

Creating Safe Spaces for LGBT Youth

Amy L. Reynolds
University at Buffalo

Anne Nowak
Sweet Home Family Support Center

Marvin L. Henchbarger
Gay & Lesbian Youth Services (GLYS) \

Agenda

- Introductions/Goals
- Challenges
- Strategies
- Next Steps



Goals

- Highlight the experiences of LGBTQ youth
- Explore approaches and strategies being used to create safe spaces
- Discuss next steps to ensure safe spaces for ALL youth



LGBTQ youth: The reality

- Young people are coming out at younger ages (changed in past 30 years from 19 to 16 years old)
- Living with bullying is a DAILY reality for LGBTQ youth
- Children and teens are targeted not because they are out as LGBTQ but because they are different

The reality

- Bulk of issues occur at school since that is where LGBTQ youth spend their time
- Issues vary at elementary, middle, and high schools
- Nationwide schools are hostile environments for many LGBTQ students
- Many LGBTQ youth hear homophobic remarks and face verbal/physical harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation or gender expression

Personal consequences of not feeling/being safe

- Victimization leads to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem
- 2-6X more likely to attempt suicide and may account for as many as 30% of youth suicides

Overall effects

- LGBTQ youth suffer emotionally, socially, and academically
- Unlike other youth targeted by bullies, they cannot often ask for help at home for fear of rejection
- These effects can be life altering

Strategies for Support

- Educate your faculty, staff and Board of Education
- Provide safe environment for students
- Provide resources and support to parents
- Make sure your GSA is just like any other club
- Be aware of where kids are at developmentally

What research says makes a difference

- ④ Having a comprehensive, effective, and enforced bullying/harassment policy that explicitly addresses bias-based bullying
- ④ Creating an inclusive curriculum
- ④ Training teachers and school personnel to intervene thus creating a presence of supportive educators
- ④ Supporting Gay-Straight Alliances and other visible programmatic efforts
- ④ **LGBT students with these resources/interventions are less likely to hear homophobic and anti gender remarks**

What schools can do

- Support national programming (e.g., No Name Calling Week, Day of Silence, National Coming Out Day)
- Form a Gay Straight Alliance
- Curricular interventions
- Expose students to positive messages about LGBT individuals
- Develop effective professional development training on LGBTQ issues
- Be proactive!!

Importance of school resources

- Gay-Straight Alliances: mostly at HS level; very few MS students (4%) have GSAs or other student clubs
- Supportive School Staff: 64% MS students report having at least one supportive teacher/staff member compared to 86% HS
- LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum: Most ES/MS students report fewer curricular resources (e.g., library materials, access to internet resources, readings)
- Comprehensive School Anti-Harassment Policies: Less common to address LGBT/gender harassment at MS and ES level

Next steps

- What programs and policies will help to create and ensure safe spaces?



Questions/Answers

