



Boston

Gay, Lesbian and Straight
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Ten Things Educators Can Do...

1. Do Not Assume Heterosexuality

The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people invisible. Such invisibility is devastating to the individual's sense of self. Both the school as an institution and its professionals must be inclusive in their language and attitudes. By reminding themselves that LGBT people are found on every staff, in every classroom, and on every team, faculty can "unlearn" heterosexism.

2. Guarantee Equality

LGBT members of the school community need to know that their schools value equality and that they are protected against discrimination. Schools should add sexual orientation and gender identity to their non-discrimination and harassment policies. In addition, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression should be included in multicultural and diversity statements as a way to communicate a commitment to equal treatment for all.

3. Create a Safe Environment

It is the school's obligation to take proactive measures to ensure that all members of its community have a right to participate without fear of harassment. Schools must make it clear that neither physical violence nor harassing language like "faggot" and "dyke" will be tolerated. Creating a "Safe Zone" program—displaying posters, stickers, and other literature encouraging acceptance—is a great way to communicate that your school is a safe environment for all.

4. Diversify Library and Media Holdings

The library is frequently the first place to which students turn for accurate sexuality and gender information. Too often, few or no works on LGBT issues are found there. Librarians and media specialists need to be sure their holdings are up to date and reflect the diversity of our world. Materials that reflect LGBT themes and authors should be prominently displayed and easily accessible to students seeking them. The library and media center should reflect LGBT holidays and events in their programming, and should strive to make sure that individual classroom libraries are similarly inclusive. The GLSEN Bookstore is a great online "one-stop shopping" resource for LGBT materials.

5. Provide Training for Faculty and Staff

School staff need to be equipped to serve all the students with whom they work, including LGBT students and children from LGBT families. Understanding the needs of LGBT youth/families and developing the skills to meet those needs should be expected of all educators regardless of personal or religious beliefs.

6. Provide Appropriate Health Care and Education

While being LGBT is not only a "health issue," health education on sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases should sensitively address the issues of LGBT people. Counselors and health staff should be particularly careful to make their sensitivity to LGBT issues clear. By educating themselves about related support services and agencies, and making pamphlets and other literature available, health professionals can provide for the needs of the LGBT students and families with whom they work.

Ten Things Educators Can Do...cont'd

7. Be a Role Model

Actions speak louder than words. The most effective way to reduce anti-LGBT bias is to consistently behave in ways that appreciate all human beings and condemn discrimination of any kind. Though both straight and LGBT students will benefit from having openly LGBT educators, coaches and administrators, staff members need not be "out" or LGBT themselves in order to be good role models. By demonstrating respectful language, intervening during instances of anti-LGBT harassment, and bringing diverse images into the classroom in safe and affirming ways, all staff members can be model human beings for the students with whom they work.

8. Provide Support for Students

Peer support and acceptance is the key to any student's feeling of belonging in the school. "Gay-Straight Alliances" (GSAs) offer students this sense of belonging as well as the chance to effect positive change in their schools. GSAs welcome membership from any student interested in combating anti-LGBT bias and raising awareness of heterosexism and diverse gender/sexual identities. There are currently over 1200 GSAs registered with GLSEN and countless more across the nation. Consider being a GSA advisor and helping students in your community to form a club that provides support, understanding and an avenue for promoting equality and school change.

9. Reassess the Curriculum

Educators need to integrate LGBT issues throughout the curriculum—not just in classes such as health education, but in disciplines such as English, History, Art and Science. Pre-existing curricula should be broadened to include LGBT images where appropriate (such as in studies of the Holocaust and Civil Rights Movement). Current events, popular music and film, and other media that include LGBT people and issues should be regularly discussed in class. Classroom libraries, story times, and assigned reading should be thoughtfully structured to include the full range of human diversity. Finally, educators should take advantage of "teachable moments," treating questions, comments and instances of name-calling as opportunities to educate students about LGBT people and issues. Children spend the majority of their time in class. As long as LGBT issues are seen as "special" and outside the classroom, students will continue to see LGBT people as marginal.

10. Broaden Entertainment and Extracurricular Programs

Extracurricular activities often set the tone for the community. Programs such as assemblies, film nights, and school fairs should regularly include content that reflects the diversity of our world. Special LGBT events and holidays such as LGBT History Month (October) and Pride Month (June) should be incorporated into school wide celebrations. Guest speakers and lectures that can inform the school community about the unique needs and accomplishments of LGBT people should be a regular part of school programming.