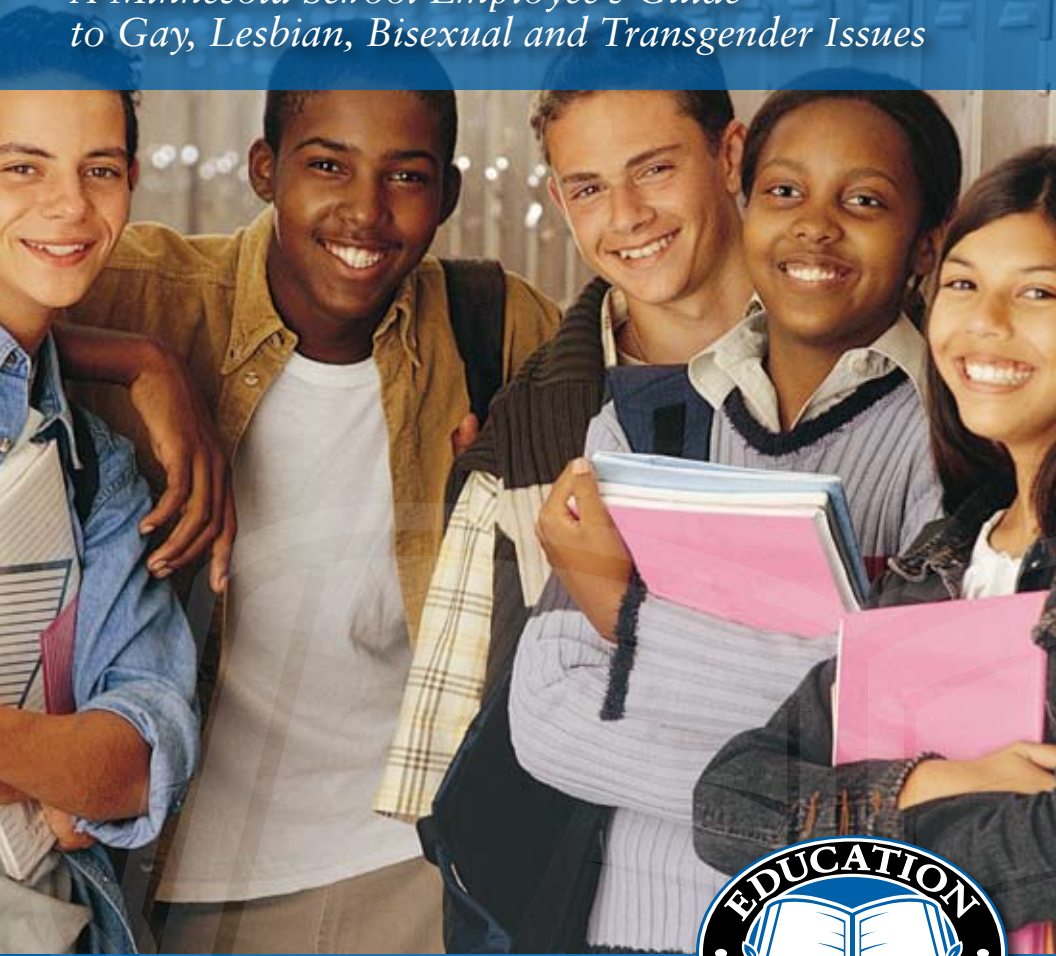


# Creating Safe Places for All Students:

*A Minnesota School Employee's Guide  
to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues*



## A message from the president of Education Minnesota

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Dear Colleagues,

Education Minnesota is committed to the fundamental principle that every child has the right to an excellent public education. Great teaching and learning cannot happen unless our public schools provide a safe and healthy environment, free from discrimination, stereotyping, intimidation and harassment.



Our union has long worked at the policy level to eliminate barriers to quality education based on economic status, disability, race, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. To that end, we must equip our members with the tools necessary to combat the bullying and harassment that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and staff experience all too often in their daily lives.

This resource booklet will provide you with a better understanding of the issues confronting this population, along with suggestions for appropriate ways to respond and offer support. It includes a listing of additional resources available in Minnesota and at the national level.

A respectful school environment begins with us. Please read and use this booklet, and help make Minnesota's public schools safe, welcoming places for all our students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas A. Doohar". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Thomas A. Doohar  
*President*

## Acknowledgements

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*The NEA and AFT offer free safe-schools workshops to school employees. These workshops focus on anti-GLBT bias and how we can make schools safe for everyone. For more information or to inquire about scheduling a workshop, contact the field staff assigned to your local.*

## Did you know:

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- 64 percent of GLBT students report feeling unsafe at school. <sup>1</sup>
- 83 percent of GLBT students report being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and 38 percent report being physically harassed. <sup>1</sup>
- 83 percent of GLBT students report that school personnel never intervene when anti-GLBT remarks are made. <sup>1</sup>
- 73 percent of students report that they were likely to listen to a teacher they respected if the teacher told them to stop using anti-GLBT language. <sup>2</sup>

*Educators can make a difference!*

## Glossary of GLBT terms

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**GLBT:** Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender; the acronym is sometimes spelled in a different order (e.g., LGBT).

**Gay:** People who are attracted (emotionally and/or sexually) to those of their same gender. Most often this word refers to men, but it can also be an umbrella term referring to both genders.

**Lesbian:** Women who are attracted (emotionally and/or sexually) to women.

**Bisexual:** People who are attracted (emotionally and/or sexually) to both genders.

**Transgender:** People who more closely identify with the gender opposite of their biology. Some transgender people may choose to alter their physical appearance, while others do not. They may or may not be gay.

**A note about the word “queer”:** At one time “queer” had a negative connotation, but acceptance of this word has grown in the GLBT community, which has embraced the word in an effort to reclaim its power in a positive way. Some GLBT people use this word to identify themselves because it is less confining than a particular category. However, “queer” can still be a derogatory label if used in a negative manner. It’s the intent that counts.

<sup>1</sup>“2005 National School Climate Survey.” *The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network*. New York: 2006.  
<sup>2</sup>“State of the States 2004.” *The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network*. New York: 2004.

## Bullying and GLBT students

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Bullying is unwarranted, repeated behavior intended to cause fear and display power over someone else. It can include physical, verbal or psychological harassment or abuse, including threats, name-calling, violence and inappropriate text messages and Internet postings.

GLBT students are frequent targets of bullying, and studies show a significant impact on these students' school attendance, academic achievement and college aspirations. In addition, students who are not GLBT, but are perceived as such, are often targeted. Girls with masculine traits and boys with feminine traits are often associated with the GLBT community and can be harassed.

The fact is, anti-GLBT bullying affects the entire school community. Educators must intervene to address both the behavior and the bias, fear or ignorance that underlies it.

## Anti-GLBT language

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The use of anti-GLBT slurs is a form of verbal bullying that should not be tolerated in our schools. This includes such terms as:

- Fag or faggot
- Homo
- Dyke
- Sissy
- Lesbo
- Queer (when the intent is negative)
- Joto (Spanish)
- Maricon (Spanish)
- Fairy
- Ladies (when used to berate males, often in an athletic context)

## “That’s so gay!”

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The incorrect use of the word “gay” as a synonym for “stupid” is pervasive in schools. One recent study found that nearly nine in 10 students reported hearing “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay” frequently or often.<sup>1</sup>

When students are allowed to use this word incorrectly, it further harms GLBT students and perpetuates the myth that there is something wrong with being gay.

### *What can you do?*

- **Confront students when they use “gay” incorrectly in a classroom or other school setting.**

Remaining silent is tantamount to affirming that it is acceptable to believe that GLBT people are stupid and/or bad.

- **Small interventions can be effective.**

Memorize a short response: “You used the word ‘gay’ incorrectly in place of the word ‘stupid’ or ‘bad.’ When you do this you are hurting gay people in our school by making them feel unsafe. I don’t want you to use this word incorrectly.”

- **If possible, personalize the word “gay” with a short addition.**

“In fact, my (friend, sister, colleague, etc.) is gay and I want them to feel safe and welcome.”

- **Sometimes a more authoritative response is needed.**

“You and your family may believe certain things and you have a right to express that in your own home. I am not telling you how to act or believe outside of school. However, in this place we are required to welcome all people and to make them feel safe. We will not tolerate your language here.”

<sup>1</sup> “2005 National School Climate Survey.” *The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network*. New York: 2006.

## Suicide awareness and prevention

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Suicide is the leading cause of death among GLBT youth, and GLBT adults also have high rates of depression and suicide. The warning signs include:

- Lack of interest in friends, family, social activities
- Poor performance in school or on the job
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Boredom, restlessness, irritability, or loss of concentration or memory
- Giving away prized possessions
- Talking of death or suicide
- Expressing feelings of sadness, hopelessness or worthlessness
- Saying things like “No one cares,” “Life isn’t worthwhile,” “People would be better off without me,” or “I don’t need this any more.”

Keep in mind that these signs may also be signs of depression. Depressed people may not necessarily be contemplating suicide, but attention is still warranted.

### *What do you do if you think someone might be suicidal?*

- Talk openly and ask direct questions about the person’s intention.
- Listen carefully to what is said and treat it seriously.
- Do not add to the person’s distress by debating, arguing or lecturing about whether suicide is right or wrong.
- Don’t leave a suicidal person alone.
- Encourage the person to seek help.
- Get help immediately and contact your administrator.

## Supporting GLBT students and staff

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If a GLBT student or staff member approaches you with a problem, you can help by listening, respecting his or her confidentiality, and referring the person to counselors and other appropriate resources.

Unless you are a counselor, you should not provide counseling yourself. You also should not meet with students alone and behind closed doors to avoid being accused of impropriety.

Here are some tips:

- Listen carefully. Let the person tell the full story before you respond.
- Reassure the person of your acceptance and respect. Offer support and encouragement.
- Keep the conversation confidential. Don't tell others that someone has "come out" to you unless there is an urgent reason. Let the student's or colleague's wishes be your guide.
- If a student's safety is in jeopardy and you must inform others, limit sharing information to the necessary individuals (such as the principal, who may discuss the situation with a parent) and the necessary facts. For example, say, "Sue is being threatened with anti-gay remarks" – not, "Sue told me she is a lesbian."
- If a student's parents must be notified, coordinate with your principal to proceed cautiously. Some parents may react angrily to news of a child's sexual orientation, even kicking him or her out of the house.
- If possible, talk with the student first to work out strategies. Do not blindside students by telling family members without their knowledge.
- Refer the person to sources of support within the school district, as well as outside support groups.
- Check in often with your student or colleague, and watch for emotional issues that may arise after "coming out." Sexual identity development can last for years, moving through stages of awareness, acceptance and integration.
- Monitor your own reactions. It is not uncommon to feel conflicted, surprised, worried or distant when a close contact raises these issues.

## GLBT resources

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### **Outfront Minnesota**

*Minnesota's largest GLBT resource organization.*

612-882-0127 • 800-800-0350

[www.outfront.org](http://www.outfront.org)

### **Rainbow Families**

*Support organization for families in the GLBT community.*

612-827-7731

[www.rainbowfamilies.org](http://www.rainbowfamilies.org)

### **District 202**

*Nonprofit community center for GLBT youth and their friends.*

612-871-5559

[www.dist202.org](http://www.dist202.org)

### **Trevor Project**

*National hotline on the issue of GLBT suicide.*

1-866-4-U-TREVOR

(24-hour crisis line)

[www.trevorproject.org](http://www.trevorproject.org)

### **Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)**

*National education organization focused on safe schools for all students.*

212-727-0135

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

### **Respect for All Project**

*Organization offering safe-schools resources for educators.*

415-641-4616 • 800-405-3322

[www.womedia.org/](http://www.womedia.org/)

[respectforall.htm](http://respectforall.htm)

## NEA resources

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### **NEA Human and Civil Rights Department**

202-822-7700

[hcrinfo@nea.org](mailto:hcrinfo@nea.org)

### **Safe Schools for Everyone**

[www.nea.org/schoolsafety/glb.html](http://www.nea.org/schoolsafety/glb.html)

## AFT resources

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### **AFT Human Rights and Community Relations Department**

202-879-4434

[HumanRightsInfo@aft.org](mailto:HumanRightsInfo@aft.org)

### **Bargaining for Family Issues**

[www.aft.org/downloads/](http://www.aft.org/downloads/)

[Bargaining\\_for\\_Family\\_Issues.pdf](#)



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