

Do You Need Support?

ASK ME!

I proudly
affirm LGBTQ
students, staff
and families.

American Counseling Association

Tip-sheet on creating affirming spaces for LGBTQ youth

According to the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) 2018 LGBTQ Youth Report, only 5% of LGBTQ students say that all of their school staff are supportive of LGBTQ people. Additionally, only 27% feel comfortable talking to a school counselor about issues related to their LGBTQ identity. School is a place where students are obligated to attend and yet LGBTQ students are not finding adequate support and affirmation from educators. LGBTQ students often hesitate talking to adults about their identity due to fear of rejection, a lack of understanding, or that educators will disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to parents or guardians.

"I don't really talk about my identity with a counselor because I don't know if they are accepting of LGBTQ people. None of my counselors make it obvious if they are accepting or not." — LGBTQ teen

School counselors should assess how LGBTQ students find trusting and affirming adults on campus. If students are unable to confirm, without a doubt, that an educator is an ally, they may be less likely to seek needed support. **The backside of this resource is a poster intended to display in the school counselor's office to show support for LGBTQ students, staff and families.** Visuals like these help LGBTQ students identify trusting adults to turn to and improve feelings of safety and connectedness.

"Talking to anyone about my identity makes me nervous right now, in case my family finds out." — LGBTQ teen

Confidentiality is crucial for many LGBTQ young people. Given the level of rejection that LGBTQ youth experience at home, sharing a student's sexual orientation or gender identity with parents or guardians could expose them to abuse, rejection and even homelessness. Absent an explicit legal obligation or written permission from the student, school counselors should never disclose a student's LGBTQ identity to parents, families or other school staff.

Schools must invest in creating a school climate that openly and vocally values and celebrates all forms of diversity, including LGBTQ identities, while directly addressing anti-LGBTQ bias and stigma. Districts that follow this practice have seen improvements in safety and connectedness thus improving attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates. School counselors play an essential role in shaping school culture and have an ethical obligation to advocate for safe and welcoming learning environments for all students. By modeling affirming behavior, school counselors can begin the process of systemic change and become leaders within their school community.

To help create an affirming campus for LGBTQ students, school counselors are encouraged to support the following best practices:

- Campaign for mandated professional development for all staff on supporting LGBTQ students
- Display a poster or visible sign of support for LGBTQ students in your office
- Advocate for and promote enumerated anti-bullying and non-discrimination policies that explicitly list protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression
- Encourage LGBTQ-inclusive curricula
- Support the creation of LGBTQ inclusive clubs at middle and high schools, such as a Gay and Straight Alliance or Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA)
- Use Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or restorative justice-type practices to curb bullying behaviors
- Attend HRC's annual Time to THRIVE conference co-presented by the American Counseling Association and the National Education Association held over Presidents' Day Weekend each February

To learn more, we encourage school counselors to download and review HRC's 2018 LGBTQ Youth Report at [HRC.IM/YouthReport](https://www.hrc.org/youthreport) and other helpful resources at [HRC.org/youth](https://www.hrc.org/youth).

Written by:

Vincent "Vinnie" Pompei, Ed.D.

Director, Youth Well-Being Project

Human Rights Campaign Foundation