

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth
Information for Teachers

Definitions

GLBT/LGBT is a collective term to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people.

A **lesbian** is a female who is exclusively emotionally, sexually, romantically and/or aesthetically attracted to other females.

The term **gay** is used to refer to same-sex sexual orientation (both male and female).

The term **bisexual** is the human sexual orientation that refers to the aesthetic, romantic, or sexual desire for people of either gender or of either sex.

Transgender is an overarching term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviors, and groups involving tendencies that diverge from the normative gender role (women or men) commonly, but not always, assigned at birth, as well as the role traditionally held by society.

The process of “**coming out**” describes the voluntary public announcement of one’s (often homosexual or bisexual) sexual orientation, sexual attractions, gender identity, or paraphilia.

-“**being out**” is when an individual does not try to hide these characteristics.

-“**being outed**” occurs when these characteristics are made public against one’s wishes or against one’s consent.

If an individual is said to be “**questioning**,” it most often means that they are going through a phase of exploration and possible transition regarding his/her sexual orientation. Another definition is that the “**questioning**” period is the initial phase prior to “coming out.”

Homophobia is the fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals. It can also mean hatred or disapproval of homosexual people, their lifestyles, sexual behaviors or cultures, and is generally used to assert bigotry.

Why do we care?

- GLBT students are far more likely to skip classes and drop out of school.
- GLBT students are at a higher risk for substance abuse.
- GLBT students are subjected to harassment, violent threats, physical/sexual assault, slurs, insults, and jokes (the average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs daily).
- GLBT students are more prone to depression and loneliness.
- GLBT students attempt suicide 2 to 3 times more frequently than their heterosexual peers.

What can you do about it?

- **Serve as a model for other students.** Be sensitive to the language you use and put an end to any discriminatory jokes or language that you hear.
- **Be an ally.** Educate yourself as to the needs and experiences of GLBT youth and their families. Make yourself available to listen to problems that GLBT kids may be having

both in school and at home. Indicate that you are an ally by placing a rainbow sticker or something similar on your classroom door.

- **Help make schools safer.** Urge your school to develop anti-discrimination policies protecting GLBT students from bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination. The APA has created their own policies related to GLBT youth in the schools which can be found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbc/policy/youths.html>.
- **Speak with colleagues** about the importance of protecting GLBT youth.
- **Start a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA).** Recruit other allies from the faculty and student body to begin a student run club that serves as a safe place for anyone to come and discuss GLBT issues.
 - If resistance is encountered by parents:
 - Create a broad support network; ensure that each person knows that the real issue is safety for students.
 - Explain to parents that a GSA is not about “sex” or promoting homosexuality, use evidence based facts that support what you hope to accomplish.
 - Some may feel that it is not part of the school’s role; however, protecting students is part of a school’s role.

Key Resources/Links

- For information on starting a GSA at your school: <http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/start.html>
- *It’s Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School* (*Women’s Educational Media*, <http://www.womedia.org>) is a documentary that focuses on teachers challenging common stereotypes and mistreatment of gays within their own schools. The film shows children (some as young as first grade) reacting to information about the gay community and questions that are discussed in the classroom.
- <http://members.tripod.com/~twood/guide.html> is a resource guide for different strategies to keep schools safe for GLBT students.
- <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html> is the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, their mission is to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. They have many resources on this website from current research to education on putting policies into action.
- <http://www.aclu.org/lgbt/youth/24003pub20060131.html> gives access to a downloadable version of the *Making Schools Safe Training Manual* from the ACLU.
- <http://www.lambda.org/youth.htm> is a website designed specifically for GLBT youth. It includes information about how to handle bullying and discrimination as well as safe places and activities for GLBT youth.

**Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance (<http://www.msmha.org>).*