SUPPORTING QUEER YOUTH: A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

BY QUEER YOUTH, FOR QUEER YOUTH
INTRODUCTION

Queer youth, especially those who are nonbinary or transgender, are disproportionally impacted by mental health struggles, peer bullying, and familial rejection.

In a world that is often adverse to queer kids, regardless of whether you yourself can change the world, you can make a difference for your own queer students.

Queer youth, just like any other demographic, need love, compassion, and support. As an educator, counselor, or principal, your unconditional efforts to understand and support are immeasurably valuable to a queer child.

This guide, put together by queer youth for educators of queer youth, will walk you through the reasons your support is so critical, and how you can demonstrate it to your students and community.
THE WHY

From GLSEN

Statistics:

- 9/10 queer youth hear the word “gay” used in a negative way
- 3/4 of queer students hear homophobic slurs in schools
- Harassment and bullying of queer students results in students skipping classes or school days
- The GPA of frequently harassed queer students is approximately half a grade lower than those who are not frequently harassed

Homophobia and transphobia in a school environment can be used against those perceived as queer. When school staff effectively intervene in harassment or support queer students, they feel safer and are less likely to miss school. Queer students with supportive educators also had higher grade point averages than those that did not.
Check your biases and internalized queerphobia by reflecting on the questions below, and encourage fellow educators to do the same!

- If someone were to come out to you as LGBT, what would your first thought be?
- How would you feel if your child came out to you as LGBT? How would you feel if your mother, father or sibling came out to you as LGBT?
- Would you go to a physician whom you thought was LGBT if they were of a different gender than you? What if they were the same gender as you?
- Have you ever been to an LGBT social event, march or worship service? Why or why not?
- Can you think of three historical figures who were lesbian, gay or bisexual?
- Can you think of three historical figures who were transgender?
- Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of LGBT people?
- Have you ever stood up for an LGBT person being harassed? Why or why not?
- If you do not identify as LGBT, how would you feel if people thought you were LGBT?
THE HOW

From CDC

Take an active stand against bullying and harassment when it occurs in your school.

Find or **create safe spaces** for queer youth to receive support from educators, whether from counselors, classes, or administrators. Foster Gender and Sexuality Alliances (or Gay Straight Alliances) as affinity spaces for queer youth and conduits for creating a safer school environment for all.

Examine your school's **health curriculum**, and advocate for content on HIV, STIs, and safe sex that is relevant to queer youth, along with usage of inclusive terminology and practices (such as not splitting health classes into boys and girls, using anatomical language instead of male/female).

Invite queer consultants to run **professional development** for school staff on queer topics.
THE HOW

From Jennifer Gonzalez

Learn about queer terminology from queer people. Practice inclusive teaching; try to include a variety of gender presentations in materials, don't group by boys vs girls, avoid language that assumes everyone is cisgender and heterosexual, include positive queer representation in your curriculum when possible.

Visibly display your allyship with pride flags, stickers, or pins with queer positive messages (Safe Space, LGBTQ ally, displaying your own pronouns, etc.) Support students who come out, and be sure to not disclose their identity to others with explicit consent.

Support a GSA at your school by becoming a faculty advisor or offering your own time to its efforts.

Look at school policies and work to change them to protect queer youth (ensure that the confidentiality of students who come out is protected, standardize pronoun sharing, designate gender neutral bathrooms, alter health curriculums to be queer-inclusive). Educate your colleagues to engage in this work as well.
ABOUT QYA

Queer Youth Assemble is a queer youth-led nonprofit serving queer and trans youth under 25 in the United States.

To find more resources like this one, learn more about our work, or get involved yourself, go to our website queeryouthassemble.org or visit our Instagram @queeryouthassemble.