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## **Speak Out -- LGBT Youth Empowerment in USA Today**

Sep. 2, 2011

USA Today spoke to GSA Network's Executive Director Carolyn Laub and featured five ways to Make It Better in a supplement by MediaPlanet! Click below to see a larger version of the page on bullying:



**Question:** How can teachers and other school leaders help provide a safe environment for youth?  
**Answer:** They can educate themselves about LGBT issues and promote equality in the classroom.

# Combating bullying

The schoolyard bully is a cliché of books and television. In reality, however, bullying can have serious, lasting consequences. And young people who are bullied because of their sexual orientation or gender identity often have fewer resources to help them.



Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced verbal or physical harassment at school in the previous year, according to a 2009 study by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). This was linked to increased depression and anxiety and decreased self-esteem. One of the Gay-Straight Alliances Network, says that students feel better because of and as part of social orientation, or gender identity experience "disproportionately high rates of negative consequences," including lower grades, dropping out of school, depression, and substance abuse. Thomas Korman, GLSEN executive

director of the match study, says, "The nation's oldest and largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) at-risk youth service provider, says that even when resources exist for LGBT youth, they may be hard to use. They are not open about being LGBT." Teachers and school administrators must educate themselves about bullying issues and connect to students' safety, "regardless of their own personal feelings," Korman asserts. "Safe space is a school isn't a privilege, it's a young person's right."

**Anti-bullying policies** must not focus on punishing bullies as a good first step toward awareness and accountability, he says, but must have adequate funding for monitoring and evaluating, monitoring, and staff training. Although adults must take action, Korman says, "students are leading this movement." One step is by forming gay-straight alliances (GSAs) to support each other and create positive change. There are some over 4,000 GSAs around the country, many with a large percentage of straight allies. Students feel safer if their school simply has a GSA, the

study found, such as that "the healthy sex coalition" in Ohio. And U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan issued a letter to state education leaders that the law requires every school meeting federal funds to provide all student groups, including GSAs, with equal access to school resources. "By encouraging dialogue and providing supportive resources," he wrote, "GSAs can help make schools safe and affirming environments for everyone."

Photo: iStockphoto.com

## Make it better now for LGBT youth

**1. Support a Gay-Straight Alliance in your school or community.** GSAs can be a life-saving source of support for students dealing with bullying. Share this support through a letter to the local paper, helping raise money for the club, or creating an online site like [www.gsa.org](http://www.gsa.org) that allows lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth to connect.

**2. Educate when you see bullying.** and spread the word that homophobic and transphobic slurs are unacceptable.

**3. Advocate for a non-discrimination or anti-bullying policy in your school.** Policies that specifically include protections for sexual orientation and gender identity are most effective. Make sure the school district has policies that protect, or that students experiencing harassment know how to get help.

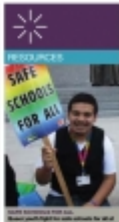
**4. Call up your Congressional representatives** and tell them to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act and the Student Non-Discrimination Act so that your local schools can learn about the standards and enforce legislation you should lobby for in your state.

**5. Write a letter** to your state school principal, let him or her know what is new for LGBT youth when you enter there, and ask the administration to make it better for today's students. Use the "Write a Letter, Make a Difference" at [www.makeitbetterproject.org](http://www.makeitbetterproject.org) for suggestions and to publish your story on its open letter.

**GSAs can be a life-saving source of support for students dealing with bullying.**

**6. Promote tolerance.** Civil rights government agencies on how kids, teens, young adults, parents, educators and others in the community can prevent or stop bullying.

**7. Welcoming Schools.** An LGBT inclusive approach to addressing family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying. Call 1-800-369-3333 or [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org)



**Safe Schools**  
 The presence of anti-LGBT language and discrimination are proven to have a negative effect on LGBT students' achievement. The safety of intervention can help boost the positive effects of a hostile school climate and promote a positive educational experience.

**The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)**  
 The leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

**GSA Network**  
 A youth leadership organization that connects school-based gay-straight alliances (GSAs) to each other and community resources through peer support, leadership development, and training. [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org)

**It Gets Better Project**  
 Offers personal videos that respond to LGBT teenagers that they are not alone—and it will get better. [www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org)

**PFLAG Safe Schools for All**  
 Collaborating Respect, a program to train and certify members to go directly into schools with community resources, staff training, model policies, and resource programs that address bullying and harassment. [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

**American Civil Liberties Union LGBT Project**  
 Schools and youth working to make public schools safe and free for LGBT students, defending their free speech in school, and making sure students can talk about their rights. [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)

**The Matthew Shepard Foundation**  
 Supports diversity groups in education and helps youth organizations establish environments where young people can feel safe and be themselves. [www.mshepard.org](http://www.mshepard.org)

**Safe Schools Coalition**  
 An international public policy organization that supports public schools and promotes safe schools. [www.safe-schools.org](http://www.safe-schools.org)

**Stonewall Youth**  
 Provides information, resources, and support for young people in the community who are experiencing bullying. [www.stonewall-youth.org](http://www.stonewall-youth.org)

**Welcoming Schools**  
 An LGBT inclusive approach to addressing family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying. Call 1-800-369-3333 or [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org)

[1]

<http://www.mediaplanet.com/> [2]

News Article  
 USA Today

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**Links**

- [1] <http://www.makeitbetterproject.org/sites/makeitbetter/files/SpeakOut-USA Today-GSAN.pdf>
- [2] <http://www.mediaplanet.com/>