

A PROGRAM OF PARENTS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS (PFLAG)



safe schools

CULTIVATING RESPECT

**THE TOP 10 WAYS TO
MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER...
FOR ALL STUDENTS**



Everyone Can Do Something:
A message from PFLAG
parent, John Cepek



For too many of our children, attending school can be a frightening experience. And for parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators, providing a safe environment for young people can seem like a daunting task, especially when dealing with the issue of how to make not only classrooms, but all school facilities, more welcoming for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.

I know: I am the father of a gay son. Like so many other parents, I just wanted him to have the same opportunity to learn, to grow, and to succeed as every other student in his school. But I also know that, far too often, young people who are LGBT, or perceived to be, are taunted, harassed, and bullied every day. And for adults, it's often difficult to know where to begin in tackling the issues that lead to unsafe schools. That's why I am so excited about this guide, **The 10 Ways to Make Schools Safe... For All Students**. It outlines, in easy-to-understand language and simple guidelines, the critical steps we can each play in making schools a place to learn, rather than a place to fear.

As parents, we each need to do something to make schools safer for our LGBT and all children, and this guide leads us through the process of recognizing what those steps are and how to take them. We each have an important role to play in fighting bullying, and everyone has a stake in the success of this work.

Anti-LGBT name-calling, derogatory remarks in the classroom, and taunts and threats against students have a very real impact on the entire school community. A student with a gay brother, a lesbian aunt, a bisexual parent, or a transgender friend is just as offended, uncomfortable, and unable to learn in such environments as students who are, themselves, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. No one is immune from attacks on our families, and everyone benefits when adults stand tall against those attacks.

Please take a moment to review the ten simple and powerful steps outlined here to help make your local school community safer. As adults and leaders in our communities, we must work for classrooms and schools where students can learn without fear and be safe from harassment and bullying.

Every day, LGBT kids go to school in fear, but every one of us can do something to change that. These 10 steps show us how.

Let's get to work!

The Top 10 Ways to Make Schools Safer...

plus extra credit!

These are ten things every adult should do to help keep students safe at school.



- 1 Learn the Facts:** Students report hearing anti-gay epithets, and enduring hostile environments, on an almost daily basis.
- 2 Understand the Language:** Before we can act we need to understand terminology and show respect.
- 3 Stop Bad Behavior:** Three key things every adult must do to stop disruptive behavior and model respect in your school.
- 4 Set the Policy:** Critical components of an effective safe schools policy.
- 5 Plan School-Wide Activities:** There are simple, and important, ways to educate the school community about why respect for everyone must be the rule, and not the exception.
- 6 Be Public:** Let students know that you are their advocate and ally.
- 7 Cyber Bullying:** Know about high-tech harassment and what to do to help those who are targets.
- 8 Train and Educate Everyone:** Ask for faculty to be trained to respond to bullying in the most effective, helpful way.
- 9 Work for Comprehensive Health Education:** Comprehensive and age-appropriate health education is essential for every student, and especially for those who are LGBT.
- 10 Resources, Resources, Resources:** Where to go for help, support and more information.

EXTRA CREDIT:

How you can help worthy students pay for college.

Learn the Facts:

School officials often believe there are no lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender students in their classrooms, and as a result, often fail to take action to protect young people. In reality, however, students report being frequently targeted, bullied and harassed based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.



As a result of the teasing and harassment that students face they are at higher risk for depression, suicide, and dropping out of school.

The reality LGBT students face, on a daily basis, is striking:

- 72.4% heard derogatory remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” frequently or often at school.
- 84.6% of students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically harassed and 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- More than two-thirds (61.1%) of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and more than a third (39.9%) felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

And the consequences of a negative classroom environment are real and far-reaching:

- 29.1% of students missed a class and 30.0% missed a day of school in the past month because of feeling unsafe, compared to only 8.0% and 6.7%, respectively, of a national sample of secondary school students.
- The reported grade point average of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression was almost half a grade lower than for students who were less often harassed (2.7 versus 3.1).

*2009 National School Climate Survey
(New York, NY: GLSEN, 2010)*

Learn the Facts:

continued



It is simply unacceptable that some students are unable to learn in a positive, secure environment, and it is critical that adults in the school community stop such behavior. When hostile climates go unchecked, and uncorrected, students suffer.

HELPFUL HINT:

For more statistics on LGBT youth in schools, visit the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) online at www.glsen.org. GLSEN conducts research on LGBT students and their experiences in schools, as well as state-specific research.

Their recent studies have included:

National School Climate Survey —

Documentation of students who identify as LGBT and their experiences in schools. Includes information on how inclusive anti-bullying policies positively affect school environments.

From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America —

Survey of all students and their experiences with bullying based on multiple factors. Includes a state-by-state breakdown of policies.

Involved, Invisible, Ignored: The Experience of LGBT Parents and Their Children in Our Nation's K-12 Schools —

A comprehensive look at LGBT parents and their kids' experiences in school from bullying to how involved LGBT parents are in their children's education.



Understand the Language:

Using respectful, and appropriate language is important. The goal is to set a tone of fairness with an expectation of respect and understanding.



Language is important but don't let it become a barrier. Learn the following words and definitions and you will be able to have conversations and put people at ease. As long as you are respectful, do not be afraid to ask if you are unfamiliar with a word or how it is used.

Sexual Orientation – Sexual orientation refers to one's sexual and romantic attraction. All people have a sexual orientation. You can be attracted to people of the opposite gender (straight) or people of the same gender (gay or lesbian). You can also be attracted to people of either gender (bisexual). Orientation does not equal action – you do not need to have had a sexual experience to know your orientation. *Avoid using **sexual preference**, as it implies a choice, or **homosexual**, as it is a dated term that focuses on only sex rather than love and relationships.*

Gender Identity – Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or something in between. For many people, one's gender identity corresponds with their biological sex (i.e., a person assigned female at birth identifies as female or a person assigned male at birth identifies as male), but this is not always the case.

Gender Expression – Gender expression relates to how a person chooses to communicate their gender identity to others through clothing, hair, styles, mannerisms, etc. This communication may be conscious or subconscious. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless permutations that may combine both masculine and feminine expressions.

Understand the Language:

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Gay – A man whose primary romantic and sexual attraction is to other males. Gay is also used as an inclusive term encompassing gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people.

Lesbian – A woman whose primary romantic and sexual attraction is to other females.

Bisexual – Men and women who have sexual and romantic attraction to both men and women. Depending on the person, his or her attraction may be stronger to women or men, or they may be approximately equal.

Transgender – A broad term describing the state of a person's gender identity which does not necessarily match his/her assigned gender at birth.

Queer – Some, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people are using the word queer as an umbrella term to embrace all the members of the community including the children of LGBT parents and other allies. There are still plenty of people in the community who find this term offensive or degrading.

HELPFUL HINT:

It is important to hear and understand terminology from the perspective of those you are engaging in conversation. For young people, the terminology presented here is often about romantic notions, ideas of identity and self-discovery, rather than the political or sexual context words may evoke for older audiences. Using the chosen term, without judgment, can make all the difference in the world to a struggling youth.



Stop Bad Behavior:

LGBT youth, and those perceived to be LGBT, endure constant bullying and harassment: in the classroom, hallways, locker rooms and bus rides to and from school. But bullying is more than disturbing, it is also dangerous and disruptive.

When students feel unsafe at school, they are also unable to learn. It is imperative that adults in the school community stop such behavior, and do so whenever, and wherever, it happens.

Three Key Points to Remember:

- **Don't ignore discriminatory behaviors:** Unchecked behavior will repeat itself again and again.
- **Don't excuse discriminatory behaviors:** they need to be addressed.
- **Don't be immobilized by fear:** Not taking action can endanger kids and make classrooms unsafe.

Managing Harassment DO'S . . .

- **DO** deal with the situation immediately.
- **DO** confirm that the particular type of abuse is hurtful and harmful and will not be tolerated.
- **DO** value everyone's feelings by listening carefully.
- **DO** take those involved aside and discuss the incident.
- **DO** impose consequences consistent with school or classroom policy.
- **DO** use it as a "teachable moment" if appropriate, so all students learn what is acceptable and what is not in your community and why.



Stop Bad Behavior:

continued

... and Managing the DON'TS

- **DON'T** let harassment pass unchallenged.
- **DON'T** overreact with a put-down of the offender.
- **DON'T** impose consequences before finding out exactly what happened from all involved.
- **DON'T** embarrass either party publicly.
- **DON'T** assume the incident is isolated.

HELPFUL HINT:

Casual comments can have unintended consequences. While young people may use phrases such as “that’s so gay” or “faggot” in circumstances where they are not meant to be destructive, other students receive such remarks with offense. Regardless of whether there is a specific target, or a specific, malicious intent, behind such words, it is important that adults step in, stop their use and explain why they are harmful.



Set the Policy:

A strong and inclusive anti-harassment policy not only protects students; it also protects the school. To avoid possible legal action, school systems should have concrete policies and back policies up with training and education for the entire school community.



Sample Policy (Model policy of NCLR, National Center for Lesbian Rights):

The [Your School District] School District is committed to providing all students, teachers, employees and staff with a safe and supportive school environment in which all members of the school community are treated with respect.

*It is hereby the policy of the [Your School District] School District to prohibit harassment based on **real or perceived** race, color, religion (creed), national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or on the basis of association with others identified by these categories. This policy is intended to comply with [Your State] state as well as federal requirements. The School District shall act to investigate all complaints of harassment, formal or informal, verbal or written, and to discipline or take other appropriate action against any member of the school community who is found to have violated this policy.*

Two Critical Components for Every Policy:

1 Enumerate - or spell out - specific categories covered by the policy.

Doing so is critical to ensuring that the policy is meaningful and “has teeth.” It is also a crucial guideline for proper training for school officials.

- Students from schools with enumerated policies are far less likely to be harassed for reasons such as physical appearance (36% vs. 52%)...their sexual orientation...(32% vs. 43%)...or their gender expression (26% vs. 37%).

Set the Policy:

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- Additionally, students from schools with policies that specifically include sexual orientation or gender identity/expression are less likely than other students to report a serious harassment problem at their school (33% vs. 44%).

2 Include LGBT students and those perceived to be LGBT in your school's policy. LGBT youth are not the only targets of bullying. In many cases, students are targeted because of perceptions about their sexual orientation or gender identity. By including terms such as “actual or perceived” with enumerated categories, *every* student is protected.

*National School Climate Survey
(New York, NY: GLSEN, 2005)*



School-Wide Activities:

Once the school has developed and adopted the appropriate policies, they must provide assistance with the challenge of implementing the new or improved policy.

It is critical that every member of the school community – including students, parents, teachers and administrators – understand the school’s commitment to protecting students, and what is expected of both young people and adults in order to live up to that commitment. There are numerous tools available, and numerous ways to convey your message.

Films:

Showing a film, and conducting a discussion after, is an effective way to reach every member of the school and get every stake holder – including youth, parents and teachers – involved in the discussion.

Groundspark Films offers three highly-acclaimed films with associated curriculum guides, available at www.groundspark.org:

- **That’s a Family** (*for elementary schools*)
- **Let’s Get Real** (*for middle schools*)
- **Straightlaced** (*for high schools*)

Books:

Providing books and resources in your school library is a critical step toward educating everyone. Find out what the policy for placing books in the library. Select books that will reflect the needs and diversity of your community. To get started, the Safe Schools Coalition (www.safeschoolscoalition.org) has book recommendations by age. For more lists and suggestions contact PFLAG.



School-Wide Activities:

continued



Programs:

School-wide programs offer an opportunity for everyone to learn and participate. These programs help build community, empathy and understanding:

- **Use Another Word** (www.safeschoolscoalition.org/UseAnotherWord.pdf)
This program, appropriate for students of all ages, can be tailored to meet the specific needs of diverse school communities. The program includes posters making activities and offers creative and positive alternatives to put-downs and teasing.
- **Mix It Up** (www.mixitup.org)
Started in 2006, **Mix It Up** is a nationwide campaign conducted each November – geared to elementary and middle school students – that supports students who want to identify with, question or cross social boundaries that separate them from each other. Free resources are available for using the program in your school.
- **Day of Silence** (www.dayofsilence.org)
The Day of Silence is a student-led day of action when concerned students – from middle school through college – take a vow of silence in solidarity with their LGBT classmates. The program highlights name-calling, bullying and harassment experienced by LGBT students and their allies.

HELPFUL HINT:

Remember not to allow gender stereotypes or norms to unnecessarily impact your responses to students who are LGBT. It is important to understand that, in most situations, behavior that is appropriate for opposite sex couples is also appropriate for same-sex couples. For example, if you would condone a male and female student walking hand-in-hand, also understand that similar behavior is appropriate for two female, or two male, students. Appropriate behavior is almost always gender-neutral.

Be Public:

Taking public stands will send a message to students that their safety is more than just policy, but is a practice emulated by the school community.

Adults, especially, should “go public” with their support for diversity, and opposition to bullying and harassment. Signs, stickers and other public displays reiterating a strong commitment to every student’s safety are important reminders – to students *and* adults – that being vigilant about curbing inappropriate behavior is a daily task.



listen think act
be respectful

safe  **schools**
FOR ALL

A program of PFLAG. Visit pflag.org for details.

Be Public:

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Come Out As a Public Ally:

- Make sure your library has LGBT friendly, age appropriate books and resources.
- Have “teachable moments” – not every language correction, bullying prevention, or calling out of stereotypes needs to be behind closed doors.
- Counselors, teachers, nurses, social workers – have some symbol of your willingness to talk and listen to issues of diversity. Sometimes all a student needs to open up is a sign that you are willing to listen. Try using the PFLAG safe schools stickers!
- Establish an anti-bullying task force and be sure to include parents, students and staff. A task force gives the school community a way to have an impact of school safety and establishes that stopping bullying and harassment is a priority in the school.



Cyber Bullying:

Cyber bullying has been defined by the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use to mean “being cruel to others by sending or posting harmful material using the Internet or a cell phone.”

According to Pew Research, about one third (32%) of all teenagers who use the Internet say they have been targets of some form of cyber bullying ranging from receiving threatening messages and having their private e-mails or text messages forwarded to having an embarrassing picture posted or rumors about them spread online.

Cyber bullying is the new frontier in bullying and anti-gay rumors, messages, and threats are often at the center of this high-tech harassment.

Terms you should know:

Flaming – online verbal attacks or fights via electronic messages.

Harassment – repeated messages of an offensive or derogatory nature.

Cyberstalking – repeated messages of an intimidating character that make a person feel afraid for his or her physical safety.

Denigration – online “put-downs,” including sending or posting hurtful gossip or rumors to cause the target embarrassment.

Impersonation – using someone’s e-mail account to send out messages, supposedly from the account holder, that reflect badly on that person and may cause trouble, shame, or embarrassment.

Outing and Trickery – disclosure of someone’s private information online, sending or posting embarrassing images, or deceptions leading another person to reveal personal details about him or herself.

Exclusion – deliberately keeping someone out of an online group, such as a buddy list.



Cyber Bullying:

continued

What students should understand:

- There can be consequences to actions you take online (schools, jobs, personal).
- You do not always know who you are talking to.
- Your messages can be re-broadcast to others.
- Tell an adult immediately if you receive a threatening, harassing, or upsetting message.
- Remember: never give out personal information online.
- Items that are posted online or texted can be traced to their original source.

What schools should do:

- Add cyber bullying to existing anti-harassment or bullying policies.
- Provide training and education for students, teachers and parents.
- Take cyber bullying seriously.



Train and Educate Everyone:

It is imperative that the faculty is trained to respond to bullying in ways that support every student. Some faculty may not be familiar with LGBT topics, or may feel uncomfortable handling situations that arise.



Every adult, however, has a responsibility to keep students safe, and there are several simple steps each person can take in accomplishing this goal.

Begin with a school survey that presents an opportunity to faculty to review the school environment, and gives administrators an important perspective on what is happening in your particular school community.

Let's Get Real, a national safe schools curriculum created by Groundspark as part of the film by the same name, provides an effective, simple survey for use in schools:

Let's Get Real SURVEY: What's Going on at our School?

Place a check (✓) next to the things people get bullied or harassed about at our school.
Put a star (★) next to the ones that you think happen the most or are the most serious at our school.

REASON	✓	★
Their race or color (or what someone thought their race was)		
Being a lighter or darker skin tone compared to others		
Being from another country		
Speaking with an accent		
Being new to this city/school		
Their mental or physical disability (or a disability someone thought they had)		
Their religion (or what religion someone thought they were)		
Their clothes		
How much money their family has		
Being in special education		
Getting good grades/doing well in school		
Getting bad grades/not doing well in school		
Being overweight		
Not being popular		
Boys making comments about girls' bodies		
Girls making comments about boys' bodies		
Being a boy who 'acts like a girl'		
Being called a bad word related to being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender		
Their age (being younger)		
Being smaller or not being good at sports		
Other:		

1. Are there different groups of students at our school? (circle one) YES NO. If so, what are they?

2. Which groups have conflicts with other groups?

3. If you were in charge, what would you do to stop what you have noticed above?

handout

Train and Educate Everyone:

continued



It is important that after evaluating the school environment, administrators develop and implement a training that meets concerns raised by the survey. Remember that most harassment and bullying does not take place in classrooms, but rather in the hallway, cafeteria, playground or locker room. Adults who supervise these areas must be included in trainings in order to effectively address the reality students are encountering every day.

There are many locally-based organizations that can provide trainings. Contact PFLAG (www.PFLAG.org) and let us help you find one.



Comprehensive Health Education:

Harassment can also be the result of an incomplete or inaccurate education. Comprehensive sexuality education that includes age-appropriate, and medically sound, education is of paramount importance.



Youth must have a clear understanding of their bodies, and health, in order to respect themselves and their classmates.

It is particularly important that schools avoid abstinence-only education, which excludes LGBT youth from important information and lessons.

- Funding for abstinence-only education is provided only for programs where marriage is strictly defined as a union between one man and one woman, leaving LGBT youth feeling isolated and excluded.
- In abstinence-only programs, LGBT youth are told they simply cannot have healthy, safe or valid sexual experiences, a dangerous myth with far-reaching, negative consequences.

An appropriate, comprehensive curriculum should:

- Include age-appropriate, medically accurate information;
- Not teach or promote a religious perspective;
- Teach that abstinence is the only certain way to avoid pregnancy or STDs;
- Stress the value of abstinence while not ignoring young people who have had, or are having, sexual experiences; and
- Provide accurate information about the health benefits of condoms and other methods to reduce the risk of STDs.

Comprehensive Health Education:

continued

Remember when developing your curriculum that parents overwhelmingly support teaching about sexual orientation at school. Three out of four parents feel comfortable speaking to their children about sexual orientation, but are unlikely to raise the topic on their own.

To overcome bias against LGBT youth, sexuality education programs must consider and include information about sexual orientation.

- **79% of parents want their children to learn about sexual orientation in sexuality education classes at school.**
- **67% of parents believe their children should be taught that gay people are just like other people.**

*What Does Gay Mean: How to Talk with Kids about Sexual Orientation
(San Francisco, CA: Horizons Foundation, 2001)*



Resources, Resources, Resources:

In addition to PFLAG, there are many other organizations and resources available to assist schools as they address issues surrounding harassment, bullying, safe spaces and LGBT youth.

Safe Schools Materials:

- **The Safe Schools Coalition** is an international public-private partnership that provides free resources by age, audience and activity. Comprehensive and easily navigated, their website is an excellent source for ideas and materials. www.safeschoolscoalition.org
- **Groundspark** produces educational videos including: **It's Elementary**, **It's Still Elementary, That's a Family** and **Let's Get Real** (about middle school bullying). www.groundspark.org
- **Teaching Tolerance** provides free educational materials to teachers and other school practitioners. Web-exclusive offerings include curricula, activities and materials for youth, teachers and parents. www.tolerance.org
- **The Trevor Project** operates the only nationwide, around-the-clock crisis and suicide prevention helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. www.thetrevorproject.org
- **Lambda Legal** provides legal counsel and court analysis of legal protections and for students and schools. www.lambdalegal.org
- **Advocates for Youth** is a youth led movement to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. www.advocatesforyouth.org/LGBTq.htm



Resources, Resources, Resources:

continued

Cyber Resources:

- A program of the **Anti Defamation League (ADL)** that helps schools develop a comprehensive approach to confront harassment and bullying through electronic media. www.adl.org/education/cyber_bullying/
- This site focuses on text- messaging and the ways to address this type of bullying. www.stoptextbully.com/help/15/advice-for-parents-and-teachers
- An interactive web site for parents, teachers, and youth about internet safety. www.netsmartz.org

Sex Ed Resources:

- **A community action kit** for establishing comprehensive and age-appropriate sex education in the school. www.communityactionkit.org/knowning.html
- **SIECUS** (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) provides education and information about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health. www.siecus.org
- **Comprehensive sexuality education curriculum** written by the Seattle and King County Public Health Department in Washington State. www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan/flash/



For Extra Credit:

The PFLAG National Scholarship Program supports gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and their allies in further education.

Spread the word at your school that there is money available and students should check the PFLAG web site in December (www.pflag.org) for details.

Recent award recipients include:

NOLAN GREEN

Recipient of the PFLAG Straight for Equality Scholarship

Nolan served as the President of his school's Gay Straight Alliance, in addition to serving as the Co-President of his school's chapter of Amnesty International. He has organized an annual Human Rights Day with his fellow students and also finds time to teach guitar lessons. Nolan is a graduate of Edina High School in Edina, Minnesota.

JEREMY WHITAKER

Recipient of the PFLAG National Scholarship

Jeremy has been highly active in his local community performing arts scene, including serving as co-captain of the Dancer's EDGE Company and as a counselor of the Delray Beach Playhouse. In addition, he was also an instructor at the Southern Dance Theater. At his high school he was secretary of his school's Gay Straight Alliance, as well as a member of the National Honor Society. Jeremy is a graduate of Atlantic Community High School in Delray Beach, Florida.



For Extra Credit:

continued

HANNAH JOHNSON

Recipient of the Jeanne Manford PFLAG Memorial Scholarship

Hannah has been active in her school's Gay Straight Alliance for over two years, planning and presenting at conferences, and has worked to educate people in her community about LGBT issues. She has been a member of Proud Theater, a youth-activist LGBT theater group. She has also canvassed for FairWisconsin and the League of Conservation Voters. Hannah is a graduate of West High School in Madison, Wisconsin.

SAGE TRAIL

Recipient of the PFLAG National Scholarship

Sage has been active in her school's Gay Straight Alliance, both serving as the President and helping in the formation of the club. She has served as a peer mentor, educator, and leader for the overnight freshmen orientation and communication sessions run by her school. She has participated in Amnesty International, Key Club, the National Honor Society, and has acted as an advocate for animal rights issues. Sage is a graduate of Ashland High School in Ashland, Oregon.



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