SELF ADVOCACY

BY QUEER YOUTH, FOR QUEER YOUTH
INTRODUCTION

Self advocacy is a critical life skill, especially for queer and trans youth whose identity and autonomy often come under scrutiny by authority figures.

Queer and trans youth volunteers with Queer Youth Assemble have compiled this guide to help youth learn how to self advocate in school, healthcare, and relationship settings.
SCHOOL
BATHROOMS

Request that all single-occupant bathrooms be marked gender-neutral and opened for student use (if faculty only).

Attend a school board meeting and advocate for gender-neutral bathroom spaces; attend with your school GSA or supportive adults and bring evidence to support your perspective (including personal anecdotes or studies showing risk for trans students with restricted bathroom access):

- Cite OSHA guidelines, which state: "transgender employees should not be discriminated against by being singled out to use a gender neutral bathroom, nor should they be denied access to the bathroom which corresponds to their internal gender identity"
- Cite study discussed on CNN and NBC: "36% of transgender or gender-nonbinary students with restricted bathroom or locker room access reported being sexually assaulted in the last 12 months"
PRONOUNS

Use this email template to communicate your pronouns to your teacher before the school year starts, at the beginning of the year, or at whatever point you feel comfortable sharing your pronouns. Fill in the [bolded and bracketed] information that is applicable to you and your situation.

Hello [teacher],

My name is [name] and I will be in your [class] this upcoming school year. I would like to inform you ahead of time that I use [pronouns]. [Here is how to use them.] I ask that you please do your best to use these in class and when talking about me. It [is/is not] safe for you to use these when contacting home. [Please use these pronouns instead].

Thank you, and looking forward to this year! [Name, pronouns]
NAME CHANGE

Use these email templates to alert a teacher of your chosen name or request that your name be changed in your school's computer system respectively.

Hello [teacher],

My name is [name] and I will be in your [class] this upcoming school year. I would like to inform you ahead of time that while my name is listed as [deadname] I go by [name] and I use [pronouns]. I ask that you please do your best to use these in class and when talking about me. It [is/is not] safe for you to use these terms when contacting home. [Please use this name and these pronouns instead].

Thank you, and looking forward to this year!
[Name, pronouns]
NAME CHANGE

Hello [guidance counselor],

I am a trans student and would like to have my name changed in the school’s system from [deadname] to [name]. I use [name] with my peers and teachers, and would prefer this information to be updated throughout the school's system if possible. Please let me know if there’s anyone I should forward this email to in order to address this.

Thank you!
[Name, pronouns]
GENDERED PRACTICES

Use this email template to request that teachers not use gendered/binary gendered practices in their classrooms, including dividing the class into groups of boys versus girls or arranging seating by boys and girls.

Hello [teacher],

I am a [transgender/nonbinary/gender nonconforming] student in your [class]. I would like to ask that you refrain from using gendered practices, such as dividing the class by gender or using gender to determine seating charts. This puts me in an uncomfortable and isolating position that hinders my ability to learn and engage.

Thank you for your time!
[Name, pronouns]
PROBLEMATIC CURRICULUM

When you encounter homophobic/transphobic curriculum, try using these email templates to start conversations about it with your teacher or administration.

Hello [teacher],

I would like to express some concerns with the [lesson/worksheet/etc.] shared on [date] in [class]. I found this [lesson/worksheet/etc.] to be homophobic and harmful due to [explain its harm to you personally or how it upholds systems of harm]. Using curriculum such as this bars me as a queer person from engaging with my learning safely and comfortably. I hope you will consider removing this [lesson/worksheet/etc.] from your curriculum.

Thank you,
[Name, pronouns]
Hello [administrator],

I would like to express my concerns with the [practice/lesson/etc.] being used in [classes/by teachers]. I find this [practice/lesson/etc.] harmful due to [explain harm, generally or personally]. The use of this curriculum prevents me from fully engaging with my schoolwork as a queer student. I hope you will consider removing this or altering it to actively address its [homophobia, transphobia]. I would be happy to meet in person at some point to discuss this issue further.

Thank you,
[Name, pronouns]
GENDERAL ADVICE

Correct others on your name and pronoun use however is most comfortable, including referring to yourself correctly aloud, asking them to respect these terms, sending an email, or having a friend use your name/pronouns actively.

When addressing concerns of homophobia/transphobia, it helps to have the support of your peers (for an incident that occurs in a class) or your school's GSA/supportive adults for a larger scale concern.
HEALTHCARE
CHOOSING A PROVIDER

Use databases of queer friendly providers, such as the Find a Provider service offered by GLMA, or the Human Rights Campaign's Interactive Map of Clinical Care Programs for Gender Expansive Children and Adolescents.

Ask your providers questions like:

- “Are you trauma informed?”
- “Are you queer-friendly?”
- “Are you sex positive?”
- “Are you affirming of non-monogamous relationships?”
- “Are you gender-affirming?”
PATIENT RIGHTS

Patients hold numerous rights in healthcare settings - note that some of these may be limited for minors still under the care of their parents or guardians.

These rights include:

1. Right to respect and dignity
2. Right to confidentiality
3. Right to quality care
4. Right to refuse care
5. Right to knowledge
MEDICAL PRIVACY

HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) protects anyone over the age of 18 (and emancipated individuals) from disclosure of medical information. This applies regardless of whether or not an individual is still on their guardian's health insurance.

Minors can request limitations be placed on the level of disclosure if the patient believes that exposure of that information would result in danger.

The level of confidentiality can vary depending on the nature of the request and to whom the request is made.

Important Note: State law can override HIPAA, which means either:
- State law can protect a minor's privacy
- State law can permit expansive guardian access to medical information.
Look for clinics or providers that follow an informed consent model - meaning providers operate under the understanding that you know yourself best, and it is their job to help you understand your care options.

If you are a minor, your parents can offer informed consent, but you yourself cannot. If you need help convincing your parents of the safety/efficacy/need for gender affirming care, check out this Linktree!

Be prepared to explain what impacts dysphoria has on you, and how gender affirming care will improve your quality of life.

Oftentimes providers will require letters from therapists or primary care doctors, particularly for insurance purposes - come prepared with these if possible. These letters should include your medical/psychiatric history, ability to consent, and need for the care you're seeking.
STIS AND SEXUAL HEALTH

If you need testing or treatment for an STI (sexually transmitted infection) look for a Planned Parenthood or sexual health clinic in your area. Organizations serving queer communities near you may offer sexual health services, or have more information about accessing them!

Resources like the Queer Sex Ed Community Curriculum offer queer-inclusive, consent-based, and trauma-informed information on topics of sexuality and sexual health.
GENERAL TIPS

List out questions you have for your provider ahead of time, especially if you find yourself becoming anxious or forgetful during appointments.

Include details about symptoms you're experiencing, and specific examples about how they impact you day-to-day.

If you feel you aren’t being listened to or respected, consider seeking a new healthcare provider - if this isn't possible, bring someone with you to appointments to help advocate, or work on setting clear boundaries and expressing your concerns.
RELATIONSHIPS
Find comfortable ways to express boundaries - this could be face-to-face communication, texting, writing a letter, setting up a google form, etc.

Types of boundaries you have may be physical, emotional, sexual, time, financial, or material, and these may be different with different people or at different times!

At times, what makes you feel comfortable or safe is not something another person is willing to practice in your relationship - try discussing what each of you need and finding a compromise, or consider altering/ending the relationship. (Boundaries don’t always align in a manner that works for everyone!).
BOUNDARIES

Examples of boundaries may include:

- I would like you to always ask before touching me.
- I don't have the capacity to support you emotionally right now.
- I am overwhelmed and cannot spend time with you today.

You can also use templates to organize your thoughts:

- When you _ I feel _, so could you/we _.
- I value _ so I need _, and will honor this by _. 
CONSENT

Consent is a critical part of any relationship or friendship. Planned Parenthood outlines the elements of consent as being freely-given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific.

This means someone is agreeing to participate in an activity without any pressure, feel empowered to change their mind at any point, fully understand what participation includes, want to participate, and have expressed the specifics of what they are and are not comfortable with.

Here are some **sample scripts to practice asking for consent** in many contexts:

- Do you mind if I talk about _?
- Can I vent about _?
- I understand if you can't handle this subject, or aren't available to talk about it right now.
- I want to make sure you're comfortable with this, should I/we keep going?
- Do you want to _?
CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

When the terms of your relationship are changing, it can be difficult to ensure everyone's comfort. Try to explain clearly what you are/are not comfortable with, including how much contact is comfortable for you, and in what contexts that contact is comfortable.

Boundaries may look like:
- I would like you to take down images of me from your social media.
- I cannot support you emotionally right now.
- I would like us to continue this relationship as friends, nd I am no longer comfortable with _
- If you’d like to discuss how you feel about this, I’m happy to support you.

Remember that no one has a right to your time and energy, and also remember that there may be circumstances impacting the other person you are unaware of! If you need help, try accessing therapy or support networks in your area.
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.