

Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgendered Persons

NEA has created two new resources to help education employees address and eliminate the bullying and harassment that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students often experience. One of the resources is a manual called *Strengthening the Learning Environment: a School Employee's Guide to GLBT Issues*, second edition, and the other is a series of workshops, whose umbrella name is "The National Training Program on School Safety, Bias, and GLBT Issues".

Strengthening the Learning Environment provides resources to accomplish the goal of providing a safe school environment for all students, whether GLBT or not. The updated manual incorporates the latest changes and developments in facts, legal issues, tips, and resources affecting schools and GLBT students.

Expanded to address the needs of not only students but school employees as well, the revised manual addresses many GLBT-related issues that educators face daily in the classroom. At the same time, the manual provides answers to some of the most frequently asked questions surrounding GLBT issues, such as:

- **Is it appropriate to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity in the classroom?**

GLBT issues are best taught in ways that are both age-and-situation appropriate. Examples of age-appropriate lessons include family diversity, current events, science and health, and civil rights. Although it is never appropriate to discuss same gender sexuality with young children, it is suitable to discuss biases, discrimination, sexual orientation, gender identity, and diverse communities without approaching topics related to human sexuality. More in-depth answers to this question can be found in the "Facts" section of the manual.

- **Can I tell if someone's gay or lesbian?**

The only way you can know an individual's sexual orientation is if that person tells you. A common misconception is that gay or lesbian individuals do not conform to gender stereotypes of masculine or feminine behavior. Consequently, some people believe they can spot someone who is GLBT, which is simply not true.

Sexual orientation is not the same as gender expression or behavior. A person might be GLBT and not even think of himself or herself as gay or lesbian. Indeed, they can be bisexual, self-identified, questioning, or straight. Therefore, it's best

not to assume anyone's sexual orientation on the basis of his or her behavior. To get a more complete answer to this question, see the "Facts" portion of the manual.

The publication also contains information on other related topics, including suggested terms that are appropriate for school employees to use when addressing GLBT members of the school community, which begs another frequently asked question.

- **How do I address students when they use words such as "gay" or "dyke" to taunt a fellow student?**

Slurs that reference sexual orientation and gender identity should always be addressed. The "Tips" section provides many examples and tactics to help education employees intervene when they encounter the verbal abuse of GLBT students.

One tactic used for addressing GLBT slurs is a brief response that all education employees can use when words, such as "faggot" are directed at students: **"__" is a word that insults gay and lesbian people. I want to remind you that there are or there may be gay and lesbian people at this school, and when you use words like that you make them feel unsafe and unwelcome. It is important to me that everyone at this school feels safe and welcome. I don't want you to use that word anymore.** (From: www.mazzonicenter.org)

The manual also advises educators to be mindful of what they say. Because there are many types of families, it's important to be sensitive when naming or addressing them. Using terms like parents or guardians, as opposed to moms and dads, broadens the panorama of familial relationships. They are also more inclusive and eliminate the ammunition that some non-GLBT students could use against their GLBT counterparts. Moreover, by setting examples in the terms they use, educators can provide models for students to emulate in their behavior.

Beyond negative terms that are sometimes directed at GLBT students, the manual also addresses some current misconceptions, such as:

- **All GLBT members are white.**

Unfortunately, such misconceptions only serve to undermine the needs and struggles of ethnic minority GLBT members. People of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are GLBT. The fact is that 45% of GLBT youths of color are verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation *and* race or ethnicity.



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Consequently, these students often have to cope with intense alienation from their families, their minority group, the white GLBT community, and the majority white world. The result: gay ethnic minority students have an attempted suicide rate that is nearly double the rate of white gay students.

In addition to data containing such statistics, the "Tips" portion of the manual also provides a section on understanding sexual orientation and racial/ethnic minorities to help education employees to become aware of the different hardships that minority GLBT students face.

Of course, the manual contains other useful information that can be applied in the classroom to aid in the promotion of a safe school environment. By providing educators with a knowledge base that can assist them in handling several GLBT issues in the school environment, the manual can be an asset for every school employee who is concerned about school safety. To download a copy, go to <http://www.nea.org/takenote/glbguide06.html>

NEA's GLBT Workshops Pave the Way

After reading *Strengthening the Learning Environment*, an education employee might want to see theory put into practice first-hand. That's easy. NEA conducts a series of three GLBT workshops for affiliates and groups from all regions of the country.

Under the rubric of "The National Training Program on School Safety, Bias, and GLBT Issues," three workshops, each 90-120 minutes in length, can be delivered separately or together upon request by certified trainers at little or no cost to schools, school districts, state affiliates, or local affiliates.

The workshops are geared toward assisting educators in designing lessons to raise awareness of bias against GLBT students so that educators can empower students to advocate for change in their schools, especially in reducing, or even eliminating, incidents of GLBT harassment and abuse.

The workshops, which are designed for all school personnel, not just teachers, also provide many activities to help participants ask the crucial questions and find the right answers. The introductory workshop, for example, "Taking a Stand," utilizes video clips and hands-on activities to examine the obvious and subtle ways that bias plays out in schools. It also provides resources for creating schools that are safe for all students, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

One of the workshop activities called 'Act Like a Guy/Act Like a Girl' sheds light on the link between GLBT biases and gender assumptions. The activity also shows how individuals often are the targets of harassment and bullying simply because they are not gender conforming. The goal of the activity is to promote under-

standing and to help students who might fall into this category.

Another workshop, "Walking the Talk," is designed to examine various approaches for integrating activities into the classroom that raise awareness of bias and empower students to advocate for change. An activity in this workshop, called 'Not Just a Bystander' is interactive and allows students to feel the effects of bullying by involving them in a skit. The goal of this activity is to give students who are targets of bullying, as well as students who witness it, the skills to handle bullies and groups in non-violent ways. Indeed, the secondary goal of this activity might seem difficult, which is to assist GLBT students in making allies of the students who bully them.

Workshops & Descriptions

- **Taking A Stand: Creating Safe Schools for All Students**

This introductory workshop, designed for all school personnel, uses video clips and hands on activities to examine the obvious and subtle ways that bias plays out in schools. It also offers resources for creating schools that are safe for all students, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

- **Making the Case: Communication Strategies on GLBT Issues**

This introductory workshop, designed for educators and education leaders, provides an overview of effective messaging and communication strategies on controversial issues, as well as resources and models for talking to constituents about the need to address GLBT bias in schools.

- **Walking the Talk: Classroom Resources for Addressing Bias**

This advanced workshop, designed for k-12 classroom instructors, examines various approaches to designing and integrating activities into the classroom that raise awareness of bias and empower students to advocate for change, especially around GLBT bias.

To request a workshop, please contact:
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