

# Bullying & LGBT Youth

While trying to deal with all the challenges of being a teenager, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) teens also have to deal with harassment, threats and violence directed at them on a daily basis. LGBT youth are nearly twice as likely to be called names, verbally harassed or physically assaulted at school compared to their non-LGBT peers. Their mental health and education, not to mention their physical well-being, are at-risk.

## How is their mental health being affected?

- **Substance Use:** Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth are more than twice as likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol.
- **Happiness:** Only 37% of LGBT youth report being happy, while 67% of non-LGBT youth say they are happy. However, over 80% of LGBT youth believe they will be happy eventually, with nearly half believing that they will need to move away from their current town to find happiness.
- **Self-Harm:** With each instance of verbal or physical harassment, the risk of self-harm among LGBT youth is 2 ½ times more likely.
- **Suicide:** Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

## 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. LGBT youth identified bullying problems as the second most important problem in their lives, after non-accepting families, compared to non-LGBT youth identifying classes/exams/grades.
- LGBT youth who reported they were frequently harassed in school had lower grade point averages than students who were less often harassed.
- One survey revealed that more than one-third of gay respondents had missed an entire day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe there.
- LGBT youth feel they have nowhere to turn. Sixty percent of LGBT students did not report incidents to school staff. One-third who reported an incident said the staff did nothing in response.

## 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. The 2011 National School Climate survey recommends:

- Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs). School clubs provide safe spaces and support networks for LGBT students. Students who attended schools with GSAs reported fewer homophobic remarks, more intervention from school personnel and a greater sense of connectedness.
- Supportive educators. LGBT Students who report having a greater number of supportive staff (six or more) had higher GPAs.
- Comprehensive bullying/harassment policies and laws. Students reported that school staff intervened twice as often in schools with comprehensive bullying/harassment policies.

## 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.
- 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 (301) 657-0270 [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)

American Psychological Association (202) 336-5500 [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists (215) 222-2800 [www.aglp.org](http://www.aglp.org)

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (212) 727-0135 [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

National Youth Advocacy Coalition (800) 541-6922 [www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org)

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (202) 467-8180 [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

### Sources:

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*Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Bartkiewicz, M. J., Boesen, M. J., & Palmer, N. A. (2012). The 2011 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.*

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