

DEALING WITH APATHY

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What is Apathy?

Apathy is a “lack of concern or interest; indifference.” [Source: Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary]. In terms of LGBTQ issues, apathy is the feeling in your community or school that nothing further needs to be done to promote acceptance and positive change.



When Does Apathy Occur?

Apathy tends to occur once a school or community has reached a level of tolerance, but not full acceptance, toward the LGBTQ community and issues. Apathy appears in environments where the majority of people believe LGBTQ-related problems to be non-existent, often because overt discrimination does not happen, though discreet forms of discrimination or intolerance, such as use of the phrase “that’s so gay,” reveal that true and full acceptance has not yet been achieved.

How Can a GSA Deal with Apathy?

• Involve the Whole School

- Talk to accepting teachers and ask them to advertise your club or bring students to your meetings. Develop a GSA-led anti-bias seminar for all incoming freshman. Contact various school departments and ask them to get involved. For example, the theater department could stage an LGBTQ-themed play such as the Laramie Project, the English department could incorporate LGBTQ-themed books into the curriculum, and the school library could display a collection of LGBTQ-themed young adult novels. This visibility can do two things: [1] help raise awareness about what challenges the LGBTQ community faces outside your school, and [2] help other students see how active the GSA club is in making a difference at school, which may inspire them to join your club.

• Make the GSA More Than Just a “Gay” Club

- Form a coalition with other clubs focused on social justice, equality, and civil rights in your school to host joint meetings and events, bringing more people together. This will broaden the image of your club by dealing with more than just LGBTQ issues. If people feel like they can relate to the issues that you talk about, they are more likely to want to get involved.

• Use Large Crowds to your Advantage

- Focus on events that will draw large crowds rather than small, intimate group gatherings, which can be intimidating for people who are considering joining. Plus, the more people you can engage, the more who will be interested next time. For example, bringing in a dynamic outside speaker who will energize people and motivate them to come to your other events.



• Get the Word Out

- Work on your publicity! Create a poster campaign, where you display a series of posters that publicize your club or bring to light issues that face the LGBTQ community outside your school. If your administration allows it, use sidewalk chalk to make large, unavoidable signs in the main areas where students walk or congregate at lunchtime. Get permission to announce your meetings and events at school-wide assemblies. Delegate tasks or take volunteers to help with different aspects of outreach and other club responsibilities.

• Spice It Up!

Fun activities engage and excite people about your club. Here are some activities to try:

- **Food:** Attract more people by appealing to their taste buds. Although some people might come just for the food, hopefully they'll find themselves engaged when they hear what you have to say. You could bring in LGBTQ "themed" foods, like skittles or rainbow-frosted cupcakes.
- **Movies:** Depending on your audience and the goal you have in mind, you could pick a movie that directly relates to LGBTQ issues or you could pick something more indirectly related. For example, you could screen Philadelphia, a movie about a gay man with AIDS suing his employer for discrimination, or you could show Bend it Like Beckham, a movie with gay themes but one that is not directly about any LGBTQ issues. Plus, watching a movie can lead into a discussion about the issues the movie raises.
- **Games:** Use a game as an icebreaker or even as the main event at a meeting to interest people who want to be more active.
- **Trips:** Go somewhere as a group outside of school. Host a picnic at a local park. Attend an LGBTQ-themed theater performance. Apply to attend a GSA Network conference or training.

• Start Writing

- Compose an editorial for your school newspaper. Some GSAs find that newspaper articles both legitimize their club and get their message out to a wider audience. You could write about why a GSA is still necessary at your school, point out things within the school that need to change, or identify issues currently facing the LGBTQ community.

• Facebook and Social Media are your Friends

- Social media is a great way to get your message out and renew interest in your club. Consider making a group for your club on sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram and then adding club events to the group page. You could also create an email address specifically for your club, like yourGSA@yahoo.com, and use it to keep club members up-to-date about upcoming events, meetings, and activities. Be sure to add yourself to GSA Network's Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr accounts. Find us on each @GSANetwork!

• Change Your Meeting Schedule

- Sometimes when club membership goes down, scheduling, not apathy, may be the real culprit. Weekly meetings may be too frequent. Consider spacing your meetings out, and having them every other week or once a month. Even your busiest members ought to be able to squeeze in a meeting here and there, and they may prioritize the GSA meetings if they know they are less frequent.

• Support Social Activists

- Allow your club to be not just a support club, but a social club and an activist club as well. Show the school that you know how to have fun and make a difference.

