

# CREATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS



Thank you for reading this handout. Just by picking this up, you have shown a willingness to learn more and support LGBTQ+ students in your school, and that matters. We created this handout for teachers and educational professionals who want to create an inclusive environment in their schools, regardless of a student's orientation and gender. Here, you will find suggestions for influencing the environment in which students learn and tips for demonstrating your support of their identity.

Thank you to Savvy Ally Action for the following information. Visit <https://www.savvyallyaction.com> for more resources and information. Portions of this information were taken from *The Savvy Ally: A Guide for Becoming a Skilled LGBTQ+ Advocate*.

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## **Silence: A Loud and Clear Message**

Straight and cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) people see themselves represented constantly in school curricula. There is no doubt in any student's mind that straight and cisgender people have invented cool stuff, created awesome art, built tall buildings, and won Pulitzer Prizes. A student working their way through an average K-12 school system might get the impression that no LGBTQ+ person had ever done anything of consequence or contributed anything to our society. According to a 2019 GLSEN\* survey, only one out of five students report seeing LGBTQ+ people and families represented in their school's curriculum in a positive way. Four states now mandate the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and families in their K-12 curricula, but another six states actually forbid teachers from representing LGBTQ+ people in a positive way. Schools' silence about LGBTQ+ people and families sends a loud and clear message that being LGBTQ+ is problematic. Positive representation of LGBTQ+ people and families in our schools reduces stigmas, creates safer environments, and increases healthy social interactions among students, parents, and school staff.

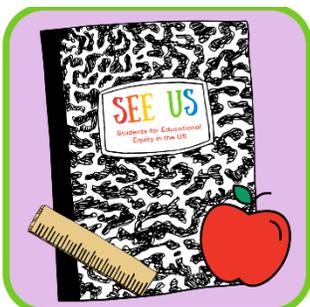
## **Relax! It's Not about Sex**

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools is the misunderstanding that conversations will be about sex. The fear is that if a teacher reads a story about two princes falling in love, the teacher will need to be prepared to answer questions about sex. Let's implement the wonderful "switch it" technique here. When a teacher reads a story about a prince and a princess falling in love, does the teacher need to be prepared to answer questions about sex? Probably not. But in either case, if questions about sex arise, the teacher will give an age-appropriate response about love and families. Being out as an LGBTQ+ student, parent, or school staff member is not about the bedroom. It's about living freely and authentically. \* GLSEN is an organization working to create safer and more LGBTQ+ inclusive K-12 school.

## Five Best Practices for Ally Action

Many children have a sense of whom they are attracted to by the age of 12 or 13 and many have a stable sense of their gender identity by age 5. LGBTQ+ children are likely to be watching and listening for signs that their teachers, school counselors, and other school staff are LGBTQ+ supportive. Below are some best-practice tips for creating inclusive schools with your language, behaviors, and activities.

- 1) Include LGBTQ+ people and families in everyday curriculum.** Children and adolescents should see themselves and their families represented in school curriculum. Don't save conversations about LGBTQ+ identities for health class. Normalize being LGBTQ+ by choosing books and films with diverse characters, representing different kinds of families in mathematical word problems, highlighting LGBTQ+ civil rights leaders in history class, talking about LGBTQ+ athletes in physical education, and discussing natural biological variation in science class.
- 2) Ungender language and activities.** Don't assume gender when you talk with students, staff, and parents. Use parents and guardians or just adults instead of mom and dad, students instead of boys and girls, and friends, folks, scholars, or team instead of guys. Update forms to include gender-neutral language. Instead of lining up by boys and girls, get creative. Have some fun with sock color, birth months, or favorite seasons. If you use endearments like love or sweetheart, make sure you're using the same ones for all the students, regardless of gender.
- 3) Don't tolerate put downs.** Even though saying, "That's so gay" isn't always meant in a mean way, it is still a put down and an opportunity for a teacher or staff member to step in and educate. Let students know why their language is not okay. Encourage them to come up with more creative, less hurtful comments. Try the "switch it" technique here and think about how you teach students not to use racial slurs or make body-shaming comments. Use those same techniques to educate about LGBTQ+ slurs and jokes.
- 4) Ask everyone how you should refer to them.** Gather information from students, parents, and other school staff members about how you should properly address them and refer to them. Consider offering your information first. For example, "Hi. I'm Beatrice Johnson. Please call me Bea. My pronouns are she, her, and hers."
- 5) Visibly indicate your support.** Showing visible support for the LGBTQ+ communities saves lives. Create a safer and more welcoming school by wearing a rainbow button or hanging a rainbow sign that says, "All students and families welcome here." Add your pronouns to your desk nameplate, door sign, webpage and/or email signature. Create a display for Pride Month in June or LGBT History Month in October.



This flyer is presented courtesy of Students for Educational Equity in the United States. SEE US was founded in 2020 to offer support to students and families who face challenges accessing a safe and inclusive educational experience. For more information, visit <https://studentsforeducationalequity.org>