language you are using is inclusive of all people. When referring to people in general, try using words like “partner” instead of “boyfriend/girlfriend” or “husband/wife,” and avoid gendered pronouns, using “they” instead of “he/she.” Using inclusive language will help LGBTQ students feel more comfortable being themselves and coming to you for support.

▼ **Respond to anti-LGBTQ behavior.** Responding to anti-LGBTQ behavior when it occurs or when you hear about it will let students know that you do not tolerate homophobia or transphobia. It sends a strong message that

anti-LGBTQ behavior is not acceptable to you and not allowed in your school.

Support Students When They Come Out to You

As an ally, LGBTQ students may come to you for support, comfort or guidance. You may encounter a situation where a student comes out or reveals their sexual orientation or gender identity to you. You may be the first or only person an LGBTQ student comes out to. It is important that you support the student in a constructive way. Keep in mind that the student may be completely comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity and may not need help dealing with it or may not be in need of any support. It may be that the student just wanted to tell someone, or just simply to tell you so you might know them better. Below you will find more information on the coming out process and how you can be a supportive ally when students come out to you.

WHAT DOES “COMING OUT” MEAN?

Simply put, coming out is a means to publicly declare one's identity, whether to a person in private or a group of people. In our society most people are generally presumed to be heterosexual, so there is usually no need for a heterosexual person to make a statement to others that discloses their sexual orientation. Similarly, many people feel that their gender identity is aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth or by society, and therefore never have to disclose their gender to the people around them.

To come out is to take a risk by sharing one's identity, sometimes to one person in conversation, sometimes to a group or in a public setting. The actual act of coming out can be as simple as saying “I'm gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender,” but it can be a difficult and emotional


**SNAP
SHOT**
**Anti-LGBTQ Bias
in School**

Renisha was a 15-year-old freshman who had just started at the school where her older brother Michael was a junior. Renisha decided that at this new school, she was going to be herself and not hide that she's a lesbian as she did in junior high. Michael's friends had begun to make fun of his little sister and Michael always defended her, telling his friends "leave her alone, she's just being herself." Michael's friends

continued to tease Renisha calling her "dyke" from across the lunchroom and defacing her locker with anti-LGBTQ language. Michael decided that this had gone too far and demanded his friends leave his little sister alone. One of his friends started to tease Michael, asking him if "being queer runs in the family." The words had barely made it out of the boy's mouth before Michael punched him. The other friends backed off and stopped the teasing, but Michael was suspended from school for a week and kicked off the basketball team for fighting.

process for an LGBTQ student to go through, which is why it is so important for a student to have support. One positive aspect of coming out is not having to hide who you are anymore. However, there can be dangers that come with revealing yourself. A student who comes out may be open to more anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying and harassment, yet they may also feel more comfortable and free to be themselves. One of the most important ways you can act in allyship with an LGBTQ student is to be there for them in a safe, respectful and helpful way.

**SHOULD SCHOOL STAFF BE CAREFUL
OF DISCLOSING A STUDENT'S SEXUAL
ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY
TO OTHERS?**

Absolutely. Information regarding a student's sexual orientation and gender identity is highly sensitive and must be handled with the utmost discretion and professionalism and be respectful of student privacy in discussing these matters.

In contrast to coming out, when a person chooses to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity, "outing" occurs when someone else tells others that a particular individual is LGBTQ without that person's permission. We often don't know what someone's beliefs are or reactions might be, and outing someone may have large repercussions for students. Although it may be hard to believe, there are students whose emotional and physical safety were jeopardized when school staff outed them to other students and even family members.

“[Reporting] causes more problems. Teachers and staff do not know how to handle the problem anonymously.”

— Student, Grade Not Reported, Texas

When a Student Comes Out to You...

When a student comes out to you and tells you they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) your initial response is important. The student has likely spent time in advance thinking about whether or not to tell you, and when and how to tell you. Here are some tips to help you support them.

▼ **Offer support but don't assume a student needs any help.** The student may be completely comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity and may not need help dealing with it or be in need of any support. It may be that the student just wanted to tell someone, or just simply to tell you so you might know them better. Offer and be available to support your students as they come out to others.

▼ **Be a role model of acceptance.** Always model good behavior by using inclusive language and setting an accepting environment by not making assumptions about people's sexual orientation or gender identity. Addressing other's (adults and students) biased language and addressing stereotypes and myths about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people also positions you as a positive role model. By demonstrating that you are respectful of LGBTQ people and intolerant of homophobia and transphobia, LGBTQ students are more likely to see you as a supportive educator.

▼ **Appreciate the student's courage.** There is often a risk in telling someone something personal, especially sharing for the first time one's sexual orientation or gender identity, when it is generally not considered the norm. Consider someone's coming out a gift and thank them for giving that gift to you. Sharing this personal

information with you means that the student respects and trusts you.

▼ **Listen, listen, listen.** One of the best ways to support a student is to hear them out and let the student know you are there to listen. Coming out is a long process, and chances are you'll be approached again to discuss this process, the challenges and the joys of being out at school.

▼ **Assure and respect confidentiality.** The student told you and may or may not be ready to tell others. Let the student know that the conversation is confidential and that you won't share the information with anyone else, unless they ask for your help. If they want others to know, doing it in their own way with their own timing is important. Respect their privacy.

▼ **Ask questions that demonstrate understanding, acceptance and compassion.** Some suggestions are:

- Have you been able to tell anyone else?
- Has this been a secret you have had to keep from others or have you told other people?
- Do you feel safe in school? Supported by the adults in your life?
- Do you need any help of any kind? Resources or someone to listen?
- Have I ever offended you unknowingly?

...and Tells You They Are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer

▼ **Remember that the student has not changed.** They are still the same person you knew before the disclosure; you just have more information about them, which might improve your relationship. Let the student know that you feel the same way about them as you always have and that they are still the same person. If you are shocked, try not to let the surprise lead you to view or treat the student any differently.

▼ **Challenge traditional norms.** You may need to consider your own beliefs about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender roles. Do not expect people to conform to societal norms about gender or sexual orientation.

▼ **Be prepared to give a referral.** Use **GLSEN's Coming Out Resource**. If students ask for your advice on coming out to others, you can use this resource as a reference.

SOME ADDITIONAL THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN A STUDENT COMES OUT TO YOU AS TRANSGENDER:

▼ **Validate the person's gender identity and expression.** It is important to use the pronoun and name that the person requests — this is showing respect. In other words, refer to the student using the pronouns that best honor them, rather than assuming what their pronouns are. Or use gender neutral language. Never use the word "it" when referring to a person, to do so is insulting and disrespectful.

▼ **Remember that gender identity is separate from sexual orientation.**

Knowing someone is transgender does not provide you with any information about their sexual orientation.

WHAT NOT TO SAY WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU:

▼ **"I knew it!"** This makes the disclosure about you and not the student, and you might have been making an assumption based on stereotypes.

▼ **"Are you sure?" "You're just confused." "It's just a phase — it will pass."** This suggests that the student doesn't know who they are.

▼ **"You just haven't found a good woman yet" said to a presumably male student or "a good man yet" said to a presumably female student.** This assumes that everyone is straight or should be.

▼ **"Shhh, don't tell anyone."** This implies that there is something wrong and that being LGBTQ must be kept hidden. If you have real reason to believe that disclosing this information will cause the student harm, then make it clear that is your concern. Say, "Thanks for telling me. We should talk about how tolerant our school and community is. You may want to consider how this may affect your decision about who to come out to."

▼ **"You can't be gay — you've had relationships with people of the opposite sex."** This refers only to behavior, while sexual orientation is about inner feelings.

Respond to Anti-LGBTQ Language and Behavior

Anti-LGBTQ behavior comes in all shapes and sizes: biased language, name-calling, harassment and even physical assault. GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* consistently finds that many LGBTQ students regularly hear homophobic slurs, such as "faggot" or "dyke," at school, and most students have been verbally or physically harassed in school. Youth who regularly experience harassment can suffer from low self-esteem, high rates of absenteeism and low academic achievement. Educators can make a difference by intervening in anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying and harassment every time they witness it. Taking action when you see it occur can help create a safe space for all students. Intervening on the spot will also serve as a teachable moment to let other students know that anti-LGBTQ behavior will not be tolerated. One of the most effective ways you can act in allyship is respond to anti-LGBTQ behavior.

HOW TO INTERVENE IN NAME-CALLING, BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Follow these steps when you witness anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying or harassment.

1. Address Name-Calling, Bullying or Harassment Immediately.

Concentrate on stopping the behavior in that moment. Sometimes it's a simple response to hearing a derogatory term like, "That language is unacceptable in this classroom." Make sure that everyone can hear you. Never miss the opportunity to interrupt the behavior. Remember: no action is an action — if an incident is overlooked or not addressed it can imply acceptance and approval.

2. Name the Behavior.

Describe what you saw and label the behavior. "I heard you use the word faggot and that is derogatory and is considered name-calling. That language is unacceptable."

3. Use the Teachable Moment (or Create One).

Make sure to educate after stopping the behavior. Decide if you are going to educate in the moment or later, and if it will be publicly or privately. If you decide to educate later you will need to create the teachable moment. You can then take this opportunity to teach one class, the entire grade, or whole school about language and behaviors that are acceptable and those that are not. Be cautious about using the student that experienced the bullying or harassment as an example. Center or focus the teachable moment around the behaviors not the specific students involved.

4. Support the Targeted Student.

Support the student who has been the target of the name-calling, bullying or harassment. Do not make assumptions about what the student is experiencing. Ask the student what they need or want. You will have to decide whether to do this in the moment or later, and if it will be publicly or privately. Suggest that the student visit with a counselor only if the student requests extra support.

5. Hold Students Accountable.

Check school policy and impose appropriate consequences. Make sure disciplinary actions are evenly applied across all types of name-calling, bullying and harassment.

RESPONDING TO UNINTENTIONAL ANTI-LGBTQ LANGUAGE

Almost all LGBTQ students regularly hear the word "gay" used in a negative way at school. Though many downplay the impact of expressions like, "That's so gay" because they have become such a common part of the vernacular

and are often not intended to inflict harm, most LGBTQ students say that hearing “gay” or “queer” used in a negative manner causes them to feel bothered or distressed. Especially because these expressions are so pervasive in our schools, it is critical that educators treat this like all other types of anti-LGBTQ language and address it.

Not all students may understand why this language is offensive, so you may need to educate the students on why this is anti-LGBTQ language. For example, ask them why they would use “gay” to mean that something is bad or boring. Let them know that it is offensive and hurtful to LGBTQ people when they use “gay” to describe something as undesirable. When

challenged on using this type of language, a common response from students and adults is that they did not mean “gay” to mean homosexual. They may say that it’s just an expression and they don’t mean any harm by it. The chart below suggests some strategies for dealing with these types of comments, including the benefits and challenges for each strategies.

For free public service announcements, lesson plans, discussion guides and other resources that address anti-LGBTQ language, visit www.glsen.org.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO “THAT’S SO GAY”

RESPONSES	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
“What do you mean by that?”	Doesn’t dismiss it.	Students might not be forthcoming.
“How do you think a gay person might feel?”	Puts responsibility on the student to come up with the solution.	Student may not say anything.
“Do you say that as a compliment?”	Asking this rhetorical question in a non-accusatory tone may lighten things up enough for your students to shake their heads and admit, “No.”	Students may just laugh off your question, or reiterate that they’re “Just joking.”
“So the connotations are negative?” or “So maybe it’s not a good thing?”	Not accusatory. Could open up the floor for discussion.	There’s always the chance that students will still be reluctant to speak up.

Support Student Clubs

For many LGBTQ students, student clubs that address LGBTQ student issues (commonly called Gender and Sexuality Alliances or GSAs) offer critical support. These clubs are student-led, usually at the high school or middle school level, and work to address anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying and harassment in their schools and promote respect for all students. The existence of these clubs can make schools feel safer and more welcoming for LGBTQ students. GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* has found that compared to LGBTQ students without a GSA, students in schools with a GSA or similar student club:

- ▼ Reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks.
- ▼ Experienced less harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation and gender expression.
- ▼ Were more likely to report incidents of harassment and assault.
- ▼ Were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.
- ▼ Were less likely to miss school because of safety concerns.
- ▼ Reported a greater sense of belonging to their school community.

Only slightly more than half (53.3%) of students reported having a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) or similar student club at their school.

— 2017 *National School Climate Survey*

GSAs, like all student clubs, must have a faculty advisor. Serving as the advisor for your school's GSA is one important way that you can act in allyship to LGBTQ students. Not only does being an advisor allow you to help the efforts of your GSA, it makes your allyship more visible to all members of your school community, making it easier for LGBTQ students to identify supportive school staff.

As an ally, you may also need to advocate for the rights of students to establish a GSA in their school. Although some opponents of GSAs have attempted to restrict the existence of or access to these clubs, the federal Equal Access Act of 1984 requires public schools to allow GSAs to exist alongside other non-curricular student clubs.

Go to www.glsen.org/gsa to find activities and planning tools for your GSA.

Dos and Don'ts of Acting in Allyship With LGBTQ Students

DO...

▼ **Listen.** One of the simplest yet most important ways to act in allyship is to listen. Like all students, LGBTQ students need to feel comfortable expressing themselves. If a student comes to talk to you about being harassed, feeling excluded or just about their life in general, keep in mind that you may be the only person they feel safe speaking to. Be there to listen.

▼ **Respect confidentiality.** Effective allies will respect their students' confidentiality and privacy. Someone who is coming out may not want everyone to know. Assume that the person only told you and just wants you to know, unless they indicate otherwise. Informing others can create an unsafe environment for the student.

▼ **Be conscious of your biases.** Effective allies acknowledge how homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism may affect their efforts to act in allyship to LGBTQ people. They continuously work to recognize and challenge their own biases.

▼ **Seek out knowledge.** Effective allies periodically brush up on LGBTQ-related language and current issues facing the LGBTQ community.

▼ **Be a resource.** Effective allyship includes knowing when and how to refer students to outside help. The last section of this guide includes a list of LGBTQ-related resources and referral sources for LGBTQ youth.

DON'T...

▼ **Think you have all the answers.** Do not feel you must always have the answers. If you are faced with a problem you don't know how to solve, let the student know you will look into the subject to try and find an answer. Sometimes the best thing for you to do is to refer the student to an outside source that may be able to help them. The last section of this guide includes a list of LGBTQ-related resources and referral sources for LGBTQ youth.

▼ **Make unrealistic promises.** Be careful not to promise something you may not be able to deliver. This can damage the relationship you have with the student as an ally.

▼ **Make assumptions.** It is important to avoid making assumptions and perpetuating stereotypes. These can be extremely offensive and may turn a student away from you. It is also important to avoid assuming you know what the student needs. Be sure to listen to your student and ask how you can support them.

ASK YOURSELF



- ▼ Which of these strategies are you most likely to use in your school?
- ▼ Are there other strategies that you have used when intervening in anti-LGBTQ language, harassment and bullying in your school?

Educate



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s an ally, you have the opportunity to educate about anti-LGBTQ bias, its effects and ways to combat it in order to create safer, more welcoming school environments. This section

discusses how to:

- ▼ **Teach students to respect others.**
- ▼ **Include positive representations of LGBTQ people, history and events into your curriculum.**
- ▼ **Engage other school staff about anti-LGBTQ bias and ways to create safer schools.**

Teach Respect

There are many ways to teach students the importance of respecting all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Your school could implement a comprehensive school-wide program like GLSEN's No Name-Calling Week®. Or, you may incorporate individual lessons into your curriculum or group activities. Here are a few resources that educators can use to teach respect and prevent harassment and bullying among students.

“It’s amazing how enthralled students will get when there are actual people they can connect with, representing the issues around diversity, discrimination, etc.”

— School Counselor, Ohio

▼ **Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project.** Building safe spaces in athletic and physical education programs is an equally important part of creating a safe and respectful environment in your school. GLSEN's Sports Project assists schools in creating athletic and physical education climates based on the principles of respect, safety and equal access for all. Download and share resources and guidelines with your school's physical education teachers and coaches to help create safe sports spaces where name-calling and bullying are not tolerated and where *everyone* can enjoy the game. For more information, visit www.glsen.org/sports.

▼ **GLSEN's No Name-Calling Week® Lesson Plans.** GLSEN's No Name-Calling Week® is an annual week of educational activities aimed at ending name-calling of all kinds and providing schools with the tools and inspiration to launch an ongoing dialogue about ways to eliminate bullying in their communities. Nevertheless, the accompanying lesson plans are available year-round and can be used at any time. For information about the program and free elementary- and secondary-level lesson plans, visit www.glsen.org/nncw.

Make your Curriculum LGBTQ Inclusive

LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum that provides positive representations of LGBTQ people, history and events helps to create a tone of acceptance of LGBTQ people and increase awareness of LGBTQ-related issues, resulting in a more supportive environment for LGBTQ students. GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* consistently finds that students with inclusive LGBTQ curriculum in their schools have a greater sense of belonging to their school community, hear fewer homophobic and transphobic remarks and are less likely to be victimized or feel unsafe at school than those without inclusive curriculum.

There are many ways to include positive representations of LGBTQ people, history and events in your curriculum. Here are a few suggestions.

▼ **Include LGBTQ history.** Raise the visibility of LGBTQ people and communities by providing students with concrete examples of LGBTQ people in history and LGBTQ-related historical events. For example, when teaching about the Holocaust or about civil rights movements, be sure to include the persecution, struggles and successes of the LGBTQ community. You can show documentary films, such as *Out of the Past* or *Gay Pioneers*, or you can use GLSEN's *When Did It Happen: LGBTQ History Lesson* or *Unheard Voices* to teach about important leaders and events in LGBTQ history. For resources, visit www.glsen.org/lgbtqhistory.

▼ **Include diverse families.** Whenever possible, include examples of diverse families, including same-sex couples and LGBTQ parents, whenever referencing families in the classroom. Providing students with these examples can help LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ family members feel included in the classroom.

▼ **Use LGBTQ-inclusive literature.** It is important for students to see themselves reflected in the school curriculum. Using LGBTQ inclusive literature will help create a welcoming space for LGBTQ students, as well as promote respect and acceptance among all students. Be sure to use books that feature positive and diverse representations of LGBTQ characters. You can find appropriate books for your curriculum and literature guides at www.glsen.org/lgbtqhistory.

▼ **Celebrate LGBTQ events.** Celebrating LGBTQ events can help LGBTQ students feel included in the school. Promote LGBTQ events throughout the school as you would any other cultural celebration. Celebrate LGBTQ History Month in October and LGBTQ Pride Month in June by displaying signs, alerting students and recognizing the struggles, contributions and victories of the LGBTQ community.

Only a small percentage (19.8%) of LGBTQ students were taught positive representations of LGBTQ people, history or events in their schools. Yet in schools with inclusive curriculum, LGBTQ students were more likely to report that their classmates were somewhat or very accepting of LGBTQ people than students in schools without (67.6% vs. 36.0%).

— 2017 National School Climate Survey

Engage School Staff

Creating safe schools for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression can be a difficult task.

There is no reason to go it alone — help other educators become supportive allies for LGBTQ students. Here are some simple ways you can share your commitment to ensure safe schools and your knowledge about the issues with other educators.

▼ **Be a role model for other educators.** Let your actions inform others. Use the appropriate terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or LGBTQ and correct people when you hear incorrect or derogatory language. Use gender-neutral pronouns and LGBTQ-inclusive language in school. Intervene when anti-LGBTQ behavior occurs and show other educators how to advocate for changes within the school.

▼ **Discuss with others.** In the hallways, during lunch or whenever you have a moment, share information with other educators. Tell them about experiences of LGBTQ students in school, some of the anti-LGBTQ behavior incidents you have responded to or about the changes in the school you would like to see. Letting other educators know about the concrete things they can do may help make acting in allyship a realistic option for them. For more ideas, talk with fellow educators about how they are including LGBTQ people, history and events in their curriculum. To learn what others are doing and share your own ideas, join the Educator Forum on Facebook or register to receive updates as part of the Educator's Network at www.glsen.org/educator.

▼ **Distribute information.** Photocopy select pages from this guide (e.g., *Responding to Anti-LGBTQ Language and Behavior* or *When a Student Comes Out to You*) and give them to school staff at meetings, post them in a staff

lounge or put them in the mailboxes of all staff. This will provide a non-threatening opportunity for other educators to learn about the issues and what they can do to make a difference.

▼ **Advocate for professional development.** Work with your principal or administrator to obtain training for staff on the school experiences of LGBTQ students and anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment. Find community organizations that can provide training resources to your school, such as an LGBTQ community center or a local GLSEN Chapter.

▼ **Give a presentation to school staff.** If possible, secure some time during a school staff meeting to discuss the issue of anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying and harassment. Provide staff with information about the problem and ideas for how to handle it. Use the provided outline for a sample 20-minute presentation to help you plan your presentation.

Sample 20-Minute Presentation to School Staff

This is a sample outline for a 20-minute presentation to school staff. With a short amount of time, you have to be sure to share key information that will get other educators interested in taking action to ensure a safe school environment for all students. There are two main points of information you should focus on during your short presentation: 1) The reasons why educators need to take action; 2) Concrete ways educators can respond to anti-LGBTQ behavior in the school. You can use this sample presentation outline to help focus your message and make the most of your brief presentation.

INTRODUCTION

Let staff know that the purpose of this presentation is to inform them of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students in schools, discuss ways to intervene when anti-LGBTQ behavior occurs and things they can do to create a safe school environment. Share why this is important to you personally; why you find it so critical to combat anti-LGBTQ behavior and ensure LGBTQ students feel safe and welcome in your school.

THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

▼ Share information about the experiences of LGBTQ students in school. Use statistics from research, such as GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* (you can download all of GLSEN's research reports at www.glsen.org/research).

▼ You may want to write out three to four key statistics on flipchart paper or display on a smartboard. These could include the following from GLSEN's *2017 National School Climate Survey*:

- 70.1% of LGBTQ students were verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation; 59.1% were harassed because of their gender expression (acting “too masculine” or “too feminine”).
- The average grade point average (GPA) for LGBTQ students who were frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was significantly lower than that of LGBTQ students experiencing less harassment.
- Over one third (34.9%) of LGBTQ students reported missing at least one full day of school in the past month because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe at school.
- Most LGBTQ students who are harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or feared the situation could become worse if reported.

- ▼ Give examples of the anti-LGBTQ behavior you have witnessed or heard about in your school.
- ▼ Lead the staff in a brief discussion using these questions:
 - Were you surprised by any of the information?
 - Have you witnessed anti-LGBTQ name-calling, bullying and harassment in the school?

RESPONDING TO ANTI-LGBTQ BEHAVIOR

- ▼ Tell staff that one of the best ways to make LGBTQ students feel safer and more comfortable at school is to directly intervene in anti-LGBTQ behavior.
- ▼ Provide staff with *Responding to Anti-LGBTQ Language and Behavior* section from this guide (page 16–17).
- ▼ Give staff a couple of minutes to review the handout silently, or have participants take turns reading it aloud.
- ▼ Lead the participants in a discussion using these questions:
 - Would these tactics work in our school? Why or why not?
 - What are some other ways you can respond to anti-LGBTQ behavior in the school?

CLOSING

- ▼ Provide examples of other things staff can do to create a safe environment for LGBTQ students, such as including LGBTQ people, history and events in their curriculum and supporting a Gender and Sexuality Alliance student club.
- ▼ Follow-up with educators and provide them with copies of important information from the *Safe Space Kit*. Support them in their efforts to act in allyship, and let them know how they can support you. Be sure to tell them that they can download the *Safe Space Kit* at www.glsen.org/safespace.

Advocate



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key role of an ally is to use the power and influence they have as an educator to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ students and ensure safe schools for all.

In this section, we discuss three measures that you can advocate for in your school:

- ▼ **Assessment of your school’s climate, policies and practices.**
- ▼ **Implementation of comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policies.**
- ▼ **Promotion of non-discriminatory policies and practices.**

This section also provides some tips for how to talk to your principal, district administration or school board to advocate for these measures.

Assess your School

The first step in advocating for changes in your school is to assess the current state of your school. This will help you focus your efforts and identify areas for improvement. You can examine your school in-depth by learning about people’s experiences in your school and examining your school’s existing policies, practices and resources.

ASSESS YOUR SCHOOL’S CLIMATE

You can do this by surveying members of your school community — students, staff and parents. Your survey should include questions that ask about the frequency of biased language, harassment and assault, as well as the level of intervention by educators. GLSEN has a tool, the Local School Climate Survey (LSCS), which was designed to help educators and community members conduct a survey to assess the climate of their school or community. Conducting the LSCS can give you detailed data to use

when advocating for changes. There are two versions of the LSCS, one to be conducted in a single school and one to be conducted with several schools or a community. The LSCS provides you with a sample participant letter, tips for conducting a LSCS and a survey form. All materials can be downloaded at www.glsen.org/lscs for free.

ASSESS YOUR SCHOOL’S POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Understanding how inclusive your school is of LGBTQ students, families and issues is key to creating a plan of action to ensuring your school is safe and welcoming for all students. To assess your school’s policies and practices, note which items in the LGBTQ-Inclusive School Checklist applies to your school.

LGBTQ-Inclusive School Checklist

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

- Fairly enforced non-discrimination and anti-bullying/harassment policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ students.
- School forms and applications that are inclusive of all identities and family structures.
- A gender-neutral dress code, including for yearbook photos.
- Gender-neutral and/or private bathrooms and changing areas.

SCHOOL EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS

- School dances and proms that are safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students.
- Proms, homecoming and athletic events that allow for gender-neutral alternatives to “King” and “Queen.”
- Valentine’s Day celebrations inclusive of LGBTQ and non-coupled students.
- Observations of Mother’s Day and Father’s Day that affirm all family structures.

COURSE CONTENT

- Health and sexuality education that is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Curriculum that regularly includes information about LGBTQ people, history and events.
- Library resources and displays that are inclusive of LGBTQ people, history and issues.

CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- Athletic teams and events that are safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students.
- GSA’s and other student clubs that combat name-calling, bullying and harassment.
- School publications that cover LGBTQ people and issues.

Once you have assessed your school’s policies and practices, you should decide which areas of your school need the most work. Collaborate with other educators and administrators to implement realistic changes within the school.

Implement Comprehensive Anti-Bullying/Harassment Policies

One major step that schools can take to affirm their support for all students' safety is the implementation and enforcement of anti-bullying or harassment policies. These policies can promote a better school climate for LGBTQ students when sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are explicitly addressed. School officials may not recognize that anti-LGBTQ harassment and bullying are unacceptable behaviors, or may not respond to the problem due to prejudice or community pressure without the cover of a specific policy. Comprehensive policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression as protected characteristics removes all doubt that LGBTQ students, and all students, are protected from anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment in school.

Some argue that generic anti-bullying/harassment policies without enumerated categories are just as effective as comprehensive ones. Students' experiences indicate otherwise. LGBTQ students from schools with a generic policy experience similar harassment levels as students from schools with no policies at all whereas students from schools with a comprehensive policy that include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression report a less hostile and more supportive school climate.

As an ally, you should find out whether your school or school district has a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that includes protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. If it does not, advocate with your principal, school board or district administration to adopt one that does. If your school already has a comprehensive

policy, be sure that all members of the school community are regularly notified of the policy and consistently implement it. Often times, a policy may exist but students are not aware of it and may not know that they are protected. If students are not aware of the policy or how to make a report of bullying or harassment, then the policy will not be effective.

For more information about safe school laws and policies, including model policies, visit www.glsen.org/modelpolicies.

Promote Non-Discriminatory Policies and Practices

Homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism can manifest themselves in school policies and practices, creating an unwelcoming, unsafe and hostile environment for LGBTQ students. Policies and practices that exclude LGBTQ students, or force them to conform to what is considered by others as "normal" can alienate LGBTQ students from the school community. There are many ways to make your school's policies and practices LGBTQ-inclusive.

▼ **Non-discrimination policy.** Many schools have a non-discrimination policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. Such policies typically apply to all activities that take place within the school and they can apply to both school personnel and students. Check to see if your school has such a policy and if not, advocate for the adoption of one.

▼ **Sports activities.** Work with school coaches, and physical education teachers to combat anti-LGBTQ language among students and staff, respond when anti-LGBTQ behavior occurs and create a safe environment within school athletics for LGBTQ students. Homophobia and heterosexism are often heavily present on the fields, in the gym, in

locker rooms and at sporting events, and sports activities can be one of the most unwelcoming school programs for LGBTQ students. Some LGBTQ students, facing harassment or assault, choose to avoid the athletics program altogether. Those LGBTQ athletes that do participate may learn to feel shame and self-hatred and hide their identities at great psychological cost. For more information about making K–12 sports and physical education inclusive and safe for all, visit www.glsen.org/sports.

▼ **School uniforms and dress codes.** Work to ensure that school uniforms or dress codes are gender-neutral, with the same set of rules and expectations for all students, regardless of gender. School uniforms and dress codes that require students to wear clothing deemed appropriate for their gender can restrict students' gender identity and gender expression, resulting in students feeling uncomfortable or unwelcome in their own school community.

▼ **School events.** Work to ensure that school events are inclusive of queer and trans couples. School events, such as proms, that limit student's guest/date choices to those of another gender can make students feel excluded and unwelcome. For example, if a prom limits a student's guest choices to someone of another gender it may make students feel excluded and unwelcome. This may particularly be a problem in cases when they are explicitly told they cannot bring their same-gender guest or are refused entry because of their guest's gender.

▼ **School libraries.** Work with school librarians to include LGBTQ-themed literature in the school library collection. Go to www.glsen.org/educator to access an online list of recommended books and video resources, to find grade-appropriate literature for your school library. School libraries are a wealth of information and provide students with literature on many topics, including multicultural literature. Far too often, even multicultural literature excludes LGBTQ people and history. Imagine being in your school library full of books about all peoples, except people like you. Leaving out LGBTQ people, history and events in the library can contribute to LGBTQ students feeling excluded from their school.

▼ **Internet filters.** Work with your school administrators to ensure that the Internet filters are not blocking students from finding positive and helpful information about the LGBTQ community. Internet filters are often used in schools to block materials harmful to students, such as violent or pornographic sites, but they sometimes can block useful and necessary information. Students may be denied access to websites that have LGBTQ-related information, such as research, historical facts or support services for LGBTQ youth. And in some cases, students may be blocked from positive information but still have access to sites condemning LGBTQ people.



Anti-LGBTQ Bias in School

Vincent was an out, gay-identified senior at his town's only high school. Although he had occasionally experienced anti-gay name-calling and bullying in the school, he was well-liked and felt fairly comfortable at school. The senior prom was approaching and Vincent was worried that he wouldn't be

allowed to bring his boyfriend and enjoy the special night with his fellow students. Vincent approached one of the teachers on the prom committee with his concerns. She promised Vincent that there wouldn't be a problem. After spending hours preparing and getting ready for the prom, Vincent and his boyfriend were rudely told they would not be allowed in the prom on the grounds that all couples needed to be of the opposite sex, and that they should take their "offensive lifestyle" somewhere else.

What Can I Say to Make an Impact with My Principal or Administrator?

Advocating for changes in your school will undoubtedly lead to a conversation with your principal or administrator. Administrators are notoriously busy people — you'll likely only have a few minutes to get your point across and make an impression. You want to make sure you give your administrator information that will motivate them to take action and support your efforts. Here are some tips for making the most out of those few minutes.

▼ **Be direct.** Let them know exactly what you're there for. "I'm here today to talk to you about the need to make our school a safe space for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression." Let them know that you support LGBTQ students, and there are some changes that can be made in the school to help LGBTQ students feel included and safe.

▼ **Show them why the change is necessary.** "I think there is a need for a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy (or a training for all staff, a change in the Internet filter software, etc.) in this school because..." Use statistics from GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* or results from your school's climate survey to inform your principal or administrator about the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ behavior in schools and its effects on LGBTQ students. If possible, use statistics from a GLSEN *Research Brief* for your specific state (see www.glsen.org/research) or a local school climate survey you have conducted in your school. Give them brief descriptions of the anti-LGBTQ behavior you have personally witnessed in the school.

▼ **Put the focus on safety.** All school administrators have a responsibility to make sure their schools are safe (physically and emotionally) for the students who attend them. "As you can see from these statistics (or incidents, stories, etc.) the climate in the school is having an effect on the comfort, safety, and sense of belonging of many of the students as well as test scores, attendance and grades." Point out to them the negative effects anti-LGBTQ behavior has not only on LGBTQ students, but all students.

▼ **Show them how the school community will benefit from the change.** "These actions will help make our school a safer and friendlier place for all students, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression." Provide information on how this change can result in a more positive school climate and improve student achievement. For example, share research from GLSEN's *National School Climate Survey* about the benefits of having supportive school staff or a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy.

▼ **Give an overview of how educators can act in allyship with LGBTQ students and the changes the school can make.** Briefly share with them specific ways educators can act in allyship with LGBTQ students, such as intervening when anti-LGBTQ behavior occurs, not assuming the sexual orientation or gender identity of their students (or their parents) and including LGBTQ people, history and events in their curriculum. Briefly share with them specific ways educators can act in allyship with LGBTQ students. Use concrete examples like starting a GSA or making the school's anti-bullying policies inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

▼ **Leave information and schedule a follow-up meeting.** Photocopy or print key information from the *Safe Space Kit* and leave copies with your principal or administrator. Leave the information that you think will get them to support your efforts. If possible, try and secure some future time to further discuss the issue. Give the principal or administrator time to learn more and digest the information before continuing the discussion.

Make Your Action Plan

Now that you have learned how to support LGBTQ students, it's time you make your plan of action. By making realistic goals and documenting them, you will be more likely to make the change you seek. Use the questions provided to specify your next steps.

What can I do to support LGBTQ students?

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What can I do to educate students and school staff?

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What can I do to advocate for changes within the school?

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What further resources, information, or help do I need?

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Congratulations!

You are ready to begin acting in allyship with LGBTQ students. Using the information and strategies in this guide, you can begin enlisting others in a common effort to transform your school into a safe space for all students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. In the last section of this guide: a list of GLSEN resources, a national referral list for LGBTQ youth, and other resources that may be useful to you. The national referral sheet will give you helpful information about organizations that you can refer students to, including hotlines and a network of LGBTQ centers. Be sure to sign up for GLSEN's communications via the Educators Network and check www.glsen.org periodically for new and updated resources.





Additional Resources

GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe and affirming schools for all students. GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community.

GLSEN Resources

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS:

Lessons and Curricular Materials

GLSEN's Education Department offers free curricula and lesson plans for educators to use with elementary, middle and high school students. These resources provide a framework for facilitating classroom discussion and engaging students in creating safer schools for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

www.glsen.org/educator

GLSEN's Ally Week®

GLSEN's Ally Week is a student-led program in which students hold a national conversation about the meaning of allyship. Ally Week calls for action from everyone. Straight and cisgender allies, as well as LGBTQ youth, are encouraged to learn about what actions they can take to support their LGBTQ peers. Educator allies can use Ally Week as an opportunity to teach lessons about compassion and diversity, and LGBTQ youth can learn about how to support one another's overlapping, intersecting identities. To learn more, visit

www.glsen.org/allyweek

GLSEN's Day of Silence®

GLSEN's Day of Silence® is a student-led national event where folks take a vow of silence to highlight the silencing and erasure of LGBTQ people at school. Educators play a critical role in the execution of this national day of action by amending their lesson plans and advocating for students who are participating. To read our Educator Guide and learn more ways to encourage participation of your school in the next Day of Silence, visit www.glsen.org/dos

GLSEN's No Name-Calling Week®

GLSEN's No Name-Calling Week® is an annual week of educational and creative activities aimed at ending name-calling of all kinds and providing schools with the tools and inspiration to launch an on-going dialogue about ways to eliminate bullying in their communities.

Although the program was originally designed for middle schools, there are new resources for elementary and high schools. For lessons, resources and contest information, visit

www.glsen.org/nncw

Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project

GLSEN's Sports Project assists schools in creating athletic and physical education climates based on the principles of respect, safety and equal access for all. Find best practices for coaches and physical education teachers, as well as policy recommendations for athletic administrators, all focused on how to make K–12 athletics and physical education safe, respectful and inclusive for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Download and share these resources and guidelines with your school's physical education teachers and coaches.

www.glsen.org/sports

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION:**Local GLSEN Chapters**

Accredited local GLSEN Chapters seek to educate local schools and communities about the impact of anti-LGBTQ bias and behavior, and the benefits that come from improving school climate with respect to LGBTQ issues. Connect with your local Chapter today!

www.glsen.org/chapters

Educator Network

Sign up for the Educators Network to stay up-to-date with LGBTQ-related education news, classroom resources and upcoming events. This regular e-newsletter highlights the resources, tools and information you need to create safer schools for all students.

www.glsen.org/educator

Educator Forum

Join this social networking site designed for educators to communicate and share ideas and resources related to creating safer schools for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

www.facebook.com/groups/glseneducatorforum

ADDITIONAL GLSEN RESOURCES:**Jump-Start Guide for GSAs**

This guide consists of eight self-contained sections designed to help students jump-start — or bring fresh and creative energy to — their student club. The resources take you through the process of establishing or re-establishing your GSA/Gender and Sexuality Alliance, identifying your mission and goals, and assessing your school's climate. Jump-Start your school and your GSA and create safer schools for all.

www.glsen.org/gsa

Resources on Policy and Legal Issues

GLSEN believes that a quality K–12 education is a fundamental right of every American. To that end, GLSEN works with elected officials and other policymakers at the local, state and federal level to ensure that the best and most inclusive safe schools policies are considered, passed and implemented.

Policy and legal resources available from GLSEN at www.glsen.org/policy

- ▼ *Respect For All: Policy Recommendations to Support LGBTQ Students*
- ▼ *Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students*
- ▼ *Transgender Inclusion in High School Athletics*
- ▼ *Model District Policy on LGBTQ-Inclusive Anti-Bullying & Harassment*
- ▼ *Model District Policy on LGBTQ-Inclusive Anti-Bullying & Harassment*

Supporting Trans and GNC Students

Compared to other students in the LGBTQ community, transgender and genderqueer students face more hostile school climates. So, too, do gender non-conforming (GNC) students, whose gender expression does not align to traditional gender norms. For videos, student and educator blogs, and resources on gender identity, go to www.glsen.org/trans

Research

GLSEN's Research Department supports the organization's mission by conducting original research, evaluating GLSEN programs and initiatives, and creating resources that document anti-LGBTQ bias in education (K–12 schools). GLSEN Research reports include the following:

- ▼ *National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of LGBTQ Youth in Our Nation's Schools*
 - ▼ *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*
 - ▼ *Shared Differences: The Experiences of LGBTQ Students of Color in Our Nation's Schools*
 - ▼ *Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools*
 - ▼ *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*
 - ▼ *Involved, Invisible, Ignored: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Children in Our Nation's K–12 Schools*
 - ▼ *GLSEN Research Briefs* (includes summary of research on GSAs and state specific information on school experiences of LGBTQ students).
- www.glsen.org/research

Partner Organizations

GLSEN is proud to partner with many organizations to strengthen the network of support available to LGBTQ youth and advocates for safe schools.

Advocates for Youth

Advocates for Youth champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. Advocates believes it can best serve the field by boldly advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health. www.advocatesforyouth.org

Family Equality Council

The Family Equality Council works to ensure equality for LGBTQ families by building community, changing hearts and minds, and advancing social justice for all families. www.familyequality.org

interACT

Advocates for Intersex Youth, the only intersex-led law and policy organization in the United States, uses innovative policy, media, and youth leadership strategies to advance the human rights of children born with intersex traits. www.interactadvocates.org

National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME)

NAME celebrates cultural and ethnic diversity as a national strength that enriches a society and rejects the view that diversity threatens the fabric of a society. NAME believes that multicultural education promotes equity for all regardless of culture, ethnicity, race, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, belief system or exceptionality.

www.nameorg.org

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)

NCTE is a national social justice organization devoted to ending discrimination and violence against transgender people through education and advocacy on national issues of importance to transgender people. NCTE facilitates a strong and clear voice for transgender equality in the nation's capital and around the country.

www.transequality.org

National Education Association (NEA)

The National Education Association, the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's 3 million members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

www.nea.org

PFLAG

PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

www.pflag.org

The Safe Schools Coalition

The Safe Schools Coalition is an international public-private partnership in support of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, that is working to help schools — at home and all over the world — become safe places where every family can belong, where every educator can teach, and where every child can learn, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Teaching Tolerance

Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children. Teaching Tolerance provides free educational materials to teachers and other school practitioners in the U.S. and abroad.

www.tolerance.org

Referrals for LGBTQ Students

SUPPORT

Refer your students to these organizations if they are in need of support or counseling. Familiarize yourself with local resources for LGBTQ students.

The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is a national organization focused on crisis and suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQQ) youth.

www.thetrevorproject.org

Hotline: 866-4Utreavor/866-488-7386

CenterLink

The Community of LGBTQ Centers exists to support the development of strong, sustainable LGBTQ community centers and to build a unified center movement. CenterLink's directory of LGBTQ community centers in the US and internationally is online in a new and improved format.

www.LGBTcenters.org

GLBT National Help Center

Provides free and confidential telephone and e-mail peer-counseling, information and local resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth.

www.glnh.org

Hotline: 800-246-PRIDE

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Refer students to these organizations if they are in need of legal assistance.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

The ACLU works to extend rights to segments of our population that have traditionally been denied their rights, including people of color; women; lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people; prisoners; and people with disabilities.

www.aclu.org

Lambda Legal

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and those with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

www.lambdalegal.org

The National Center for Lesbian Rights

A non-profit, public interest law firm that advocates for equitable public policies affecting LGBTQ community, provides free legal assistance to LGBTQ clients and their legal advocates, and conducts community education on LGBTQ legal issues.

www.nclrights.org

Glossary of LGBTQ-Related Terms

The glossary is designed to provide basic definitions of words and phrases commonly used in discussions about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and related issues. All language is constantly evolving; new terms are introduced, while others fade from use or change their meaning over time. This remains true for the following terms and definitions. For terms that refer to people's identities, people must self-identify for these terms to be appropriately used to describe them.

Ableism: A system of oppression that benefits able-bodied people at the expense of people with disabilities.

Ally: A member of the majority or dominant group who works to end oppression by recognizing their own privilege and supporting or advocating for the oppressed population. For example, a straight cisgender person who supports and stands up for the equality of LGBTQ people.

Asexual: A person who does not experience sexual attraction, but may experience other forms of attraction (e.g., intellectual, emotional). Asexual people may also identify as “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “straight,” and many more.

Bisexual: A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to two or more genders, often used to describe people attracted to “genders like theirs” and “other genders.”

Bodily Characteristics: Physical traits that compose one's body; i.e. primary characteristics such as chromosomes, genitals, internal reproductive organs, hormone levels, and secondary characteristics such as facial hair, chest development, etc.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth or by society.

Classism: A system of oppression that benefits people with high and middle socioeconomic status at the expense of people with lower socioeconomic status.

Coming Out: The ongoing process that an LGBTQ person goes through, to recognize their own identities pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression, and to be open about them with others.

Dyke: A derogatory term directed at a person perceived as a lesbian. It is oftentimes used against women who are gender nonconforming, with the assumption being that their gender nonconformity implies a sexual attraction to women. Many lesbians (of all gender-expressions) have reclaimed the term and use it as an affirming label with which to identify.

Fag/Faggot: A derogatory term directed at a person perceived as a gay man. It is oftentimes used against men who are gender nonconforming, with the assumption being that their gender nonconformity implies a sexual attraction to men.

Gay: Someone, who can be transgender or cisgender, who is generally attracted to someone of the same gender.

Gender: A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles — codified as feminine or masculine — that are assigned to people, based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construction, it is possible to reject or modify the assignment made, and develop something that feels truer and just to oneself.

Gender Binary: A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories, “male” and “female,” in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary is inaccurate because it does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people. The gender binary is oppressive to anyone that does not conform to dominant societal gender norms.

Gender Expression: The multiple ways (e.g., behaviors, dress) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.

Gender Identity: How an individual identifies in terms of their gender. Gender identities may include, “male,” “female,” “androgynous,” “transgender,” “genderqueer” and many others, or a combination thereof.

Genderism: Genderism may take the form of transphobia, bias and discrimination towards transgender and gender nonconforming people.

Gender Nonconforming or Gender Variant: A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not conform to the gender they were assigned at birth or by society. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

Heterosexism: A system of oppression that benefits straight/heterosexual people at the expense of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Heterosexism may take the form of Homophobia or Biphobia, bias and discrimination towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Homosexual: A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some members of the same gender. Many people prefer the terms “lesbian” or “gay,” instead.

Identity: Identity is how we understand ourselves, what we call ourselves and often who we connect to and associate with. Each of us has a unique diversity of social identities based on our sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion and other important parts of who we are. Those identities develop over time, intersect with each other and help give meaning to our lives. Below, you’ll find many common terms that people use to identify themselves, especially in relation to their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. It’s important to remember that these terms are about self-identification; no one can tell anyone else how to identify or what terms to use.

Intersex: People who have any range of bodily characteristics that may not fit typical expectations for “male” or “female” development. Some intersex traits are identified at birth, while others may not be discovered until puberty or later in life. There are over thirty specific medical terms for intersex variations and each intersex person is different. Experts estimate that as many as 1.7% of people are born intersex.

Lesbian: Someone, who can be transgender or cisgender, who generally considers themselves a woman or femme who is attracted to other women and/or femmes.

LGBTQ: An umbrella term referring to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. The acronym can also include additional letters, in reference to other identities that do not conform to dominant societal norms.

Nonbinary: An umbrella term for people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman or masculine/feminine. Nonbinary people are often included under the trans umbrella, but not all may identify as transgender. Other genders that may be included under the nonbinary umbrella are genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender.

Oppression: Systems of power and privilege, based on bias, which benefit some social groups over others. Oppression can 1) take many forms, including ideological, institutional, interpersonal and internalized; 2) be intentional and unintentional; 3) be conscious and unconscious; and 4) be visible and invisible. Oppression prevents the oppressed groups and individuals from being free and equal. Many people face oppression based on more than one of their identities, creating a unique complexity of challenges and resilience.

Pansexual: A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some people, regardless of their gender identity.

Person of Color: A person who identifies as African-American/Black, Latino/Hispanic, Native American/First Nation, Asian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and/or having mixed ancestry may also identify as a “Person of Color.”

Pronouns: The pronoun or set of pronouns that a person identifies with and would like to be called when their proper name is not being used. Examples include “she/her/hers,” “he/him/his,” “ze/hir/hirs,” and “they/them/theirs.” Some people prefer no pronouns at all. For more information, refer to GLSEN’s Educator Resource on Pronouns at www.glsen.org/trans.

Queer: An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. While it is used as a neutral, or even a positive term among many LGBTQ people today, historically “queer” was used as a derogatory slur.

Questioning: A person who is in the process of understanding and exploring what their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and gender expression might be.

Racism: A system of oppression that benefits white people at the expense of people of color.

Reclaimed Words: As language evolves, some individuals and communities choose to identify with terms that had previously been used as slurs against them. The words are “reclaimed” and given new meaning, often imbued with a sense of pride and resilience. Examples include, “queer,” “dyke,” and “tranny,” among others. It’s important to remember that identity is unique to each individual; not all members of a community readily accept the use of reclaimed words, as they may still find them offensive and hurtful.

Sexism: A system of oppression that benefits male-identified people at the expense of female-identified people.

Sexual Orientation: The inner feelings of who a person is attracted to emotionally and/or physically, in relation to their own gender identity. Some people may identify as “asexual,” “bisexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “pansexual,” “queer,” “straight,” and many more.

Straight or Heterosexual: A person who is emotionally and/or physically attracted to some members of another gender (specifically, a male-identified person who is attracted to some females or a female-identified person who is attracted to some males).

Tranny: A derogatory term directed at a transgender person. Some transgender people have reclaimed the term and use it as an affirming label with which to identify.

Transgender: An umbrella term describing people whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth or by society.

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