If a student or someone you know displays thoughts of suicide or other self-harm, call the Trevor Project Lifeline at 866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386) to speak with a trained volunteer counselor.

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What is Spirit Day?

On October 17, 2019, millions will wear purple for Spirit Day as a symbol of support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth and to take a stand against bullying. Join media outlets, celebrities, schools, landmarks and corporations in #SpiritDay and speak out for LGBTQ youth.

How did Spirit Day get started?

Spirit Day was started in 2010 by high school student Brittany McMillan as a way to show support for LGBTQ youth and take a stand against bullying. With GLAAD’s help, millions of teachers, workplaces, media personalities and students wore purple, a color that symbolizes spirit on the rainbow flag created by Gilbert Baker in 1978.

How can I support my LGBTQ students?

tips for teachers to stand up when they see anti-LGBTQ bullying

How can I participate?

1. Wear purple on October 18
2. Download a kit for how you can organize for Spirit Day in your community
3. Visit glaad.org/spiritday in October to turn your Twitter and Facebook profile pics purple
4. Tweet your Spirit Day pics to @glad
And if you’re on Flickr, add your pics to this group: flickr.com/groups/spiritday
5. Help promote by downloading a graphic for your blog or website: glaad.org/spiritday/fb

In a [GLSEN] study, nearly 7 out of 10 LGBTQ students experienced harassment at school because of their sexual orientation. GLSEN found that inclusive anti-bullying and harassment policies, supportive school faculty and the presence of school clubs like Gay-Straight Alliances are all factors that lead to safer schools and better school performance.*

• Know that all students should feel safe in the classroom for purposes of a healthy learning environment.
• Even in jest, anti-gay slurs have a very harmful impact on LGBTQ students. Ensure that such comments made in your classroom are dealt with seriously, regardless of whether they were intended to be intimidating or “humorous.”
• Understand that homophobic and transphobic remarks are just as harmful as any other comments that demean and denigrate a young person, and should be disciplined accordingly.
• When possible, include the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals in curriculum, to emphasize they are an important part of our society. Learn more about sample lesson plans.
• If an LGBTQ student approaches you about having been bullied, report the matter to school administration immediately and let the student know you are on his or her side.
• If you are aware of any student experiencing anti-LGBTQ bullying, reach out to the student and ask if you can better assist the student in any way. Alert the student’s other teachers.

Wearing purple on Spirit Day is a simple way to show the world that you stand by these courageous young people and a simple way to stand up to the bullies.

Where can I find anti-bullying resources?

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has a number of resources available on their website to assist teachers in combating bullying, including:

- Identifying Bullies & Victims
- Creating a Safe Learning Environment
- AFT has also compiled a list of state laws that deal with bullying.

With the new school year upon us, you have a wonderful opportunity to take steps to ensure that your classroom is welcoming and supportive of all students. The (GLSEN) offers educational resources for educators. Among them:

- Back-To-School Guide for Creating LGBTQ-Inclusive Environments
- The Educator's Guide to LGBTQ Pride
- Safe Space Kit
- K-12 Curricula and Lesson Plans
- Day of Silence: Resources for Educators
- No Name-Calling Week
- Bullying and LGBTQ Students
- A Bullying and LGBTQ Students
- A Bullying Quiz
- A Bullying Survey
- Allies: A Discussion Activity
- “Bullied: A Student, A School and a Case That Made History”, a documentary film, complete with a two-part viewer’s guide and standards-aligned lesson plans and activities.

The National School Climate Center offers several resources, including through Educator Bully Prevention Guidelines.

How can I make my school district more LGBTQ-inclusive?

The safety and well-being of all students is of the utmost priority for school administrators, faculty and staff. This responsibility extends to anyone and everyone employed by the school district, from principals to bus drivers.

School administrators have a duty to promote a safe and inclusive learning environment. A number of organizations, including the (GLSEN); American Federation of Teachers (AFT); and Teaching Tolerance have devised strategies, guides and lesson plans for creating a more LGBTQ-inclusive environment in the school district.

It’s important that auxiliary staff, including bus drivers, custodians and cafeteria workers, also take an active role in ensuring that every student feels safe when at school. While a student might feel safe in the classroom, he or she might also feel especially vulnerable to harassment while at lunch or when travelling on the school bus. School officials can help by calling on every staff member to take action whenever they hear or see anti-LGBTQ bullying, even if the incident might be perceived as “a joke.” The AFT has devised special guidelines and recommendations for bus drivers in disciplining student behavior.

The Safe Schools Coalition recommends a number of actions school districts can take, including:

- Adopt strong, explicitly protective policies like the Washington State model policy and procedure. Be sure the school district’s bullying policy protects students based on gender identity and real or perceived sexual orientation. The school board’s nondiscrimination policy should prohibit discrimination based on real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Learn more about model policies.
- Provide training for every single adult in a school, from bus drivers to coaches to teachers’ aides and the principal, so that they will consistently and swiftly enforce the rules and talk with students about why, and so that principals will do proper investigations and levy productive consequences.
- Collect data (qualitative & quantitative) to track harassment and to measure each teacher, school and district’s progress and then make reducing harassment a part of every team member’s performance evaluation.
How can I support my LGBTQ child?

Learning that your child is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) can be a difficult experience for parents. Many parents feel shock or fear. Some blame themselves, some reject their child, others want to be supportive but don’t know how. Even parents who consider themselves accepting of LGBTQ people can react harshly to their own child’s coming out.

If your child comes out to you, you may feel like you’ve lost the person you love. However, it is important to remember that this is the same person you loved just minutes before he or she told you. The very fact that your child felt comfortable enough to tell you speaks volumes about the relationship you share.

If you have a negative, knee-jerk reaction, do not be ashamed of this; try to accept the fact that you have had a shock for which few parents are prepared. Give yourself time to absorb the news, but do not take your anger or confusion out on your child. Though there is no “right” way to act when your child comes out, understand that now is a time to talk, to ask questions and, most of all, to show your child that you love them.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) offers information and support to help you through the process of accepting your LGBTQ family member, including:

- Our Daughters and Sons: Questions and Answers for Parents of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual People
- Faith in Our Families: Parents, Families, and Friends Talk About Religion and Homosexuality

Tips for Athletic Directors and Coaches

- Be a visible and active role model of respect and fairness for your team.
- At the beginning of your sport season, make clear your expectations of respect for diversity among all members of athletic teams, including LGBTQ coaches and athletes.
- Communicate to athletes and coaches that anti-LGBTQ actions or language will not be tolerated.
- Use language that is inclusive of LGBTQ athletes and coaches.
- Treat all athletes and coaches fairly and respectfully regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- Do not make anti-LGBTQ slurs, jokes or other comments.
- Schedule an educational program on LGBTQ issues in athletics for your team.
- Expect the same standards of behavior from all athletes regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.
- Let LGBTQ athletes or colleagues know that you are an ally and that you support them.
- Help promote enthusiastic but respectful sports fan behavior at athletic events.

GLAAD works with LGBTQ athletes – both amateur and professional – and sports media outlets from ESPN to Sports Illustrated to elevate LGBTQ-affirming voices, stories and accomplishments from the world of sports. GLAAD also works to address the persistent problem of homophobia in locker rooms and on the stands by encouraging media outlets to investigate these issues and generate a conversation that helps change hearts and minds. In addition, GLAAD works to raise the profile of openly LGBTQ athletes through support of LGBTQ-focused sporting events such as the Gay Games.

How can I support LGBTQ student athletes?

School and community sports are a key area where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth have been excluded, discriminated against and/or harassed. Anti-LGBTQ attitudes are still far too prevalent in the world of sports, but that is changing for the better every day. Athletes like Kye Allums, Michael Sam, Jason Collins, and Darren Young are examples of how much LGBTQ players can accomplish. GLAAD, alongside GLSEN and other organizations, have launched campaigns to promote LGBTQ inclusion in professional, amateur as well as K-12 sports.

GLSEN’s Game Plan: Changing the Game project aims to foster an athletic and physical education environment based on principles of respect, safety and an equal access for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Respect for all teammates cultivates camaraderie and a healthy environment to focus on the game.

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How can I promote transgender equality?

Transgender people often face discrimination and hostility from their families, friends and coworkers. These harsh reactions usually stem from fear and a basic misunderstanding of the transgender community. By being an ally and showing your support of transgender people, you are doing your part to help end ignorance surrounding transgender issues.

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) has a list of 52 Things You Can Do For Transgender Equality. Here are some ideas for students that can help build equality:

1. If you know transgender students in your school, community, or in your after-school activities, make an effort to get to know them.
2. Ask your local or school library to carry books that deal positively with transgender people and youth.
3. Make sure that transgender people are welcome to join your sports teams, after-school activities, and clubs.
4. Hold a fundraiser, like a bake sale or a walk, and donate proceeds to an organization that provides support for transgender people.
5. Find out if your town or state has transgender-inclusive non-discrimination ordinances and share what you find out with your friends and family. About 43% of U.S. population lives in a jurisdiction with explicit laws that ban employment discrimination based on gender identity and expression.
6. Advocate for school policy that supports and protects transgender students. (To see a model non-discrimination policy, click here.)
7. Submit a story idea to your school paper about the transgender community. This is an effective way to express opinions and distribute information on transgender issues from a variety of voices.
8. Plan or attend a Day of Remembrance Event every November 20. This is a yearly opportunity to remember those lost to hate-motivated violence directed towards the transgender community, and also a time to encourage people to take action to make the world safer.
9. Start or attend a transgender support or education group at your school. These groups are often a vital way that transgender people connect with one another.
10. Start a conversation about gender-related books or gender issues that are important to you.
11. Encourage fair, accurate and inclusive media coverage of transgender issues in your school newspaper. Many people learn about transgender people from watching television or reading stories in the newspaper. GLAAD encourages journalists to use its Media Reference Guide when writing about transgender issues. If you see transgender people being misrepresented in the media, contact us at glaad.org.

How can I prevent teen suicide?

Suicide is now the second leading major cause of death among high school and college students. Studies in the United States have shown that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adolescents and adults have two to six times higher rates of reported suicide attempts, compared to straight adolescents and adults.

Though it’s not always evident when someone you know might be at risk of suicide, warning signs are often present. Suicide can be prevented by recognizing warning signs and responding effectively. Warning signs of suicide include:

• Unrelenting low mood
• Pessimism
• Hopelessness
• Desperation
• Anxiety, distress, and inner tension
• withdrawal
• Sleep problems
• Increased alcohol and/or drug use
• Recent impulsiveness and taking unnecessary risks
• Threatening suicide or expressing a strong wish to die
• Giving away prized possessions
• Sudden or impulsive purchase of a firearm
• Otherwise means of killing oneself such as poisons or medications
• Unexpected rage or anger

Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed. Serious depression can be manifested in obvious sadness, but often it is rather expressed as a loss of pleasure or withdrawal from activities that had once been enjoyable. The five key warning signs for depression in teens are:

• Feelings of sadness or hopelessness, often accompanied by anxiety.
• Declining school performance
• Loss of pleasure/interest in social and sports activities
• Sleeping too much or too little
• Changes in weight or appetite.
How should I respond to suicide warning signs?

- Take it seriously: 50 to 75 percent of all suicide victims give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member. Inefficient signs must be taken seriously.
- Be willing to listen: Start by telling the person you are concerned and give him/her examples. If he/she is depressed, don’t be afraid to ask whether he/she is considering suicide, or if he/she has a particular plan or method in mind. Ask if they have a therapist and are taking medication. Do not attempt to argue someone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care, that he/she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, and that depression can be treated. Avoid the temptation to say, “You have so much to live for,” or “Your suicide will hurt your family.”
- Seek professional help: Be actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately. Help the person find a knowledgeable mental health professional or a reputable treatment facility, and take them to the treatment.
- Follow-up on treatment: Suicidal individuals are often hesitant to seek help and may need your continuing support to pursue treatment after an initial contact. If medication is prescribed, make sure your friend or loved one is taking it exactly as prescribed. Be aware of possible side effects and be sure to notify the physician if the person seems to be getting worse. Usually, alternative medications can be prescribed. Frequently, the first medication does not work. It takes time and persistence to find the right medication(s) and therapist for the individual person.

Addressing Incidents of Suicide

Suicide in a school community is tremendously sad and often unexpected. Faced with students struggling to cope and a community struggling to respond, schools need reliable information, practical tools, and pragmatic guidance.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s “After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools” includes general guidelines for action, do’s and don’ts, templates and sample materials, and covers topics such as crisis response, helping students cope, working with the community, memorialization, social media, suicide contagion, and bringing in outside help.

In any situation that appears to be an emergency, call 911, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or The Trevor Project Lifeline at (866) 4-U-TREVOR. Trained volunteer counselors are ready to speak with you 24-hours a day.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) has launched an LGBTQ Initiative, with initial focus on suicide prevention efforts targeted toward youth and those impacted by suicide. The Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s “After a Suicide: A Toolkit for Schools includes general guidelines for action, do’s and don’ts, templates and sample materials, and covers topics such as crisis response, helping students cope, working with the community, memorialization, social media, suicide contagion, and bringing in outside help.

Children’s / Picture Books

“Trouble Talk”
By Trudy Ludwig
This book highlights the harm that can result from spreading rumors. The story follows Bailey, a new girl in school who befriends a girl named Maya. Bailey soon turns on Maya and spreads a rumor that Maya’s parents are getting divorced. Through the help of the school counselor, Bailey learns a lesson on how to pick friends and stay above the fray. Bailey eventually learns to reform her behavior. The book is for children ages 4 to 8.

“Confessions of a Former Bully”
By Becky Ray McCain (Author) and Todd Leonardo (Illustrator)
This picture book tells the story of a 10-year-old bully. After finding herself in the principal’s office for harassing other students, Katie reflects on her actions through a journal. The writings, in scrap-book form, give insights on physical, emotional, and cyber harassment. The book is geared for grades 3 to 6.

“My Secret Bully”
By Trudy Ludwig (Author) and Aligned Marble (Illustrator)
This book, written for elementary students, teaches on this issue of friends who bully. The fictional story focuses on Monica, who is increasingly teased and excluded by her best friend Katie. The book highlights the subtle bullying that takes place among females and is often overlooked. Monica eventually overcomes her issues with Katie with the help and support of her mother.

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“Speak” (1999)
By Laurie Halse Anderson
Lazare and discussion questions.

Where can I find books that deal with themes of anti-bullying?

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Lazare and discussion questions.

Books for Teens and Pre-Teens

“Please Don’t Cry, Cheyenne”
By Cindy J. Beard
The book follows Cheyenne, a junior high student who is bullied for her family’s poor financial status and her plain looks. She suffers humiliation at the hands of a “rich clique.” The story illustrates Cheyenne’s journey towards inner strength.

“Speak” (1999)
By Laurie Halse Anderson
Lazare and discussion questions.

“Letters to a Bullied Girl: Messages of Healing and Hope”
By Olivia Gardner, Emily Buder, and Sarah Buder
With accolades. It tells the story of the fictional Melinda Sardina, a high school freshman who becomes an outcast after calling the cops on a summer party. The book follows Melinda as she loses her friends, interest, and spirals into depression. Her only solace is art class, where she receives the support of her art teacher. It is eventually revealed that Melinda was the victim of a brutal rape at the party, which prompts her peers to express sympathy and support.

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“Breathing Underwater” (2001) by Rachel Simmons 

“Breathing Underwater” tells the fictional story of Nick Andrews, an abusive boyfriend, through his journal. The book reveals Nick’s thought patterns regarding his relationship with his girlfriend, Caitlin, his abuse, subsequent restraining order, and his journey through rehabilitation in a court-ordered family violence class. The book is unique in that it looks at teen violence through the eyes of the aggressor.

“Breaking Point” by Alex Flinn 

In her second novel, Flinn focuses on why teens commit violence. The protagonist, Paul, is targeted by bullies when he moves from homeschooling to a wealthy prep school. He is harassed because he is the son of a poor single mom and only has one friend. He is soon manipulated by Charlie, a popular boy, who convinces him to hack into the school’s computers. Things take a turn for the worse when another bullied student commits suicide. Eventually, Paul becomes so enamored with Charlie that he considers planting a bomb in the school to gain his acceptance. The book follows Charlie as he learns about himself and his relationships.

“Hate List” by Jennifer Brown 

By Alex Flinn 

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GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

glaad.org
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