



How Supporters Can Help Make Schools Safe for LGBTQ Students

Sometimes people are passively supportive. They may believe that addressing LGBTQ student issues is important, but they don't know how to express their support, and they don't know that students need and want their help. These people can help LGBTQ students by establishing themselves as visible allies—people that students know they can turn to for support and help. Some teachers, administrators and counselors have put up LGBTQ positive posters in their classrooms and offices. Others have made conscious effort to use inclusive language. Many have placed stickers in their rooms that have a pink or rainbow triangle and the word “ally”.

Supporters can help fight anti-gay prejudice by addressing incidences as they occur. When you hear an anti-gay remark or slur, you can pull the students aside and state that the words were inappropriate, hurtful and hateful. Take a stance for zero tolerance of any form of hateful language or behavior.

In addition to helping individual students, supporters can help build consensus within their schools and communities that help to educate and address these issues. Some suggestions include:

- Community members can create a “Youth Commission” that meets to discuss a range of concerns to youth.
- Community leaders can establish a “Youth Task Force” dedicated to addressing the needs of LGBTQ students—for example, a Superintendent’s Task Force on LGBTQ Students.
- Religious leaders can establish support and social groups for LGBTQ youth.
- Members of the PTA/PTO and Parent Advisory Board can address LGBTQ student’s safety in their meetings and newsletters.
- Administrators and superintendents can change policies to include sexual orientation and gender identity expression and provide in-service time for staff to learn about making schools safer for LGBTQ students.

- Guidance counselors, counselors and school psychologists can become educated and familiar with the issues affecting LGBTQ students, specifically as they relate to mental health and academic performance.
- Schools can establish Gay Straight Alliances (GSA's), offering all students an opportunity to discuss and address concerns and improve student unity.
- School libraries, reading lists and classroom libraries can include books and resources that include and address LGBTQ youth.

**Information taken in part from the: Massachusetts Department of Education.
Additional information from Jaime Bishop, M.A., L.S.W.**