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Speak Out -- LGBT Youth Empowerment in USA Today

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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. Gayle P. Lath, executive director of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network, says that students feel bullied because of not a perceived 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 network states teachers, 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. "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 exist and focus on including policies 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, Lath says, "Students are leading this movement." One step is by forming gay-straight alliance (GSA) clubs to support each other and create positive change. There are some over 4,000 clubs 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 benefits are amplified" for at-risk youth participants. And U.S. Secretary of Education Van Dewine issued a letter to state education leaders that the law requires every school meeting federal funds to provide all student groups, including clubs, with equal access to school resources. "By encouraging dialogue and providing supportive resources," he wrote, states "can help make schools safe and affirming environments for everyone."

Photo: iStockphoto.com

Make it better now for LGBT youth

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth shouldn't have to suffer through bullying in school. Here are some concrete steps you can take to make it better now for LGBT:

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 donating books that address lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth issues on www.makeitbetter.org.

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

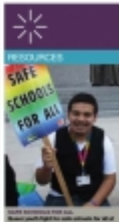
3 Advocate for a non-discrimination or anti-bullying policy in your school district that specifically includes protections for students and students toward gender identity and expression. Make sure the school district has policies that protect, or that students experiencing harassment know how to get help.

4 Call up your Congressional representatives and tell them to support the Safe Schools Improvement Act.

and the Student Non-Exclusion Act so that your local school can learn about the statewide anti-bullying legislation you should lobby for in your state.

5 Write a letter back 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. Go to www.makeitbetter.org for suggestions and to publish your story on its open forum.

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



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

GSA Network
 A youth leadership organization that empowers school-based gay-straight alliances (GSAs) to work effectively and consistently nationwide through peer support, leadership development, and training. 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

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 creative programs that address bullying and harassment. 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

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

Safe Schools Coalition
 An international public policy organization that supports public schools and transgender youth. 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

Welcoming Schools
 An LGBT-inclusive approach to addressing family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying, and same-gender life. www.welcomingschools.org

[1]

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

News Article
 USA Today

Source URL: <https://gsanetwork.org/news/speak-out-lgbt-youth-empowerment-usa-today/090211#comment-0>

Links

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