



Reducing Homophobia in Schools




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Objectives

- Discuss how homophobia and transphobia negatively impact gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth.
- Define common GLBTQ terminology.
- Articulate strategies on how to assess school climate and attitudes toward sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Identify the role of school board members, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents in creating safe and inclusive spaces for GLBTQ students.




Overview




What are homophobia and transphobia?

- **Homophobia:** an irrational fear of, or aversion to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) people.¹ It can be manifested as fear and hatred.²
- **Transphobia:** fear or hatred of transgender people. It can manifest in a number of ways, including violence, harassment and discrimination.¹



Homophobia negatively affects GLBTQ young people:

- In one nationwide survey:³
 - 81.9% of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students reported being verbally harassed;
 - 38.3% reported being physically harassed; and
 - 18.3% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
 - 63.5% felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, and 43.9% because of their gender expression.
 - 31.8% missed at least one entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.



Homophobia negatively affects GLBTQ young people:

- Median rate* of students' reported sexual identities and missed days of school because of feeling unsafe at school or on their way to or from school:⁴
 - 4.8% among heterosexual students
 - 21.1% among gay or lesbian students
 - 12.7% among bisexual students
 - 17.4% among unsure students



*Across 5 states and 4 large urban school districts, during the 30 days before the survey.

Homophobia negatively affects GLBTQ young people:

- Gay and lesbian students had higher prevalence rates for health risks in 7 out of 10 health risk categories.⁴
- GPA of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was 2.9 versus 3.2 for students who were less often harassed.³
- Another study found:⁵
 - LGBTQ students were more likely to report high levels of bullying and homophobic victimization.
 - Students questioning their sexual orientation reported the most bullying and homophobic victimization compared with either heterosexual or LGB students.



Homophobia and transphobia negatively affect all young people

- Cause young people to police one another, limiting individuality and self-expression.⁶
- Prevent the teaching of comprehensive, medically accurate sex education that is inclusive of all young people.^{7,8}
- Prevent young people from appreciating each other's true diversity and uniqueness.^{9, 10}
- Prevent young people from engaging and supporting one another across all spaces, including at school, work, or home.¹¹




Matching Game:

Common GLBTQ Terminology




Common GLBTQ Terminology

- **Bisexuality:** A person who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders and there may be a preference for one gender over others.¹³
- **Gay:** A male who is attracted to males in a romantic, sexual, and/or emotional sense. Also a term used to refer to the GLBTQ community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual.^{12, 13}
- **Lesbian:** A female who is attracted romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally to other females.^{12, 13}
- **Questioning:** Being unsure of one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity; feeling uncomfortable with or unwilling or unable to self-categorize within traditional labels such as gay, straight, male, female, etc.¹³
- **Transgender:** People whose psychological self differs from the social expectations for the physical sex they were born with. Also an umbrella term used for transsexual, cross-dresser (transvestite), gender queer, and people who identify as neither female nor male and/or as neither a man or a woman.¹



Common GLBTQ Terminology

- **Identity:** What, how, and who one perceives oneself to be; a multi-faceted self-concept that evolves throughout life.¹³
- **Gender:** A socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. The social and cultural expression of sex; not biological.^{1, 13}
- **Coming out:** Recognizing one's sexual orientation, developing an identity based on it, and disclosing one's orientation to others. Also refers to the process by which one accepts one's sexuality or gender identity.^{14, 12}



Common GLBTQ Terminology

- **Queer:** An umbrella term which embraces a matrix of sexual preferences and orientations. It is also a reclaimed word that was formerly an exclusively derogatory term for all GLBTQ people. Also used by those who see their own gender identity, sexual identity, and/or sexual orientation as not fitting the widely recognized pattern of straight, gay or lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning.^{12, 13}
- **Gender identity:** A person's sense of being masculine or feminine (or as male or female), or lying somewhere outside gender lines.^{12, 13}
- **Heterosexism:** Assuming every person to be heterosexual therefore marginalizing person who do not identify as heterosexual. It is also believing heterosexuality to be superior to homosexuality and all other sexual orientations.¹
- **Gender role:** Culturally or socially determined sets of attitudes and behaviors that are expected of an individual based on her/his biological sex.¹³



Common GLBTQ Terminology

- **Gender expression:** The ways in which an individual communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, and/or the emphasis or de-emphasis of bodily characteristics; *not* an indication of sexual orientation; behaviors and traits used publicly to express gender identity—as masculine or feminine or something else.¹³
- **Gender fluidity:** The belief that social constructions of gender identity and gender roles lie along a spectrum and cannot be limited to two genders; a feeling that one's gender varies from societal notions of two genders.¹³
- **Internalized homophobia:** When individuals internalize society's negative ideology about GLBTQ people. Can result in a diminished sense of personal self-worth or esteem as well as shame, secrecy, and silence.^{14, 15}



Tips and strategies for assessing school climate and attitudes



Assessing school climate and attitudes

- To ensure a safe environment for GLBTQ students, the first step is to assess the climate of the school.
- The following 5 questions provide ways to initiate dialogue among your school's community members about the climate and attitudes.



Assessing school climate and attitudes

1. Do the GLBTQ students, teachers, and staff in the school know that they are cared about – individually and as whole people?
2. Is there a safe space where all students can openly ask questions about and discuss issues such as sexual health, body image, relationships, and gender?




Assessing school climate and attitudes


3. Does the school educate students, teachers, and staff on GLBTQ issues through presentation, speakers, and classroom discussions?
4. Does the school offer information about local GLBTQ communities and resources? Are students referred to these resources?
5. If the school offers information about safer sex, HIV prevention, and/or pregnancy prevention, is it also GLBTQ friendly? Is the information appropriate for all students attending the school? Is it culturally appropriate?




GLSEN Local School Climate Survey¹⁶



Local School Climate Survey
School-Based Version



**Strategies for reducing homophobia
in schools**




**Creating safe spaces in schools requires a
combination of supportive:**

POLICY

PROGRAM


CLIMATE



Policies: Non-discrimination; anti-bullying; comprehensive sex education*

Programs: Gay Straight Alliances; assemblies; teacher, counselor, and administrator training; peer educators; inclusive curricula

Climate: Inclusive resources; open and welcoming school faculty, teachers, and students



* Comprehensive sexuality education programs build a foundation of knowledge and skills relating to human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. Ideally, comprehensive sexuality education should start in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade. At each developmental stage, these programs teach age-appropriate, medically accurate information that builds on the knowledge and skills that were taught in the previous stage.¹⁷


Supporting Safe and Inclusive School Environments




School Board

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Review and educate on policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- Create a committee for monitoring and evaluation.
- Review and educate on policies that support the teaching of comprehensive, medically-accurate sex education that is inclusive.
- Create a process to address schools when they are not following or implementing the school district's policies.



School Board

Inclusive Programming

- Review and educate on inclusive curricula across various subject areas to highlight GLBTQ people and issues.



School Board

Open and Affirming Climate

- Encourage school libraries to provide resources and information on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Ensure students, teachers, and school faculty members have access to GLBTQ-inclusive websites and other online resources.



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School Administrators

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Review and educate on policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- Ensure that these policies are widely publicized.



School Administrators

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Assess and educate on guidelines that support teachers in the discussion and delivery of comprehensive sexual health education.
- Assess and educate on protocols or guidelines for dealing with harassment.
- Build strong youth-adult partnerships.



School Administrators

Inclusive Programming

- Increase training for health educators.
- Schedule regular educational and sensitivity trainings for staff.
- Invite outside speakers that represent the diversity of students and their families.
- Make GLBTQ resources widely available.



School Administrators

Open and Affirming Climate

- Designate gender-neutral restrooms and locker rooms or changing facilities to be inclusive of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
- Avoid heterosexism on all paperwork.
- Involve students, including GLBTQ students, in assessing/evaluating the school environment.



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Teachers

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Assess and educate on school policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- Actively publicize these policies throughout the classroom and in materials sent home to parents and guardians.



Teachers

Inclusive Programming

- Be an advocate for teacher training and professional development opportunities for staff.
- Take steps to ensure that your subject matter is inclusive of GLBTQ histories and experiences.
- Consider being the teacher sponsor for a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA).



Teachers

Open and Affirming Climate

- Create a space in the classroom where students are able to share freely about their identity and families.
- Put posters around the classroom which show diverse families and people.
- Safe Zone sticker: "A person displaying this symbol will be understanding, supportive, and trustworthy if gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth need help, advice, or just someone with whom they can talk."¹³



Teachers

Open and Affirming Climate

- Do not assume all students are heterosexual.
- Always intervene when you hear anti-GLBTQ language or actions.
- Be a role model for your students.
- Establish rules that make it clear that racist, homophobic, sexist, and all discriminatory comments are not welcome in your classroom.



Teachers

Open and Affirming Climate

- Use a homophobic incident as a teachable moment by following these steps:¹

1. Stop the offensive behavior;
2. Publicly name the behavior and describe why it is offense;
3. Respond on behalf of the school; and
4. Ask for a change in behavior –

For example, “We agreed not to say ‘that’s so gay’ in this classroom. That is a homophobic comment because it implies that there is something wrong with being gay. Our classroom and our school is a welcoming environment for all students therefore, next time please say what you mean without using homophobic language.”



Teachers

Open and Affirming Climate

- Take action when other faculty members make offensive comments or jokes about GLBTQ students and staff.
- Stay informed about the physical, mental, and physiological needs, and resources for GLBTQ students.
 - Maintain student confidentiality
 - Identify resources



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Students

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Assess and educate on policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- Schedule meetings with the principal and other school administrators.



Students

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Speak at school board meetings, leverage new media, write to local newspapers, and contact state and local policy makers.
- Learn how to file complaints if rights are violated and educate other students about their rights.
- If the school or district has a school health advisory council (SHAC), join the council.



Students

Inclusive Programming

- Join or support the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) if one exists.
- GSAs bring together GLBTQ and ally students to support each other, provide a safe space to socialize, and create a platform to educate on how homophobia and transphobia affect all young people.
- If one does not exist, consider creating one!



Students

Inclusive Programming

- GSAs can focus on inclusive programming:
 - Assessing, tracking, and educating on LGBTQ youth-friendly policies
 - Educating students through peer education workshops
 - Hosting movies and discussions
 - Hanging posters around the school and community
 - Hosting plays which create awareness of issues surrounding LGBTQ students
 - Participating in the Day of Silence¹⁸



Students

Open and Affirming Climate

- Students have the right to attend a safe school and feel safe at school.
- Speak up against harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ students by following these steps:¹³
 1. Assess if you are physically safe;
 2. Address the harassment;
 3. Put the focus on the bully;
 4. Name the harassment and its consequences; and
 5. Refuse to join in.



Students


Open and Affirming Climate

- Raise awareness by asking questions about LGBTQ issues in class or in conversations with teachers and faculty.
- Seek allies in teachers and other school staff and determine where to get resources, information, and support around LGBTQ issues.



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Parents

Safe and Supportive Policies


- Join parent-teacher associations or organizations and speak out.
- If the school or district has a school health advisory council (SHAC), join the council.



Parents

Safe and Supportive Policies

- Support medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education that is also inclusive.
- Speak at school board meetings, write to local newspapers, and contact state and local policy makers.
- Challenge inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation.



Parents

Support Inclusive Programming

- Support teacher, counselor, and administrator trainings and professional development opportunities.
- Attend parent/teacher conferences and ask teachers what steps they are taking to promote an inclusive environment.
- Request parent workshops.



Parents

Support Inclusive Programming

- Support linkages with GLBTQ-friendly organizations.
- Encourage increased GLBTQ-friendly resources in the classrooms, libraries, and in information sent home to parents and guardians.



Parents

Open and Affirming Climate

- Be a strong ally by standing up for the rights of all GLBTQ students.
- Support begins at home.
- Create a support group or safe space.



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Summary

- Combination of strategies is needed for reducing homophobia.
- Students, parents, and community stakeholders must work in collaboration with the school board, school administrators, and teachers.
- Change will not happen overnight, but inclusive policies, programs, and climate will benefit all students.



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Resources

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
 - [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#)
- **Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)**
 - [Building a Safe School Checklist](#)
 - [Beyond the Binary](#)
- **Public Health Agency of Canada**
 - [Questions & Answers: Sexual Orientation in Schools](#)
- **Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Network (GLSEN)**
- **Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**
 - [Greater Boston PFLAG Safe Schools and Communities Project](#)
- **Kaleidoscope Youth Center**
- **Trevor Project**



Thank you!

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