

Bullying Prevention Resource Guide

FOR SCHOOLS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

TIPS AND TOPICS FOR BULLYING PREVENTION SUCCESS

BULLYING OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH

In a recent study, bullying of LGBT youth was found to be pervasive and occurred in multiple contexts such as schools, sporting events, families, places of worship, malls, youth shelters, the media, cyberspace and within the LGBT community (Mishna, F., Newman, P., Daley, A., & Soloman, S., 2007). Furthermore, a study by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network illustrates the prevalence of bullying and harassment in America's schools and that students who experience bullying are more likely to miss class which can impact a student's ability to learn. Some of the findings in this study are that:

- 75% of students heard derogatory remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often at school and nearly nine out of ten reported hearing “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” - meaning stupid or worthless—frequently or often
- 37.8% of students experienced physical harassment at school on the basis of sexual orientation and more than 25% on the basis of their gender expression (external characteristics and behaviors associated with gender which are socially defined, i.e. the perception of the way one looks or acts).
- Nearly one in five youth had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and one in ten because of their gender expression.
- LGBT students were five times more likely to report having skipped school in the last month because of safety concerns than the general population of students.
- Overall, LGBT students were twice as likely as the general population of students to report they were not planning to pursue any post-secondary education (2005).

Only nine states and the District of Columbia have comprehensive anti-bullying laws that specifically address bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and only three of these laws mention gender identity. Nine other states have broad anti-bullying laws that do not specifically define “bullying” or list categories of protected classes such as sexual orientation or gender identity. The remaining 32 states have no laws at all. The National School Climate Survey found that both states with “generic” anti-bullying laws and states with no law at all had equally high rates of verbal harassment. States with inclusive policies that specifically spell out categories including sexual orientation and gender identity, however, have significantly lower rates of verbal harassment (31.6% vs. 40.8%) (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network, 2005).

The Impact:

- Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation has dangerous consequences for students, according to data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (California Safe Schools Coalition, 2004). Compared to students who were not harassed, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are:
 - More than three times as likely to carry a weapon to school, to seriously consider suicide, or to make a plan for attempting suicide.
 - More than twice as likely to report depression, to use methamphetamines, or to use inhalants.
 - And, are more likely to have low grades (Cs or below), to be victims of violence, to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, binge drink, or use marijuana.
- As with any type of bullying, harassment of same sex attracted young people can contribute, among other things, to lack of sleep, loss of appetite, isolation, nervousness, being upset or angry, elevated rates of actual and attempted suicide and self-harm, absenteeism, truancy and limited achievement at school.
- Alarmingly, in a study of the long-term correlates of bullying, 53% of adult lesbians and gay men reported contemplating harming themselves as a result of being bullied at school, 40% indicated they had attempted to harm themselves or had attempted suicide on at least one occasion.

Addressing and Intervening in Bullying of LGBT:

School or Community Wide

- Enact an equal opportunity policy that makes reference to sexual orientation
- Organize a senior management team that supports activities to address homophobic bullying
- Have the sex and relationship education classes address sexual orientation
- Offer training for staff to address issues related to homophobia and sexual orientation

Administrator Response

- Protect and support the targeted person by taking them seriously and providing a safe learning environment
- Remove perpetrator from the situation (transferring them to another class, banning them from the bus, etc.)
- Arrange for staff to be present wherever the harassment has been occurring
- Encourage the targeted student to report any incidents and keep a record
- Announce and post a firm anti-harassment policy that explicitly prohibits orientation-based harassment
- Educate the student body so that even if they don't like homosexuality they know harassment won't be tolerated
- Inform your superintendent and school board of the seriousness of the issue

Educator and Adult Response

- First, stop the behavior!
 - Cut it out!
 - Keep your hands to yourself
 - Whoa, that is not OK!
- Then educate the perpetrator on the words they are using or behaviors they are demonstrating:
 - That was a putdown. It does not belong in this room.
 - You may not have meant to hurt anyone, but that was a derogatory gesture...it implied he was gay in a disrespectful way.
 - That's bullying. It's against school rules. And besides, what business is it of yours if somebody is gay?
 - She may or may not be lesbian, but writing graffiti and spreading rumors is wrong.
- Educating is a crucial step. It is not enough to stop the behavior. The perpetrator may get the wrong message that it is okay as long as it isn't in your presence or he or she may not understand the implications of what they are saying or doing.
- Make your intervention appropriate so that both the target and the perpetrator feel safe and are not humiliated. Practice how you might respond before you actually have to.
- If your administrator is not supportive, you should still share what you have witnessed. You have a legal and moral obligation to protect every student from harassment and violence. Unfortunately, there are many who will forbid you from intervening in peer-on-peer anti-gay harassment but it is important that you not put yourself at risk. It is more important for YOU to stay there to help the youth. If you need assistance contact:
 - GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (212-727-0135 or glsen@glsen.org)
 - Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (212-809-8585 or lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org)
 - National Center for Lesbian Rights (415-392-6257 or info@nclrights.org)

Resources:

California Safe School Coalition & 4-H Center for Youth Development, University of California, Davis. (2004). *Consequences of Harassment Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps for Making Schools Safer*. Retrieved, August 13, 2007, <http://www.casafeschools.org/SafePlacetoLearnLow.pdf>

Harris Interactive and Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network. (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN. Retrieved, August 13, 2007: http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/500-1.pdf

Mishna, F., Newman, P., Daley, A., & Soloman, S. (2007). Bullying of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth. *Society for Social Work and Research, Bridging Disciplinary Boundaries*. Retrieved August 13, 2007, <http://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2007/techprogram/P5722.HTM>

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