

A NETFLIX SERIES

# HEARTSTOPPER

FALL HARD,  
LOVE HARDER.

## Heartstopper: A GLSEN Discussion Guide for Students and Youth Groups

### **Heartstopper**

**Rated TV-14 for language, self-harm, sex, and suggestive dialogue.**

*Teens Charlie and Nick discover their unlikely friendship might be something more as they navigate school and young love in this coming-of-age series*

### **HOW TO UTILIZE HEARTSTOPPER TO CREATE DISCUSSION**

Whether you've read the novels or watched the series before, Charlie and his diverse group of friends have the potential to spark important and meaningful conversations about self-discovery, community, mental health, and more. Host a watch party or afterschool screening, and consider inviting other student clubs or groups to join you. Use the guide and discussion questions below to start conversations in your GSA, diversity club, leadership class, or other youth group.

### **FRAMING THE CONVERSATION**

1. Before starting, preview the discussion questions and select which ones you want to use. Plan which questions will be presented to the whole group, which ones will be for pairs or trios, and which ones will be best for solo reflection.
2. Set up the room so that you can all see each other while discussing the questions (e.g. a circle or U-shape).
3. Before starting the discussion questions with your group, go over group guidelines of how to have a respectful conversation. Ask the group if they have any other guidelines they would like to add.
4. As the discussion is happening, keep an eye on the time so you can cover different themes from the show and preserve space for a variety of people to share their thoughts.

**NOTE:** Each section below has 4-5 questions for discussion, including follow up questions, and should take groups around 30 minutes to work through. For those with a limited amount of time, feel free to select enough sections to fill the time available while being considerate of the most relevant themes to your group. These groupings can be modified depending on the comfort level of your group. While facilitating the conversation, be mindful of the unique identities and experiences of each member. Make sure to choose questions and themes that resonate with the group. Take care to provide content warnings for difficult topics to avoid causing harm or triggering group members.



## SELF-DISCOVERY & IDENTITY

1. In Season 1 Episode 6, Nick watches *Pirates of the Caribbean* with his mother and realizes that he finds both the male and female leads of the movie attractive. While he spent much of the season initially confused about his sexuality, this moment was a turning point in helping him understand his bisexuality. Just as Nick used this movie to explore and understand a part of his identity, how can other forms of media support personal journeys of self-discovery?
  - Follow-up – How has media helped you understand yourself in a deeper way? Are there any specific books, movies, or television shows that made you feel seen?
2. Once Nick starts questioning his identity, Nick uses the internet to find out more about bisexuality. How can online research both be helpful and a potential danger when used as a tool for self-discovery?
3. Throughout Season 3, Isaac is seen reading many different queer-affirming literary works, including *Genderqueer* by Maia Kobabe, *Queer City: Gay London from Romans to the Present Day* by Peter Ackroyd, and *Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller. How does the reading of this type of inclusive literature fit in with the themes of *Heartstopper*?
  - What role does inclusive literature play in helping students understand different identities or their own self-discovery? Are there any books that stand out to you as examples of this in action?
4. What are some of the identities that the main characters hold (think about race, sexuality, gender identity, socioeconomic status, family structure, and ability)? In the show, how did you see these identities intersecting? What examples of marginalization or privilege did you observe?

## FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY

1. According to GLSEN's 2021 [National School Climate Survey](#) (a US-focused survey), access to supportive educators and other adult allies is one of the most important factors in making LGBTQ+ students feel safer. In Season 1, Charlie confides to his teacher about a difficult romantic relationship, and the teacher offers support. In Season 3, Nick tells his aunt about the stress of trying to help Charlie through his eating disorder. What role do allies and other supportive adults play in the lives of queer youth?
  - Follow-up - Why is it sometimes important to talk to an adult about certain serious issues?
  - Follow-up - Who in your community do you turn to first when you need advice and support?
2. Across the show, many of the characters go through hardship that requires leaning on their friends for advice and support. How does the friend group make sure everyone feels loved and supported?
  - Follow-up - How do you make sure your friends feel loved?



3. In Season 3 Episode 6, Elle experiences an uncomfortable radio interview where she is asked painful questions about discrimination against transgender women. Elle tells some friends that she does not want to talk about it with Tao, even though they love each other, because he will never fully understand the trans experience. Discuss the ways in which having other openly queer friends can be vital for LGBTQ+ students.
4. Queer Joy is a central theme in *Heartstopper*, extending beyond individual happiness to showcase collective experiences through connection, self-discovery, and mutual support among friends. For instance, Nick's coming out journey is depicted not as one of fear or shame but as a moment of affirmation, love, and acceptance—challenging the typical narratives of trauma often associated with queer stories. What are some other ways queer joy appears throughout *Heartstopper*? How does the friend group exemplify queer joy in their conversations and activities together?

## COMING OUT

1. In Season 1 Episode 2, Elle says that Nick is “the straightest person I’ve ever seen,” and Charlie’s other friends give similar comments about their perceptions of Nick’s sexuality, without ever getting to know him. How can stereotypes about masculinity and heteronormativity make coming out look different for different people?
2. Some characters, like Charlie and Nick, feel comfortable using labels to describe their identities, while others, like Isaac and Imogen, don’t feel the same need for a specific label. For some people, labels can provide a sense of connection and community, while for others, they may feel restrictive or not fully representative. Discuss how identity labels can bring comfort to some and feel limiting or inadequate to others, reflecting the diverse experiences of self-identification.
  - Follow-up: Do you have any identities (consider, race, class, gender, etc.) that you prefer to put a label on? How about any that do not seem to fit into the boxes of an exact label?
3. During the school trip to Paris, Season 2 Episode 5, Tao apologizes to Charlie for accidentally outing him the year before. Discuss the importance of agency in coming out stories. Why is it so important to have the ability to choose when and how to come out?
4. Not every LGBTQ+ person lives in a community where it is safe to come out. According to GLSEN's 2021 [National School Climate Survey](#) (a US-focused survey), many LGBTQ+ students experience hostile environments in schools. Even in seemingly supportive spaces, more than half of LGBTQ+ students reported facing verbal harassment. This demonstrates how coming out can be both a privilege and a burden, depending on personal circumstances and the level of support within their community. Discuss how this duality is reflected in diverse experiences and its implications for those who choose to come out—or not—in varying contexts.





## CONSENT AND RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

1. In Season 3 Episode 1, Nick wants to talk to Charlie about his eating disorder, but Charlie isn't ready to discuss it. If you were in Nick's position, what would you have done similarly? What would you have done differently?
  - Follow-up - How do you balance getting a loved one help while also respecting their needs for independent decisions on their own time table?
2. Although Tara and Darcy are enjoying living together at the start of Season 3, Tara encourages Darcy to move to her Gran's house because she needs more personal space. How does Darcy demonstrate respect for her girlfriend's needs by honoring this request?
3. In Season 3 Episode 6, Elle feels uncomfortable talking about her experiences as a transgender girl in a country filled with anti-trans sentiment. What are some ways to balance a desire to speak up about lived experiences and injustices while also protecting a personal need for privacy?
4. Many characters explore their desires for physical intimacy throughout Season 3. Elle shares with Tao that moving their relationship forward might trigger body dysphoria, while Charlie opens up to Nick about his own physical insecurities. How do Tao and Nick demonstrate respect for their partners' boundaries?

## MENTAL HEALTH AND BULLYING

1. Charlie and many of his friends are forced to confront bullying and homophobia in their schools throughout Season 1. What are some of the lasting impacts of this trauma in Charlie's life, and how does bullying contribute to worsened mental health?
2. In Season 1 Episode 8, Charlie decides to confront his bully after enduring repeated harassment and negative impacts on his mental health. This is a turning point for Charlie as he chooses to stand up for himself and set boundaries. Why do you think Charlie eventually felt the need to confront his bully, and what do you think he hoped to achieve by doing so?
3. In Season 3 Episode 1, Nick does not know how exactly to help Charlie with his anorexia or OCD. What types of strategies (such as communication and other types of care) does he use to make Charlie feel safe and supported? How does Charlie later help Tara through her panic attack?
  - Follow-up - Do you think they could have or should have done anything differently?
4. What are some strategies you use to help friends when they are going through emotionally difficult events or periods of time?



## SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

### Coming Out

As a young person, learning about your own LGBTQ+ identity and coming out in a heteronormative and cisnormative world can be challenging. To help with the coming out process, we've compiled some key things for you to think about and consider as you begin to share your identities around sexuality and gender. This is not prescriptive, and your coming out journey(s) may skip around or return to other parts of the list. No two coming out stories are exactly the same; your coming out will be shaped by the supports that you have in school, at home, or in your community, and the privileges you hold in other aspects of your identity.

### Gender Terminology

Gender is much more complex than “boys” and “girls,” but not too complicated for students of any age to learn about. All students have a gender, express that gender each day, and are affected by gender stereotypes. You can use GLSEN’s Gender Terminology Visual to explain these basic gender terms.

### Start a GSA

If you’ve been looking for a queer community, a way to make new friends, or a group of people who are interested in getting involved in advocacy, joining or starting a GSA is a great place to start! The 2021 National School Climate Survey found that students in schools with a GSA are significantly less likely to hear anti-LGBTQ+ remarks in their schools, more likely to report feelings of safety, and more likely to feel a sense of belonging and support in their school.

**Learn more about GLSEN and stay up-to-date on our work by following us on social media: @GLSEN on Facebook and Instagram, and @GLSEN\_National on TikTok!**

