

Things You Can Do to Make Your School a “Safe Space”

1. **Do not assume heterosexuality.** Remind yourself and others that LGBT people are found on every staff, in every classroom, and on every team.
2. **Include the significance of LGBT people in lessons.** “Out” the figures you study whose sexual orientation and gender identity expression is not discussed. Just as race, class, sex, and ability affect the way people shape our world, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression impact people’s experiences deeply.
3. **Work with the librarian towards inclusive collections of literature.** The library is frequently the first place to which students turn for accurate information on sexuality and gender.
4. **Work with athletic staff / athletes to reduce bias on the field.** Transphobia and homophobia are often at their worst in the locker room or in the gym.
5. **Work towards inclusive dances, proms and social programming.** These activities often set the tone for the community. Make them memorable for everyone.
6. **Work with student or staff groups concerned with diversity and oppression.** The same conditions that allow homophobia and transphobia to develop most likely promote other forms of prejudice. Collaborate to unite against all oppression.
7. **Provide appropriate health education.** Sex education should address the needs of LGBT youth, and should affirm the fact that they go through many of the same changes, and face many of the same ‘challenges during adolescence as their straight peers.
8. **Celebrate LGBT History Month.** Recognize the struggles, contributions, and victories of the LGBT community with special lesson plans, events, and displays.
9. **Join or start a GSA.** Creating a time and place to talk about LGBT issues recognizes their value and opens up dialogues which lead to healing.
10. **Create inclusive anti-discrimination policies.** LGBT members of the school community need to know that their schools value equality and that they are protected against discrimination. In addition, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression should be included in multicultural and diversity statements as a way to communicate equal treatment for all.

Check out “Institutionalized Heterosexism in Our Schools: A Guide to Understanding and Undoing It,” a GLSEN resource that provides a lot of other great ways to work for change in your school community. Go to the Staff Development section in the Resource Center at www.glsen.org.



How Anti-LGBT Bias Hurts Us All

At the same time the victims (or targets) of prejudice are oppressed, the perpetrators (or agents) and other members of the dominant group are hurt in some way also. Although the effects of oppression differ for specific target and agent groups, in the end everyone loses.

1. Homophobia and transphobia lock all people into rigid gender roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.
2. Homophobia and transphobia compromise the integrity of heterosexual people by pressuring them to treat others badly, actions that go against our basic humanity.
3. Homophobia and transphobia limit our ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own sex.
4. Homophobia and transphobia generally limit communications with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limits family relationships.
5. Homophobia and transphobia prevent some lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people from developing an honest self-identity, and add to the pressure to marry and / or have children, which places undue stress on themselves and their families.
6. Homophobia and transphobia are a cause of premature sexual activity, which increases the chances of pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove that they are "normal."
7. Homophobia and transphobia result in the elimination of any discussion of the lives and sexuality of LGBT people in the curriculum, keeping important information from all students.
8. Homophobia and transphobia can be used to stigmatize, silence, and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by others as LGBT, but who are, in actuality, heterosexual.
9. Homophobia and transphobia prevent heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by LGBT people: theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions, contributions in the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed, to all parts of society.
10. Homophobia and transphobia (along with racism, sexism, classism, etc.) inhibit a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS.
11. Homophobia and transphobia take energy away from more positive activities.
12. Homophobia and transphobia inhibit appreciation of other types of diversity / making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, we are all hurt when any one of us is disrespected.

Adapted from Warren J. Blumenfeld, ed. Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price

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www.pflagwestchester.org

