

Organizing GSAs in Challenging School Climates:

A Guide for Students

LGBTQ+ students and allies thrive when they have spaces for connection, support, and leadership. These spaces might be called GSAs (Genders and Sexualities Alliances) in some schools, or they might take other forms—a book club, wellness circle, or community group off campus. Whatever the name, they create community, safety, visibility, and leadership opportunities while making schools and communities more welcoming.

It's important to recognize that not every school is supportive of LGBTQ+ student clubs, and in some places, students may face pushback or even hostility. Even where GSAs are legally protected, districts or administrators still sometimes deny them, making it harder for students to organize. You still have rights. Choosing to build community for yourself and your peers is more than just starting a club—it's a form of resistance and a powerful act of leadership.

Ideas for Organizing

These ideas are designed to help you find community while staying safe, respecting your privacy, and adhering to school policies and state laws. Take what works for you, leave what doesn't, and build the kind of space your student community needs.

Form Inclusive Groups

- ✳ If your school allows GSAs but still faces resistance, create a club with a broad focus where a variety of discussion topics and activities can be incorporated for on-campus clubs.
 - Examples: Anti-Bullying Club, Kindness & Inclusion Club, Culture & Identity Club.
- ✳ Set shared agreements to create a space free of name-calling, teasing, and bullying.
- ✳ **Remember:** You don't have to use the words "LGBTQ+" or "GSA" to build the relationships, joy, and safety a GSA provides. What matters is connection, trust, and care for one another.

If meeting in person at school isn't possible, you can still connect safely locally or online.

Use Community Spaces

- ✳ Partner with public libraries to host meetings if your school doesn't allow GSAs.
- ✳ Ask local coffee shops or community centers about hosting small meet-ups.
- ✳ Join or partner with existing youth-serving nonprofits for meeting spaces.
- ✳ Wear visible signs of pride, like rainbow pins, that help others identify safe peers.

Protect Privacy Online

- ✳ Use small, private group chats (Signal, WhatsApp, and Discord) to organize events, meetings, or hangouts.
- ✳ Avoid using school-provided accounts if privacy is a concern. Instead, create new personal or shared accounts.
- ✳ Collaborate with a trusted adult to guide conflict or safety concerns.

Be Informed and Assess Risk

Before starting or joining any LGBTQ+ student group outside school channels, use this checklist to help you evaluate the personal, legal, and safety risks in your specific area. You do not have to answer “yes” to all of these to move forward — but you should be aware of potential risks and how you’ll address them.

Organizing Checklist

School Policies

- ☐ I know what my school district’s policies say about student clubs.
- ☐ I’ve checked whether the Equal Access Act applies to my school.
 - My school is a secondary public school that receives federal funds.
 - My school already has extracurricular clubs.
- ☐ I know if my state/district has laws limiting LGBTQ+ content or requiring parental notification.
- ☐ I understand that meeting without school recognition means losing school-based protections (space, publicity, staff supervision).

Safety and Privacy

- ☐ I’ve identified peers I trust fully to maintain confidentiality.
- ☐ Our meeting place is neutral, safe, and accessible to everyone.
- ☐ I have safe ways to communicate that won’t be monitored without group consent.
- ☐ I’ve thought about whether my group’s existence could cause backlash against supportive staff or peers.

Support and Well-Being

- ☐ I have at least one trusted adult (inside or outside school) I can turn to for assistance if our group needs additional support or help.
- ☐ I understand that being involved in an LGBTQ+ group in a challenging environment can be emotionally draining.
- ☐ I feel confident about my personal safety if peers or staff find out I’m involved.
- ☐ I have decided what information about myself I’m comfortable sharing (name, pronouns, identity).

If your school denies your GSA or you need extra support, you don’t have to navigate it alone. [GSA Network](#) has resources specifically for student organizing on campus. Continue to find safe ways to connect, build leadership, and make your student community more welcoming, especially as you face challenges.

