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Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth

AT A GLANCE

- Youth with LGBTQ+ identities include those with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning identities. They are more likely than cisgender and heterosexual youth to experience violence at school and have lower levels of school connectedness.
- Several practices can improve the health, safety, and school connectedness for LGBTQ+ youth. Among them are conducting professional development with school staff, providing inclusive school programs, and developing inclusive school and district policies.
- Inclusive practices can promote the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth and foster school connectedness. Inclusive practices have also been shown to benefit the whole school environment.



Professional development

Professional development for teachers and school staff should address fundamental knowledge about:

- Concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity, including appropriate language.
- Health risks faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) youth.
- Effects of the school environment on the health of LGBTQ+ youth.
- Supportive school policies and practices (such as [Genders and Sexualities Alliances](#), safe spaces, and inclusive curricula).
- Unique needs of transgender and gender diverse students.

Did you know?



Conducting [professional development](#) with school staff is a best practice for improving the health, safety, and [school connectedness](#) for LGBTQ+ youth.

Other school-based approaches for supporting LGBTQ+ youth include instituting programs, policies, and practices that ensure inclusivity.

Inclusive practices

Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs)

Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) are student-led clubs where students with LGBTQ+ identities and their allies can socialize, provide support, and work together to [create safe and supportive school environments](#) with the guidance and supervision of a school staff sponsor. GSAs can:

- Help change school environments to be more welcoming and supportive of all students.
- Provide valuable leadership opportunities to students.
- Improve the mental health and well-being of all students in a school.

Safe spaces

Safe spaces are places that students know they can turn to for support.



Safe spaces are important for LGBTQ+ youth who experience bullying more often than cisgender and heterosexual youth.

- Any school staff willing and open to provide nonjudgmental support can be a safe space.
- Trainings exist to help staff who are interested in offering a safe space but may not know how best to provide support.
- Use of physical markers like flags or stickers can identify a safe space for students.

Positive youth development

Positive youth development (PYD) helps strengthen protective factors. These factors can include skills, abilities, and supportive relationships. PYD programs have improved sexual health and should be open and welcoming to LGBTQ+ youth.

See Also:

[Resources on PYD](#)

Inclusive sexual health education

Sex education that is relevant to LGBTQ+ youth can:

- Increase these students' use of condoms.
- Encourage students to talk with their partner about safer sex.

Parent engagement

Family acceptance has been linked to positive health outcomes. The [Family Acceptance Project](#) offers resources to strengthen family support of LGBTQ+ youth.

Tools for supporting LGBTQ youth

- CDC | [LGBTQ Inclusivity in Schools: A Self-Assessment Tool](#) PDF. School and district staff who want to facilitate a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ students can use this tool. The tool assesses individual-level knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that foster inclusivity. The tool can also help determine strengths and weaknesses in current school-level inclusive policies, programs, and practices.
- ACLU, Gender Spectrum, HRC, NCLR, and NEA | [Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools](#) PDF. This is a resource guide for supporting transgender students.
- GSA Network | [GSA Advisor Handbook](#) PDF. This resource contains guidance for GSA advisors. Topics include: incorporating racial equity and intersectionality; starting, sustaining, and enhancing GSAs; and promoting youth leadership.
- GLSEN | [Safe Spaces Kit](#). This is an implementation resource on establishing safe spaces.

- GLSEN | [Changing the Game](#). This implementation resource focuses on making sports more inclusive for students. There is an educator-specific version of this resource.

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

Adolescent and School Health; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP)