

Creating A Safe School: Celebrating All

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 8th grade, students will be able to:

ID.8.ADV.1 - Develop a plan to promote dignity and respect for all people in the school community

ID.8.AI.1 - Access accurate information about gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation

PS.8.SM.2 - Demonstrate ways they can respond when someone is being bullied or harassed

TARGET GRADE: Grade 8
Lesson 1

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Desktop or laptop computer with PowerPoint on it
- LCD projector and screen
- PowerPoint: "What is School Like for LGBTQ Students?"
- Worksheet: "Is Our School LGBTQ Inclusive" enough copies for half the class
- Homework: "LGBTQ Issues Online: What Did You Learn?" cut in half, enough copies for each student to receive one
- White board and markers
- Pencils in case students do not have their own

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Go through the PowerPoint slides so that you have a little bit of familiarity with the facts they contain before the class session. You may also wish to view the GLSEN School Climate Survey or its Executive Summary to be prepared for questions that may come up in class: <http://www.glsen.org/article/2013-national-school-climate-survey>.
- Print out, photocopy, and cut in half the homework assignment worksheets.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe at least two things their school does well around LGBTQ inclusion, as well as two things it could do better. [Knowledge]
2. Explain what that they, as students, can do to improve the school environment around LGBTQ inclusion. [Knowledge]
3. Name at least one reliable website about sexual orientation and gender identity for their age group. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Ask, "What kinds of things make you feel like school is a safe environment for you?" Write students' responses on the board, probing for the following as applicable (feel free to contribute one to get the brainstorm going):

- There are a lot of adults around
- There is a buzzer at the front of the school so no one can get in without being buzzed in
- There are posters up on the walls with pictures of students who look like me

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- Adults greet us in the morning
- The adults know my name and things about me and my family
- There is a security guard/metal detector when we first come in the building
- There is a hall monitor who checks to make sure we belong in the school
- I have a locker (whether solo or shared) so I have a place to put my stuff

Ask, “What is it about these things that make school feel safe? How do you think it would feel if any one of these was missing? What if none of these took place here?” After a few people have responded, say, “What this tells us is how we feel when we’re at school makes a big difference in whether we want to be there – as well as how we do in our classes. Everyone has the right to feel like they belong at school. But what if they don’t?” (7 minutes)

STEP 2: Say, “Today we are going to be talking about sexual orientation and gender identity and our school environment to see how well we make school feel like a welcome place for people of all orientations and genders. We’ll also look at where we see room for improvement; and how we would propose making some changes.”

Note to the Teacher: Depending on your school environment, this can be a one-day assignment, or be turned into a class or even school-wide project. This lesson is designed to create the foundation to enable you to create what you feel you can do in your own setting. (2 minutes)

STEP 3: Say, “We’re now going to look specifically at what schools are like for students who identify as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer.” Start the PowerPoint, “What Is School Like for LGBTQ Students?” Read the first slide aloud, explaining that you are going to share a few facts from a national survey of LGBTQ middle and high school students.

Ask a different student to read each slide. After each slide has been read, say or ask the following:

Slide Two: “This school is our school—it doesn’t just belong to the teachers or the students, nor is it designed only for certain students. So every student has the right to feel safe and a sense of belonging here. What that looks like is different from community to community and school to school. Some places do it well, and some don’t.”

Slide Three: “The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network does a survey of schools across the US every few years on how LGBTQ students are treated, and the impact of that, both positive and negative.”

Slide Four: “Verbal harassment is being taunted for who you are. It’s not the same as teasing. It usually targets a certain aspect of your personality, background or appearance—like your skin color, country of origin, how much money people think your family has, who is raising you, etc. Harassment can go on for a while if it’s not stopped.”

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Slide Five: “Has anyone ever heard someone use a mean or hateful word to someone else when you’ve walked by? How do you think it made that student feel?”

Slide Six: “In many schools, it’s not just about students not harassing other students. It’s about the school making a strong statement that harassment and bullying won’t be tolerated. And the school has a responsibility to have policies in place that specifically make students of all sexual orientations and gender identities feel equal.”

Slide Seven: “When we don’t feel good—when we’re sad or angry or anxious – we don’t feel smart. We don’t feel safe. And the way this shows itself at school is that students who don’t feel like they belong or don’t feel safe sometimes stop going to class, or even to school altogether. Their grades start to go down and they may stop having goals for the future. They feel hopeless.”

Slides Eight & Nine: “The good news is, just as not having these things can make a school environment feel less safe and have a negative impact on LGBTQ students – taking some specific steps can also make school feel safe and welcome. And if one group of students feel like they belong at school, it can help all students know that they are welcome, no matter who they are.”

Process the information you presented by asking the following questions:

- What are your reactions to what I just shared with you?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What do you think schools have a responsibility to do for these students – or any student – to feel like they belong in school?
- What about students? For what do you think they should be held responsible?

Note to the Teacher: *If you have any backlash or defensive reactions such as, “If they didn’t act/dress that way, then maybe people wouldn’t harass them,” take the time to discuss that. If students are not able to come around to the idea that no one has a right to bully or harass others, no matter how they present themselves or identify, highlight your school’s anti-bullying policy to remind them of what the school believes. (13 minutes)*

STEP 4: Say, “The good news is, there are things that a school community can do to make sure all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, feel like they are safe and included. We’re going to take a look at our school now.”

Divide the class into pairs. Once they are in pairs say, “I am going to give each of you a worksheet and ask you to work together for the remainder of class to complete it. The first side is a checklist of possible things a school can do to make sure it is respectful and accepting of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Please be honest! How do you think the school does on each of these? Once you’ve completed the checklist, think about what grade you’d give our school – but just as it relates to LGBTQ issues, not in general. Please do not go on to the second side yet.” Tell them they have about 5 minutes in which to complete the first side (7 minutes).

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STEP 5: As students are working, write “A B C D F” in a column on the board. After about 5 minutes, ask students how many would give each of the grades, by a show of hands, and write the number of raised hands next to each grade.

Say, “Clearly, there’s some work we need to do here.”

***Note to the Teacher:** If you are in a school that is more socially progressive around LGBTQ issues and you have mostly good grades, you can say, “We’re doing a pretty good job! But what can we be doing better?”*

Ask students to flip their worksheets to the other side and answer the questions there. Explain that they are going to be identifying specific things that they feel need to improve at school, as well as steps that they, as students, can take to help those happen. Tell them they have about 10 minutes to complete their task. (15 minutes)

STEP 6: After about 10 minutes, stop the students as they’re working. Make sure they have put their names at the bottom of their worksheets. Say, “We don’t have time to go through all the sheets, but does anyone have an idea they think is really great that they’d like to share?” As time allows, have a few pairs share their ideas.

***Note to the Teacher:** If you have time in the next class to come back to this – especially if this ends up being an actual project – you can go through the other worksheets/ideas then.*

Praise the good ideas and work the students did and explain the homework assignment in which they will be looking at websites where they can find information about sexual orientation and gender identity. Distribute the homework and collect the worksheets. (6 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The plans of action generated by the paired activity will enable the teacher to determine whether the first two learning objectives were met. The homework assignment will demonstrate their ability to access a reliable resource on LGBTQ issues.

***Note to the Teacher:** There are very few online resources that are age-appropriate for middle school. The websites in the homework assignment, although written by teens, is age-appropriate for this lesson and purpose.*

HOMEWORK:

Have students visit <http://sexetc.org/info-center/post/athlete-ally-hudson-taylor/> and complete the three questions on their homework worksheet.

Is Our School LGBTQ-Inclusive?

(Adapted from The Safe Space Kit: Guide to Being an Ally to LGBT Students)

Instructions: Read each characteristic. Do you think this is something our school has? A little, a lot or not at all? Please check the box that best matches how you feel.

Characteristic	We Totally Do This!	We Kind Of Do This	We Don't Do This	Don't Know/ Doesn't Apply
1. Anti-bullying lessons and efforts include LGBTQ students				
2. School forms include different families (say "parent/gaurdian" vs. "mom and dad")				
3. Dress code allows people of any gender to dress anyway they want that is appropriate for school				
4. There are gender-neutral or private bathrooms or changing areas, not just "Boys" and "Girls" rooms and locker rooms				
5. We talk about LGBTQ people in at least some of our classes				
6. The library has resources for and about LGBTQ people				
7. Assignments include LGBTQ people or issues				
8. We have a gay-straight alliance (GSA) or similar club or group				
9. Our sports teams and other activities include LGBTQ students				
10. School's publications cover LGBTQ people and issues				
11. School dances/events are safe for and inclusive of LGBTQ students				
12. Valentine's Day celebrations include LGBTQ and non-coupled students				
13. There is at least one LGBTQ identified or friendly teacher/ staff in the school.				
14. There are posters or other visuals that reflect LGBTQ people or couples in the classrooms, offices or hallways.				
15. Observations of Mother's Day and Father's Day that affirm all family structures, including someone who has an LGBTQ parent or caregiver.				

Overall, what grade would you give our school on how we do on LGBTQ inclusion?

A B C D F

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Worksheet

Which of the things listed above do you think our school could do better on? (List the numbers of all that apply here).

What steps could you, as students, take to make these changes happen? Select one of the things you feel the school could do better on, and three specific actions you and other students can take to see those changes take place:

Change: _____

We, as students, need to:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What, if anything, could get in the way of your making these changes?

What could you do to overcome those so that change can still happen?

Names: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Homework - LGBTQ Issues Online: What Did You Learn?

Instructions: Please visit the *Sex, Etc.* website and read the article "Athlete Ally Hudson Taylor" found here: <http://sexetc.org/info-center/post/athlete-ally-hudson-taylor/>

1. What is your reaction to how Hudson describes the typical homophobic climate of some school sports? If you have participated in team sports, does it match your experience?
2. Why did Hudson, who identifies as heterosexual, champion the cause of LGBTQ athletes? How do you think his peers responded to his passion about this issue?
3. What is something you still have questions about after reading the article?

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Name: _____

Date: _____

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