

How to Support Your Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Students

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Overview

There are many students who do not feel safe because of their gender identity, sexuality, or similar questions. Unfortunately, there remains a lack of support from their teachers, school staff, and other adults in their lives. It is important to create safe and inclusive schools for everyone to feel safe and welcome no matter how they identify.¹

The purpose of this handbook is to provide resources and education to teachers, staff, and community members on how to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students. This handbook will include a variety of statistics, general information, and resources that you can use to expand your knowledge in supporting these students.

Terminology

It is important to begin with some basic definitions of words often associated with LGBTQ+ students. While not everyone will use these terms in exactly the same way, helping students define them from their accepted cultural usage can function as a moment of empowerment, where a student or group can begin to “name” their identities and express them to others in healthy, constructive ways.

Ally- refers to a person who advocates for and supports a community other than their² own. This includes educating oneself and others, providing support, and challenging oppressive behaviors, remaking policies, and creating supportive institutional structures.

¹ 2014 GLSEN School Climate Survey, accessed via:

<https://www.glsen.org/article/glsen-releases-new-national-school-climate-survey>

² “Their” will be used throughout this manual as the encouraged gender-neutral pronoun for an individual or group. Although it may violate basic rules of grammar (a plural pronoun for a singular person), it is becoming more and more accepted as the preferred mode of address, as it removes gender assumptions from language.

Asexual- refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction. Asexual people can be any sex, gender, age, ethnic background or body type. They can be rich or poor, can wear any clothing style, and can be any religion or political affiliation.

Bisexual- someone who is sexually attracted to more than one gender.

Cisgender- a person whose gender identity matches their assigned biological sex at birth.

Coming Out- this refers to the act of a person disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to other people.

Dysphoria- Anxiety or discomfort regarding a person's assigned sex at birth. It is also related to "body dysphoria" where one obsesses about perceived physical flaws, which is statistically higher in pre- and pubescent youth, with higher rates in LGBTQ+ youth.³

Female to Male (FTM)- a transgender person who has socially and/or medically transitioned from female to male.

Gay- a sexual orientation often used for men who are attracted to other men. However, there are other genders who may refer to themselves as "gay". The term gay is also often used as an umbrella term for the queer community.

Gender- socially constructed roles based on a group of emotional, behavioral, and cultural characteristics that are associated with male (masculine) or female (feminine). However, gender is a spectrum.

Genderfluid (also "Fluid")- someone who does not identify with either gender or may identify with both genders.

³ The Body Image Therapy Center, 2016, accessed via:
<https://thebodyimagecenter.com/news-blogs/nutrition/talking-lbgtq-bdd-ed-but-gd/>

Gender Identity- this is a spectrum; it is how someone identifies and expresses themselves. Many terms fall within this category: Transgender, transexual, gender nonconforming, cisgender

Gender Nonconforming- a person whose behavior or appearance does not conform to social norms that are considered appropriate to their gender.

Genderqueer- is a self-identifier for people who do not identify with binary terms that traditionally describe gender identity (e.g. male or female)

Heterosexual- refers to a person who is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Homophobia- an irrational fear of or aversion to homosexuality or queer people.

Intersex- a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male (including variations in chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals).

Lesbian- women who are attracted to other women.

LGBTQ (LGBTQIA+)- an umbrella term used for **L**esbian, **G**ay, **B**isexual, **T**ransgender, and **Q**uestioning or **Q**ueer people. Intersex, **A**lly/**A**sexual, and **+** (for all other non-listed terms) are sometimes also added.

Male to Female (MTF)- a transgender person who has socially and/or medically transitioned from male to female.

Non Binary- an umbrella term used to refer to all genders other than male/female or man/woman, used as an adjective.

Polyamory- Polyamory is the practice of, or desire for, intimate relationships with more than one partner, with the knowledge of all partners.

Queer- a term for gender identity and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. Queer is also a term that is often used to refer to the entire LGBTQ community. (Note: the Queer community itself reclaimed this term to now denote empowerment and the unity of the community. It is no longer considered derisive unless used in a slur, or derogatory fashion.)

Sex- how one is defined at birth based on genitals. It is biological, based in the genes XY or XX (Male or Female).

Sexual Orientation- the person one is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to (leads to identifying as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.).

Straight- someone who is attracted to people of the opposite sex. (See also: Heterosexual)

Transgender- someone whose gender identity does not match their biological sex.

Transexual- someone who identifies as transgender, but has gone through medical procedures to change their appearance.

Transphobia- systemic violence that occurs against transgender people, generally associated with attitudes such as fear, discomfort, or distrust.

Two-spirit- refers to a person who has both a masculine and a feminine spirit or traits. This term is used by some Native American people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity. (It is only appropriate for indigenous folks to identify as Two Spirit).

Title IX

Title IX, signed in 1972 is a Federal document that provides important protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students who face bullying and harassment that can interfere with their access to education. Unfortunately, “Seventy-seven percent of K-12 students who were out as (or perceived to be) transgender experienced at least one significant form of discrimination, such as being verbally harassed by peers, disciplined more harshly than cisgender peers, or even being physically or sexually assaulted because others believed they were transgender.”⁴ Students who are harassed in school are more likely to avoid going to class, which can lead to dropping out of school completely. Title IX applies to all federally funded education programs or activities.

Title IX prohibits sex-based discrimination in education. There are multiple federal courts that have put laws into place which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, including discrimination against transgender people. **This also means that transgender students have the right to have equal access to educational opportunities as a part of Title IX.**

In May 2016, ED and DOJ released guidance detailing schools’ obligations to transgender and gender nonconforming students under Title IX. Schools must take “prompt and effective steps” to end sex-based harassment, “Use pronouns and names consistent with a transgender student’s gender identity,” allow transgender students to

⁴ <https://www.knowyourix.org/college-resources/title-ix-protections-lgbtq-students/>

participate in and access “[sex-segregated] activities and ... facilities consistent with their gender identity.”⁵

In Feb, 2017, the ED and DOJ (now under the direction of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and Attorney General Jeff Sessions) revoked the guidance. However, **the law remains the same**: Students are still entitled to the legal protections guaranteed by Title IX.

Currently, several federal courts are considering cases regarding the rights of transgender students.

According to the MIYHS (2017), in York County,

- 21.3% of high school students say that they are bullied regularly in school.**
- 14% (1,091 high school students) have said that they have seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months and**
- 6.8% (533 students) said that they have actually attempted suicide in the past 12 months.⁶**

It is critical that students have access to the resources they need and that faculty, staff, and teachers provide these students with a safe and inclusive space.

⁵ <https://www.hrc.org/blog/title-ix-at-45-advancing-critical-protections-for-lgbtq-people>

⁶

https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/files/2017_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2017_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf

Maine Laws

Doe v. RSU 26, 2014 ME 11

In 2014, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court held that making a transgender girl use a different bathroom than other girls violated the law. The case involved Nicole Maines, who had been forced to use a staff bathroom when she was a student in the Orono schools.

At this time, the Maine Department of Education had not issued guidelines to schools about how to support transgender students. In January 2016, the Maine Human Rights Commission issued a memo to schools providing guidance on how to support transgender students. The memo can be found [here](http://www.state.me.us/mhrc/guidance/CCmemo.education.so.pdf).⁷

⁷<http://www.state.me.us/mhrc/guidance/CCmemo.education.so.pdf>

Supporting Your Students

“When teachers are accepting of you, it means the world to you. You know that things will be OK and that they are there for you. ” -11th Grade BHS Student

Many LGBTQIA+ people start to explore their gender identity and sexual orientation while at school. This can be challenging because administration, teachers, and peers may not have the same views as these students who are exploring themselves. Students who do not have support in school can become victims of bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

Supporting your students is incredibly important to ensure proper and healthy development. It can often be challenging to support students who may identify as LGBTQIA+. What is important is that you support your students to the best of your ability. This does not mean you have to be an expert. A few things that can be done to help support your students are:

1. Using proper terms when speaking to or about students (see above):

Also, a note on “trans*” identity: It’s very important to use appropriate terms when talking about transgender people. Often times, you may see the term “trans*,” which is a shortened way to say transgender. However, it is also important to understand that trans* or transgender is an umbrella term. The term “transgender” should only be used as an adjective and never as a noun.

(Example: **Adjective:** This is a transgender person. **Noun:** That transgender likes ice cream.) Also, the term “Transgendered” is grammatically incorrect and should not be used. (Example: **Correct:** “Have you heard about the transgender community?” **Incorrect:** “Have you heard about transgendered people?”) Other words that should not be used include: tranny, transvestite, she-male, he/she, lady man, or “it”. These are all offensive words and are not appropriate when trying to support students. **The best option is always to ask students first which pronouns or identifiers they use/prefer.** Some institutions even provide stickers, pins, or name cards that include preferred pronouns.

2. Understanding that gender identity and sexual orientation is a spectrum:

Gender identity and sexual orientation can be very fluid. Often at the end of the spectrum there will be Male/Female, Masculine/Feminine, etc. However, many people fall anywhere on this spectrum and don’t generally stay on one side or the other. It is now known that healthy people can and will move on the spectrum throughout their lifespan. (See next page for graphic from the Trevor Project)

Spectrum Thinking, cont.

Note: Much research exists on gender and sex spectrums. If you have questions looking for [peer reviewed articles on Google Scholar](#) is a great start.

3. Mandated Reporting: What needs to be shared and what doesn't when a student comes out to you as LGBTQ+.

- a. If a student comes to you and expresses concerns about their gender identity or sexual orientation, **you do not have to share this information with their parents or guardians, unless the student is threatening to harm themselves or others.**
- b. If a student comes to you with confidence that you will keep their information confidential, make sure you understand the consequences that may arise if that information is shared. Not all parents or guardians are accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community and by sharing this information, it can put the student at risk of physical and/or emotional violence. Many youth who have unaccepting parents also end up being homeless.⁸

4. What benefits does this support have?

What benefits come with supporting your students if it is done correctly? There can be many benefits that come with supporting your students, this affects the student, you, and the entire community. Students are often told not to share their gender identity or sexual orientation with others until they are sure this is what they want. However, by doing that, it can be leading these students down a path of unacceptance and possible destruction. LGBTQIA+ students who come out during school and are supported by

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<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2010/06/21/7980/gay-and-transgender-youth-homelessness-by-the-numbers/>

their teachers have higher self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and have an easier time reaching their full academic potential.⁹ Students who come out to their teachers are showing that they have a level of trust with these professionals that they may not have with others. This makes teachers and staff role models for these students, which should be portrayed with positive and accepting attitudes.

FAQ

What is gender expression? Gender Expression is how someone expresses themselves. This could be wearing clothes that you feel comfortable in. Not all people necessarily wear traditionally masculine or feminine clothes all of the time. Often, people will wear a variety of clothes. Some days people may feel more masculine and other days they may feel more feminine, and their dress may reflect the feelings they have from day to day.¹⁰

Why are gender pronouns important? Pronouns are very important when referring to people. Using the correct pronouns allow people to feel validated and accepted. Pronouns that are often used are he/him/his (masculine), she/her/hers (feminine), and they/them/theirs (gender neutral). To learn more about pronouns click [here](#).¹¹

Is it okay to use the term ‘queer’ when referring to LGBTQIA+ individuals? Yes.

Although the term queer has a long history of being used in a negative way,, it has been

⁹ <https://uanews.arizona.edu/story/lgbt-teens-who-come-out-at-school-have-better-self-esteem-study-finds>

¹⁰ www.walkinglifepath.com

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xpvricekxU>

reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community since the late 1980s. As long as you are not using the word in a deliberately pejorative manner it is okay to use it. The term queer is a great word to make sure everyone in the LGBTQIA+ community is included.¹²

Is it important for schools to have Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) or Gay Straight Trans Alliances (GSTAs)? Yes! Schools that provide supports for their students like GSTAs will allow students to feel included and accepted by the school and their peers. GSTAs can provide a safe space in schools where all students feel welcomed. By having safe spaces it can lead to a students having higher success rate inside and outside of school. ¹³

Can schools question your gender identity? Schools should accept a student's assertion of a gender identity when there is "consistent and uniform" assertion of their gender identity or any other evidence that their gender identity is sincerely held. A school can ask for additional evidence if there is a "credible, objective reason" to believe it is being asserted for an improper purpose.¹⁴

- A school **may not** require medical records.
- A student **can** provide a written statement from a medical provider.
- A student **can** provide a document that shows the correct gender marker.
- A student **can** provide a statement from family or from an adult close to them who knows about their core gender identity.

¹² <https://www.pride.com/queer/2015/8/04/6-reasons-you-need-use-word-queer>

¹³ <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2007/this-is-why-we-need-a-gsa>

¹⁴ <http://www.state.me.us/mhrc/guidance/CCmemo.education.so.pdf>

Resources

Community Programs

Out Maine Youth Retreats <https://outmaine.org/youth-programs/>

Portland OutRight (Portland, Maine)

<https://portlandoutright.com>

Maine Transnet (Portland, Maine)

www.mainetransnet.org

Frannie Peabody (Portland, Maine)

<http://peabodycenter.org>

Planned Parenthood (Portland, Maine)

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org>

EqualityMaine (Portland, Maine)

<https://equalitymaine.org>

PFLAG (Portland, Maine)

<https://www.pflag.org>

Course Curriculum Material

Safe space Kit - <https://www.glsen.org/safespace>

LGBT- inclusive Curriculum (variety of grades) -

<https://www.glsen.org/educate/resources/curriculum>

Grades K-3 - <https://www.glsen.org/article/boy-rainbow-heart-lesson-plans-grades-k-3>

Grades K-5 -

<https://www.glsen.org/article/celebrate-neas-read-across-america-lessons-grades-k-5>

Grades 9-12 - <https://www.glsen.org/matthewshepard>

Grades 6-12 -

<https://www.glsen.org/article/thinkb4youspeak-guide-educators-grades-6-12>

Web Resources

Out Maine (Rockland, ME - they provide supports and trainings statewide)

<https://outmaine.org>

Walking Life's Path (Statewide - provides training and resources)

www.walkinglifespah.com

EqualityMaine (Portland, ME - Provide trainings) <https://equalitymaine.org>

PFLAG Atlanta (Additional FAQ Information) <http://www.pflagatl.org/lgbtfaq/>

Welcoming Schools (Resources for Schools) <http://www.welcomingschools.org>

Teaching Tolerance (Resources for Schools and Communities) <https://www.tolerance.org>

Crisis and Suicide Prevention

The Trevor Project (Crisis intervention and suicide prevention)

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/#sm.00013lwu04yrre1zxbp2cmn4ly0dz>

Maine Crisis Hotline - Phone: 1-888-568-1112

<https://www.maine.gov/suicide/youth/resources/call.htm>

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network)

<https://www.rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline>