

10 BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIPS FOR LGBTQ STUDENTS



2019-2020 National Student Council

We as members of GLSEN’s National Student Council know that going back to school can be difficult; especially if you are LGBTQ+. These tips go out to the kids who worry about more than homework during break and first day back outfits. You deserve a school where you feel safe and respected; and hope that these tips will make your school experience a little less complicated.

1. [Ask for Pronouns](#)

You’ll meet new people even if you are returning to the same school. By providing an opportunity for teachers and students to share their pronouns, you demonstrate that you’re not assuming anything about their identity or experience. It’s important to remember that the way you perceive someone does not dictate how they identify, what their pronouns are, or generally how they like to be referred to. It also opens up the opportunity for you to share yours as well!

Example 1: “Hi! My name is El and I use they, them, theirs pronouns. What about you?”

Example 2: “This is my friend El, they are in my Theatre class

2. [On Coming Out...](#)

Despite negative stigma about being “in the closet”, your inability or fear of expressing yourself does not make you any less of a person who belongs in the LGBTQ+ community. Do it for yourself, and only if you are ready. If you decide to come out at school, consider your safety and the capacity of your support system. Amongst other things, you’ll want to think about who has power over you, where you feel most safe,

and what resources you can supplement when having to educate others. We all deserve to live openly and personal safety is the most important thing on the list.

3. **You are Valid!**

Remember that no matter what comes your way, your reaction/emotions are valid. School can throw a lot of things at you; from group projects and strict teachers to bullying or difficult breakups. It's important to find positive coping mechanisms or outlets to release these emotions. This may take the form of listening to music, speaking to a therapist/trusted adult, or finding time in your schedule to do something you enjoy; like drawing or watching an episode of your favorite TV show. You can also [follow us on Instagram](#) and check out our cool affirmations and photos!

4. [Locate a Trusted Adult](#)

It can be difficult, but locating an adult that you trust can really improve your K-12 school experience. This could be anyone; a teacher, a school nurse or psychologist, a librarian, a coach, or even a janitor. Ensuring you have someone to talk to or rely on at school can be really helpful when trying to report harassment, seeking help for mental illness, or navigate other school processes. You don't have to go through anything alone!

5. **Finding Yourself**

It is okay to still be figuring things out! Middle school and high school are a great time to experiment with your identity. Finding what is right for you may come in the form of changing up your self-expression, going by different pronouns, pursuing relationships with people of different genders, or finding a class/ extracurricular you really enjoy. Allow yourself time and space to explore your identities, they can also change over time and that is totally OK!

6. **Check Your Records**

If you are going back to school using a different name or pronoun, there are ways that you can prepare. You can change the information on your school records by reaching out to your school office or guidance counselor. Another option is to email your teachers before classes start and explain how you wish to be addressed throughout the school year. You can also ask them to call out **only last names** to give other students the opportunity to share the name they go by rather than what is automatically listed on the roster.

7. **Serve as a Mentor**

If you are an LGBTQ+ student returning to your school, take the opportunity to share your knowledge with others. You could [join/form your school's GSA](#), put up posters encouraging acceptance, or perhaps even form a kind of "lunch bunch," allowing other LGBTQ-identified students to meet others like them. Using your experience to help other LGBTQ+ folks navigate the challenges at school will not only make you feel good, but hopefully foster a culture of support.

8. **Connect with Leaders**

It's a great idea to connect with your [Gender and Sexuality Alliance \(GSA\)](#) advisor/leaders when entering

a new school year (if you haven't already.) As an LGBTQ-identified student, GSA can serve as an affirming place for you to experiment with your identity, change your expression, try out new names, or pronouns. If you don't have a GSA [check out this resource](#) on how to start one [and how to find new members](#).

9. **Binding and Tucking in School (for trans and non binary folks if applicable)**

This tip is especially significant for those of you who take gym class, choir, or play a wind instrument. If you're someone who chooses to bind, ensure that you have a sports bra or looser fitting piece of clothing in case you need to change. If you are someone who tucks, you can plan ahead and bring a change of clothes like tights or tighter but not restricting undergarments. Remember: only bind or tuck with articles meant for that specific purpose and always follow the time guidelines provided by the supplier.

10. **Use Your Resources**

Many school districts have health professionals such as social workers, psychologists, and nurses already on staff. It's a good idea to know how to contact them and where their offices are. For example: the nurse might have a non-gendered bathroom you can use, the social worker may be able to provide you or your family guidance on any given issue, and the psychologist could advise you on healthy coping skills. These folks are resources at your disposal so make sure you take advantage! Whatever you are going through, you don't have to face it alone.

GLSEN and the National Student Council wishes students, teachers, and families all the best as they head back to school. If you are looking for more information, check out [GLSEN's website](#)! We focus on making schools more LGBTQ+ inclusive by providing resources to students and educators.

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER! EMAIL US AT STUDENTS@GLSEN.ORG.