



Creating a Safe School Environment for **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Non-conforming Children**

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We Understand:

- ✓ The origins and nature of sexual orientation and gender identity are complex and for some, controversial.
- ✓ What is not controversial is that ALL MARYLAND STUDENTS deserve a safe and nurturing learning environment regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity and gender expression.
- ✓ YOU have tremendous power and opportunity to influence students' experience.



Objectives:

- ✓ Understand and appreciate the importance of safe schools.
- ✓ Explore your own stereotypes, myths and experiences in a safe, non-judgmental learning environment.
- ✓ Enable you to help gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, questioning and gender non-conforming students to succeed.
- ✓ Increase your confidence in answering questions from students, families and staff.
- ✓ Play a game, tell some stories and save time for Q&A.



Understanding Our Own Perspectives



- What were some of the first things you ever learned about lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people? (Positive, negative, neutral?)
- Who taught you those perspectives and how were they communicated?
- How would your childhood experiences affect how you respond to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender non-conforming children?
- Have your life experiences changed you?
- Would anyone like to share their thoughts on this?

Why? Because Our Youth Are Vulnerable



- **Suicide:** LGB youth are 2-3 times more likely to attempt suicide; 1 in 2 trans children have attempted suicide before age 20.
- **Harassment:** 85% experience verbal harassment; 25% physical harassment and assault; 65% of those never report it
- **Prejudice:** 90% hear “gay” used in a negative way frequently or often at school; unfortunately they hear it from staff too.
- **Safety:** 61% of LGB kids and 82% of trans kids feel unsafe at school.
- **Homelessness:** One in four children who come out to their parents are thrown out of their home due to conflicts with religious and moral values. 20-40% of homeless youth in urban areas are LGBT kids.



Why? Because Our Youth Are at Academic Risk



- **Absenteeism:** 30% have skipped a day in the last month because of the harassment they suffer.
- **Dropping Out:** Up to 28% of LGBT kids drop out of school.
- **Threatened:** 31% were threatened or injured in the past year.
- **Lower Academic Performance:** Those frequently harassed have a lower GPA (2.7 vs. 3.1) and are less likely to pursue college.
- **Lower Ability to Focus:** They fear for their physical and psychological safety.
- **Straight Kids** perceived to be gay are at the same risk.
- **Proactively addressing LGBTQ youth safety** issues will help your school meet both its safety and academic goals.



Words Matter: Definitions



- **Romantic (or Sexual) Orientation:** A core aspect of our identity defining who we love and are attracted to; believed to be developed by adolescence
- **Heterosexism (heteronormative):** The assumption that our children are heterosexual and that being straight is “normal”
- **Lesbian:** A woman who is attracted to women
- **Gay:** A man who is attracted to men; also used as an umbrella term for the lesbian, gay and bisexual community
- **Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to both genders
- **Pansexual:** Someone attracted to all gender identities

Words Matter: Definitions



- **Gender Assignment:** Based on body parts; how the doctor defines the baby's sex
- **Gender Identity:** Based on internal sense of who we are; it can appear very early, even pre-verbal. Can be clear and stable; can be fluid.
- **Gender Expression:** How we express our gender in dress, movement, gestures, etc. May be mildly different from what others expect of us or it may be so bold as to be considered "variant." Aka gender creative
- **Transgender or Trans:** An umbrella term for any person whose gender identity differs from their gender assignment
- **Cysgender:** When our gender assignment and gender identity agree
- **Stealth:** When a trans person does not want it known that he or she is transgender



Terms and Transitions

Terms for Girls

- **Affirmed girl:** A child born with boy parts who identifies as a girl
- Trans girl, trans woman, male-to-female, MtF, girl

Terms for Boys

- **Affirmed boy:** A child born with girl parts who identifies as a boy
- Trans boy, trans man, female-to-male, FtM, boy

Transitions

- **Social:** Changing name, pronoun, dress and hair (presentation)
- **Pharmacological:** Blocking hormones of the birth sex and applying hormones of the identified gender
- **Surgical:** “Top” or “bottom” surgery to correct the effects of the wrong hormones



Discovering Ourselves: Gender

An inherent and intrinsic part of who we are

- First awareness of gender: very young, even preverbal
- Develops before and distinct from romantic orientation
- Expressed in clothing choice, toy choice and pretend play
- We give more room to girls who act like boys than we do to boys who act like girls
- Can be rigid or fluid, but cannot be changed
- For more gender fluid or less clear-cut gender identities, the understanding of oneself as “trans” may come in adolescence or even adulthood
- The same spectrum of people we find in all walks of life exist within the trans community. Some are flamboyant and outgoing; some are reserved; some painfully shy





Discovering Ourselves: Gender



“Becoming Me”

a short video clip from In The Life Media



Trans & Gender-Variant Youth

- Are often diagnosed with ADD, anxiety, depression, OCD and other illnesses and learning disabilities
- Lack knowledgeable and accepting providers
- Very often find themselves bullied at school and shamed at home
- Extremely high risk for school failure, homelessness, substance abuse, self-harm and suicide
- Puberty is a crisis
- Rarely have the opportunity to transition in private
- Often cannot hide who they are



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Can Gender Variance be Cured?

Reparative therapy does not work

- There is **no scientific evidence** that supporting a child's gender variance or cross-gender identity results in physical or psychological harm.
- There is **significant evidence** that lack of support leads to **suicidal ideation and even death**.



Plotting Ourselves on the Gender Spectrum

1. My birth gender was assigned as:

Female

Intersex

Male

2. My gender identity is:

Hear Me Roar

Woman

Gender Queer

Man

Macho

3. My gender expression is:

Feminine

Female

Androgynous

Male

Macho

4. My romantic attraction is to:

Macho

Sensitive Men

Androgynous

Sporty Women

Feminine



Discovering Ourselves: Romantic Orientation

First awareness is younger than you might think

- First awareness of same-sex attraction is in elementary school (boys at age 9; girls at age 10)
- First same-sex experience is in middle to high school (boys at 12-14; girls at 14-15)
- Self-identifying as a lesbian or gay comes in high school (boys at 14-16; girls at 15-16)



It Isn't Easy Being an LGBT Child

We assume our children are straight

- LGBT children tell us they know from a very young age (usually pre-school) that they are different, but cannot articulate how they are different for many years.
- Why do we never ask our straight children if it is a stage or if they are “sure”?
- We can help our children articulate their gender identity and romantic orientation, so they know they are not “freaks,” but part of nature’s great diversity.



Challenges of LGBT Development

LGBT youth must develop a healthy and integrated identity

- In spite of their greater risk for harassment
- Amid a wealth of negative stereotypes
- In the midst of prejudice
- With few role models
- With no help to articulate or explore themselves in public
- Often without family support



Creating a Safe Environment



Data show the most important four things your school needs to make a safe environment:

1. Include sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in non-discrimination and harassment policies.
2. Provide training for administration, faculty and staff.
3. Provide support through student groups (Gay Straight Alliance).
4. Inclusive curriculum and media resources.

GLSEN National School Climate Survey



Creating a Safe Environment

Try to avoid prejudice and fear.

- Don't presume to know someone's orientation. And don't assume heterosexuality.
- Never "out" an LGBT child to others, especially to parents. Remember, home is not safe for many of these kids.
- Don't worry that by listening, you can influence a child's sexual orientation or gender identity. It cannot be done.
- Don't turn a deaf ear to gay-bashing jokes or hate speech. Assert that name-calling and hateful speech is offensive to you, just like racial slurs, and will not be tolerated.



Creating a Safe Environment

Try to offer a safe space.

- Be respectful of differing sexual orientations and identities. Practice a diversity-centered approach to individual differences on a variety of issues.
- If a student comes out to you, listen and convey acceptance. Be patient. Coming out is a process, not a once-and-done thing.
- Deal with feelings. Most LGBTQ youth feel alone, afraid and guilty. Allow them to express feelings and thoughts that are often in conflict.
- Identify and provide appropriate referrals for support.



We Cannot Remain Silent

Now that we know what we know



**“Silence encourages the tormentor,
never the tormented.”**

--- Elie Weisel, *Night*



What to say to “That’s so gay!”

What words can *you* use?

- It’s not okay to say that.
- That is hurtful and disrespectful.
- I don’t think you mean to call all gays and lesbians stupid, do you?



How can you define the terms?

- Being gay is about who you love (just like being straight is).
- Being trans is about who you are.



Words Matter: Speak Out



It's hard to be a gender non-conforming child.

Reach out. Don't be afraid. Talk to the child; see what comes up....

- You say you have the best of both worlds: you're both a boy and a girl. Wow! Do you want to talk about that? It sounds pretty magical, but I bet it could feel confusing too, huh?
- Do you ever feel like you're just not who everyone thinks you are?
- Do you like being a girl (boy)?
- It's okay to like girl things better than boy things and still be a boy. What makes a toy a "girl toy" or a "boy toy" anyhow?
- I have short hair and I'm a girl; does my short hair make me less of a girl?



Words Matter: Speak Out



It's hard to be a parent to a gender non-conforming child. Reach out. Don't be afraid. Often it will have nothing to do with being transgender. Sometimes it will.

- I saw Jimmy playing Barbies with the girls yesterday. It's so good to see a young child so comfortable just being himself. But I saw him getting teased too. Is he okay? How do you feel about his creative side?
- I understand Suzie likes to pretend she's Sam while she's here at school. Isn't that courageous of her? Do you ever wonder if it's more than just play? Are you comfortable with her exploration?



Exercises: Thinking it Through

Elementary School

- Stevie Always Plays Only With Girls
- Andrew Has Two Dads

Middle School

- Homophobic Kids
- Puberty in Trans Children

High School

- Issues With Colleagues
- Prom Dream



Elementary School Scenario A

Stevie Always Plays with Girls: Scenario

- Stevie is a second grader who plays only with girls, and during pretend play is always a female character. When the teacher separates the class into a boy group and a girl group, Stevie always wants to go with the girls.
- The girls like Stevie a lot, but the boys call him a sissy and a faggot (even though they don't know what that word means).
- Sometimes Stevie's behavior is so over-the-top effeminate, the teacher finds herself (or himself) sighing even rolling her (or his) eyes.
- The teacher is frustrated that peer pressure is doing nothing to make this boy act more like a boy and doesn't know what s/he should do.



Elementary School Scenario A

Stevie Always Plays with Girls: Discussion

- Is Stevie's behavior harmful or inappropriate?
- What could the teacher do to learn about gender variant children?
- How could the teacher separate the children without using gender?
- How could the teacher respond to the boys who call Stevie a sissy and a faggot?
- How does it make a child feel when a teacher rolls his or her eyes at the child's expression or behavior?
- Should the teacher allow peer pressure on Stevie to make him act more like a boy?
- What would be different if this were about a girl who played only with boys?
- If Stevie's parents tell you their child is really a girl and to start calling the child Stephanie, do you have a professional obligation to call Child Protective Services?
- How should the teacher handle it if Stevie's parents tell him or her not to allow him to play with girl toys.



Elementary School Scenario B

Andrew Smith Has Two Dads: Scenario



- Andrew's third grade teacher tells him that when behavioral incidents occur, she will need to call Andrew's mother to report them.
- The teacher consistently addresses information sent home to Mr. & Mrs. Smith.
- When her class makes hand-make gifts for their parents on Mother's and Father's Day, the teacher has no alternative project for students who may not have a mother or a father in their lives.
- While Andrew feels comfortable with his friends about having two dads, he is unsure about how to respond to his teacher.

Elementary School Scenario B

Andrew Smith Has Two Dads: Discussion

- How could Andrew's teacher be more gender-neutral in her contact with the parents as well as with her references with the children?
- How might an elementary level teacher handle gender-specific holiday activities, such as Mother's Day and Father's Day?
- How could classroom teachers learn more about resources that are available (regarding family diversity) both in their school and in the community?
- Identify potential safety risks (physical and emotional) for Andrew in the scenario.
- What could the teacher do to create a more open and accepting classroom environment without singling Andrew out.



Middle School: Scenario A

Homophobic Kids: Scenario

- Charlie is 14, an average student, and generally popular with other students. He is large for his age, a good athlete, and the leader of a group of boys who pride themselves on their own masculinity, occasionally intimidating other students with their macho behavior.
- Name calling and use of stereotypes is common in the group, especially with regard to a few students who are smaller and weaker and who they feel exhibit non-masculine characteristics. Charlie and his friends often refer to students as “faggots” or “queers” in conversations.
- Never challenged in the past, the behavior of the group can no longer be ignored by the faculty after a particularly vicious verbal attack on another student. A group of teachers have met to plan an approach to resolve the problem.



Middle School: Scenario A

Homophobic Kids: Discussion

- What are the essential elements of a plan of action?
- Should punishment be applied, or are there other strategies for modifying Charlie's behavior and that of his followers?
- What reasons might explain Charlie's behavior?
- Should the parents of the various students be brought into the situation? If so, how should this be handled?
- What overall personnel attitudes need to be addressed?
- Should the parent community be involved?



Middle School: Scenario B

Puberty in Trans Children: Scenario



- Lauren is an 8th grader who does not stand out in a crowd. She's quiet, shy and you can sometimes forget she is in your class or school.
- She's a loner and you've wondered if she suffers from depression. You've noticed, this year, that she shrugs her shoulders forward when she used to have great posture.
- You also see that she loiters around the locker rooms, waiting for all the other girls to come out before she goes in.
- She's missing school a lot too. And now she's coming late to class complaining that she had to use the restroom.

Middle School: Scenario B

Puberty in Trans Children: Discussion

- What do you think is going on?
- How is puberty, scary enough for cisgender kids, affecting Lauren?
- Why is Lauren avoiding the locker room and bathrooms?
- How could you support Lauren?
- Do you know of a youth group in your area where Lauren could go and feel welcomed?
- Is it okay to ask Lauren how she feels about being a girl and growing into a woman?
- Is it a good idea to find out how supportive Lauren's family is of Lauren's struggles?
- Should you reach out to Lauren's family, and if so, how could you do that without "outing" Lauren?
- What is the suicide risk for kids like Lauren?



High School: Scenario A

Issues with Colleagues: Scenario

- Coach Thorpe is known for his outspoken views on a variety of topics, and he is openly scornful of boys he considers to be weaklings or sissies. Despite his frequent verbal abuse, his skills in physical education and success on the football field have made him widely popular in the community and among many of the students.
- Joey, a 10th grader, is smaller than most of the boys in the class and Coach Thorpe views his mannerisms as effeminate. Recently, Joey's grades have been dropping and he is unable to compete effectively with the other boys in his PE class. He is viewed with disdain by the coach (who tells him he should be in the girls' class) and by many of his classmates. His self-esteem is low, he is considering dropping out of school, and has even considered suicide as a way out.
- Joey's situation has become more difficult in recent weeks. Rumors circulate that he is gay, and a group of boys have taken to calling him fag, queer and AIDS factory. His difficulties are exacerbated by Coach Thorpe's disdain and refusal to intervene in the name calling, even when comments are made in his presence. As a result, other students have adopted the attitude that this behavior is approved and consistent with the coach's own views about Joey. Other teachers have become aware of this problem, but most are afraid to confront Coach Thorpe directly.



High School: Scenario A

Issues with Colleagues: Discussion

- What is likely to happen to Joey if this situation continues?
- What approaches should be considered to restore his self-esteem?
- What are some short-term and long-term solutions?
- Who should take direct responsibility for Joey's welfare and achievement?
- What can be done to modify Coach Thorpe's behavior and understanding of his responsibility to all students, especially those who do not fit his stereotypes?
- Who has primary responsibility for dealing with the coach?
- Who else has responsibility?
- How should they approach the situation?



High School: Scenario B

Prom Dream: Scenario

- Kaden is 16 years old. Even as a young child, Kaden always felt more like a girl than a boy, and it's getting exhausting to keep trying to hide it at school.
- Kaden's parents don't know what to think of Kaden expressing as a girl, but they don't speak English very well, so they don't reach out to the school about their unusual child. Kaden is alone on this when it comes to navigating the school.
- Kaden has always dreamed of being prom queen, and this year, has decided to come to the prom in her girl persona: Kaitlin. Kaitlin takes exquisite care to be beautiful that night and arrives at the prom with a girlfriend. Many of the kids think Kaden/Kaitlin is cool and courageous; some don't care about Kaden/Kaitlin either way; some are very upset and call out names, taunts and threats.



High School: Scenario B

Prom Dream: Discussion

- What pronoun should you use for Kaitlin that night?
- How do you respond to the taunts and threats from other children?
- How can you keep Kaitlin safe at the prom?
- What restroom would Kaitlin use that night? Would she be safe in the boy's restroom? What would the girls say if she used the girls room?
- What will you do if Kaitlin comes to school Monday morning instead of Kaden?
- What if Kaitlin wants to run for Homecoming Queen next year?
- What obligations, if any, do you have to Kaitlin's family?



Creating a Safe Environment

What YOU can do is POWERFUL!



One moment of you stepping up on behalf of a child can mean the world to that child.

Brainstorm

Creating a Safe Environment



What YOU can do is POWERFUL!

- Begin to notice and point out bullying and stereotypes based on gender identity and expression.
- Say the words: lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.
- Include lesbian, gay and trans people and their history in your curricula, on posters and on your walls.
- Volunteer to run your Gay Straight Alliance, even in middle school (same-sex attraction can begin as young as age 9).
- Intervene when you hear gay, faggot, dyke, freak, etc.

SAY SOMETHING!



There is Help Out There!

- PFLAG Metro D.C., Howard, Baltimore, Frederick and Carroll Counties (and coming soon to the Eastern Shore)
 - Parents' forums
 - Education and support
 - Rainbow youth groups
- Online support
- Welcoming congregations
- Resources, videos and books



Resources

Information

- *GLSEN Safe Space Kit*, 2011 School Climate Survey, K-12 curricula (www.glsen.org)
- *Supportive Families, Healthy Children*, Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University
- Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org)
- *The Transgender Child*, by Stephanie Brill
- *Gender Born Gender Made*, by Diane Ehrensaft PhD
- *Lesbian & Gay Youth: Care and Counseling*, by Caitlin Ryan & Donna Futterman

Support

- PFLAG (www.pflagmd.org or www.pflag.org)
- Family Acceptance Project (familyproject.sfsu.edu)
- Gender Spectrum (www.genderspectrum.org)
- Trans Youth Family Allies (www.imatyfa.org)



Questions

