



# **Responding to the Killing of Nex Benedict:** A Conversation Guide for Educators

This February, a group of children in Oklahoma murdered a Choctaw nonbinary student, Nex Benedict (they/them). Nex passed away following a physical assault from other students, resulting in severe injuries that were not immediately addressed. Instead of supporting Nex, Owasso High School sent them home bloodied and bruised without notifying police or seeking urgent medical attention, which led to their death the following day.

This guide aims to support you to host conversations about this tragedy, whether with students, community members, or peers, which in turn would deepen relationships, share resources, and show solidarity.

## Educators: Classroom Conversations

### Grades K - 5

*Note: This may be the first time some learners may be speaking about LGBTQ people. For additional resources on discussing LGBTQ+ inclusion with your students, visit [GLSEN's Elementary Resources page](#).*

**Select a time** of day when students are calm and ready to have a serious discussion (such as community meeting). If possible, invite another staff member (such as an aide or social worker) to be in the room during the conversation, in case individual students need personalized support.

**Before beginning the conversation, remind students of classroom/school values or community agreements.**

Elevating any community agreements about respecting one another and using kind words can reduce the likelihood of harmful comments coming up in the discussion.

**Use clear and simple language.** It is important to not overwhelm students with details. Practice using short clear sentences to explain what happened and to invite students into the conversation. You can display a picture of Nex, along with a map of the country, so students see where Oklahoma is in relation to where you are.

#### Background Information:

- Something sad happened this month to a high school student in our country. In a high school in Oklahoma, a group of students beat up another student, whose name was Nex Benedict.
- Nex used they/them pronouns. Nex was nonbinary (part of the LGBTQ+ community) and Choctaw. Choctaw is a Native American Nation. The students attacked Nex because Nex was nonbinary. Nex had been bullied for over a year.
- Nex was very hurt, but their school didn't bring them to the doctor or get them help. The next day, Nex died, and many people are sad and angry about their death.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Sometimes, there are people who don't understand or like other people.
  - Sometimes those people do things to hurt the people they don't like or understand.
- Does anyone have any questions or feelings they want to share?
- Why is it important to be kind to everyone?
- How can we practice being kind to everyone?

- What can we do when we see someone being unkind, or when we are being unkind ourselves?
- How can we make sure that our school community is safe for everyone?

**It is important to Invite students** to ask questions about what happened. It's okay to tell students that you don't know the answers to certain questions.

**If you are feeling grief**, you can name that, or other emotions you're feeling. This may make it easier for students to share how they're feeling. For [more information on supporting children through a loss, see this resource from Pathlight Mood and Anxiety Center](#).

**Encourage students to share** how they're feeling by journaling, discussing in small groups, or drawing a picture.

**For older elementary students**, if students are interested in taking action after the discussion, you can offer for them to connect with a student-run GSA club, to raise funding for Nex's family, other LGBTQ+ people, Choctaw people, or to take another action. You can share [GLSEN's GSA Guide](#) if students are interested in starting a GSA.

**Respond to harmful comments as they happen.** You may need to intervene in response to comment that is demeaning to nonbinary or Native people. Be clear what you're responding to, and why you're intervening: "All kids should feel safe at school, and nobody should be killed because of who they are." For more guidance on responding to harmful comments amidst critical conversations, see [pages 20-22 of this resource from Learning for Justice](#).

**Let students know** who they can reach out to in your school community if they want to continue discussing or have more questions.

Close the conversation in a positive way by asking students to share something that makes them special or by completing the [Garden of Kindness](#) activity.

## Grades 6 - 12

**Coordinate with other staff** to determine when during the day these conversations will happen, and who should be in the room for them.

- For example, you may want to align with colleagues so all students have this conversation either during an advisory block or a social studies block.

**Before beginning the conversation, remind students of classroom/school values or community agreements.**

Elevating any community agreements about respecting one another and valuing others' identities can reduce the likelihood of harmful comments coming up in the discussion.

**Share a news article with students** about the tragedy. Preview the article ahead of time to ensure that it is the right fit for your class. If you aren't able to dedicate enough time for students to review the article, you can use language such as,

"This month at a high school in Oklahoma, a group of students beat up a Choctaw nonbinary student named Nex Benedict (he/him). Nex died the next day. Nex's school didn't stop the bullying or help Nex after he got attacked. Oklahoma's laws make life very difficult for trans and nonbinary students there: they often can't go by their self-identified name and pronouns, and they aren't allowed to use the bathroom in line with their gender."

**If you are feeling grief**, you can name that, or other emotions you're feeling. This may make it easier for students to share how they're feeling. For [more information on supporting children through a loss, see this resource from Pathlight Mood and Anxiety Center](#).

**Create an environment** that allows students to ask questions safely. It is okay to tell students that you don't know the answers to certain questions.

Sample Conversation Questions:

- Have you heard about this already? How did you feel when you heard it or how do you feel now?
- What impact do you think this has on our communities?
- Why do you think things like this happen?
- How can we make sure that our classroom community is a safer space?
- What can we do to support each other?

**Create space for students** to share how they're feeling, either whole-group, with a partner, or by journaling. Be sure to let students know if you would like them to share what they are writing or talking about with the full group before you give the instruction.

**Provide information** on where students can access additional support after the conversation, such as a school counselor or psychologist or community center.

**Respond to harmful comments as they happen.** You may need to intervene in response to a transphobic or racist comment. Be clear what you're responding to, and why you're intervening: "A child's right to survive should not be up for debate in this classroom." For more guidance on responding to harmful comments amidst critical conversations, see [pages 20-22 of this resource from Learning for Justice](#).

**Understand** that while the conversation may allow students a space to process grief and elevate feelings, some students may be interested in taking action after the discussion. You can offer to connect them to a student-run GSA club. They also may come up with some ideas themselves, such as raising money for the victims and their families. Students can also sign up to be a part of GLSEN's [National Student Network](#).

**Close the conversation** by asking students to share a word (or a weather word) to describe their feelings. Remind students where they can go for additional support.

## GSA Club Advisors: GSA Conversations

**Be prepared** for a wide range of responses, feelings and emotions from students. Grief, rage, fear, sadness, numbness, dissociation are all valid ways for students to be feeling during this time. It is important to allow students to process the way that they need to, and not pressure anyone to 'see the bright side' or come up with a solution.

**Build a safer space** for students to share their feelings, thoughts and needs by working with student club leaders to generate group agreements or norms prior to starting the conversation.

**Encourage students** to have a dialogue with one another, try not to drive the conversation, but to allow students to talk through things as they need to.

**Provide information** on where students can access additional support after the conversation, such as a school counselor or psychologist or community center.

**Center community care.** It is important to highlight the ways in which we can provide care and support to one another during these times. Spend some time identifying ways students and affirming adults can work together to keep each other safe.

**Acknowledge the history** of the LGBTQ+ liberation movement, including the history of the fight for inclusive schools. See a history of the LGBTQ Inclusive Schools Movement on [p10-12 of this resource from Advocates for Youth](#). Read about [school climate in your state with GLSEN's state snapshots](#).

## Best Practices

**Work to establish trust** with any youth you are having this conversation with. This might include sharing why you want to have this conversation, what outcomes you want to come from the conversation and how you are going to have the conversation.

**Be open to perspectives and feelings of others**, including young people - avoid dismissing their experiences due to their age. It is important to remember that the feelings and perspectives of students are valid and informed by their life experiences.

**Consider looking to other adults**, including elders, as well as youth-serving professionals, such as educators and youth workers, for guidance and resources on how to support students in having this conversation.

**Don't compare generational trauma** or other traumatic acts of violence against communities against one another. Hate in any form, at any time is unacceptable and can be overwhelming to discuss.

**Establish a clear container** for the conversation. Let students know exactly how you would like them to participate in the conversation and include some time to debrief at the end.

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