

Supporting LGBTQ Youth in our Schools and Communities

Questions and Answers from participants at the May 10, 2011 Webinar

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Q: Where can we get resources to have in the office in support of LGBTQ or images reflecting diversity? We are in a small rural environment with very little resources for LGBTQ support.

A: The Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, offers a **Safe Space Kit** designed to help educators create a safe space for LGBT youth in schools. Go to: www.glsen.org and click on **Store**.

The Kit is \$ 15.00 (plus shipping and handling; taxable in NY State) through the **GLSEN Store**. It contains:

- 42-page *Guide to Being an Ally*
- 10 full color *Safe Space* stickers
- 2 full color *Safe Space* posters (14x18)

Q: Do members of the LGBT population use terms like gay, fag, and queer with each other the same way that some young Black youth use the word nigga? I have been around young blacks and they use nigga all the time. But I have not been aware of being around the LGBT population to hear if they use related words the same way Blacks use this words.

A: Originally used in a derogatory manner, the term queer is increasingly being re-appropriated by young LGBTQ people as an identity to reflect their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It is important - weather LGBTQ or Straight - to be aware that words can hurt and have consequences on people's well-being. To be sensitive, it is important to check in with people about what terms they prefer to identify with and to respect those preferences.

Q: I work for Pennsylvania's Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services. This week we are going to have an adjudicated delinquent Transgender youth admitted into one of our programs. What are some of the most important issues that we should train our staff about? What are some of the best practices for meeting this youth's needs?

A. It is important to get a sense of Trans issues and have your staff aware of them and open to this young person's needs. A great resource is a video on *Transgender Basics* produced by the Gay Center. Staff can watch this video free online at:

<http://www.gaycenter.org/gjp/transbasics/video>

Many Transgender homeless youth need referrals for specific needs like providers for hormone therapy or legal counsel to help change name or gender markers on identification. A great service for finding these resources is

<http://www.glbtnearme.org/>

Q: From Jenn Burleton at TransActive - Is there recognition of the need to include "children" in our discussion of youth, particularly with regard to the development and expression of gender non-conforming identity? Too often, the focus on "sexual orientation" in youth overshadows the early challenges faced by kids who just don't conform to gender stereotypes.

A: It is very important that youth should include children of all ages. Many children who experience rejection or mistreatment for not conforming to gender stereotypes have less emotional fortitude and certainly less agency to deal with rejection or mistreatment the younger they are. The emotional scars left during this time can last a lifetime.

Q: I absolutely agree that they shouldn't modify the type of clothing they wear and so on, to prevent being harassed. I also agree that we have to put in the work to spread the acceptance and promote tolerance. Is it appropriate however to make the student aware that certain things may draw certain attention, so that they can be more aware and if they don't want certain attention then they will be more cautious, but on other days they can wear what they want confidently knowing they won't care what people say. but building their own self-awareness so they can inform their own decisions?

A: Many youth who are rejected by their peers for their dress - particularly if it is seen as "flamboyant" or gender non-conforming - are probably already very aware that this clothing may make them a target. However they are making the conscience choice that expressing their true sense of self is more important than hiding. It is important to remember that suppressing one's identity also has negative health outcomes. It may be more important to this young person that you accept them for who they are and how they present than to remind them of how they are different.

Q: What are strategies you would use for building self-acceptance in an LGBT middle school student, particularly in a counseling situation?

A: A great model for counseling can be found in this article:
Gay Affirmative Practice: A Model for Social Work Practice with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth
Catherine Crisp AE Emily L. McCave. Child Adolescent Social Work Journal (2007) 24:403-421

Q: Has the Safe Schools Improvement Act been passed?

A: No. The Safe Schools Improvement Act has been referred to committee in both The House and Senate and is still waiting for action.

Q: A 12 yr old youth who was born a young man enters a hospital and parent and youth request that the youth be served on a girls' unit, because although this youth was born with male genitalia he is a female. Mother is very impatient with staff who would dare to question –

A: If there is no medical reason why the youth could not be served on the girls unit than her gender should be respected and she should be treated like a girl by staff. This treatment is important to her psychological well-being.