

Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health in Schools

School is the most supportive in-person environment for LGBTQ+ young people (57%), according to [The Trevor Project's 2025 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#). Access to supportive spaces within educational settings can have a profoundly positive effect. Data show that LGBTQ+ students with access to LGBTQ+-supportive school environments report significantly lower rates of suicide attempts (8%) compared with those who lack such support (13%). Creating supportive school environments is, ultimately, a critical component of effective suicide prevention.

As an educator, you are in a unique position to make an impact — even as just one person. **Research shows that LGBTQ+ young people who said their teachers were accepting of their sexual orientation had 43% lower odds of attempting suicide in the past year.** From modeling inclusive introductions to supporting Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs), every professional in a school community can contribute to creating a supportive environment — and, in doing so, may help save lives. This guide covers overarching guidance on best practices as well as specific actions that educators and school staff can take to better support LGBTQ+ youth.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH



Trust that LGBTQ+ youth know who they are.

LGBTQ+ young people are the experts on their own lives, and allies should honor their autonomy by respecting their choices and supporting their agency. Doing so helps ensure they feel a sense of control and empowerment.



Support policies that protect LGBTQ+ students.

School practices and decisions should consistently reflect a commitment to equity.

- LGBTQ+ youth at schools with bullying policies which explicitly protect LGBTQ+ students report higher rates of feeling that their school is a supportive environment and lower rates of being bullied at school.



Stand up for LGBTQ+ youth.

Support is most meaningful when adults actively interrupt harm, address bias, and reinforce expectations for respect. Schools must create clear systems for reporting and responding to bullying.

- 48% of LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-17 reported being bullied in-person within the past year.



Respect the pronouns of LGBTQ+ youth.

Using a student's name and pronouns is a basic and visible way to demonstrate respect and build trust. Normalize pronoun use through optional sharing and modeling.

- 25% of trans and nonbinary youth use pronouns beyond the binary.
- Transgender and nonbinary youth who said their pronouns were respected most or all of the time attempted suicide at half the rate of those whose pronouns weren't respected.



Support gender expression.

Students should be able to express themselves through clothing, interests, and behavior without fear of judgment or restriction.

TAKING ACTION TO SUPPORT LGBTQ+ YOUTH

The chart on the right highlights several actions — identified directly by LGBTQ+ youth — that educators can take to demonstrate meaningful support and acceptance.

LGBTQ+ young people reported the following actions as ways people in their life can best show their support and acceptance:



GRADE-LEVEL SPECIFIC ACTIONS*

PreK - 2

- Believe children when they tell you what they like (e.g. favorite/preferred colors, toys, clothes, and activities) and who they are.
- Use the name and language a child shares, even if that changes.
- Treat gender and family diversity like any other classroom topic.
- Avoid grouping students by gender; use inclusive language like “students” or “friends.”
- Interrupt teasing or exclusion immediately: “We let everyone be who they are.”
- Model respect consistently through your own tone and behavior.
- Keep explanations simple and focused on kindness and inclusion.
- Protect student privacy and avoid unnecessary sharing.

Grade 3-5

- Accept and use students’ stated names and pronouns without requiring proof.
- Teach clear peer expectations: “We respect how people describe themselves.”
- Address biased comments directly and calmly.
- Reinforce that interests and appearance should not be limited by gender stereotypes.
- Ask support-oriented questions: “What would help you feel comfortable at school?”
- Interrupt misinformation like “you’re too young to know” with simple corrections.
- Teach ally behavior explicitly and reinforce that it is a classroom expectation.

Middle Grades

- Trust students’ identity language, even if it changes over time.
- Use affirming, non-evaluative responses: “Thanks for trusting me with that.”
- Address peer dynamics directly, including jokes, exclusion, and online behavior.
- Address intentional misgendering or bias as harm, not disagreement.
- Ensure consistent use of names and pronouns across school settings.
- Be explicit about confidentiality and its limits.
- Support students in identifying trusted adults.

High School

- Treat students as the primary authority on their identity.
- Ensure school systems reflect affirmed names.
- Address bias and harassment as school climate issues.
- Support students navigating identity across contexts (school, peers, family).
- Communicate clearly about confidentiality, including what can be protected and what may be shared due to policy.
- Align classroom practice, policies, and expectations with student safety and inclusion.

CENTERING JOY

It is equally important to recognize that increasing protective factors and fostering resilience among LGBTQ+ youth are as critical as understanding the risks and barriers they face. In a 2022 survey conducted by The Trevor Project, LGBTQ+ young people identified hundreds of sources of joy and strength. A sampling of the most common themes can be found [here](#).



Notably, connection to the LGBTQ+ community, visibility of LGBTQ+ role models, and support from accepting friends and family emerged as prominent contributors to LGBTQ+ young people's well-being. Many of the sources of joy identified are not exclusively LGBTQ+ specific; however, allies (that's you!) play a vital role in ensuring these sources of joy are accessible to LGBTQ+ youth.

SIGNALING ALLYSHIP IN HOSTILE PLACES

Sometimes, laws or policies prohibit ally actions and make it difficult for educators to show support for LGBTQ+ youth. If this sounds like where you teach, you can [try these strategies](#):

- Introduce yourself with your name and pronouns.
- If not explicitly prohibited, decorate your space with items that signal allyship (e.g., Pride flags, safe space stickers).
- Talk positively about LGBTQ+ people. Celebrate the accomplishments of LGBTQ+ historical figures, which can be done without discussing their sexual orientation or gender identity, where prohibited.
- Weave LGBTQ+ history, accomplishments, and topics into conversation and lessons.
- Advocate for LGBTQ+ people in your community: join community events, protests, and mutual aid efforts, and speak up against bigotry in all spaces (work, school, or with your lawmakers).

A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Being an educator is a tremendous responsibility, but it is also an incredible opportunity. As you navigate supporting your LGBTQ+ students, know that your efforts matter. Even one person can make a life-saving difference for LGBTQ+ youth. We encourage you to return to this guide whenever you need. The work is hard, but the ultimate goal — the thriving of ALL young people in your care — is exactly why you got into this profession in the first place.

**The guidance, recommendations, and examples provided here as best practice are very general and designed to be used broadly for informational and educational purposes. State education laws and mandates, district policies, and collective bargaining agreements vary widely by jurisdiction and are frequently updated.*

SOURCES

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