Creating Spaces of Belonging

A Resource Guide for Educators, Students, and Families

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CHAMPIONING LGBTQ+ ISSUES IN K-12 SCHOOLS SINCE 1990

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Belonging is a fundamental need.

A 2023 literature review from The Kids Mental Health Foundation shares that children who experience belonging in one or more areas of their lives tend to:

- **Do better academically**
- **Feel safer and more included by peers**
- **Learn new skills**
- **Engage more confidently in social settings**

Prioritizing inclusivity is key to creating spaces of belonging.

According to GLSEN's 2021 National School Climate Survey:



81.8% of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe at school because of actual or perceived personal characteristics

68% of LGBTQ+ students reported hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks often or frequently at school.



We all have a role to play.

This guide provides actions and GLSEN resources that can help you foster greater belonging in your learning environments and broader community today.

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Resources for Educators

Educators and school administrators play a vital role in creating learning environments where every student feels seen, valued, and supported. By engaging with these materials, you'll gain valuable insights into addressing bias, fostering a sense of belonging, and building healthy relationships among all students:

68% **of LGBTQ+ students reported hearing anti-LGBTQ remarks often or frequently at school.**

60% **of LGBTQ students who reported an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it.**

The Belonging Blueprint

GLSEN Educator Advisory Council member, Gus R., shares recommendations on ways to foster belonging in a school setting:

- Implement comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ students.
- Provide professional development for staff on LGBTQ+ issues and creating inclusive classrooms.
- Support student-led clubs like gender-sexuality alliances (GSAs).
- Include LGBTQ+ history and perspectives in the curriculum, where possible.
- Consider displaying visible signs of support, such as Safe Space stickers or posters.

Inclusive Curriculum

Research shows students thrive academically when they feel seen and supported. Inclusive content serves as both a mirror and a window—affirming identities and building empathy. When students see themselves represented, they feel like they belong, while everyone gains understanding. We believe families and educators are best positioned to lead these conversations and provide resources to support them in doing so.

Including LGBTQ+ content creates a more positive environment where all students feel welcome and valued! Check out GLSEN's Inclusive Curriculum Guide to find easy ways to add more LGBTQ+ representation to your teaching materials and build a stronger sense of belonging in your classroom.

Additional resources and community building opportunities provided by GLSEN include:

GLSEN's School Year Calendar allows educators to plan events and lessons around social justice issues, diverse communities, and LGBTQ+ issues.



Changing the Game aims to empower educators and coaches to take actionable strategies that foster belonging both on and off the field.

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Resources for Students

Students can help make schools a place where everyone feels included and celebrated for who they are. By using these tools, you can learn how to advocate for yourself and your friends, start a GSA, and create a more welcoming environment. Your voice matters, and by embracing individuality and supporting one another, you can build a community rooted in belonging.

Your Journey, Your Identity

Exploring your identity is a key part of growing up, and understanding who you are - whether it's your gender identity, sexual orientation, or both - is a big piece of that journey. Gender identity relates to how you see yourself and how you share that with the world. Sexual orientation is about who you feel emotionally, romantically, or physically connected to. Both are deeply personal and may shift or evolve over time. Whether you're reflecting on your own identity, want to support a friend, or just learn more, GLSEN's resources are here to help.

To learn about the different aspects of gender identity like expression, attribution, and more, check out GLSEN and interACT's Gender Triangle. Additionally, GLSEN's Coming Out Resource offers advice on sharing your identity in a way that feels safe and comfortable for you.

Creating Community

GSAs (Gender and Sexuality Alliances) are student-led clubs that are a powerful force for fostering belonging and improving educational outcomes for LGBTQ+ students and allies. They provide:

- A safe space where students can socialize, find community and belonging, and peer support;
- A pathway for students to organize and advocate for inclusive policies and practices at school;
- A platform for greater education and awareness about LGBTQ+ issues within your school community.

To learn more about starting a GSA and access other GSA-related resources and activities, visit www.glsen.org/gsa.

Don't forget to follow @GLSEN on social media to stay up-to-date on youth topics, like the importance of queer friendship!

Tools for Tough Times

Taking care of your mental health is super important, especially if you find yourself in an unwelcoming environment. It's okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes, but also know there are tools and resources to help you feel stronger and more confident.

These worksheets can guide you through managing anxiety and overcoming self-doubt, so you can focus on being your best self:

- Managing Anxiety
- Conquering Imposter Syndrome

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Resources for Parents & Caregivers

Supporting the young people in your life and creating a world where they feel safe, accepted, and valued is paramount to kids' ability to thrive. By engaging with these materials, parents and caregivers can learn how to have meaningful conversations, address challenges, and cultivate environments where every child can thrive.

Understanding and Respecting Pronouns:

Pronouns are words we use to refer to people in place of their names, such as "she," "he," "they," or others that reflect their gender identity. They are a fundamental part of how we communicate and acknowledge one another. Pronouns can serve as an indicator of someone's gender identity, though they don't always tell the full story. It's essential to avoid making assumptions about gender based on external factors like clothing, hairstyle, or mannerisms. By creating space for individuals to share their pronouns, you demonstrate respect for their identity and foster a sense of belonging.

GLSEN's Pronoun Guide and Gender Terminology Guide are great places to start to learn about pronouns, key terms, practice their use, and make your support visible.

Mapping and Analyzing the Landscape:

The national landscape of LGBTQ+ rights and policies differ by state and territory. Understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people and the policies impacting them where you live can empower you to foster greater belonging in your community. By being informed, you'll be better able to identify gaps in support and hold schools and policymakers accountable.

GLSEN's State Report Card map is a comprehensive tool that maps policies and experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in K-12 schools across the U.S. Parents and caregivers can use this map to better understand local school climates, identify areas for improvement, and advocate for positive change.

Solidarity is voluntary, collective, sustained action based on an understanding that we don't all share the same risks, and we must work across differences to foster greater belonging and connectedness with LGBTQ+ young people.

In addition to educating yourself about LGBTQ+ terminology, identities, and issues, consider these other tips from GLSEN's National Student Council for showing solidarity with the LGBTQ+ youth in your life:

- Challenge Stereotypes and Myths: Disrupt stereotypes and misconceptions about LGBTQ+ people when you encounter them. The more you educate yourself, the more you'll be able to speak up.
- Listen Actively: Be a supportive and empathetic listener when LGBTQ+ young people share their experiences, challenges, and feelings with you.
- De-center Yourself: Create conditions that allow directly impacted communities to take front and center if they so wish. Remember that oftentimes those that are closest to the problems are also the closest to the solutions.
- Be Consistent: Inconsistencies erode trust and the practice of solidarity must be sustainable.
- Learn from Mistakes: Be open to learning and acknowledge if you make mistakes or have biases. It's a part of the journey toward solidarity!

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Looking for more resources to support LGBTQ+ youth?

Visit GLSEN's Resource Hub for curated content, literature, and tools for all ages.

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GLSEN is a national non-profit organization, working to create safe and inclusive K-12 learning environments for LGBTQ+ youth. Championing LGBTQ+ issues in K-12 education since 1990, we believe that every student has the right to safe, supportive, and affirming learning environments.

Visit us at GLSEN.org to learn more.