

# ~~THAT'S SO GAY~~ FIGHTING SLURS IN YOUR SCHOOL



GSA Network's anti-slur campaign manual, **TAKE IT BACK: A MANUAL FOR FIGHTING SLURS ON CAMPUS**, is a tool to help your GSA raise awareness about slurs on your campus, as well as to help you accomplish long-lasting positive change in your school. A lot of students hear slurs everyday on campus, but sometimes don't know how to combat them, and don't understand the damage that they can do. In an effort to give students an overview of this important campaign,

GSA Network has briefly summarized it below, but encourages everyone to check out the full version by requesting a copy or viewing it online at: [www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback](http://www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback)

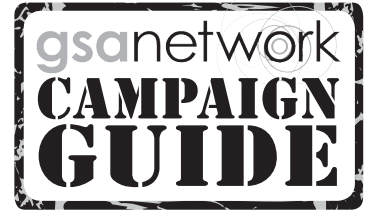
## What is a Slur? And What's the Big Deal About Using Slurs?

A *slur* is any offensive, insulting remark or comment that is meant to ridicule someone based on their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion, class, etc. Slurs create an unsafe environment on campus for students who are members of a targeted group and thus affects their ability to learn. A few examples of easily recognized slurs include "faggot," "FOB (*Fresh Off the Boat*)," and the n-word. But slurs also include commonly used words such as "ghetto" (implying that working class communities of color are bad or inferior), "bitch" (used against assertive, powerful women), and "retarded" (implies that people/things/situations are stupid, which implies that people with mental retardation are also stupid or inferior).

The problem with using this type of language is that it **reinforces the systems of power (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism)** that continually oppress folks who have less power; it's a way of ensuring that the people in power stay in power (see the *Power Chart* below). **In other words, slurs are tools of oppression.** Slurs keep others down and prevent people from joining together to fight all kinds of oppression.

### Power Chart

MORE POWER	LESS POWER	SLURS USED
Adults	Young or Elderly People	"kids," "old fart"
White People	People of Color	"FOB," the n-word, "wetback"
Men	Women/Intersex People	"bitch," "slut"
Gender-Conforming People	Gender Non-Conforming & Transgender People	"freak"
Rich/Middle-Class People	Poor/Working-Class People	"ghetto"
Christians	Non-Christians	"heathen," "uncivilized"



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# HATE FREE ZONE



**Note:** We recognize the fact that some terms such as "queer" and "dyke" have been reclaimed by some targeted communities. Some members of these communities see them as empowering whereas others may still see them as offensive. It's important to respect each individual's right to choose their own identity and labels as well as to see the difference between language used to target people and language used within a group.



# TAKE ACTION!

## Organize a campaign to fight slurs in your school.

*Your GSA can work on creating and carrying out a campaign to change your school. Whenever you plan a major campaign, there are a series of questions, situations, and tactics to consider. Developing a strategy will help you tremendously to be organized and strategic around your activist goals, no matter how small or big those goals may seem.*

**What is your overall goal?** While your long-term goal may be to eliminate or reduce slurs on your campus, it will help you to find a more immediate goal, too. For example, you may try to get some anti-slur policies passed at your school or district, which will then in turn give you some concrete legal language to continue in your quest. Then, when you begin considering specific tactics and actions, you can ask yourselves this question: “If we take this action, will it get us closer to our goal?”

**What do you know about your problem?** This is where research, tallies, surveys, and an evaluation of your findings become crucial!

**What are your strengths and weaknesses?** Honesty is key in this section of your planning. Think about the number of people working on your campaign, access to transportation, money, and also your group's morale. The more honest and thorough you are, the easier it will be for you to get organized.

**Who are your supporters? Who are your opponents?** Consider who will help you achieve your goal—who else wants to stop slurs on campus? Teachers? Student groups? Community members? Also think about who might try to prevent your campaign from being successful. It's not important to list every single person that you've ever heard say a slur; what's important is to list those who will organize against you.

**Tactics:** What actions will help you reach your goal? When brainstorming tactics, ask yourselves how each tactic will help you meet your campaign goal. Examples of tactics may include: getting students to sign a petition supporting what you are trying to do, asking parents to write supportive letters to the school board, or having students wear buttons or ribbons in support of your campaign.

**How will you get approval?** If your strategy requires school approval, it's important to think about who has the power to approve your tactic. It might be helpful to target one or two people instead of an entire group; find out who is undecided in a group, or find out who holds the power.

**Develop a timeline.** A timeline will help you keep track of what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and when it will be done. It's also a great way to keep track of your progress and to make sure that no details get lost along the way.

**What do you do after the campaign is over?** Once your campaign is over, it is important to spend some time evaluating what happened and what impact your group had on your community. If you won a victory such as changing school policy or getting teachers trained on campus, be sure to celebrate your success. If you weren't successful, think about what prevented you from succeeding.

**Finally, ASK FOR HELP!** Reach out to a supportive teacher, parent/guardian, and especially us here at GSA Network for help at any stage in your campaign. We're here to help and will do anything we can to make sure your campaign is successful!



# TACTICS & EVENTS

## Suggestions for your anti-slurs campaign

### Research & Evaluation

In order to solve a problem, it's important to understand it first. Researching the prevalence of slurs on your campus is a great way to begin the process of strategizing a campaign to fight slurs on your campus. You can conduct your research in a number of different ways (and you don't need approval to do these!):

- **Tally Slurs.** Have each GSA member tally the number of times in a day they hear slurs. It would be a good idea to also ask them to document when and where the slur was heard.
- **Keep Journals.** Have your GSA members keep a journal of incidents that they witness and the slurs they hear, and ask them to describe what happened (and when and where).
- **Collect Stories.** Have some GSA members write down their personal experiences being targeted by slurs and then put them together. But make sure they stay anonymous so that they won't feel uncomfortable sharing (as well as ensuring their safety).
- **Distribute Student Surveys Outside of Class.** This is an excellent way of gathering data, and can give you some concrete information to show your administrators when you try to get some anti-slur policies implemented. Pass surveys out during lunch, have a supportive teacher pass them out in his/her classroom, or get some snacks and invite people to fill them out during your GSA meeting. See the *TAKE IT BACK MANUAL* pp. 19-22, and a sample survey on p. 51: [www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback](http://www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback)

One of the benefits to having solid data backing up your claim that slurs are a problem on campus is that it gives you leverage when you're presenting the problem to the administration. In other words, it allows you to have a way of proving that slurs are a problem at your school and that they're causing students to feel uncomfortable or even unsafe.

### Peer Education

Educating your peers is perhaps one of the most effective ways of curbing slurs on your campus as well as making your school safer for everyone. The suggestions that follow below – and that don't require your school's approval – are also an opportunity to build coalitions with other school clubs.

- **Hold a teach-in after school.** Hold an educational session at your local church, community center, youth space, or with another supportive organization. You can also have a teach-in during your GSA meeting and invite other clubs and students to attend. Even better, plan and carry out your teach-in with other clubs. See the *TAKE IT BACK MANUAL* p. 52 for a sample agenda, [www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback](http://www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback)
- **Practice guerrilla theater.** This is a great way to attract attention to your cause. You can stage an incident where one of your GSA members uses a slur and other members then confront them. After explaining your purpose, you can then have a discussion on why slurs are hurtful. It's important to practice ahead of time, as well as assess the risks involved (such as getting in trouble even if you were acting).

### Teacher Education

In your efforts to promote a safe learning environment for all students, teachers can be powerful allies. By reaching out to and training teachers on the different school laws and policies that protect diversity on your campus, as well as educating teachers on the different terms that exist, you will have begun to garner the support of your administration. Here are some tips on reaching out to your teachers, neither of which requires prior administrative approval:

- **Cultivate & nurture teacher allies.** Meet with individual teachers who you feel are supportive of your cause. Ask them how they deal with slurs when they hear them, and have them commit to intervening regularly when they hear hate speech. Also ask them to talk to other supportive teachers and to encourage those teachers to do the same.
- **Conduct an off-campus voluntary teacher training.** Organize a teacher training after school or on the weekends. Get a local community organization to help you cover all of the important legal obligations that a school has to protect you from hateful speech. See the *TAKE IT BACK MANUAL* p. 54 for a sample agenda and p. 55 for a sample handout: [www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback](http://www.gsanetwork.org/takeitback)

## GSA Network provides FREE posters to any registered middle school or high school GSA in California.

For more details, contact your local GSA Network coordinator (see regional office info below).

### Visual Activism

Art activism is a powerful way of bringing attention to your cause. A well-designed poster campaign, for example, can effectively summarize the main points of your cause and can be a great way to get support from your fellow students and faculty.

- **Individual & Collective Activism.** Your GSA or a coalition can make armbands, buttons, T-shirts, ribbons, stickers, etc. with messages and slogans that will encourage others to take a stand against slurs. Encourage everyone to wear them on the same day or week to demonstrate unity, as well as to encourage (or pressure) your administration to lend you support in making your campus safer. It's also a good idea to plan around important events such as the Day of Silence or National Coming Out Day; you maximize your education this way!
- **Using Classrooms.** Your GSA or coalition might also be able to display posters in teachers' classrooms. If your administration allows your teachers the sole authority to decide what to put up on their walls, then this would be a great way to reach different groups of students day after day.



Poster design by GSA Network youth Andy Duran & Jack (Devin) Thompson.

THIS CAMPAIGN GUIDE BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

**gsanetwork**

For more ideas on how to fight  
homophobia & transphobia in your school,  
visit [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org).

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