**Students that Identify as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual: How to Make a School More Inclusive**

**In Brief**

Middle school is a time when most students discover what sexual orientation they identify with. Students that identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual may live a more difficult life due to bullying and lack of support that can result in psychological problems (anxiety and depression) and/or substance abuse. It is important that everyone in the school’s community makes the school an environment that is accepting and welcoming for every student.

**Statistics of Students that identify as Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual**

Most people do not realize that each of the sexual orientations are treated differently by peers and society, based on gender and the orientation itself. When it comes to the different genders, males in this grouping face the most bullying. Their rates of suicide are at least double the number of females in this group. Many males that identify as gay feel that they do not meet society’s standards of being a man who is big, muscular, and shows no emotions. When it comes to sexual orientations, the students that are identified as bisexual reported being bullied the most. Their suicide rate is the highest out of all the sexual orientations because most people do not understand their identity and/ or that they are attracted to more than one gender. Females in both cases have it the easiest because society is more accepting of seeing two females out together. Most times, people walking past them might think that they are just friends. However, there are females within this community that will be bullied for their sexual orientation (Birkett et al., 1990).

**Making the School More Inclusive**

As society changes, so should schools and their rules. Each student needs to be given a proper education. However, if they are not accepted for who they are, this interferes with their learning. Some students that identify in this community may not attend school as often because they do not want to be around bullies or be reminded that they are different than the typical student. This may also lead to lower grades due to the students not caring about being in school. Some LBG students may need counseling (bullied or not), while others will not need help. Schools need to realize that there will be students that identify as having a different sexual orientation than the norm, and they need to include those students in the rules as well as the curriculum.

**What to Do as a Teacher**

* Report any bullying that is seen or that has been reported to a teacher
* Talk to the school counselor about any student that shows signs that they are being bullied (this includes lower grades on homework and quizzes to being absence more frequently)
* Tell and model for the students that school is a safe place to be and that nobody will be judged for what they believe in
* In the classroom, use technical, gender neutral terms (i.e. partner instead of boyfriend/girlfriend)
* If a student does “come out,” treat them like any other student and do not make a big deal out of it
* At the same time, be supportive of them
* If a student does come to talk, let them know that as a teacher, it is required to report anything illegal or could harm anyone or anything

**What the School Can Do to Act**

* Let it be known that the school will not tolerate anti-gay slurs, actions, etc.
* Edit the rules to include this community into the handbook and make them feel acknowledged and respected
* Make the parents aware of the new inclusive rules
* Create “Brave Zones” or “Safe Spaces” where everybody is accepted and that students know that this is a place where they are free to be themselves (there are appropriate trainings around the country)
* Create a club or organization to form an alliance between all students to make everyone feel included; Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) is one of the more popular among schools
* Include lessons that involve the LBGT+ community (i.e. English reading stories involving a couple that is gay; history/social studies/civics including laws passed about for the LGBT+ community, etc.)

**Submitted by**

Rachel E. Shaffer

[res09@lvc.edu](mailto:res09@lvc.edu)

Lebanon Valley College

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**Resources**

10 Keys to Creating an Inclusive Classroom Community for LGBTQ Students. (2012, March 01). Retrieved March 25, 2017, from https://changefromwithin.org/2012/03/01/10-keys-to-creating-an-inclusive-classroom-community-for-lgbtq-students/

<https://changefromwithin.org/2012/03/01/10-keys-to-creating-an-inclusive-classroom-community-for-lgbtq-students/>

This website provides an overview of statistics on LBGTQ students in school, along with providing a list of ways to make classes more inclusive.

Birkett, M., Espelage, D. L., & Koenig, B. (2009). LGB and questioning students in schools: The moderating effects of homophobic bullying and school climate on negative outcomes. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *38*(7), 989-1000.

[http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/5/art%253A10.1007%252Fs10964-008-9389-1.pdf?originUrl=http%3A%2F%2Flink.springer.com%2Farticle%2F10.1007%2Fs10964-008-9389-1&token2=exp=1490834470~acl=%2Fstatic%2Fpdf%2F5%2Fart%25253A10.1007%25252Fs10964-008-9389-1.pdf%3ForiginUrl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Flink.springer.com%252Farticle%252F10.1007%252Fs10964-008-9389-1\*~hmac=a1299720bdca24606052c4adb32d26775b7cacee88ebcc2a2ab848c7f942c1d7](http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/5/art%253A10.1007%252Fs10964-008-9389-1.pdf?originUrl=http%3A%2F%2Flink.springer.com%2Farticle%2F10.1007%2Fs10964-008-9389-1&token2=exp=1490834470~acl=%2Fstatic%2Fpdf%2F5%2Fart%25253A10.1007%25252Fs10964-008-9389-1.pdf%3ForiginUrl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Flink.springer.com%252Farticle%252F10.1007%252Fs10964-008-9389-1*~hmac=a1299720bdca24606052c4adb32d26775b7cacee88ebcc2a2ab848c7f942c1d7)

This article explores the repercussions students face when they “come out” in a school environment. (Must buy the PDF or subscribe to the journal)

Espelage, D. L., Hong, J. S., Merrin, G. J., Davis, J. P., Rose, C. A., & Little, T. D. (2017). A Longitudinal Examination of Homophobic Name-Calling in Middle School: Bullying, Traditional Masculinity, and Sexual Harassment as Predictors.

<http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2016-62668-001/>

This article explores the psychological side of bullying of those that are in the LBG community. (Must create an account to view the material)

Hatzenbuehler, M. L., & Keyes, K. M. (2013). Inclusive anti-bullying policies and reduced risk of suicide attempts in lesbian and gay youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *53*(1), S21-S26.

<http://ac.els-cdn.com/S1054139X12003540/1-s2.0-S1054139X12003540-main.pdf?_tid=6bdfee40-366b-11e7-a9b4-00000aacb35e&acdnat=1494522245_43d70d38be95a4615c8a371eedbff86a>

The article includes a study on how anti-bullying policies can help the youth when they are the victim, along with what can be done to help those that are suicidal or self-harming.

Patterson, C. J. (2013). Schooling, sexual orientation, law, and policy: Making schools safe for all students. *Theory Into Practice*, *52*(3), 190-195.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00405841.2013.804312>

This website provides techniques schools can use to be more inclusive to those that identify as part of the LBGT+ community. (must create an account on the website to view the material)

Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, *12*, 465-487.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4887282/pdf/nihms-789458.pdf>

The article explains the mental aspects of students that are LGBT+ and their identity within the negative environment that may surround them at school.