

How to be an Ally

Goal

To raise awareness about the effects of high school homophobia and give teens the tools they need to become LGBT allies.

Rational

According to the *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network 2003 National School Climate Survey*:

- Sixty-eight percent of LGBT students in schools without a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) say they feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation.
- Sixty percent of LGBT students in schools with a GSA were less likely to report feeling unsafe in school for the same reason.
- Eighty-four percent of LGBT students report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation.
- Eight-three percent of students report that faculty rarely or never intervene in harassment when it occurs.

In addition, the study found a definitive relationship between schools and communities with policies and laws regarding violence, bias, and harassment against LGBT students and student safety. (http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/274-3.PDF)

Approximate total time

40–60 minutes

Topics

Facilitators should be prepared to cover the following topics:

- LGBT issues
- Homophobia
- Gay-Straight Alliances
- How to be an ally

Participants

- Approximately eight to 25 teens and young women and men, ages 13+
- One to two facilitators

Materials

Copy of “Fight High School Homophobia” article

(<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2003/if-20030411p072-homophobia.php>)

Plan

Part A (approx. 10–15 minutes)

Line up the group on one side of the classroom. Ask each student to take one step forward for every statement that applies to them.

Take one step forward if anyone has ever made fun of you or said anything offensive to you based on your

- race
- age
- religion
- weight
- parent's income
- grades
- clothes
- hair cut
- friends
- parents being separated
- country of origin
- appearance
- disability
- personal hygiene
- home/neighborhood
- hobbies
- gender
- physical development (early/late bloomer)

Discussion and Debrief

- 1) Comment that almost everyone has probably taken at least one step forward. Ask the group how it felt to publicly take a step forward.
- 2) Ask the group if anyone would like to share an experience they thought about when taking a step forward.
- 3) Ask if anyone can think of particular types of people in their high school who are harassed more than others.
- 4) Ask if anyone has ever heard a homophobic comment in their school. If yes, did anyone do anything about it?
- 5) Explain that while almost everyone has experienced some sort of prejudice, for LGBT teens, harassment and discrimination may happen with greater frequency. Because of this, many LGBT teens don't feel safe at school. Explain that everyone has a right to attend school without being harassed.

Part B (15–20 minutes)

1) Break the larger group into pairs. Have each pair come up with a list of five ways in which they can be allies to LGBT teens. Remind the pairs that anyone, gay, straight, lesbian, or transgender, can be an ally

To be an ally you could

- Interrupt homophobic jokes or comments, and let the person making the remark know that homophobia is not acceptable.
- Get involved in (or start) your school's Gay-Straight Alliance.
- Identify allies: find teachers, counselors, staff, and parents who are supportive of LGBT students, and get the word out to the student body.
- Make sure your school's anti-discrimination policy includes sexual orientation. If your school doesn't have an anti-discrimination policy, encourage it to adopt one.
- Ask your librarian to make available in the school library books that deal with issues relating to LGBT teens..
- Invite speakers to your school from organizations like PFLAG (Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays) to share their stories about the damage homophobia does and the healing that love and support bring.
- Organize a Diversity Day or Week at your school to tackle various forms of discrimination.
- Let people know that you, personally, support people who are LGBT.

2) Present the lists to the group. Compile a comprehensive list of all suggestions. Add any of the above that were not mentioned.

Part C (15–25 minutes)

1. Distribute copies of the In Focus article “Fight High School Homophobia.” Have participants take turns to read the article out loud.
2. Lead a discussion.
3. Have information on starting a GSA available for interested participants. The following link is a good resource: <http://www.centeryes.org/SIGNS/manual/index.html>

Potential discussion questions

- Are GSAs controversial in some schools? If so, why?
- Why would a straight person want to join a GSA?
- Has anyone ever tried to start a club at your school and been met with resistance? Why?
- What would be the first step for you in starting a GSA in your school?
- Can you think of one teacher or staff member who would be supportive of a GSA at your school? Are you willing to approach that person?
- What is the difference between an LGBT student group and a GSA?
- What do you think is achieved by gay and straight students joining forces?

Potential discussion points

- **Homophobia hurts lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBT) students.** It makes them feel bad about something natural that they can't change.
- **Representations of LGBT people aren't often included in school classes or textbooks.** This can alienate LGBT students and make them feel that being straight is the only "right" way to be.
- **LGBT students are often ignored by the school's administration.** This can hurt all students, not just those who aren't straight, because it establishes an environment in which differences aren't celebrated but are, instead, kept hidden.
- **The *Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network 2003 National School Climate Survey* found that 91.5 percent of LGBT students report hearing homophobic remarks, such as "faggot", "dyke" or the expression, "that's so gay" frequently or often.**
- **Eighty-four percent of LGBT students report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation.**
- **Thirty-nine percent of LGBT students report being physically harassed (being shoved, pushed, etc.) because of their sexual orientation.**
- **GSAs can provide community, serve as a safe space, and offer support and resources to LGBT teens.**

Additional Resources on teenwire.com

- How to be an Ally
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2004/if-20041012p325-ally.php>
- Fight High School Homophobia
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2003/if-20030411p072-homophobia.php>
- Beaten Up for Being Gay
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2005/if-20050412p351-LGBT.php>
- Day of Silence Speaks Louder Than Words
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2005/if-20050325p096-silence.php>
- "Why when a gay person hits on a straight person, it's a big conflict. Why can't you just say no, I don't go that way? Why don't you accept people for the way they are instead of joking on them or cracking on them?"
<http://www.teenwire.com/ask/2002/as-20020923p445-homophobia.php>
- Helping Your Buddy Out
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2001/if-20010525p098.php>
- Not Your Parents' Prom
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2003/if-20030530p230-prom.php>
- The Locker Room and the Closet
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2003/if-20031111p264-closet.php>
- Under Attack: LGBT Students Fight for Their Rights
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2005/if-20050916p382-LGBTQ.php>
- Out and Proud: Point Scholars Sound Off
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2005/if-20051011p386-LGBT.php>
- A Celebration of Pride
<http://www.teenwire.com/infocus/2001/if-20010626p105.php>

In Spanish

- Cómo ser un aliado/a
<http://www.teenwire.com/espanol/2005/es-20051021p133-aliado.php>
- La verdad sobre los hombres gay
<http://www.teenwire.com/espanol/2004/es-20040706p104-gay.php>
- Combatiendo mitos sobre las lesbianas.
<http://www.teenwire.com/espanol/2002/es-20021204p054-lesbiana.php>
- ¿Qué significa ser homosexual, o gay?
<http://www.teenwire.com/espanol/2000/es-20000626p006.php>
- ¿Qué hace que una persona sea gay o heterosexual?
<http://www.teenwire.com/preguntas/2005/pr-20050823p163-gay.php>