

Creating safe, caring and supportive learning environments for our kids

One thing that was so difficult for me when my son came out was the fear that I immediately felt. Yes, at the time I was afraid because I thought same sex relationships were wrong and I was afraid that meant he could never have a happy life but I was also afraid about how he would be treated by his peers ... and there was good reason for me to be afraid because LGBT youth and those perceived as LGBT are at an increased risk of being bullied.

My son didn't come out until his second year of college but I knew he was perceived as gay when he was in middle and high school. I did my best to keep an eye out for him and try to make sure he was connected to groups and activities where he could feel good about himself but I wish I could have done more.

Today there is a lot more awareness and some great programs.

One program that I keep hearing great things about is "Rachel's Challenge". One thing I love about "Rachel's Challenge" is that it isn't just about protecting LGBT kids and that is good because kids can be bullied for many other reasons also ... weight (both under and overweight), lack of athletic skills, blemishes and other skin conditions, being socially awkward, having disabilities, low grades etc.

For anyone who works with children and youth in any capacity I want to recommend you consider using **"Rachel's Challenge"**.

For the rest of us I recommend we do what we can to encourage our local schools to consider using the program.

It is a great program that seems to reach kids and create safer environments. It teaches students things they may not have learned in their own home. It teaches kindness, basic respect, and human compassion. It essentially would be a "preventative" bullying tactic, rather than waiting until bullying happens and THEN dealing with it. It does not specifically highlight gay kids or any "one" group. It has made a world of difference in many communities.

One of our members, Shannon Doherty, gives Rachel's Challenge a glowing review:

"It has made a world of difference in our small community. My gay son has not been made fun of, bullied, teased, nor left out in his 4 years of high school. This program is a gift. Every single student got a Valentine this year....kindness is not always inherently built in! It must be taught." – Shannon Doherty

Making sure that our local schools work to create a safe environment for all kids is one tangible thing we can all do for our kids.

Here is a link to the Rachel's Challenge website:

<http://www.rachelschallenge.org/>