

# Ten suggestions for reducing homophobia in your environment

- 1. Make no assumption about sexuality.** If a student has not used a pronoun when discussing a relationship, don't assume one. Use neutral language such as "Are you seeing anyone" instead of "Do you have a boyfriend". Additionally, do not assume that a female student who confides a "crush" on another girl is a lesbian. Labels are often too scary and sometimes not accurate. Let students label themselves.
- 2. Have something gay-related visible in your office.** A sticker, a poster, a flyer, a brochure, a book, a button... This will identify you as a safe person to talk to and will hopefully allow a gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning youth to break his/her silence. SAFE ZONE campaign stickers and resources can provide this visibility.
- 3. Support, normalize and validate students' feelings about their sexuality.** Let them know that you are there for them. If you cannot be supportive, please refer to someone who can be. Then work on your own biases by reading, learning and talking to people comfortable with this issue. And always remember, the problem is homophobia not homosexuality.
- 4. Do not advise youth to come out to parents, family and friends as they need to come out at their own safe pace.** Studies show as many as 26% of gay youth are forced to leave their home after they tell their parents. IT IS THEIR DECISION and they have to live with the consequences. Help them figure out what makes sense for them.
- 5. Guarantee confidentiality with students.** Students need to know their privacy will be respected or they will not be honest about this important issue. If you cannot maintain confidentiality for legal reasons, let students know this in advance.
- 6. Challenge homophobia.** As a role model for your students, respond to homophobia immediately and sincerely. Encourage in-service trainings for staff and students on homophobia and its impact on gay and lesbian youth.
- 7. Combat heterosexism in your classroom.** Include visibly gay and lesbian role models in your classroom.
- 8. Learn about and refer to community organizations.** Familiarize yourself with resources and call them before you refer to make sure they are ongoing. Also, become aware of gay-themed bibliographies and refer to gay-positive books.

9. Encourage school administrators to **adopt and enforce anti-discrimination policies for their schools or school systems which include sexual orientation.** The language should be included in all written materials next to race, sex, religion, etc.

10. **Provide role models.** Gay and straight students benefit from having openly gay teachers, coaches and administration. Straight students are given an alternative to the inaccurate stereotypes they have received and gay students are provided with the opportunity to see healthy gay adults. You, as teachers, can help by making gay and lesbian students feel more welcome.

Suggestions compiled by [Youth Pride, Inc.](#)

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