



GLBTQ/LGBTQ is a collective term to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Questioning people. The term gay is used to refer to same-sex sexual orientation (both male and female). A lesbian is a female who is exclusively emotionally, sexually, romantically, and/or aesthetically attracted to other females. The term bisexual is the human sexual orientation that refers to the aesthetic, romantic, or sexual desire for people of either gender or of either sex. Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. If an individual is said to be “questioning,” it most often means that they are going through a phase of exploration and possible transition regarding their sexual orientation. Another definition is that the “questioning” period is the initial phase prior to “coming out.”

Coming Out

The process of “coming out” describes the voluntary public announcement of one’s (often homosexual or bisexual) sexual orientation, sexual attractions, or gender identity.

- “Being out” is when an individual does not try to hide these characteristics.
- “Being outed” occurs when these characteristics are made public against one’s wishes or against one’s consent.

Homophobia is the fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals. It can also mean hatred or disapproval of homosexual people, their lifestyles, sexual behaviors or cultures, and is generally used to assert bigotry.

Why is this important?

GLBTQ students:

- Are far more likely to skip classes and drop out of school.
- Are at a higher risk for substance abuse.
- Are subjected to harassment, violent threats, physical/sexual assault, slurs, insults, and jokes (the average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs daily).
- Are more prone to depression and loneliness.
- Attempt suicide 2 to 3 times more frequently than their heterosexual peers.

What can educators do about it?

- Serve as a model for other students. Be sensitive to the language you use and put an end to any discriminatory jokes or language that you hear.
- Be an ally. Educate yourself as to the needs and experiences of GLBTQ youth and their families. Make yourself available to listen to problems that GLBTQ kids may be having both in school and at home. Indicate that you are an ally by placing a rainbow sticker or something similar on your classroom door.
- Help make schools safer. Urge your school to develop anti-discrimination policies protecting GLBTQ students from bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination. The American Psychological Association has created their own policies related to GLBTQ youth in the schools which can be found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbq/policy/youths.html>

- Speak with colleagues about the importance of protecting GLBTQ youth.
- Start a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA).
- Recruit other allies from the faculty and student body to begin a student run club that serves as a safe place for anyone to come and discuss GLBTQ issues.

If resistance is encountered by parents:

- Create a broad support network. Ensure that each person knows that the real issue is safety for students.
- Explain to parents that a GSA is not about “sex” or promoting homosexuality. Use evidence-based facts that support what you hope to accomplish.
- Some may feel that it is not part of the school’s role. However, protecting students is part of a school’s role.

Resource Links

Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA)

Originally Gay-Straight Alliance. For information on starting a GSA at your school visit <https://gsanetwork.org>

It’s Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School

A documentary that focuses on teachers challenging common stereotypes and mistreatment of gays within their own schools. The film shows children (some as young as first grade) reacting to information about the gay community and questions that are discussed in the classroom.

<https://groundspark.org/our-films-and-campaigns/elementary>

Creating Safe Schools for Lesbian and Gay Students: A resource guide for school staff

A resource guide for different strategies to keep schools safe for GLBT students.

<http://twood.tripod.com/guide.html>

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

Includes many resources from current research to education on putting policies into action. <http://www.glsen.org/>

Providing Safe Spaces for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: Guidelines for Gender Identity Non-Discrimination

A guide to laws, regulations, and best practices for use in schools. Maryland State Department of Education - October 2015

<https://pflagmd.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/providing-safe-spaces-for-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-youth.pdf>

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an initiative of



The Children’s Mental Health Matters Campaign, an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD), receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Family Network, and community sponsors. Together with the Maryland Coalition of Families, National Center for School Mental Health, MANSEF, and hundreds of community champions, we work to raise public awareness and acceptance of the importance of children’s mental health to overall child and family wellbeing. We are grateful to the National Center for School Mental Health for their collaboration in creating these resources for families.