

Bullying and LGBTQ Youth

RESEARCH SHOWS that students who identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) face bullying at significantly higher rates than their peers, and the consequences, such as increased rates of suicide, can be heart-breaking. Dedicated educators have an extraordinary opportunity each day to create a safe and welcoming environment for the children who come through their doors.

The AFT's own Share My Lesson offers a bullying prevention collection of resources to help teachers educate all students about LGBTQ issues and build inclusive school communities. The free antibullying materials, which teachers, parents, and LGBTQ advocacy organizations from across the country have contributed to, are designed to support all students. This year, a special effort has been made to highlight the crisis faced by LGBTQ youth. The following are suggestions from Share My Lesson on ways teachers can help these students.

Recognize Biased Language

Students and educators hear language that is hurtful to LGBTQ students on a regular basis—most frequently, the expression “That’s so gay.” Teachers can deter the use of such phrases by monitoring language in school and intervening on behalf of students. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance website offers resources on helping all students understand why language matters.

Develop LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum

One way to send a positive message to students is to recognize and include achievements of LGBTQ individuals in lesson plans and class discussions. When done authentically, such information shows students that every person has worth and can make valuable contributions to our society. GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) offers suggestions on highlighting LGBTQ individuals and issues in your classroom.

Learn More about LGBTQ Experiences

If you don’t have friends or family from the LGBTQ community, you might be unsure how best to advocate for students who identify as LGBTQ. Educating yourself and your students about LGBTQ issues can help

build empathy. The award-winning short film *A Place in the Middle* chronicles the life of an 11-year-old transgender Hawaiian girl who dreams of leading the hula troupe at her Honolulu school. The film’s accompanying classroom discussion guide and online resources provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Recognize that LGBTQ Students of Color Face Unique Challenges

Be aware of and sensitive to the fact that the experiences of LGBTQ students of color may differ from those of their nonminority peers. Also, keep in mind that an additional stigma comes from being labeled a “double minority.” GLSEN offers resources for supporting LGBTQ students of color.

Become a Schoolwide Advocate for LGBTQ Students and Allies

Teachers and other school staff can advocate for LGBTQ students by simply paying attention to language used in classrooms and hallways and intervening in ways that make LGBTQ students feel not only safe but also part of the school community.

Organizing schoolwide character education programs can also set the tone for positive behavior. Teaching Tolerance’s multimedia kit “Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History,” and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights’ “Speak Truth to Power” curriculum, feature the story of Jamie Nabozny, an LGBTQ advocate who was bullied in school. Both are powerful resources for schoolwide programs.

Ask for Help

Students often, for good reason, view teachers as compassionate authority figures with all the answers, but there are certain situations teachers cannot handle alone. Seek out the advice of school counselors, who can serve as mental health resources for students in need.

Since students sometimes lack the emotional maturity and external support systems to handle difficult experiences, learn the signs students may exhibit when they are in trouble and direct them to professional help. Visit Share My Lesson for a presentation by Samantha Nelson, a National Board Certified Teacher, on identifying the warning signs for suicide.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM



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Recommended Resources

-  “Share My Lesson Collections: Bullying Prevention Resources”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml1>
-  “What’s So Bad about ‘That’s So Gay?’”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml2>
-  “Developing LGBT-Inclusive Classroom Resources”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml3>
-  “A Place in the Middle”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml4>
-  “Working with LGBT Students of Color: A Guide for Educators”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml5>
-  “Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml6>
-  “Jamie Nabozny: Bullying, Language, Literature”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml7>
-  “Suicide Prevention PowerPoint Presentation”: <http://go.aft.org/AE416sml8>