

An Administrator's Guide To Handling Anti-Gay Harassment

To protect and support a targeted young person, you should:

1. Assure the targeted student that:
 - you take what happened seriously.
 - you believe he or she deserves a safe learning environment.
 - he or she is not required to talk face-to-face with the offenders, even with a mediator present
 - (bias-based harassment is substantially different from ordinary peer conflict).
2. Offer the targeted student:
 - first aid, if necessary, and a private room in which to recover and a telephone in case he or she wants to call a parent or guardian or some other responsible adult (e.g., counselor, spiritual advisor) or the police.
 - the chance to tell his or her side of the story.
 - help to problem-solve ways he or she might protect him or herself in the future, but make very clear that you are not assuming that he or she is to blame for what happened.
 - the option of removing him or herself from danger (e.g., to drop the class where the harassment is happening, to change for PE somewhere else, etc.) ... but recognize that this might contribute to his or her social isolation, hence feeling more like punishment than protection.
3. Remove the offenders from the situation (transferring them to a different PE class, banning them from the bus, etc.).
4. Arrange for staff to be present wherever the harassment has been occurring (e.g., in the south corridor before and after lunch or next to the basketball court during second grade recess).
5. Encourage the targeted student to report retribution, if the offender(s) are disciplined, but also arrange for your staff to be vigilant so that if there is retribution the targeted young person won't have to be the only one reporting it.
6. Keep a record of the events in the permanent files of the targeted student, with his or her permission, and of the offenders, if there has been any disciplinary action. Also keep an incident report on file in a malicious harassment log, so that patterns can be discerned and on-going problems can be addressed.

To investigate what happened, you should:

- interview all the witnesses, as well as the protagonists, so that if the offenders are disciplined, it will not be only the targeted student who turned them in.
- involve the police if you believe a crime may have been committed (including malicious harassment), or Child Protective Services, especially if you believe a child is in serious jeopardy of further harm.

To discipline and educate the offenders, you can:

- explain to them why their behavior is so wrong, beyond its simply violating a rule.
- reprimand them in a serious no-nonsense tone.
- warn them that if the behavior continues they'll be disciplined.
- require them to write a note of apology or to make restitution or do relevant community

service.

- discipline them in a way that is consistent with what is done for other forms of malicious harassment (for example, if the offender used a gay slur while hitting someone, you might want to discipline him/her not just for assault but in whatever way an assault accompanied by a racial or religious or disability-related slur would be handled).
- call their parent(s) or guardian(s), if the offenders are students.
- counsel them, if the offenders are employees, and if their actions don't improve, use progressive discipline.

To support your staff, you should:

Assure a targeted staff person that:

- you take what happened seriously.
- you believe he or she deserves a safe working environment.
- you will do everything in your power to make sure school is safe for him or her.
- you will not tolerate retribution for his or her having reported the incident.

Consider an employee's professionalism and competence to be the **ONLY** criteria for working in your school and say so to any student, employee, or parent who questions whether someone they perceive to be gay belongs in this career.

Provide your staff on-going training in how to enforce your school's malicious harassment policy ... how to intervene, educate, discipline, and protect students, visitors and staff. follow up when an employee enforces your school's harassment policy, ensuring that the offending student knows that you endorse what the teacher (secretary, counselor) said were the rules.

To prevent future incidents, you should:

- announce a firm anti-harassment policy (one which explicitly prohibits orientation-based harassment along with other forms of harassment and which spells out specific consequences) in faculty meetings and student assemblies every year.
- educate your student body so that even if they don't like homosexuality they will not turn a deaf ear on harassment. Education should dispel stereotypes, provide accurate information, and build students' skills for standing up for themselves and their peers non-violently.

For the sake of consistent, aggressive policy enforcement:

- inform your supervisor (superintendent, school board president, or whomever you report to) of serious infractions of your school district's harassment policy, especially if you take disciplinary actions and you have the slightest concern that your judgment will be challenged. Your supervisor can support you only with full understanding of your investigation and conclusions.

The bottom line is ...

Legally and ethically, you must do whatever is necessary to stop harassment against all students and staff, including those who are perceived to be gay. When they are safe, teachers can teach and students can learn.

An Educator's Guide To Intervening In Anti-Gay Harassment

First, stop the behavior:

- Cut it out!
- Keep your hands to yourself!
- That's way out of line!
- Stop it right now!
- Out of the room!
- Whoa, that is not OK!
- Leave him alone!
- Hey, that was uncalled for!
- That is unacceptable!
- (Name of offender), I said knock it off.

Then educate:

- That was a stereotype. Stereotypes are a kind of lie and they hurt people's feelings.
- That was a putdown. I don't think it belongs at (name of school).
- You may not have meant to hurt anyone, but that was a really derogatory gesture ... It implied he was gay in a really disrespectful way.
- That's bullying. It's against school rules. And besides what business is it of yours if somebody's gay?
- That's mean and it's sexual harassment. It could get you suspended.
- Do you guys know what that word means? It's a put-down for a gay man. That's like putting down people of a different race from yours or a different religion.
- She may or may not be lesbian, but writing graffiti and spreading rumors is wrong.

Educating is a crucial step.

It is not enough to stop the behavior. Students may interpret a simple, "Stop it right now!" to mean that it is OK to bully Johnny, but not during math. And while stopping to educate may take a moment in the short run, it will save time and energy, not to mention some child's heart, in the long run. And that child might not be the one who was targeted. It might be the bystander or the bully. You may be preventing a much more serious assault or a suicide down the road. It is worth the extra moment.

Do you educate on the spot or take the offender aside and educate in private?

Sometimes one is more appropriate; sometimes, the other. On the one hand, the target and the witnesses need to hear what you have to say. It can be a very valuable chance to model standing up for someone. And it can reassure them that your classroom really is a safe space. However, allowing the child who said the slur to save face may lead to sincere regret and changed behavior. And pursuing the issue at length in front of the target may only embarrass him or her. Use your professional judgment. The point is to support and educate all the children.

What if the offender retaliates against you for speaking up, by demanding, “Why do you care? Are you gay?”

You have lots of choices:

- You can ask, “Why? Do you think only gay people have the courage to stand up against bullying?”
- You can say, “I hope I would speak up about meanness no matter what my orientation was!”
- You can answer the question honestly. For example: “No, but what difference does my sexual orientation make?” or “Yes, I actually am. But the issue here is that you are harassing Chris, Pat. That’s not OK in my class or in any other class in this school!”
- You can decline to respond, falling back on previously established classroom ground rules, — That’s a really personal question. Remember we had a class ground rule that we would all protect our own, and other people’s, privacy here? And anyway, I think my identity is irrelevant.”

Of course, some students will assume that you would not be declining to answer if you were really heterosexual. If you are heterosexual, being ambiguous about it may be difficult for you, while it provides a valuable learning experience for your students. If you are actually a sexual minority, ambiguity may be almost as emotionally and practically risky as coming out.

On the other hand, authenticity is a very important component in developing a climate of community and trust in the classroom. So there is something to be said, if the political climate in your school and district allows it, for a genuine answer to a direct question, even if the question is a defiant, angry one. Young people need sexual minority role models who are not afraid to be open and openly heterosexual role models who object to anti-gay harassment and violence.

Again, your professional judgment must ultimately determine how you respond. The point is to think about it ahead of time and to practice how you will handle this kind of situation, so that your fear won’t get in the way of protecting children.

What if I am not sure I have my administrator’s support?

You still have a moral and legal obligation to protect every student from harassment and violence. So do stand up for targeted children.

But definitely talk with your supervisor about the problem, before you begin to intervene in it. Share a copy of the Safe Schools Report, “They Don’t Even Know Me: Understanding Anti-Gay Harassment and Violence in Schools.” Discuss examples of harassment and ostracism you have witnessed in your own building or about which students have told you.

If your supervisor agrees that something must be done, make a proposal. Explain how you would like to address the problem. Try to agree on a strategy.

If your supervisor explicitly forbids you from intervening in peer-on-peer anti-gay harassment, do not become “insubordinate.” Talk with your union representative. If you don’t belong to a union, or if your union is unresponsive, contact:

- GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (212-727-0135 or www.glsen@glSEN.org)
- Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (212-809-8585 or lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org)
- In Washington state, the Safe Schools Coalition (1-888-3079275 or www.intervention@safeschoolscoalition.org).

But defying an explicit directive can jeopardize your job. We don’t recommend it.

If, on the other hand, you leave the conversation with your supervisor still unsure of where you stand, and if you happen to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, we would urge you to find a way to object to bullying that doesn’t require your —coming out.” We know that young people need role models, but without your supervisor’s support, it can be professionally risky to be honest ... and losing you altogether as their teacher will clearly not help your students.

The bottom line is ...

Legally and ethically, you must do whatever is necessary to stop the harassment against children and teens who are perceived to be gay. Seeing you stand up against bullying will make every child, gay and straight alike, feel safer at school. Only when they feel safe, can students learn.

A Family's Guide To Handling Anti-Gay Harassment

First, take pride in your child's trust. Only half the young people who experience anti-gay harassment feel safe going to their families for help. Your child clearly sees you as a resource.

Then, support your child:

Listen. If you ask questions, try to make them supportive, not blaming, questions. Make sure your child knows that you ...

- Love and believe in your child, no matter how you may be feeling about the fact that he or she is gay or lesbian (or may be gay or is perceived to be gay).
- Do not blame him or her for what happened or think he or she "deserved" what happened.
- Are upset that it happened & but angry not at your child, just at the offenders and those who let them think it was OK to hurt someone they thought was gay.
- Will do what you can to make sure school is a safe place for him or her.

You may want to gather information and support for yourself:

- Call a trusted school counselor, nurse, teacher, administrator or social worker.
- Contact another parent. Try PFLAG, Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays: Phone: 202-638-4200, E-mail: info@pflag.org. If your child was the victim of a hate crime, contact FUAH, Families United Against Hate: 202-467-8180, ext. 217; E-mail: lwmahfuz@pflag.org
- Contact an advocate. Try GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (212-727-0135 or glsen@glsen.org) or, in Washington state, The Safe Schools Coalition (1-888-307-9275 or intervention@safeschoolscoalition.org)
- Contact a local community resource, such as a gay-friendly minister or counseling agency. In Washington state, you can find these resources in the Supplement to the Safe Schools Resource Guide, online at: www.safeschoolscoalition.org
- Find a book at your local library. These are a few written by and for parents:
- Beyond Acceptance: Parents of Lesbians and Gays Talk About Their Experiences, C. Griffin, M. Wirth and A. Wirth, 1997. ISBN: 0312167814. Written by parents, for parents, this book honors the pain and isolation many people feel when they discover their child is gay, while offering a map for a journey to acceptance. NY: St. Martin's Press. \$12.95.
- Trans Forming Families: Real Stories about Transgendered Loved Ones, M. Boenke, 1999. ISBN: 0966327217. This book is a collection of stories by mothers of very young gender variant children, parents of adult transgendered folks, spouses and partners, grandparents, siblings and friends. Stories of profound caring. Web site: www.aiyiyi.com/transbook. Waterford Press. \$13.95.

Next, you may want to talk with your child's teacher, if the problem is confined to a specific classroom:

Explain what happened and what makes you think the harassment or violence was bias-based. Explain that you want the teacher's help to ensure your child's emotional and physical safety at school and in transit.

Discuss with the teacher ...

- How the investigation will be handled and how your child's safety might be considered in that process
- What the possible disciplinary outcomes are, if the offender(s) is/are identified, and whether that is consistent with the way other forms of malicious harassment are generally handled.
- What the teacher will do to stop the harassment from continuing ... by the same offender(s) or any others.
- What the teacher will do to reduce the chances of retribution against your child for speaking up and what to do if there is retribution despite his/her best efforts.
- What the teacher will do to avoid a recurrence of the harassment ... against your child or anyone else's child next semester or next year.
- Send the teacher a letter thanking him/her for meeting with you and spelling out your understanding of what was agreed upon. Keep a copy of the letter.

If meeting with the teacher doesn't stop the abuse, or if it is happening in the halls and on the playground rather than in a single classroom, you may want to go through exactly the same steps ... with your principal, and if that doesn't solve the problem, with the assistant superintendent or the superintendent,

- and if that doesn't solve the problem, with the school board president.

If you do find yourself climbing this ladder of responsibility,

- Keep in mind that each new individual with whom you speak must care about children or he or she probably would not have become an educator. You have this in common, although of course you know and love your own child better than anyone does.
- Keep track of all the events, including dates, times, and witnesses to each act of harassment and each meeting of adults.

Do not hesitate to involve the police if your child is the victim of a crime ...

if, for example, his or her belongings were damaged or stolen or your child was threatened or physically injured because the offender thought she or he was gay or lesbian.

- In Washington state, you should tell the police officer that the crime you are reporting is — malicious harassment as defined by RCW 9A.36.080.“ Stress that the crime was motivated by hate based on perceived sexual orientation. You don't have to say whether the child is actually gay, and you shouldn't be asked.

- Describe in detail the hate or prejudice that was expressed and what caused your child to fear harm. For example, “They called him ‘faggot’ and said they would ‘kick his butt.’” Or, “They asked her why dykes liked other girls and said they would ‘teach her to like boys.’” If your child has any physical pain, make sure it is written down in the police report. Get the incident number from the officer and ask how to get a copy of the police report. Get the officer’s name and badge number.

Some people also decide to:

- Contact the United States Department of Education’s Regional Office for Civil Rights ... Phone: 1-800-421-3481, TDD: 202-205-5166; E-mail: OCR@ED.Gov; Web site: www.ed.gov/ocr
- Contact a lawyer about bringing a “civil suit” against the offenders:
- Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (212-809-8585 or lambdalegal@lambdalegal.org)
- American Civil Liberties Union (212-549-2585 or find your local chapter: <http://www.aclu.org/community/community.html>)
- ACLU of Washington State: Phone: 206-624-2180; 705 2nd Ave. Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98104; Web site: www.aclu-wa.org

The bottom line is ...

Your child deserves a safe education no matter what his or her race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, language of origin, or physical or mental abilities. You obviously agree or you wouldn’t have read this far. Your child is lucky to have you for a parent. Together, you can help your school become a safe place.

A Student's Guide to Surviving Anti-Gay Harassment and Physical or Sexual Assault

The first thing is to get safe...

You can:

- Tell the person to back off (You can say something like, "Maybe you didn't mean anything by it, but ..." or, something more angry than educational, such as, "Cut it out! Get your hands off me!"). But don't escalate the situation by calling the offender names or threatening to get physical.
- Defuse the situation, if it seems to be getting physical ("Never mind; let's forget it. "), and go to a safe place.

Think about your possible choices:

- Is there a safe place nearby? Are there people close by who could help you?
- Is there more than one assailant? Does the assailant have a weapon? Could you use your voice and your body to protect yourself by yelling, running away, fighting back, or attracting someone's attention?
- Sometimes people decide that not resisting is the best way to minimize physical injury or further danger.

However you respond, remember that the assault is not your fault.

After you are safe...

Tell someone you trust:

- Talk with someone you trust, someone you feel safe and comfortable with, such as a good friend.
- Tell an adult. Maybe there's an adult at school whom you trust ... a particular counselor or teacher, the nurse, the principal, a school security person, or whomever you trust most. If that doesn't work, ask their supervisors for help. Go to the school board if necessary.
- Maybe you feel you need to go outside the school for help, to a parent or guardian or a family friend. Whoever seems safest, do tell an adult. As understanding as a friend your own age may be, there are some times when only an adult can provide protection or legal advice or that sort of thing.

Write down everything that happened (who said and did what, the time and place, and who was involved, including witnesses).

Treat the assault seriously:

Even if other people minimize what happened by acting as if it doesn't matter or by saying that it's not "that bad," physical and sexual assault are very serious. And verbal harassment can feel like torture. You deserve to be safe.

Understand that you may have many different kinds of reactions to the assault:

Sometimes people who are assaulted feel upset, angry, scared, ashamed, or hopeless. Other people don't feel anything. There is no right way to feel after an assault.

STUDENTS:

What to Do if You See a Student Being Harassed

1 If it is likely to turn physical/violent, call an adult immediately.

2. If it is verbal, stop the harassment.

Interrupt the comment.

Make sure all the students in the area hear your comments.

3. Identify the harassment.

Label the form of harassment: "That was a put-down based on race" (religion, ethnicity, abilities, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, size, age, etc.).

Do not imply that the victim is a member of that group. Don't even mention the victim.

4. Broaden the response.

Speak on behalf of the whole school: "We do not harass people here. " "Our school treats everyone with respect. " "We don't appreciate put-downs. "

Re-identify the offensive behavior: "This name calling can also be hurtful to others who overhear it."

5. Physically lead the victim away from the situation without further talk.

Put your arm around his/her shoulder, perhaps.

Say, "Come on, let's go," and walk away to a safe place.

Avoid any debate or arguing back.

their behavior!

It is important that all students, whether onlookers, potential victims, or potential harassers, get the message that students care about the safety of others in this school.

A major goal is to take the spotlight off the victim and turn the focus to the behavior.

Students should realize what was said, regardless of what was meant (e.g., kidding).

"We don't do put-downs at this school" specifically includes those listening, as well as the school community in general.

Even if they were only kidding, harassers must realize the possible results of their actions.

Whether you know the victim or not, remove him/her and yourself from the situation, showing that you will stick up for anyone who is being treated badly, and preventing any more confrontation.

Do not risk getting involved in a fight or challenging harassers so that they escalate

STAFF:

How To Handle Harassment in the Hallways in 3 Minutes!

Interrupt the comment / Halt the physical harassment.
Do not pull students aside for confidentiality unless absolutely necessary.

Make sure all the students in the area hear your

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3. Broaden the response.

Do not personalize your response at this stage: "We at this school do not harass people. " "Our community does not appreciate hateful/thoughtless behavior. "

Re-identify the offensive behavior: "This name-calling

4. Ask for change in future behavior.

Personalize the response: "Chris, please pause and think before you act. "

Check in with the victim at this time: "If this continues, please tell me, and I will take further action. "We want everyone to be safe at this school."

It is important that all students, whether onlookers, potential victims, or potential harassers, get the message that students are safe and protected in this school.

A major goal is to take the spotlight off the victim and the harasser and turn the focus to the behavior. Students should realize what was said, regardless of what was meant (e.g., kidding).

"We don't do put-downs at this school"specifically includes those listening, as well as the school community in general.

Even if they were only kidding, harassers must realize the possible ramifications of their actions.

1. Stop the harassment.

comments.

identifiable group.

can also be hurtful to others who overhear it."

Now turn the spotlight on the harasser specifically, asking for accountability.

Again, be sure not to treat the victim like a helpless victim or a member of any target group. Rather, plainly give him/her this responsibility on behalf of others.

