

HOW TO BE AN AWESOME ADVISOR

www.gsanetwork.org



GSAs are clubs run by and for students. However, these clubs would not be possible without the advisors who open the doors of their classrooms and offer support to students in GSAs.

Advisors offer advice and assistance, while supporting students in taking on leadership and making their own decisions. To start a GSA, students need a faculty advisor (typically a teacher, staff member, counselor, librarian, or nurse) who is supportive or has already shown him or herself to be an ally around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity at school. Advisors offer continuity from year to year, as student leadership often changes.

As an adult in a school, the advisor has the ability to communicate with and educate other faculty and administrators. Having faculty and administrators as advocates helps students feel safe, supported, and empowered. Adult allies can help other adults learn to respect young people's rights to be treated fairly and express themselves.

Advisors are behind-the-scenes advocates, allies, and mentors.

Advisors can be allies to youth starting GSAs by...

- Offering positive encouragement and advice in starting the GSA club.
- Providing a safe space to meet and materials to use.
- Helping create the GSA's constitution and mission statement.
- Promoting the club to teachers, staff, and administrators.
- Speaking up for students' rights to express themselves and form clubs.
- Using neutral labels like "partner" and "significant other" and stopping the use of slurs.
- Locating other adult allies for support in addressing the anti-LGBT climate at school.
- Intervening when a co-worker engages in anti-LGBT comments or actions.
- Becoming familiar with federal and state laws, as well as district policies that protect LGBT students, and speaking up to administrators if those laws aren't being followed.

Youth-Adult Partnership in GSA clubs

- Evaluate the structure of the organization: Did youth or adults start the group? Who leads the group? Have both youth and adults always participated?
- Define the differences in leadership roles and set clear expectations for youth and adult leaders.
- Prioritize youth leadership and facilitation and focus on leadership training and skill-building for students.
- Follow a specific process for planning events and projects in your GSA. Make sure responsibilities are clearly designated and expectations are well-defined.
- Frequently evaluate group dynamics: Do adult advisors and student leaders both feel supported? Do youth members feel they have power and control in the group?
- If adults tend to outnumber youth or dominate the GSA, consider forming a separate Gay-Straight Teacher's Alliance or a faculty support group.
- If adult advisors wish to be involved in setting meeting agendas (or are required to by school policy), make sure that a youth leader is also involved in the process.
- If adult advisors have concerns about a particular project, voice these by asking questions instead of handing down authoritative decisions.
- Make sure youth have opportunity to finish their own tasks and responsibilities with help only when asked.