

Bullying in Schools: Harassment Puts Gay Youth at Risk

While trying to deal with all the challenges of being a teenager, gay/ lesbian/ bisexual/ transgender (GLBT) teens additionally have to deal with harassment, threats, and violence directed at them on a daily basis. They hear anti-gay slurs such as "homo", "faggot" and "sissy" about 26 times a day or once every 14 minutes.[1] Even more troubling, a study found that thirty-one percent of gay youth had been threatened or injured at school in the last year alone![2]

Their mental health and education, not to mention their physical well-being, are at-risk.

How is their mental health being affected?

- Gay and lesbian teens are at high risk because 'their distress is a direct result of the hatred and prejudice that surround them,' not because of their inherently gay or lesbian identity orientation.[3]
- Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.[4]

How is their education being affected?

- Gay teens in U.S. schools are often subjected to such intense bullying that they're unable to receive an adequate education.[5] They're often embarrassed or ashamed of being targeted and may not report the abuse.
- GLBT students are more apt to skip school due to the fear, threats, and property vandalism directed at them.[6] One survey revealed that 22 percent of gay respondents had skipped school in the past month because they felt unsafe there.[7]
- Twenty-eight percent of gay students will drop out of school. This is more than three times the national average for heterosexual students.[8]
- GLBT youth feel they have nowhere to turn. According to several surveys, four out of five gay and lesbian students say they don't know one supportive adult at school.[9]

What can we do to help?

Schools should offer a safe and respectful learning environment for everyone. When bullying is allowed to take place, it affects everyone. For every GLBT youth who reported being targeted for anti-gay harassment, four heterosexual youth reported harassment or violence for being perceived as gay or lesbian.[10] Also, we know that bullying was a contributing factor in the Columbine shootings and other school violence. Students, teachers, and school administrators who look the other way are contributing to the problem. In contrast, kids who said that they had a supportive faculty or openly gay staff member were more likely to feel as if they belong in their school.[11]

Help end bullying at your school with the following actions:

- Be alert to signs of distress.
- Work with student councils to have programs on respect, school safety, and anti-bullying.
- Ask school personnel to have a discussion at an assembly or an after school activity about gay prejudice.
- Help start a Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) chapter at your local high school. Youth whose schools had these kinds of groups were less likely to have reported feeling unsafe in their schools.[12]
- Arrange for a group like GLSEN to present bullying prevention activities and programs at your school.
- Do encourage anyone who's being bullied to tell a teacher, counselor, coach, nurse, or his or her parents or guardians. If the bullying continues, report it yourself.

Other Resources

National Association of School Psychologists

4340 East West Highway, Suite 402
Bethesda, MD 20814
Phone Number: (301) 657-0270
Fax Number: (301) 657-0275
TTY Number: (301) 657-4155
Website URL: www.nasponline.org

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

3615 Wisconsin Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016-3007
Phone Number: (202) 966-7300
Fax: (202) 966-2891
Email Address: clinical@aacap.org
Website URL: www.aacap.org

American Academy of Pediatrics

141 Northwest Point Blvd.
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
Phone Number: (847) 434-4000
Fax Number: (847) 434-8000
Website URL: www.aap.org

American Psychological Association

750 First Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20002-4242
Telephone Number: (202) 336-5500
Toll-Free Number: (800) 374-2721

TDD/TTY Number: (202) 336-6123
Website URL: www.apa.org, <http://helping.apa.org/>

American School Counselor Association

1101 King St., Suite 625
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone Number: (703) 683-ASCA
Toll-Free Number: (800) 306-4722
Fax Number: (703) 683-1619
Website URL: www.schoolcounselor.org/

Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists

4514 Chester Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19143-3707
Phone Number: (215) 222-2800
Website URL: www.aglp.org

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

90 Broad Street, 2nd Floor
New York, New York 10004
Phone Number: (212) 727-0135
Fax Number: (212) 727-0254
Email Address: glsen@glsen.org
Website URL: www.glsen.org

Human Rights Campaign

1640 Rhode Island Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036-3278
Phone Number: (202) 628-4160
Toll-Free Number: (800) 777-4723
TTY: (202) 216-1572
Fax Number: (202) 347-5323
Email Address: hrc@hrc.org
Website URL: www.hrc.org

Human Rights Watch

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th floor
New York, NY 10118-3299 USA
Phone Number: (212) 290-4700
Fax Number: (212) 736-1300
Email Address: hrwnyc@hrw.org
Website URL: www.hrw.org

National Education Association

1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3290
Phone Number: (202) 833-4000
Fax Number: (202) 822-7974
Website URL: www.nea.org

National Youth Advocacy Coalition

1638 R Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC, 20009
Phone Number: (202) 319-7596
Toll-Free Number: (800) 541-6922
TTY: (202) 319-9513
Fax Number: (202) 319-7365
Email Address: nyac@nyacyouth.org
Website URL: www.nyacyouth.org

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone Number: (202) 467-8180
Fax Number: (202) 467-8194
Email Address: info@pflag.org
Website URL: www.pflag.org

References

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- [5] Chase, Anthony. "Violent Reaction; What do Teen Killers have in Common?" *In TheseTimes*. 9 July 2001: 3.
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- [7] Chase, Anthony. "Violent Reaction; What do Teen Killers have in Common?" *In These Times*. 9 July 2001
- [8] Bart, M. Creating a safer school for gay students. *Counseling Today*, September 1998
- [9] Sessions Stepp, Laura. "A Lesson in Cruelty: Anti-Gay Slurs Common at School; Some Say Insults Increase as Gays' Visibility Rises." *The Washington Post* 19 June 2001
- [10] Reis, B. (1996). *Safe Schools Anti-Violence Documentation Project, Third Annual Report*. Seattle: Safe Schools Coalition
- [11] The 2001 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, p.35
- [12] *Ibid.*