Battling the Bullying of LGBTQ Students

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Despite the best efforts of professionals to implement anti-bullying policies and curricula designed to foster tolerance and respect, bullying remains a serious problem in some learning communities. Surveys find that about a third of high school students are bullied in a given school year; seven percent of students noted they were bullied every day.[1] LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth are frequent targets of bullies, which makes them a vulnerable population that needs their safety and welfare protected.

The suicides of three gay boys in recent years were the tragic result of merciless, nonstop bullying. Only a month after he came out as gay to his classmates, Kenneth James Weishuhn received death threats and his name was listed on an online hate group page that his classmates created. The 14-year-old Iowa teen took his life after telling his mother, "You don't know how it feels to be hated."[2] The second boy, Alexander "AJ" Betts Jr., was outed by his classmates and then ridiculed for being gay. Insults were also hurled at the 16-year-old for being half African American and because of his cleft lip.[3] The constant barrage of slurs and epithets proved too much for AJ. The third boy was a New Mexico teen, Carlos Vigil, who had been bullied since he was 8 years old. In his suicide note, Carlos apologized to all of those who considered him "a loser, a freak, and fag" and explained that in his death he was finally "free."[4]

These boys were loved by their families and close friends; they were held in regard by their teachers; and they were fine young men who would have grown up to be positive contributors to society. Lamentably, the ongoing harassment they endured resulted in each believing they were better off sacrificing their own lives. But what makes LGBTQ youth targets of bullying? And, what can be done to combat this in schools?

Varied Forms of Bullying

According to the federal government, "Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children. It involves a real or perceived power imbalance and the behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time."[5] Bullying is intentional. In other words, the bully expects to harm the victim with physical assaults or attacks, or distress him or her with verbal abuse and threats. Bullying can take varied forms of verbal abuse (such as teasing, name-calling, and slurs), physical abuse (e.g., pushing, shoving, hitting), and social abuse, which can include spreading rumors about the victim, excluding him or her from social groups or gatherings, and ganging up on him or her.[6] Bullying behaviors also include stealing or destroying a victim's belongings.[7]

With the advent of accessible technology, cyberbullying has become a real threat, too. Through the medium of cell phones and other digital devices, bullies send hurtful email and texts, or post damaging messages (i.e., lies or rumors) or pictures on social media platforms using real or fake identities.[8]

LGBTQ Youth Are Often Targets of Bullies

There are many reasons why bullies target LGBTQ youth, but quite often their behaviors are rooted in prejudice and hatred.[9] Bullies often hold negative attitudes towards LGBTQ youth or they are uncomfortable around them. Either way, bullies feel impelled to harass their victims. Bullies may target a gay youth who has come out, for instance, because they believe that homosexuality is a deviation and should be punished. Some affected youth may not even be LGBTQ, yet they may be targets of abuse because their classmates perceive them to be. For example, a bully may harass a fellow high school student because she has a short haircut, wears no makeup, and dresses in flannel shirts and jeans. While she may be heterosexual, the bully might interpret her gender non-conforming ways as a sign of homosexuality and believe she is deserving of harassment.

Compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBT youth are more likely to be bullied and more likely to experience physical bullying.[10] According to one survey by GLSEN (the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network), nearly 90% of LGBT youth report being bullied.[11] Many LGBTQ youth encounter a hostile school climate characterized by peer rejection and victimization.[12] Another GLSEN study found that:

- nearly 58% of their LGBTQ student sample said they felt unsafe at school because of their same-sex orientation, and about 43% said they felt unsafe because of their gender expression;[13]

A Gay-Straight Alliance school bus, Seattle Pride 2008 (Jon Gilbert Leavitt via Flickr CC By 2.0)

- 85.2% of the LGBTQ sample had been verbally harassed, nearly 27% were physically harassed, and 13% were physically assaulted;[14]
- about 98% of students in the same GLSEN survey said they heard "gay" used negatively, and about 96% said they heard homophobic remarks.[15]

Effects of Bullying on LGBTQ Youth

The effects of bullying toward LGBTQ youth can negatively affect their mental health. Most youth-serving experts agree that adolescence can be the most difficult stage of human development when teens worry intensely about fitting in and not having personal qualities that set them apart from their peers, such as wearing thick glasses or having poor fashion sense. Consider, though, the added challenges that LGBTQ youth experience (e.g.,

worrying that they will be outed, fearing their parents' non-acceptance, and keeping a same-sex infatuation secret), and compound those experiences with the added anxiety of possible harassment and abuse.[16] Make no mistake about it, any challenges they have are exacerbated when they are bullied.[17]

LGBTQ youth who are harassed are more likely than their heterosexual peers to: engage in destructive behavior (such as experimenting with substances), be depressed and consider self-harm;[18] have anxiety and stress years later in their lives;[19] have lower self-esteem;[20] and, attempt suicide.[21] It should surprise no one that harassed LGBTQ youth do not receive an adequate education.[22] Studies have found that a sizeable number of LGBTQ youth report missing school days because they were concerned for

their safety, having lower GPAs than peers who were harassed less often, and dropping out of school.[23]

Modern Day LGBTQ Youth

It is nearly impossible to determine the exact number of youth who are LGBTQ, primarily because so many are either silent or uncertain about their sexual orientation. It is estimated, though, that about 10 million Americans are considered to be LGBT, with a quarter of that population, or about 2.5 million, under the age of 18.[24] According to research studies, a safe estimation would be that 1% to 4% of the general youth population is LGB.[25]

Most current data suggests that the average age that an American youth discloses their same-sex or bisexual orientation is 16 years old,[26] which is about

three years younger than youth living in the 1970s, according to one research sample.[27] Sociologist Stephen Russell explains,

> Contemporary youth are the first to have visible LGBTQ role models, along with access to information and support about same-sex sexuality in their communities and online. These dramatic changes have created the possibilities that LBGTQ youth recognize, label, and come out in ways that were never possible before.[28]

Teachers and youth-serving professionals will witness a noticeable increase in the number of students coming out, and doing so at earlier ages. Subsequent social changes will require teachers, school district leadership teams, and state boards of education to become more responsive to LGBTQ student needs.

Practices That Promote a Secure Learning Environment

It can be transformative for an LGBT or questioning student to have supportive teachers who reach out to them and provide a secure environment within which they can develop a sense of well-being and a positive self-concept. Developing a school culture that conveys an attitude of respect and tolerance for differences can be achieved through these three key practices:

1. Honor LGBT Youth Rights

Teachers need to first recognize that the sexual minority rights of students on their campus (no matter how small the number) are important to protect. These rights include:

- LGBT students should be protected from harm. Bullying, harassment, and any kind of insulting language should not be tolerated.
- LGBT students should have reasonable access to support systems that help them to work toward their learning potential. They should also have adequately trained counselors available to them at convenient times throughout the school day, and gay-straight alliances or similar student-led clubs should be allowed to form if students express the need to have them.
- All LGBT related issues and events should be addressed with respect. Even if teachers believe they have no LGBT students, the class is likely to be composed of students who are closeted or questioning their sexuality, students who have loving LGBT relatives who are open about their sexuality, or students who have same-sex parents.

Teachers honor these rights by responding immediately to bullying problems, ensuring that the procedures for reporting bullying are effective, and coming to the immediate aid of bullying victims. Most importantly, teachers—regardless of their personal beliefs—can honor LGBTQ youth in their learning community by explaining that what students reveal to them about private matters will be held in confidence.

2. Use Correct Terminology and Avoid Damaging Myths

Teachers should be familiar with and correctly use terminology that is commonly associated with the LGBTQ student population. The acronym LGBTQ and other common terms are defined in Selected LGBTQ Terminology. These terms reveal some of the ways in which the LGBTQ youth population is diverse.

While they may share similar experiences, developmental milestones, and interests and displeasures, the fact remains that they differ considerably (e.g., personal characteristics, race and ethnicity, geographic locations and regions, religion, etc.).[29] These differences serve as a reminder to avoid making assumptions or accepting myths about LGBTQ youth that can perpetuate stereotypes. The following myths can lead to damaging misunderstandings.

Myth #1: Gay students want to be girls; lesbian students want to be boys.
Actuality: Gay boy students have romantic and sexual attractions to boys. They have a boy gender identity, accept their biological sex, and want to live life as boys. Lesbian students have romantic and sexual attractions to girls. They have a girl gender identity, accept their biological sex, and want to live life as girls. If a boy student who is openly gay dresses as a girl on occasion or a lesbian student dresses as a boy, he or she may be doing so for the fun of it and not because they have a different gender identity.

Myth #2: You can always spot an LGBT student because they are flamboyant and blatantly provocative.
Actuality: While some LGBT students may be open about their sexuality and like to draw attention to themselves, many more students remain reserved about their sexual orientation. Others may not be out or may be questioning their sexual orientation. As mentioned above, mannerisms or behaviors do not imply a same-sex orientation.

Myth #3: The media and LGBT adults cause students to become LGBT.
Actuality: Individuals do not choose their sexual orientation; emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions are innate. LGBT youth follow the same trajectory as their heterosexual peers in the development of their sexual identity. In childhood and early adolescence, they develop romantic crushes, and by adolescence they begin to have sexual attractions. Unlike their heterosexual peers, though, LGBT youth go through a unique continuum of pivotal moments from childhood well into adolescence and adulthood.[30]

Same-sex orientation development models suggest that in their childhood LGBT youth first learn that there are negative connotations associated with not being heterosexual. This later causes them psychological stress as they come to terms with their sexual orientation. As they age they begin to realize they are different from their heterosexual

peers. At the next pivotal moment, they realize that the primary reason they feel different is because they have same-sex romantic and sexual attractions. Many LGBTQ youth later experience denial and resistance about their same-sex orientation before accepting their sexual identity and coming out to friends, siblings, and parents. No LGBT student comes to their same-sex orientation or transgender identity on a whim simply because they hear or read about it or see a news story about the LGBT community.

While it may seem that an increasing number of youth are coming out dur-ing their K-12 schooling, this is likely attributable to the fact that LGBT persons are becoming more widely accepted as LGBT issues and events are covered in the news media, and as popular sit-coms and dramas feature positive portrayals of LGBT characters, such as the gay couple Mitchell and Cameron on *Modern Family*.

Myth #4: LGBTQ students can be cured of their same-sex orientation or transgender identity if they would just meet the right heterosexual person. Actuality: A student's emotional, roman-tic, and sexual attractions to a specific sex are innate and fixed for life. No relationship with the "right" heterosexual person and no conversion therapy can "cure" LGBTQ students and make them heterosexual. In fact, many psychological organizations, such as the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the American School Counselor Association affirm the rights and dignity of LBGTQ youth and strongly oppose any form of "therapy" designed to alter a person's same-sex orientation or gender identity. A similar myth is that LGBTQ

Selected LGBTQ Terminology*

Ally: A heterosexual individual who supports LGBTQ persons.

Coming Out or Out: The process of disclosing the status of one's same-sex orientation or gender identity. A student who is "out" is publicly open about his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. "Outed" or "Outing" refers to the disclosure of a person's same-sex orientation or transgender identity without their personal consent.

Gay-Straight Alliance (**GSA**): A school-based, student-initiated, student-led club for LGBTQ youth and their straight allies. "'GSA' has historically stood for Gay-Straight Alliance, however, many clubs have expanded the name of their clubs beyond the binary Gay-Straight terminology. Some examples include: Genders & Sexualities Alliance, Queer Students Alliance, Pride Club, etc."**

Gender Identity: The innate, deep-rooted psychological sense an individual has about how he or she identifies—as a man (boy) or woman (girl), which may not correspond to his or her bio-logical sex. A person's gender identity may also be somewhere between or apart from the categories of male and female (the gender binary).

Gender Expression: How a person chooses to outwardly pres-ent his or her gender identity to others, which can be manifested through characteristics such as clothing, hairstyle, voice, and so forth. The terms **gender fluid**, **gender creative**, and **gender expansive** suggest the multiplicity of ways gender identity is expressed, as on a continuum.

Genderqueer: A term used by those whose identity is not ade-quately represented by the labels of male/female or gay/straight.

Heterosexism: The notion that a heterosexual orientation is the norm and is superior to other sexual orientations. Heterosexism, like other "-isms" (such as racism), can manifest itself widely through personal beliefs and actions, as well as institutional poli-cies that lead to the marginalization of LGBT people. Examples include believing that the same-sex orientation of lesbian and gay people is not normal or that something is wrong with a person who is transgender, and passing policies that keep teachers from addressing LGBT-related issues in the classroom.

Intersex: When the biological sex characteristics of a person do not make him or her exclusively male or female. An example would include a girl student who has male and female genitalia.

LGBTQ: An acronym used to describe a specific student popu-lation, typically a group of youth who have same-sex attractions (LG for Lesbian and Gay); students who are attracted to and can have romantic and/or sexual experiences with both sexes (B for Bisexual); youth who are transgender (T) and **assert** that their gender does not match their biological sex; and young people who are questioning (Q) their sexual identity. Q may also refer to queer, an LGBT-inclusive umbrella term, or to identities that are not captured by LGBT terminology. It can be offensive, depending upon the context in which it is used.

Sexual Orientation or Sexual Identity: An umbrella term for the categories of heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, which describe the gender that individuals are fundamentally attracted to emotionally, romantically, and sexually. A student's sexual orientation is not determined by his or her outward appearance, mannerisms, interests, hobbies, and so forth. The best way of learning a student's sexual orientation or gender identity is for them to tell you.

students are in a phase they will outgrow and they will eventually develop a heterosexual orientation. While some of them may have same-sex experiences as part of their childhood and grow up to have a heterosexual orientation, students who claim they are LGBT have a fixed sexual orientation or transgender identity and cannot be influenced otherwise.

Myth #5: LGBTQ students will never amount to anything.
Actuality: On the contrary, the LGBTQ community is made up of outstanding citizens who are fine teachers, attorneys, police officers, and executives, as well as artists, musicians, doctors, nurses, and more. Many protect this country and our American civil liberties by serving in the U.S. armed forces. Numerous LGBT persons are excellent role models, such as television host Rachel Maddow, business executive Tim Cook (CEO of Apple Inc.), actress Megan Fox, and Greg Abbink, the first openly transgender officer in Austin, Texas.

3. Support LGBTQ Students

Teachers should never tolerate anti-LGBT language, bullying, or harassment of any kind in their classrooms. Statements like, "I'm not going to have that in my class," or "Don't talk like that around here," can send a powerful message to students. Even if you have not witnessed the harassment, you can respond, "I'm aware that students are being harassed in our school, and I don't like it. It has to stop!" Additional tips for addressing bullying can be found in the case study, "Why Are People So Mean?" When students respect their teachers, they will be more likely to conform to their expectations and behave accordingly.

LGBTQ students face school pressures while they are developing their sexual identities. Because they are preoccupied with surviving a storm of psychological distress, many of them will experience mental health problems such as depression and suicide ideation.[31] LGBT students who are out at school

"Why Are People So Mean?"
A Case Study of Bullying at One High School

Central High School (a fictitious school) is considered a diverse learning community with about 1,800 students. In addition to athletics, band, and the fine arts, students have a wide range of clubs to choose from, although there is no Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Most of the student body is middle class with nearly a quarter of the community recognized as economically disadvantaged.

In the last five years, there have been no reports of bullying behaviors or harassment. In fact, all of the administrators, faculty, and staff have mentioned that they consider their school a safe learning environment. The school instituted a no-bullying policy 10 years ago, and the process for reporting harassment is posted on the school's website, printed in the student handbook, and displayed on the bulletin boards outside the administration and counseling offices.

The faculty and staff consider the students well-behaved, although they expect occasional improprieties, insubordination, and mischief. Administrators witness about six physical fights a semester, which is rare, especially for a high school this size. The students regularly use "gay", "fag," and "faggot" among common curse words, to which most teachers and staff respond with, "Improve your vocabulary."

The school climate has become more hostile than usual, however. Since the academic year began a group of five friends have been bullied. This is their story.

Five students started their sophomore school year as close friends. James and Patrick have known each other since they were toddlers. Kacey, Nicole, and Janet met in middle school, but their friendship developed over freshman year. All five became friends when they started marching band last year. While all of the students were socially accepted early in the academic year, faculty noticed a change in attitudes toward them when the five students began calling themselves the Morrissey Brigade. (The five students became fond of 1980s alternative music, namely The Smiths, and took the moniker Morrissey from the lead singer.) Shortly thereafter, they became the targets of verbal harassment when four of the students dyed their hair platinum blonde. (While the color may seem obscure, it is considered conventional and meets the confines of the school policy on hairstyles and color.) Patrick chose not to participate.

James was the first to begin hearing homophobic comments, which were directed toward him. In the hallways between classes, he would hear regular epithets "fag" and "joto" (a derogatory term in Spanish), but different slurs began to materialize, such as "back door bandit," and "prissy queen," and some boys would shrill his name in an effeminate manner. None of James's friends or teachers intervened. While James is gay and some of his classmates regard him as being feminine, he is in the closet and only recently came out to Patrick. In a matter of days, the harassment intensified from epithets to a shoving match. Two boys pushed James and responded with, "I bet you liked that." When others accused Patrick of being gay, he started to distance himself from James. Later, he told some of his classmates that James is gay, which fueled the harassment.

The three girls were verbally harassed as well. They were called "butch dikes" and "kitty callers." The epithets broadened to "the obese herd" and "The Ugly Girl Brigade." The three girls had already been deemed outsiders with a poor sense of style because they did not fashion themselves after the Kardashians, the current trend. In an effort to defend James one day, Nicole outed herself to a group of aggressive classmates, which exacerbated matters. The girls have since separated themselves from Nicole. While Nicole and James remain close friends, they are harassed regularly with

added slurs such as "butt ugly," "poor trash," and "retard." One early evening off school property, a brawl began when Nicole physically retaliated against a group of classmates who were hurling insults at James.

James is depressed and dejected. He no longer wants to go to school. He has told his mother, "Why are people so mean? I do nothing to them. I just live my life." Nicole is more inclined to fight back. The parents have urged all five youth to report the bullying to school leaders, but the youth fear retaliation and are reluctant to do so.

Before reading the tips for how to best handle the bullying at Central High School, take a moment to think about what you would do.

Some tips for how school leaders can best handle the bullying of LGBTQ students:

To Stop the Bullying
- Clearly communicate to all students that the bullying has to stop.
- All teachers need to emphatically denounce the harassment with statements such as, "I don't like it." "It needs to stop." And "That is SO not cool."
- All teachers need to convey the message that no student should be treated differently or harshly (by any means of harassment) just because they are different or don't fit in.
- All teachers need to encourage bystanders to report bullying. Teachers can say, "If you suspect it, report it. It's anonymous." Or, "If you tell me, report it anyway. I promise to keep the information confidential."

To Help the Bullied
- Have counselors ready to meet with the student. Together they can work through the harassment, attend to mental health issues they are having, and think about how to handle future bullying.
- Identify a teacher who is comfortable talking about LGBTQ issues and can act as an ally whenever the student needs a safe person to talk to. Let students know that there are specific places and persons they can turn to if they are being harassed.
- Inform students that their privacy is protected and that any school personnel they confide in will keep their personal matters confidential.
- Ensure that the student knows where he or she can get LGBTQ information and resources.
- Meet with the bullies privately to reduce retaliation toward the student.

To Prevent Future Bullying
- Start a GSA and have it co-moderated by popular teachers. Encourage the GSA to sponsor events that are regarded with favor, such as a semi-formal dance or a recreational sports competition.
- Survey the learning community and parents to determine whether bullying is a problem, especially among vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ youth, students with disabilities, students who are overweight and obese, and students of color. Arrange for professional development on how to best address verbal and physical harassment through prevention and intervention.
- Train members of all student clubs and participants of after-school programs on what constitutes bullying behavior and how bystanders can intervene. Follow with exercises that promote understanding, respect, and tolerance toward the LGBTQ community, persons with disabilities, people of color, and so forth.
- Encourage all teachers to be watchful for signs of fighting, poor attendance patterns, and students who are isolated from others or seem unusually distressed. Teachers also can pry with, "Have you noticed anyone being bullied?"
- Offer professional development opportunities for teachers and parents on how to prevent and intervene against bullying, especially with regard to LGBTQ youth.
- Remind all students at the beginning of each semester about the school's anti-bullying policies and how to anonymously report harassment. Specifically mention protected classes of students highlighted in the policy, as in the example, "Harassment based on race, ethnicity, ... sexual orientation, and gender expression is not tolerated," which is more effective than the general statement, "Harassment toward all students is not tolerated." Teachers can emphasize that bystanders can protect victims by reporting harassment of any kind.
- Encourage teachers to engage in impromptu lessons on why treating people unkindly and unfairly is contrary to the ideals of this country.

have achieved a significant milestone in their lives, but they can experience intense stress associated with coming out. Before coming out they often fear that their sexual orientation or transgender identity will be discovered and that their friends and parents will reject them.

And while LGB youth who have supportive parents tend to have a more positive outlook on their sexual orientation and a stronger sense of self-worth,[32] negative reactions from parents have led to adverse mental health and substance abuse problems.[33] As a result, about l5% to 36% of the 1 million homeless youth in the U.S. are LGB.[34] Many LGBT youth run away from home and others are kicked out of their homes when parents learn about their sexual orientation or transgender identity.

Teachers and other educators should be alert to the warning signs that LGBTQ students need help (e.g., changes in appearance, withdrawal from friends, decline in academic performance, feelings of depression and anxiety, personality changes, etc.) and let students know that licensed school counselors are available to deal with a variety of mental health issues common to adolescents (including LGBTQ-related concerns). It is in the students' best interest to direct them to counselors who are allies of LGBTQ students. Counseling organizations, such as the National Association of School Psychologists, also provide resources online. Their GLBTQ Youth Resources pages, **www.nasponline.org/advocacy/glbresources.aspx**, are highly recommended and include information about transgender students.

Another way teachers can support LGBTQ students is by being LGBT role models/allies. Just the presence of such support in schools gives LGBTQ students a greater sense of belonging and well-being. Letting students know that you are available if they want to talk, and participating in GSA-sponsored events even when a club is composed of only a handful of members, is validating to your students.

Practices That Promote Equality and Inclusiveness

While there are numerous ways to treat LGBTQ students and community members with respect and to reflect acceptance in the classroom, these are a few suggestions:

- *Integrate LGBTQ people, events, and issues into the social studies curriculum.*
  GLSEN surveys find that when LGBTQ students see themselves in the curriculum they have a greater sense of belonging at school, which also leads to a better school experience. Articles in this issue of *Social Education* suggest many ways to integrate LGBTQ history and social sciences content, children's literature, and media into the social studies curriculum. The hidden curriculum can also be incorporated, by using the classroom environment to make the LGBTQ community visible.

- *Address LGBT-related issues with respect in instructional conversations and teachable moments.* Be prepared to discuss controversial LGBTQ topics/current events in a respectful way. Develop classroom rules that allow for differences of opinion without disrespect. If you overhear students discussing whether a student is lesbian, for instance, you can say, "I'm sure if she wants you to know that she is lesbian, she will tell you. There are so many students who are lucky she is their friend." Or, if students are gossiping about the two fathers of a student, you can interject, "His fathers are upstanding men. Their sexual orientation isn't a big deal because they are contributing members of this society. And they're doing a nice job of raising their family."

- *Teach about behaviors/attitudes of LGBT intolerance and LGBT respect.* Materials from Teaching Tolerance, such as the publications *Responding to Hate and Bias at School* and

Speak Up at School, and GLAAD's *Amplify Your Voice Resource Kit*, as well as dozens of LGBTQ-related lessons by Rethinking Schools, address these issues. Children's literature is often used to enhance such lessons. The article in this issue of *Social Education* on LGBTQ children's literature contains many examples, and illustrates how to facilitate discussions on topics like nonconforming gender roles/gender expression. Class discussions about comments heard in school using "That's so gay" to convey "That's dumb" can lead students to understand why the phrase can be demeaning, and to create and substitute new adjectives or phrases.

- *Treat LGBTQ parents and students with respect.*
  Use inclusive communication and official forms that reflect the diversity of the school population. Recognize that students belong to diverse families, and be sure that they are treated with respect when they visit the school and participate in its activities. Be aware of and provide for the particular needs of transgender students (e.g., records, name, gender expression and identity, bathroom use, etc.) as well as LGB students.

Conclusion

In the last two decades or so, society has slowly come to support LGBT rights, which has motivated many LGBT youth to come out. Unfortunately, many school communities are slow to accept openly LGBT youth, leaving many feeling unsafe. Research data confirms that LGBTQ youth are often targets of harassment, and hear biased remarks, which can be distressing and can adversely affect their mental health and educational achievement. Since youth spend so much time at school, much of their burden can be lifted when school personnel work toward creating safe, supportive, and respectful school climates.

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