***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 dis- cussed. 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 frequent- ly the first place to which students turn for accurate in- formation on sexuality and gender.*

*4.* ***Work with athletic staff/athletes to reduce bias on the field.*** *Transphobia and homo- phobia are often at their worst in the locker room or in the gym.*

*5.* ***Work with inclusive dances, proms and social programming.*** *These activities often set the tone for the community. Make them memorable for everyone.*

*6.* ***Work with students 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.*

***When Someone Comes Out To You …***

* ***Be a role model of acceptance.*** *The LGBT person has likely spent some time thinking about whether or not to tell you, and is aware of the risks that come with telling.*
* ***Ask questions that demonstrate compassion.*** *Don’t ask questions that would have been considered rude before the disclosure. The person has the same sensibilities as before. However, you might need to do some “catching up.” Some good questions to ask are:*

***~*** *How long**have you known you were LGBT?*

***~*** *Is there someone special?*

***~*** *Has it been hard for you carrying this secret?*

***~*** *Is there some way I can help?*

***~*** *Have I ever offended you unknowingly?*

* ***Appreciate the person’s courage and trust.*** *Thank them for sharing with you,*

*and follow up later to see how they’re doing.*

* ***Have a sense of humor.*** *While it’s important to take the disclosure seriously, a little gentle humor might ease any tension the LGBT person is feeling.*
* ***Offer support.*** *Ask if you might be available as the person comes out to others.*
* ***Be prepared to give a referral.*** *If there are questions you can’t answer, or if the person is feeling isolated, be prepared to refer them to a hotline, community center, GSA, or sympathetic counselor.*
* ***Listen, listen, listen.*** *Coming out is a long process, and chance are you’ll be approached again to discuss this process and it’s challenges.*
* ***Assure confidentiality.*** *The person may not be ready to come out to others, or would like to do so in their own way.*

***GLSEN Safe Space***