



➤➤➤ LGBTQ Students—Providing a Safe and Respectful School Environment

DID YOU KNOW



As a substitute employee, if you witness or suspect bullying or harassment of any type, it is your responsibility to know, and follow your school’s reporting policies.

In This Document...

The goal of this document is to provide information about students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) and how school staff members can create an environment that is safe for them. Based on NEA recommendations, we will share :

- **Why** it is so important
- **Define** LGBTQ
- **Tips** for working with LGBTQ students

Why?

All students regardless of their sexual orientation face personal challenges. LGBTQ students often have additional difficulties. These may include a lack of acceptance from their peers or the school community leading to bullying and harassment issues. Such challenges cause higher dropout rates, depression, and suicides among LGBTQ students. Providing all students with a safe environment is the most important responsibility you have as an authority figure in the school environment. Creating a culture of respect, positivity and acceptance reduces bullying and harassment, causes a reduction in student absences and increases academic achievement.

Defining LGBTQ

The NEA defines LGBTQ students as:

- **Lesbians:** females attracted to females
- **Gays**—persons attracted to people of their own gender
- **Bisexual**—people who are attracted to both males and females
- **Transgender**—people whose gender identify differs from the sex they were assigned at birth
- **Queer or Questioning**—people who may be figuring out their gender identity

Tips and Strategies

As an authority figure in the school environment, there are a few basic steps that you can implement to help LGBTQ students feel safe.

1. Intervene immediately when you witness bullying or harassment
2. Communicate demonstrate to students the appropriate policy and conduct to follow
3. Approach students who are bullied to offer assistance
4. Search out some of the training offerings offered for free to you on [SafeSchools](#) courtesy of Kelly.

Professional Boundaries

Regardless of personal feelings or intentions, it is **not** the role of the substitute educator to advise or comment on a student’s sexual orientation or gender identity. This includes advising whether or when to disclose this information to others, including family members. Do not engage in these personal types of discussions with students.

What is your role is to preserve a safe environment for students under your watch and to maintain a positive learning environment. If any student is being subjected to bullying, intimidation, or harassment including LGBTQ “teasing”, it is your responsibility to follow the school’s reporting policies to ensure their safety. **Taking action immediately while carefully following the district’s anti-bullying policy is the first and most powerful step to thwart bullying and harassment in schools.**

Continue on to the next page for some key word tracks and phrases you can use as suggested by the National Education Association.

What do you say to ‘That’s so Gay’ and other anti-LGBTQ comments?

Source: <http://www.nea.org>

Warning: the following contains words and phrases that are difficult to hear and read in print. We reference these words only because you may encounter them in your day-to-day interactions and not out of disrespect. This content condensed from the National Education Association.

Whether it’s a first grader who might not know what the word ‘gay’ means, or a sixth grader trying to sound cool, or a tenth grader ‘teasing’ a friend – you should be prepared to deal with the situation. All of these scenarios have the potential of creating an unsafe classroom or school environment and must be addressed as they constitute bullying and/or harassment. Here are some ways to do so:

Stop It:

Keep it simple with quick responses:

- “Remember we don’t use put-downs in this class”
- “Do you know what ‘gay’ means?”
- “It’s not OK at this school to use ‘gay’ disrespectfully to mean something is bad.”
- “You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word ‘gay’ to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful.” Follow-up with, “Do you know why it is hurtful?”
- “Using the word ‘homo’ to tease someone is harassment and is unacceptable.”
- “Even if you didn’t mean to offend people who are gay, it is offensive to call this assignment gay (or queer); if you don’t like something, then say you don’t like it”
- “It is never OK to say, ‘you act like a girl (or look like a boy)’ as a put-down.”
- “Using the words ‘queer’, ‘dyke’ or ‘fag’ to joke around is not OK. These are hurtful words and can impact anyone who overhears them.”
- “It doesn’t matter who said it, I don’t want to hear that kind of language again. Is that clear?”

Don’t Ignore It

- Harassment does not go away on its own.
- Ignoring mean name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse.
- If other students do not see action, they get the message there is nothing wrong with it.
- Not speaking up teaches the student targeted, as

well as anyone within hearing range, that they will not be protected from harassment.

- Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say, but you must stop the harassment.
- Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling and harassment isn’t always easy. With experience you will become more comfortable in handling it. Practice with colleagues.
- You can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond well.

Be Proactive

- Develop an environment of respect and caring for all students in your school and classroom using inclusive language, books and other materials.
- Enforce schoolwide and classroom policies against hurtful teasing and bullying. Ensure that all students understand what the policies are and why they are important.
- Be explicit that rules against hurtful name-calling include “That’s gay!” “Homo!” “Fag!” “Tranny!” “Sissy!” and other LGBTQ put-downs.
- Develop the capacity of students and educators to be allies that stand up for students who are harassed.

