

Why teach LGBTQ History?

Teaching LGBTQ History creates safer schools and a full understanding of important issues facing our society today.

- 1.) **Including LGBTQ Information in classes creates a safer environment for LGBTQ kids.** Research in High Schools has shown that including LGBTQ material in classes decreases bullying by 15%. (See "LGBT Issues In Curriculum Promotes School Safety" www.casafeschools.org/FactSheet-curriculum.pdf)

School safety impacts students' academic performance, psychological health, and physical safety. This is not just for kids who identify as LGBTQ – it is for kids who are *perceived* to be GLBTQ by other students. The studies also show that including LGBTQ issues in school curricula make the climate of our schools safer for all students.

- 2.) **LGBTQ issues are now a major part of the U.S. culture and politics.** Gay Marriage was a wedge issue in the 2004 election, 48 Million Dollars was spent in the campaigns for and against Prop 8, and last year's Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage was one of the most watched cases this year. The issue is not going away. Understanding the correct historical record is important for all US citizens.
- 3.) **Right now, we are teaching core historical issues with incomplete information.** For example:
 - a.) We should not teach about the Suffrage Movement in the US without including the critical role of leaders who were lesbian. Their sexuality is not a side fact -- it was their sexuality, the fact that they were not under the legal and economic control of men, that gave them the freedom to act as political organizers.
 - b.) The Christian Church tolerated and sometimes protected homosexuality for its first 1000 years. Leaving this information out of our history classes distorts kids understanding of history.
- 4.) **LGBTQ History is relevant to all kids.** All kids are immersed in media full of images and discussions about homosexuality and gender through pop culture, the news, and on YouTube. We will provide them with accurate historical information and cultural frameworks to understand the issues in mature ways.
- 5.) **LGBTQ history should be added to our classes in relevant lessons.** We agree that this information should not just be tacked on to other lessons in ways that do not matter to our teaching goals. Poor teaching is poor teaching, whatever the content. This information should be integrated into our current curriculum – when we are teaching about China, include the fact that China had a 1700 year tradition of gay male literature. When we are teaching about the Suffrage movement, we include the facts about lesbian leadership. Students should analyze and think critically about the facts, see the trends in history, and understand how it connects to their lives today.
- 6.) **It's the law.** The FAIR Education Act – SB48- mandates that all California public schools must include positive images of gay, lesbian and transgendered people in their social studies classes from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

In sum, the issue here is teaching history that matters to the kids today. Deciding not to teach it is to actively ignore a major cultural issue and to decrease the safety of our kids.

5.) Including LGBTQ information in classes decreases bullying.

Research in High Schools has shown that including LGBTQ material in classes decreases bullying by 15%. School safety impacts students' academic performance, psychological health, and physical safety. Whatever your views, I know you want all kids to be safe.

6.) We are not teaching kids about LGBTQ people - they already know about it. All kids are immersed in media full of images and discussions about homosexuality and gender through pop culture, the news, and on You Tube. Our lessons provide them with accurate historical information and cultural frameworks to understand the issues in more mature ways.

School Legal Responsibilities

In providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students there are often questions about legal responsibilities and limitations. Many laws have been established to protect our students and give educators the ability and responsibility to address issues of diversity in the classroom. The following is a summarized version of the rights and responsibilities in California that explicitly, but not exclusively, affect LGBTQ individuals and families.

1. Teachers and school employees are **mandated by law to protect students from harassment** with regards to actual or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation. If a school employee witnesses such harassment they must intervene. (AB537 & AB9)

2. Students have a **right to privacy about personal information** regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. School employees are mandated to protect this information and cannot share it with the student's guardians/parents without the student's consent. (CA Constitution & AB537)

3. **Guardians/Parents do not have to be specially notified about education on LGBTQ topics** and educators do not have to ask permission to talk about such subjects. Notification is only given if the lesson involves descriptions of human reproductive organs and their functions. (SB71 & AB537)

4. Guardians/Parents and students **do not have the right to opt out** of diversity curriculum or training designed to promote safety and equality for LGBTQ people, even if objections are religiously based. (AB537)

5. Rules that apply to one gender **must apply to all genders** and must be enforced consistently. (Title IX & AB1266)

6. **Students should be recognized by the gender identity with which they identify** and should be addressed with their preferred gender pronouns. Schools are required to provide accommodations for these students' restroom and locker room needs. (Title IX)

7. If a school receives federal funding and allows any group that is not related to school curriculum to meet and use school facilities, such as a club, then it **must provide the same access** to groups they may deem controversial, such as a Gay-Straight Alliance. (Equal Access Act)

8. Schools must include the **accurate portrayal of the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people** in social science instruction when adopting new instructional materials. Portrayal of LGBT individuals or groups that promote discriminatory bias is prohibited. (SB48)

9. Students cannot be unfairly excluded from physical education, athletic teams, or any other school activity or facility based on their gender identity. **Schools must allow students to participate in sports teams and P.E. classes as their affirmed gender.** (Title IX & AB1266)

10. Schools must adopt a policy that **prohibits discrimination pertaining to gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.** This must include procedures for filing complaints and a timeline for how these complaints will be investigated. (AB9)



Many educators and administrators fear a negative reaction from parents/guardians when addressing issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in schools. It is important not to automatically assume there will be a negative response from the community when addressing these issues.

In reality, many parents/guardians have a profound lack of awareness regarding the specific problems associated with anti-LGBTQ harassment and exclusion in schools. At the same time, most parents/guardians are overwhelmingly welcoming of efforts designed to eliminate bullying and exclusion.

In some cases, a small but vocal group of parents/guardians may not agree with the necessity of LGBTQ-safety and inclusion work and/or the school's position on these issues. It is important to be prepared to address their concerns.

Concerns surrounding the discussion of LGBTQ issues in school may be for a variety of reasons. Inviting parents/guardians to discuss these issues can ensure that their concerns are recognized and that the school is able to clearly explain the rationale for the work.

In discussions with parents/guardians, it is important to:

- F1 Emphasize the importance of positive relationships and partnerships with all parents/guardians
- F2 Ensure that the concerns of the parent/guardian are heard, fully understood, and recognized
- F3 Clearly explain (GRTD) safety and inclusion work happening in the school. Clarify any misconceptions there may be about the focus and age appropriateness of the work.

The three-step process at right is offered to help outline steps to take when dealing with particular parental/guardians' concerns especially in situations of potential conflict.*

*Adapted from *Addressing LGBT Issues with Young People, Healthy Respect*, www.healthyrespect.co.uk

Addressing Parent Concerns

- 1 ACKNOWLEDGE**
 - Identify the chief concerns of the parent/guardian
 - Listen and acknowledge and recognize
- 2 ADDRESS**
 - Explain the professional rationale and the role of inclusion work for the school
 - Propose the range of all options including:
 - LGBTQ-youth groups and trainings
 - Uphold the values of the school
- 3 RECONCILE**
 - Demonstrate commitment to resolve the matter
 - All those with school responsibilities will receive the educational needs of all students and the community
 - Develop a plan which will challenge the school to reflect
 - Explain the scope of parent/guardian rights



Additional Information for Parents

Explain the evidence behind the decision to support the safety and inclusion work. Some parents/guardians may simply be unaware of the issues facing LGBTQ youth and those who experience anti-LGBTQ harassment, and/or regarding the levels of these behaviors in the school community. Ensuring that they have current, accurate information on these issues may make a real difference to the way in which parents/guardians view it. (To be prepared with 'the evidence' you need, see Ally Action's [Numbers Talk: Making the Case for Addressing LGBTQ Issues in Education](#) for clear data on these issues.)

Refer to the relevant legal authorities. In 2000, AB 537 (the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act) added sexual orientation and gender to the nondiscrimination provisions of California's Education Code § 220. The California Education code clearly states that schools are responsible for implementing programs to promote school safety and for preventing harassment and discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. (See Ally Action's [LGBTQ Issues, California Schools, and the Law](#) for more information.)

Clarify how LGBTQ youth are targeted for harassment and how their parents/guardians can help. Anti-LGBTQ bullying and name-calling are serious issues that critically impact not just LGBTQ students. They also impact any student who, because they are perceived to be 'different,' is targeted for this type of bullying. Any student, even the child of the parent/guardian concerned, could experience anti-LGBTQ harassment. Proactively addressing LGBTQ safety and promoting inclusion and respect for diversity benefits the whole school community. *Certainly, no parent wants their own child, or any child, to be bullied.*

Make sure it is clear to parents/guardians that the focus of this work in the school is on anti-bullying, anti-discrimination, and positive respect for all. Some parents/guardians may assume that if a school is preventing anti-LGBTQ bullying, they are therefore discussing sexual activity, or encouraging students to be LGBTQ. This is not the case, and this needs to be made clear for parents/guardians.

Research has shown that an overwhelming majority of parents/guardians across the country value having anti-LGBTQ harassment addressed in schools.

- 80% of parents favor "expanding existing anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies to include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students" and support "teacher sensitivity trainings on tolerance that include instructions on dealing with gay and lesbian harassment in schools."*
- More than half (63%) favor "including positive information about gay and lesbian people in middle and high school health and sex education classes" and 60% favor "information about transgender people" in those forums.*

*Talking About Respect: 4+ Messages for Those Working to Create Safe Schools for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth, GLESEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network), 2001

Keep a list of school districts/sites that have also been proactively addressing LGBTQ issues within their communities. Share their success stories and the positive impact of their work. And build ally relationships with key LGBTQ-inclusion leaders in these districts so that you can call upon each other for support.



Building Blocks

What to Say When...



People often ask us, "What's the best thing to say when..."

What *do* you do when you only have a split-second to respond to what someone's said or done?

So many educators are eager to feel more confident about addressing anti-LGBTQ teasing and harassment in their classrooms and on their campuses. With little or no training available to them, they just don't feel confident enough that they know the "right" thing to do.

This mini-tool, *What to Say When...*, is a collection of examples of what we've learned and gathered from educators, other adults, and students. If you'd like to prepare for that next split-second moment when you'll need to respond to a sensitive or difficult situation, this resource is for you.

Key considerations

- Focus on respectfully spotlighting the inappropriate behavior. Humiliating anyone publicly will only make it harder to restore safety and respect. Don't put down the offender or allow attention to focus on whoever has been targeted by the harassment.
- Label the behavior, not the person (e.g., "That remark was homophobic," rather than "You are being homophobic.")
- Address any attempts to minimize the behavior as "just joking" or "just kidding around."
- Some behaviors are misgendered, not vicious. Using respectful humor can help diffuse a tense situation!
- Don't assume that the incident is isolated. Sometimes witnesses or those targeted may need to talk to you privately.



What to say when... you need to stop it

- "Ouch! That is NOT okay!"
- "That is unacceptable!"
- "Excuse me...?"
- "Hey (name of offender), let's have a talk."
- "I forget your name... can you remind me? Let's have a talk."
- "Whoa... that's out of line!"
- "What did you just say? I think I heard it, but I just want to make sure..."
- "What's going on?"
- "Hey, think about what you're saying, ..."
- "You may not have meant anything inappropriate, but..."
- "You may think that was funny, but..."
- "Use another word, please..."



What to say when... you need to answer it

- "You might be surprised to know that what you just said/did could hurt someone's feelings. That's a stereotype and it's offensive."
- "Why do you think I stopped what you just said/did? Are you being safe? Respectful? Responsible? Can you show me the appropriate behavior?"
- "This is a homophobia-free zone. Homophobic slurs like that aren't ok here."
- "That's harassment (bullying, a put-down, hurtful), and it doesn't show respect for everyone here."
- "Putting someone down or making degrading comments about someone's race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, nationality, etc. is disrespectful and unacceptable here."
- "Using language/gestures like that isn't funny. It's mean and hurtful, and it's against our (school rules, agreements)."
- "That isn't cool. Even if you didn't mean it this way, it's derogatory, and doesn't belong here."





Moment / Scenario

Response

What I Shouldn't Do

4) "Why do we have to spend time talking about this?"

"Because our community is made up of all kinds of people and we all have the right to feel like we belong here. We all know (or will know) people who are LGBTQ, and it's important to learn about these issues so that we can be more educated and respectful of all people in our communities."

- Don't get defensive.
- Don't imply that you think this is a questionable use of class time.

5) You find out that a student has written graffiti on a desk in your classroom:

"Laticia's a LESBIAN"
"Angel's a HE/SHE"

"I'm aware that there has been some graffiti and some rumors going around about a student. This needs to stop immediately—treating people this way is disrespectful and inappropriate, and is not acceptable. If you are responsible for this, I encourage you to apologize, and to help undo what you have done. How would you feel in that student's place? If you know something about who is responsible, I encourage you to talk to me about it—think about what you'd want someone else to do if you were the target."

- Don't focus the attention on the student who was targeted. Avoid naming the student or focusing on the content of the comments or graffiti when you talk about the problem with the class.
- Don't forget to talk to the student who was targeted to check in regarding her needs.

6) A student asks if Ms. Johnson is a lesbian.

"Whether she is or not, do you think it would be right for me to tell you details about her private life? That sounds like gossip to me. If you want to know, why don't you ask her yourself?"

- Don't get upset with the student for asking. He may be looking for support or advice.
- Don't forget to tell your colleague about the conversation, so she doesn't get blindsided if the student actually does ask her later on.
- Don't answer the question directly unless your colleague has specifically told you she'd be okay with that.

7) "Homosexuality's a sin in my religion."

"There are many things that different faiths believe about homosexuality—no one is saying you can't believe as you do, but you still are expected to treat everyone with respect and dignity."

- Don't argue theology or disrespect anyone's religious beliefs.
- Don't excuse harassing behavior done under the guise of "religious expression."

8) A student tells you that her friend is gay.

Find out how you can help—does her friend want information, or someone to talk to? Is she worried about her friend? Offer to find information and give it to her so she can give it to her friend—and tell her to invite her friend to come talk to you.

- Don't assume that she is talking about herself (not a "friend."). And don't assume she's not.

9) "I've known her since we were little—there's no way I'm calling her 'him.' She can pretend she's a guy, but that's just not right."

"When you don't respect a person's request for a male pronoun, you are playing into the idea that people must fit into only two opposite genders with nothing in the middle and no room for self-definition. You are not respecting that he identifies as a man regardless of the way you see the body he was born into."

- If you hear the student continue to deliberately use the wrong gender pronouns, don't ignore it!





Moment / Scenario

Response

What I Shouldn't Do

- 5) "Leroy wants to play the 'mommy' and wear a dress! He can't do that, can he?"
- "There aren't any 'girl games' or 'boy clothes' or 'boy clothes.' Those are just stereotypes of what you're 'supposed' to like to be a girl or a boy. It's OK to be different."
 - "No, I do not think being gay is weird. I think it is normal. Please remember that all people deserve respect, including gay and lesbian people."
 - "When you say 'they all' dress strange you are using a stereotype. A stereotype is when you assume that everyone in a group acts or dresses the same way, and it's often based on misinformation. That's like saying that all African American people like rap music."
 - "You can't tell if people are gay or lesbian by how they look, talk or walk. Only some people fit 'stereotypes' — that's what makes them 'stereotypes.'"
 - "I think gay people deserve our respect. They've made some amazing contributions to our world, despite being treated badly by others."
 - "It is our right to our own personal beliefs, but it is not our right to hurt others because of them."
 - "Just like we respect your religious beliefs at this school, LGBTQ people are to be respected at this school."
 - "Our family has their right to their own opinion, but I know that your family would not like it if you hurt another person's feelings just because they were gay or lesbian."
 - "Not everyone will agree with your dad. And it is not okay to hurt others by using terms that are derogatory."
- 6) "Don't you think being gay is weird? They all dress strange..."
- Don't ignore the student, minimize their question or shut them down. They may be testing you for your reaction.
 - Don't feel like you have to share your personal opinions or thoughts about these issues. Focus on your role and responsibilities for making sure everyone feels safe and respected.
- 7) "What if my family believes that being gay is wrong?"
- Don't dismiss or dispute anyone's religious beliefs.
 - Don't address the father's views directly with the child.
- "Homosexuality's a sin in my religion."
- "Queers are disgusting. My dad says so."
- 8) You see a boy in the hallway who is crying because he was teased when he told some friends that he wanted to dress up as a girl for Halloween.
- First comfort the child to make sure he is okay.
 - Let him know that it is okay to want to dress this way for Halloween.
 - Ask him who the others were that made fun of him.
 - Don't draw even more attention to the student by keeping him out in the hallway in front of other students while you're talking with him.
- 9) A student excitedly runs into your classroom to tell you about two girls kissing on the playground.
- Frame your response the same way that you would address their comments about a boy and girl kissing.
 - Don't ignore the student or shut them down. They may be testing you for your reaction.
 - Don't overact.