

Statement recognizing recent LGBTQ youth tragedy

American Psychological Association Division 44

It is with profound sadness and a sense of urgency for action that we, the members of the American Psychological Association, Division 44 – Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues, wish to extend our deepest sympathies to the families, friends, and allies of Justin Aaberg, 15, Minnesota; Asher Brown, 13, Texas; Tyler Clementi, 18, New Jersey; Billy Lucas, 15, Indiana; Seth Walsh, 13, California; Tyler Wilson, 11, Ohio; Raymond Chase, 19, Rhode Island; Cody J. Barker, 17, Wisconsin. There are others whose names may not be known and who may have been victims of hatred or bullying. Their losses are a reminder to all of us that hatred and intolerance against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning loved ones, and their families, friends and allies who care about them, can lead to tragedy.

We are deeply troubled because these losses were the result of relentless bullying and intimidation, and in some cases, the failure of school systems to provide sufficient support, protection, and education to assist those in need. Countless others continue to suffer from harassment because of their sexual orientations and gender identities, or by simply being a vocal supporter for LGBTQ loved ones. We recognize that harassment also occurs based on how peers erroneously perceive a person's expressions as indicators of different sexual orientations or gender identities. Even children who are too young to even view their own behaviors and expressions as different from normative expectations can be victims of harassment. We are cognizant of how social norms can restrict how a person expresses his or her sexual orientation and gender identity, and how these norms can create contexts in which peers feel justified in harassing and bullying others. We find ourselves renewing our call to continue to search for more ways to end this trend and advocate that all need to take action against this systemic problem before more tragedies occur.

These recent tragedies serves as a reminder to us all that as psychologists, we are strong leaders who can guide the efforts of others who want to ensure that our society is free from homophobia, sexual prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, and violence against LGBTQ loved ones. As psychologists, we will continue our efforts to not only be proactive in securing equal rights and protections for our LGBTQ loved ones, but to ensure that LGBTQ individuals, and their families, friends and allies, have the support they need to lead healthy, happy, and productive lives. We support efforts to pass important legislation that will provide protection for LGBTQ youth in schools and prompt school officials to respond promptly to reports of bullying and harassment. We support efforts to advocate that school systems,

counseling centers, workplaces, and other institutions open opportunities to educate others about the consequences of bullying and harassment. We encourage all places to host conversations about making their spaces truly LGBTQ affirming. We will continue our roles in leading efforts to ensure that people's sexual orientations and gender identities are affirmed and valued by all.